

IN LAUDEM JOANNIS FECKENHAM, O.S.B.

WE are indebted to the kindness of a friend for the following verses taken from the Harleian MS. 3258, fol. 45—6. The MS. is on paper, in folio, of the early part of the 17th century, and contains poems on the great festivals of the year, the saints English martyrs and confessors of the 16th century and some contemporary parochial occurrences. "Auctor certe Papista acer," says the Catalogue (vol. III., p. 13), non vero optimus poeta; at quis fuerit non apparet."

These verses were evidently written at a time when the memory of the abbot was yet fresh. They give a fair summary of the events of the latter part of his life, and supply some details not mentioned by Antony à Wood, Weldon, Dodd, or Oliver:—his custody by the Bishop of Ely (this hard and grasping "*pseudopræsul*" was Cox, the "proud prelate" whom Elizabeth in a well-known letter threatened to "unfrock"); the Wisbeach and Holborn road-making; the rumours of foul play at his death. The improvements in Holborn receive here a new light; certainly the expedient to afford coloured excuse for withdrawal from protestant service and heretical preaching was ingenious.

This "Praise of Feckenham" brings out very well a characteristic of the old race of monks. The monastic houses might be destroyed, the few surviving religious might be prevented from observing their Rule; but not all the evils of the times could deter the last of the abbots of England from seizing every opportunity that offered—at Westminster and Holborn, at Bath and at Wisbeach—for planting and building and road making, like the best of those who had gone before him. His example herein is doubtless not lost on his spiritual children, for to Abbot Feckenham the whole revived English Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict must trace up their succession.

IN LAUDEM JOANNIS FECKNAMI ABBATIS WESTMONASTERIENSIS.

ULTIMUS Abbatum, quos Anglia noverat, iste :

Ultimus, at primis æquiparandus erat.

Angelicus vultus, vox suavis, lingua diserta,

Mixtus erat summa cum gravitate lepos.

Rege sub Eduardo sua dogmata falsa minister
Exposuit populo. Cum sibi finis erat
Pulpita conscendit Fecknamus, falsa refellit,
Deceptæ plebi dogmata vera refert.
Gratus erat sermo multis, tutusque recessit.
Postea sed stricto carcere clausus erat.
Disputat interea sacris de rebus Hoperus,^a
Atque cupit docti nomen habere viri.
Ducitur e turri Fecknamus, vincit Hoperum,
Londini in variis disserit ille locis.
Sic voluere viri clari, certamine facto
Carcer eum recipit non sine laude sua.
Solvit eum vinclis Regina Maria solutis,
Paulini templi quando decanus erat.
Mox Abbas rexit monachos veteresque novosque :
Westque monasterii sic reparator erat.
Hæresis extinctâ cœpit remeare Mariâ.
Fit Parlamentum, relligioque cadit.
Suscipit hic causam fidei : sermone diserto,
Antiquam cunctis suadet habere fidem.
Mittitur ad turrin, transacto tempore certo
Præsul eum vinctum Vintoniensis^b habet.^c
Frangere dum tentat Fecknamum, flectere nescit.
Vult de primatu juret, at ille negat.
Concipit et causas, cur juramenta recusat.
Asserit et scripto jura vetusta libro.
Ad turrin rediit, sed non ad tempora longa :
Si non longa, tamen tempora dura satis.
Ædibus inde suis custodit Episcopus Eli.
Nec cessat variis sollicitare modis,
Et nimirum falsus vexabat Episcopus illum.
Antistes durus, sævus, avarus erat.
Carcer erat melior, quam pseudo præsulis aula,
Eligit ad turris vincla redire, redit.
Postea martis^d eum custodia suscipit, illic
Detentus, longo tempore vinctus erat.
Rursus laxatur, certa remoratur in æde,
Cujusdam civis liberiore modo.

^a Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester.

^b Horn, Bishop of Winchester.

^c So written originally. The same or a similar hand has expunged "vinctum" and prefixed "pseudo" to "præsul."

^d The Marshalsea prison.

Ad se Cæcilius Fecknamum accedere jussit.
 Miratur, quod post vincula longa valet.
 Ille refert: "causa est, quia vivo in carcere clausus,
 Non in me carcer; perfero vincula lubens."
 Dum sic Fecknamum custodia libera servat,
 Hospitium placidos prospiciebat agros.
 Huc solet in Festis percrebra coire juvenus,
 Dum volat ad certum missa sagitta scopum.
 Sic minus in Festo peccatur; concio prava
 Sic non auditur, nec mala sacra colit.
 Fecknamus videt hoc, pro metis ergo per agros
 Disponi vario ligna colore jubet.
 Pulchra sagittiferos invitant signa popellos;
 Spicula jamque arcus, quæ jaculetur, habet.
 Curritur in campis, per prata virentia ludunt.
 Vincenti dantur præmia certa duci.
 Interea ægrotat Fecknamus; balnea visit.*
 Hic pro pauperibus commoda tecta struit.
 Displicet hæreticis Fecknami splendida virtus:
 Abbatis nequeunt nomina ferre pii.
 Ergo illum relegant ad Visbica^f castra remota.
 Hic reparat propriis sumptibus ille vias,
 Quodque prius fecit, dum martis carcere mansit,
 Plurima dat vinctis pauperibusque viris.
 Ut nunquam caruit vir justus amatus ab omni,
 Sic fratrum variis usibus ille dedit.
 Ferre sed hæretici non hoc potuere ministri,
 Invidiamque movent, insidiasque parant;
 Fama refert igitur, quod dira venena dabantur
 Fecknamo: nec res suspicione caret.
 Saltem fluxus eum subitaneus arripit agrum,
 Nec mors longe aberat; nuncius ergo venit,
 Et gestat secum Christi venerabile corpus,
 Fecknamus viso corpore lætus ait:
 "Tu bona cuncta mihi tecum sapientia portas:
 Tu lætitia es, tu mihi vita, salus."

Should the present specimen—which we can hardly venture

* In the roll of accounts rendered by the chamberlain of Bath in 1576 occurs the following entry:—"Delivered to Mr. Ffekewand, late Abbot of Westminster, three tonnes of tyMBER and 10 fote to build the House for the poore by the Whote Bath, 33s. 4d. To him more 400 Lathes at 10d. the 100, 3s. 4d."

^f Wisbeach prison.

to recommend on the score of poetical merit — be favourably received, other pieces from the same manuscript may later find a fitting place in the pages of the “Downside Review.”

Who was the author? we may ask. Materials at present fail for giving a definite answer. The MS. itself tells us this much: the writer was evidently an Englishman, interested in French affairs and having no sympathy with Spain; a partisan of the Guises; a priest apparently, and though not a monk, one who had a reverence and affection for the monastic state; finally, though he was unacquainted with the affairs of the English College whilst yet at Rheims (1578-93), he mentions the assassination of Henry IV. (1610).

If we found record that Dr. William Gifford, (afterwards Father Gabriel of St. Mary and first President of the English Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict), had the weakness of verse-making, there might be a temptation to ask the question: —Can the author of the pieces collected in Harl. MS. 3258 be Dr. William Gifford?

SOME NOTES ON RUSSIA : THE RUSSIAN CHURCH AND A RUSSIAN MONASTERY.

(Continued from page 380.)

THE monks of the Russian Church are all of the same order and entirely distinct from secular ecclesiastics. The rule which they follow, and from which in principle they have never deviated, is the rule of St. Basil, a rule of asceticism, prayer, and contemplation. Amongst them we must not look for learning, or preaching, or teaching, or the arts to a high degree. The monks of the East have never shown the spirit, the vigour and life so remarkable in the West. Dean Stanley, in his “Lectures on the Eastern Church,” says:—“As a general rule there has arisen in the East no society like the Benedictines, held in honour wherever literature or civilization has spread; no charitable orders like the sisters of mercy, carrying light and peace into the darkest haunts of suffering humanity. Active life is, on the strict Eastern theory, an abuse of the system.” As a class the monks represent the