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Historical Papers.

EDITED BY THE REV. SYDNEY F. SMITH, S.J.

No. XXI.

PRINTED BY
H. K. GROSSETESTE,
PRINTING SHOP OF LINCOLN.

EDITED BY MGR. W. CROKE ROBINSON.



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Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln.

BY MGR. W. CROKE ROBINSON.

ROBERT Grosseteste, the famous Bishop of Lincoln (A.D. 1235—1253), is claimed by all sorts and conditions of Protestants as the great medieval champion of British ecclesiastical rights against the so-called encroachments of Rome. He is commonly quoted as evidence of the fact that Papal jurisdiction never sat comfortably upon the English nation. His example is of peculiar value for this purpose (so it is maintained), because being for a great part of his life an ardent supporter of the claims of the See of Rome, at the last he was forced, in spite of himself, to give up his allegiance, and died in violent opposition to the Papal system. Such is the account given in ordinary Protestant histories and biographical articles¹ of the life of this celebrated man.

Canon Perry, of Lincoln, in his *Life and Times of Grosseteste*,² does not shrink from stating that

Robert Grosseteste was the Protestant of the thirteenth century, but he was a Protestant on the highest Church principles, and from the conviction that the Papal system

¹ See, for instance, Chambers' *Encyclopædia*, article "Grosseteste."

² Published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. This book is often quoted by Anglicans.

in its practical working was anti-Christian and destructive of souls.¹

Again, on the same page, he says :

He was the most ardent supporter of Rome of his day, but he died, if not excommunicated, yet cursed and reviled by the Pope.

Again :²

His extreme hierarchical views led him, for the greater part of his career, to pay the most complete deference to the Pope as the head of the Church on earth, and to be ready, without scruple or fear, to listen to his commands rather than to those of the King or State. But, together with extreme views as to Church power, Grosseteste also held the most intensely earnest opinions as to the obligations of the clerical office and the pastoral care. For a long time he strove to reconcile these deep, practical convictions with the theory which assigned so high a place to the Pope and the Court of Rome. At length, the manifest iniquities tolerated and upheld by the Pope, produced in him a complete revulsion. From being, in his view, the representative of God, the Pope became the very minister of Satan.

Finally,³ we are told that,

had his life been a few years prolonged, it may be easily believed that he would have been the leader in a general rejection by England of the preposterous claims of Rome.

Dr. Creighton, Bishop of Peterborough, in a lecture delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral on November 21, 1895, seems practically to adopt the same view, in language moderate indeed, but most misleading. If correctly reported,⁴ he concludes that "Grosseteste, devoted to the ecclesiastical system as he was, and

¹ P. 6. ² *Ibid.* p. 292. ³ *Ibid.* p. 295.

⁴ *Church Times*, November 29, 1895.

an absolutely devout son of the Pope, was driven, in spite of himself, into *antagonism to that system.*" Observe here the delightfully vague expression which we have italicized. If it means that Grosseteste opposed several acts of Papal administration concerning his own diocese, or even the English nation at large, we have no contention with Dr. Creighton. If, however, it is designed to convey the impression that Grosseteste died in virtual denial of Papal prerogative in general, then we do not think that Dr. Creighton is to be congratulated upon the fallacious argument from the particular to the universal.

In reply to these Anglican contentions, we shall try specially to keep two points in view: (1) what was the attitude of Grosseteste towards the Holy See in the earlier part of his life; (2) and whether it became changed to any extent in his later years.

It will be well to begin with some sketch of the authorities on which we may rely.

Of primary importance, as collecting the materials for our history, is the edition of the Epistles of Grosseteste by Henry Richards Luard, M.A., late Fellow and Assistant Tutor of Trinity College, Cambridge. The author for many years made Grosseteste his special study, and pursued his researches not only in the libraries of these countries, but also in that of the Vatican, where a large part of these epistles is preserved. It may be as well to mention that Luard, though a fair-minded man and a scholar, shows no bias in favour of the Catholic Church.

Next in importance are the editions, by the same

author, of the Annals of Winchester, Waverley, Dunstable, Bermondsey, Osney, Thomas de Wykes (probably a chronicler of Osney), and Worcester. These, with the epistles of Grosseteste, under the title of *Annales Monastici*, form part of the *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland*, published by the authority of Her Majesty's Treasury, under the direction of the Master of the Rolls. An admirable Index, forming the fifth volume of the series, will indicate the various passages concerning Grosseteste. Belonging to the same series is the edition of *Franciscana Monumenta*, by H. S. Brewer, containing numerous references to Grosseteste.

Next may be consulted *The Life of St. Edmund of Canterbury*, by Dom Wilfrid Wallace, O.S.B., and for German scholars, Dr. Felten's Life of Grosseteste, a notice of which may be found in the *Dublin Review*.¹ Two articles in *The Month*² may be studied with great advantage.³

A very little research into the subject will discover that a large proportion of the history of Grosseteste is taken from Matthew Paris. But what is the exact worth of Paris as an historian of the inter-relationship of Rome and England? Modern criticism universally pronounces that very qualified credence must be given to many of the statements of this pugnacious monk of St. Alban's. His intense nationalism ran

¹ *Dublin Review*, January, 1888, p. 230.

² *The Month*, August, 1880, and March, 1895.

³ Students who wish to exhaust the subject will find references to original MSS. in Luard's Preface, pp. xci.—xcviii. Those who require a slighter account of the life and times of Grosseteste, may be referred to *The History of the Church in England*, vol. i., by Miss Allies, who hits off the character of the sturdy Bishop very happily.

away with much of his devotion to the Holy See, upon which he heaps abuse whenever occasion arises, with such vehemence and acrimony that it becomes manifest to every sober and impartial student of history that in great part Matthew must be drawing from his imagination. Dr. Lingard says of him :

It may seem invidious to speak harshly of this favourite historian. But this I may say, that when I could confront his pages with authentic records or contemporary writers, I have in most instances found the discrepancy between them so great as to give to his narrative the appearance of a romance rather than a history.¹

Another critic writes of him thus :

Matthew Paris is a writer of many merits, and we could ill spare the fruits of his laborious industry. At the same time, among those merits no competent historian would set down a striking absence of prejudice, or a scrupulous regard for accuracy in his language about those against whom his prejudices biassed him. . . . Particularly he was prone to say things spiteful against any Bishop, Sovereign, or Pope who ventured to make the monks of St. Alban's pay money out of their treasury.²

Whereas Canon Perry and Dr. Creighton in great part rely upon Matthew Paris for their telling points against Rome, their history of Grosseteste must evidently be accepted with a very liberal number of the proverbial grains of salt.

Let us now proceed to the life of the great Bishop. He was born at Stradbroom,³ in Suffolk, about the year 1175, according to the best authorities, and of

¹ Lingard, vol. ii. p. 237, in note.

² *The Month*, March, 1895, p. 406.

³ His family name was Copley ; the name of Grosseteste, or Great-head, was given him in France during his studies there. (Le Neve, *Fasti*, vol. ii. p. 10.)

humble parents. To his lowly origin we find allusion in the Lanercost Chronicle and in Matthew Paris, who states that in the subsequent quarrel of the Canons of Lincoln with Grosseteste, they expressed their regret that a man of such humble origin should have been raised by them to so high a dignity. Of his early life we know scarcely anything. He was sent to Oxford by his friends, where he studied law and medicine. All modern authors state that from Oxford he proceeded to Paris, though this is not mentioned in any contemporary history; and there, probably, he was grounded in Greek and Hebrew. It was not long before he returned to Oxford, where he graduated in Divinity, and became Master of the School, or Chancellor,¹ as is proved by a paper in the Registry at Lincoln of the year 1294. How long he remained at Oxford is uncertain; but with the University he identified himself in great measure during his whole life. He saw clearly the immense influence such an institution might have over the whole country, and he apparently never lost sight of this. For this reason, among others, he was led to patronize the two Orders of Friars, the Dominicans and Franciscans, who came, as will be seen later on, into England during his early career at Oxford. It is most probable that he was the means of introducing to Oxford the Franciscans, to whom he was especially devoted. By their help he hoped to carry out his reforms, expecting that their teaching and example would stimulate the other clergy to greater devotedness of life. Soon after becoming Doctor (in 1224)

¹ The Chancellor in those days was always resident, and Director-General of the studies of the whole University.

he became the first lecturer to the Franciscans, as well as their first Rector, and probably continued in this office till his election to the see of Lincoln. At this time he began that series of writings which evince his prodigious learning, and which it will be opportune here once for all to particularize. Besides innumerable sermons and theological treatises, he wrote a large number of works on both physical and mental philosophy, commentaries on Aristotle and Boethius, translations from the Greek, French poems, works on husbandry, &c. He possessed considerable knowledge of medicine and of music, and played with great skill on the harp. It is difficult to understand how a man of such active habits and constant occupation could have found time to master, far more to write, so much. Doubtless many books and tracts have been fathered upon him, as is constantly the case with voluminous writers of the middle ages. Yet so many undoubted works proceeded from his pen, that there can be no question of the universality of his genius and his well-merited fame as an author, in the age—be it remembered—of St. Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus.¹ And yet, as will be seen, his fame in our own days, at all events till quite recently, has been kept green by one single letter;² a very small proportion of his works having been published.³

To proceed with his life. He was made Archdeacon of Wilts in 1214; became Archdeacon of

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas died in 1274, and Albertus Magnus in 1280.

² No. cxxviii. The numbers by which Grosseteste's letters are referred to are those in Luard's collection.

³ A list of these may be found in the Appendix to Brown's *Fasciculus Rerum Expetendarum*, written towards the close of the sixteenth century.

Northampton, and then of Leicester. He held the prebend of Clifton in Lincoln Cathedral, and was parish priest of Abbotsley, in Huntingdonshire. In 1232, however, he was seized with a violent fever, and possibly in consequence resigned all his preferments except his prebend at Lincoln. Nothing from that time is known of him till 1234, when he is ascertained to have been at his beloved Oxford. In February, 1235, Hugh de Wells, Bishop of Lincoln, died, and the Chapter at once elected Grosseteste as his successor. After some dispute as to the place of his consecration between the monks of Canterbury and the Archbishop, he was consecrated at Reading by St. Edmund on June 3rd, 1236, and enthroned about Candlemas, 1237.¹

The diocese of Lincoln was at this period of enormous size, comprising the archdeaconries of Lincoln, Leicester, Stowe, Buckingham, Huntingdon, Northampton, Oxford, and Bedford. Not only might the ordinary administration of such a diocese make the episcopal heart quail, but, alas! to this must be added the rectifying of abuses which had been allowed to exist under the laxer rule of some of his predecessors. Nothing, however, appeared to daunt the "terrible Bishop." He set to work at once with characteristic vigour to purify that portion of the heavenly vineyard committed to his care.

Meanwhile let us endeavour to determine the general condition of things with which he had to deal.

As has been well remarked :

The monks had been the factors of civilization to the English people, but had worked exclusively in the country.

¹ Le Neve's *Fasti*, vol. ii. p. 10.

The towns still awaited their missionaries. In social status they were at a very low ebb, whilst they were not richer in material appearance or construction than the most remote Irish or Scotch village of to-day, the municipal element was highly developed. Self-government existed to an extraordinary extent with ignorance, squalor, and unsanitariness. The Mendicant Orders were made for the town just as the monks for the country; and of none is this truer than of the Franciscans.¹

The introduction of the Friars was the providential remedy for existing social evils, and Grosseteste, as we have already observed, was not slow to recognize it, and avail himself of their aid. Of the Franciscans, or Grey Friars, who came to England in 1219, of the Dominicans, or Black Friars, introduced into England in 1221, of the Carmelites, or White Friars, whose arrival was in 1240, Grosseteste was the devoted friend, but chiefly of the Franciscans.

Wherever he went he took some of them with him. In one of his epistles² he begs of the Minister-General of the Franciscans that, as there are no such valuable assistants as the Friars Minor, two or four of them may be always with him.

Next we have to deal with the clerical order and the abuses already alluded to. Doubtless manifold miseries and scandals existed at this period, as indeed at every period of ecclesiastical history. They were forecast by our Lord as in the first place permitted by Divine providence, and then as being certain to occur. But it may well be questioned if the picture is altogether so black as is painted, especially by

¹ Cf. Brewer, *Monumenta Franciscana*, Preface, p. xiv. Rolls Series.

² See also epp. xl. xli. lviii. lix.

those whose melancholy interest it is to defame the Spouse of Christ. Anyhow, we shall confine ourselves in this inquiry chiefly to those evils which Grosseteste himself in his various epistles has occasion to rebuke and reform. These are to be found in epistle xxii. of the year 1236, in epistle lii. of the year 1238, which includes his Constitutions, and in epistle cvii. of the year 1244 (probably). The Bishop condemns in the strongest terms the presence of the clergy at "scot-ales,"¹ or ale-parties, which oftentimes during these ages were held not only for convivial purposes, but to raise money for charitable objects. Again he sternly prohibits the abuse known as "the Feast of Fools,"² as did not only Grosseteste, but also most of the Popes and Bishops all along the middle ages. This "Feast of Fools" was in reality the old heathen festival of the January kalends. The first day of the new year from time immemorial and among all peoples was set apart as a day of general "license" and levity, in which, *e.g.*, the slave reclined on his master's seat at table, the master waited on his slave, and society for the moment seemed to be turned upside down. This pagan feast was gradually introduced into ecclesiastical observance, probably with the view, in the first instance, of weaning the minds of converts from these pagan

¹ For an account of these, see *Discipline of Drink*, p. 107, by Father Bridgett, C.S.S.R. Burns and Oates.

² For the *Feast of Asses* and *Feast of Fools*, see Maitland's *Dark Ages*, pp. 146, seq., where also may be found the best available exposition of the absurdity, as well as wickedness, of accounting things like these as evidence of the depravity of the times. It need scarcely be said that Maitland was not a Catholic. His famous book was written in 1848, whilst he was Librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth. See also an excellent article in Chambers' *Encyclopædia*, vol. iv. p. 721.

ceremonies. It is easy to see what watchfulness was required to preserve such institutions from abuse.

Again, the vigils of saints' days, funerals, celebrations of patronal feasts, were at times made into the occasions of riot and debauchery, through the negligence of the pastors of the flocks. Here and there, too, were to be found priests who recited their Breviary very badly or not at all; others, jealous of the Friars, prevented the people from confessing to them; others exacted a sum of money in return for Holy Communion. But the most serious abuse is to be found in epistle cvii., where the Bishop writes that—

He has heard from good authority (*ex relatu fide digno audivimus*) that several priests of a certain archdeaconry are guilty of immorality (*focarias habent*), though in his visitation of the archdeaconry he himself has not been able to discover it, because probably the offenders are screened by those who ought to bring them to justice, and who would not shrink from perjury for that purpose.

Still the phrase, *ex relatu fide digno audivimus*, must fairly be taken as implying the comparative infrequency of such offences, and would scarcely be used by the Bishop, if they were so wide-spread and notorious as we are asked to believe by some authors.

In another epistle¹ we find Grosseteste remonstrating with the importation from abroad of certain immoral monks into the monastery at Minting. Dr. Luard remarks upon these: "The way in which they are spoken of would incline us to believe the case an exceptional one."²

In an earlier epistle³ is contained a vehement exhortation to an immoral clergyman.

¹ Ep. cviii. ² *Grosseteste's Letters*, Preface, p. xxv. n. 2. ³ Ep. x.

Finally,¹ we find one more possible allusion to abuses of this nature in the phrase, *illecti fœdis voluptatibus*. These are the only passages, as far as we know, to be found in the epistles of Grosseteste, which refer to any licentiousness among the clergy of his day. From other sources, especially the epistles of Adam de Marisco,² the famous Franciscan theologian and precursor of the Franciscan schoolmen, who was the life-long friend and adviser of Grosseteste, we gather that, whilst on the one hand the zeal of the Reformers seems to have preserved every nauseous scrap and morsel of anecdote or ballad that could reflect on the morals of the priests and monks of this period; yet, on the other hand, undoubtedly a dark account of the times remains. As regards Giraldus Cambrensis, Welsh ecclesiastic and historian of the period, who is commonly quoted by non-Catholic authors as irrefragable evidence of the utter corruption of the age, we may "reduce his universal propositions to particulars, his plurals to singulars, yet in many respects he is not far wrong."³ We do not wish to withhold a particle of truth in this unsavoury matter; but we affirm, with all who are worthy of the name of scholars, that the day has gone by for No-Popery invective against abuses which all right-minded men, whether Catholic or Protestant, deplore, but which, under the Divine permission and through human frailty, can never be altogether suppressed. The time is also happily gone by for arguing from particular abuses

¹ Ep. cxxx.

² See especially Brewer's *Monumenta Franciscana*, vol. i. ep. xlix. Rolls Series.

³ See *The Month* (August, 1880), article by Father John Rickaby, S. J.

to universal degradation; for reading epistles and constitutions of this or that bishop directed against certain existing scandals, and then dubbing the whole body ecclesiastical as scandalous. Canon Perry's work on Grosseteste is on this account completely out of date. Let it be remembered that, if abuses did exist, the remedy was always at hand. Let it be remembered too that in this very age, when the whole head is represented by non-Catholics to be sick, and the whole heart faint, no less than three canonized Saints appear on the page of English history, St. Edmund of Canterbury (died November 16, 1242), St. Richard of Chichester (April 3, 1253), and St. Thomas of Hereford (August 25, 1382), whilst, outside our own shores, there were doing battle for Holy Church, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Louis of France, St. Ferdinand of Castile, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary. Is it not altogether more reasonable to affirm with the editor of the second volume of *Franciscan Monuments*,¹ that the many vocations to the religious life of this period,

Can be signs of nothing less than a rallying of the strength of that piety which has never in the darkest times died out from the Church to so great an extent as her enemies are eager to assert?

To proceed with our story.

In the year 1237 was held the great Council of London,² under the presidency of Cardinal Otho, in which a strenuous attempt was made to deprive

¹ *Monumenta Franciscana*, vol. ii. Preface, p. x. Rolls Series.

² Wilkins' *Concilia*, vol. i. p. 647; see also Lyndwood's *Provinciale* in the Appendix; also Collier, vol. ii. p. 453.

pluralists of all their benefices but one, and Constitutions and Canons were promulgated which seem long to have been the principal rules for the Church in England. It was on the strength of these Conciliar regulations that Grosseteste sent his own Constitutions¹ through his diocese. If we are to believe Matthew Paris, it was in consequence of the severity of his efforts to carry them into effect that the Bishop's life was attempted by poison, from which he recovered with great difficulty.

It soon became manifest that no power on earth, neither Papal nor regal, neither ecclesiastical nor civil, could induce the Bishop to institute to a benefice one whom he considered incompetent. It was not, as is generally maintained, that he was opposed only to Papal provisions, nor was he actuated by a stupid national prejudice against foreigners as such; for he once desired a Franciscan friar to provide six or

¹ Luard, *ibid.* pp. 154, seq. Among these are several which give great scandal to Protestant historians. Thus almost all of these writers draw particular attention to the prohibition of the custom of saying Mass with vinegar. Here we have a ludicrous instance of the misleadings of prejudice. The prohibition in question merely means that in those days when good wine was scarce, and perhaps expensive, and even the best was liable to grow sour far more quickly than the wine of modern days, priests must be very careful to renew it frequently. This is why the same prohibition so frequently occurs in the canons of contemporary synods and episcopal Constitutions. We need not, then, vex our souls about the alleged enormous scandal and detriment to spiritual interests of invalid consecrations. In his *History of the Holy Eucharist*, Father Bridgett tells us (vol. i. p. 171) that although foreign wine could be always procured in England even from the times of the Roman invasion, yet until the union of the vine-growing provinces of France with the English crown, it was native wine that was in general use. Even as far north as Derbyshire the vine was grown. Yet, he adds, it is probable that the native wine was rather pure than excellent. Sour or poor wine could be mixed with honey and spices for table use. Of course no mixture of this sort was allowed in altar-wine, and care is frequently recommended in the Canons that it should not be too sour.

seven foreign clerks, by whose exemplary conduct he might benefit his diocese, even if they could not speak English. Thus, says Eccleston, he refused the nominees of the Pope and Cardinals, not because they were foreign and ignorant of English, but because they sought only temporal things.¹

These energetic and probably somewhat intemperate proceedings² naturally raised a storm of opposition from the King, the barons, the clergy, and from his own Chapter. In the year 1239 began the famous quarrel between the latter and Grosseteste. Among other visitations of his diocese he included that of the Dean and Chapter. This claim was at once vehemently opposed by that body, on the ground that it had never been heard of before from the earliest times.³ They produced a document stating that when the see of Lincoln was founded under William Rufus, it was settled that any delinquent member of the Chapter should in the first instance be visited and punished only by the Dean or the Chapter, the Bishop's authority being invoked, and behind the Bishop's, the King's, only in the eventuality of the delinquent member resisting the Dean or Chapter. This settlement, according to the document in question, was ratified by two Cardinal Legates who had received Apostolic authority for the purpose. Luard regards this document as a forgery, and thinks the Chapter must have known it to be such. Matthew

¹ *Life of St. Edmund.* By Dom W. Wallace, O.S.B., p. 178.

² Luard's *Epistles of Grosseteste*, Preface, p. xlvii.

³ The complete organization of a modern or medieval Chapter—the Bishop, the *quatuor personæ*, i.e., dean, precentor, chancellor, and treasurer—the archdeacons and canons, &c., is not found till the Norman times and the twelfth century. (Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, vol. i. p. 349; but see Note A.)

Paris, however, does not make any such suggestion, nor does the document purport to be more than a memorandum of certain historical facts. It does not purport to be the authoritative charter itself. What may have been the real truth about this claim cannot nowadays be determined. According to modern ecclesiastical law the Bishop's claim would be unimpeachable. But it was such as might have been over-ridden by long-established custom or formal Papal privilege such as was invoked.¹

The case excited a great deal of attention in the country, each diocese feeling that these proceedings would settle the question for itself also. It appeared at the first as if the dispute would be easily settled. Otho, the Papal Legate, imagined that he had only to appear before the contending parties, when the strife would cease. It very soon became evident that recourse must be had to the Pope. The Chapter took the initiative: appointed in secret an agent at the Papal Court, and issued a mandate to the vicars and chaplains ministering in the prebends and churches belonging to the Chapter, to refuse submission to the Bishop if he attempted to visit them. Eventually it was agreed between the disputants that application should be made to the Pope to commit the whole question to the Bishop of Worcester, Walter de Cantilupe, and the Archdeacons of Worcester and Sudbury, who were either to decide on the entire case without allowing any appeal; or, after the cause had been sufficiently investigated, by a certain day to be named by the Pope, to submit it to him to be finally settled, each

¹ *Chronica Majora*, iv. p. 155.

party in the meantime ceasing from exercising any visitatorial power. It was thought that by this arrangement the business was at an end, but for six long and weary years the life of the Bishop was embittered by the sad contention. At the end of that time, Pope Gregory IX. had died, as likewise his successor, Celestine IV., in the same year, 1241. Innocent IV. (1241—1254) now occupied the Papal Chair. To Innocent, whose residence was then at Lyons, whither he had been driven from Italy by the impiety and treachery of Frederic II., the German Emperor, Grosseteste with his friend, Adam de Marisco, set out at the age of seventy—at which time, by-the-bye, we have been told¹ by Canon Perry, that he had “ceased to look upon the Pope as the representative of God,” and had even come to regard him “as the very minister of Satan;” and by Dr. Creighton,² that he was driven, in spite of himself, into antagonism to the Papal system.

Almost immediately upon his arrival (January 15, 1245), Boniface of Savoy was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in succession to St. Edmund, who had died in 1240, the see having remained vacant for five years; and Roger de Weseham, Dean of Lincoln, was consecrated³ Bishop of Lichfield. And here Luard⁴ and Dr. Creighton find it difficult not to suspect unfair dealings between Grosseteste and Roger de Weseham. The triumph of the Bishop was complete as far as the right of visitation was concerned. But does it not look as if Grosseteste obtained the

¹ *Life and Times of Grosseteste.* By Canon Perry, p. 292.

² See above, pp. 128, 129.

³ *Rege penitus inconsulto*, is the expression of the ancient chronicle.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. lxii.

episcopate for Roger on the understanding that the latter would withdraw his claim and that of his Chapter from any further contention? There does not, however, seem sufficient reason for this unfavourable suspicion of Luard. The exact circumstances whereby the Bishop gained his cause cannot be ascertained. What we do know is that the honesty and straightforwardness of Grosseteste is the prominent feature of his character, and that it is only fair to suppose that he was true to himself all through the transaction.

We must not omit to notice, in the course of these hostilities between Bishop and Chapter, a striking piece of evidence as to the intimate knowledge of Holy Scripture, in an age, be it remembered, one hundred and forty years before the production of the so-called¹ Wickliffe's Bible. We cannot do better than quote Luard. Of the letter² of Grosseteste to his Chapter, Luard writes :³

It is a very singular specimen of the mode of thought of the time. If the arguments seem weak and fanciful to us now, we must remember that not only are they such as appeared weighty to Grosseteste, but also such as he expected would influence his Chapter; and thus they give a curious insight into the mediæval mind, and the thorough familiarity with the Old Testament is perhaps only what we might expect; but the use of all the characters of Scripture and the forced, sometimes outrageous way, in which they are used to illustrate his argument, show how thoroughly biblical the age was.

¹ See article in *Dublin Review*, July, 1894, on the Pre-Reformation English Bible, by Dom Aidan Gasquet, O.S.B.

² *Ibid.* n. cxxvii.

³ *Ibid.* Preface, p. xlvi.

We will now proceed as briefly as may be with our history ; and, for convenience' sake, we will consider the relations of Grosseteste first with the King and then with the Holy See ; by which time we shall be able to determine on the whole what is the true estimate to be formed of our good Bishop as a champion of the rights of Holy Church against State encroachment, and as a loyal son and servant of the Vicar of Christ.

In 1241, the prebend of Thame in Lincoln Cathedral becoming vacant, Grosseteste conferred it upon Simon de London, the penitentiary of the Bishop of Durham. The King, meanwhile, had given the presentation to John Mansel, one of his clerks. Henry was relying on a Papal provision which had been granted to him, but it seems¹ that, on a former occasion, in a dispute of this nature, Grosseteste had obtained a privilege from the Holy See whereby he was empowered to disregard any subsequent Papal provision which did not contain a special clause derogating from his privilege. As there was no such special reference in the Papal provision pleaded by the King, Grosseteste at once threatened Mansel with excommunication. Mansel being, as it seems, a man of peace, resigned his benefice ; and the Bishop overweary of royal interference, seriously contemplated his own resignation and exile. The King, however, gave way, and the affair was compromised.

In 1242, Henry imposed severe exactions upon the country in order to prosecute his foolish war with France, then under St. Louis IX. Grosseteste vehemently exhorted his Chapter to make a common

¹ Matthew Paris, vol. i. p. 374. Bohn's Edition.

stand with himself against the King, who is probably referred to in the purposely ambiguous language of his letter.

In 1243 occurred the famous contest between the Bishop and the Chapter of Canterbury. Truly if the life of man is one of storm, that of Grosseteste was one of hurricane. The said Chapter during the long vacancy of five years claimed metropolitanical power, and undertook to receive appeals from the provinces. The validity of their claim is discussed in Note B.

A clerk, whose name does not appear, sued the Abbot of Bardney, in Lincolnshire, for the recovery of a debt. The Abbot disputed the debt, upon which the clerk appealed to the Archdeacon, who seconded him in applying to Grosseteste to enforce the claim. The Bishop sent lay visitors to the monastery for this purpose, but the monks shut the door in their faces, and stoutly defied the Bishop's right to interfere. Grosseteste would certainly seem to be within his rights: his prudence and tact do not seem quite so clear. The Abbot, hearing of the claim of the Canterbury Chapter, appealed to them. At this juncture of events the King, recognizing the validity of the sentence of deposition which was now pronounced by Grosseteste, proceeded to seize the temporalities of the vacant abbacy, upon which the Bishop turned round upon the King and threatened him with the fate of Ozah, who perished for touching the ark.¹ The Canterbury monks then proceeded solemnly to excommunicate the Bishop with bell, book, and candle. This only intensified the quarrel, the censure

¹ 2 Kings vi. 7.

being received by Grosseteste with contempt. Eventually appeal was made to Innocent IV., who had just been elevated to the Papacy, and Innocent directed the monks to withdraw their excommunication, and sought a peaceable adjustment of the conflicting claims. Grosseteste, however, complained of the action of the Pope in directing the Canterbury monks to annul their sentence. It seemed to him as if the Pope thereby more or less gave colour to their preposterous claim. But Innocent's object was clearly to shelve an examination which would have required long delays, and settle matters by an exercise of his own unquestioned superior authority. The letter of Grosseteste to Cardinal Otho on this occasion is noteworthy.¹ He calls the episcopal dignity the greatest upon earth. The Pope himself, he says, is not more than a Bishop, although within the sphere of the episcopate he holds the very summit and the plenitude of power, from which plenitude the other Bishops receive what they possess. Here is proof positive that up to the age of sixty-eight Grosseteste is as orthodox in his faith and allegiance to the Holy See as can possibly be.

In 1244 a serious disturbance between the scholars and the Jews arose at Oxford.² Wood's quaint remark—*nescio an de usuris*—probably indicates the cause. Grosseteste took the scholars' part, though the precise mode of the settlement of the affair is uncertain. What is certain is that the Bishop, in what he

¹ No. cx. "Dignitas episcopalis est maxima qua Christus homo usus est in terris : qua nec majorem gestat apex papalis licet in hac locum obtineat *summi verticis* et plenitudinem potestatis : de qua plenitudine ceteri quod habent, recipiunt."

² Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses*, i. p. 233.

did, laid the foundation of the jurisdiction of the University. For we find that shortly afterwards the King issued a privilege to the Chancellor and University, recognizing and ordaining that for the future,

all clerical causes respecting loans given or received, or the taxation and letting of houses, or matters regarding food and clothing or any contract whatever of movable goods in the municipality or suburbs of Oxford should be decided in the Court of the Chancellor of the University, and the King's prohibition was not to be in force.

The year 1244 was one of perpetual friction between Grosseteste and the King. The interference of the latter with the filling up of the vacant sees of Winchester and Chichester, successfully resisted by the Bishop, and the royal demand for subsidy likewise refused by the Bishop's influence, may be found related in Luard's Preface.¹ It is impossible within our prescribed limits to enter into details of these transactions.

The next dispute, however, between Grosseteste and the King deserves particular attention. In 1246 the financial condition of the see of Canterbury was in a deplorable state: a great part of its debts arising out of the expenses attending the Translation of the relics of St. Thomas in 1220. Boniface, the Archbishop, appealed to the Pope in his distress, and was authorized to appropriate the revenues of the first year of all the benefices falling vacant during the next seven years in the city, diocese, and province of Canterbury, until the sum of ten thousand marks should have been collected. Boniface thereupon applied to Grosseteste for his help in procuring the

¹ *Ibid.* pp. lviii. seq.

money, a matter of great difficulty, for the demand was highly resented by the King and his subjects. Grosseteste at first refused to help the Archbishop. In epistle lxxxix.,¹ in terms of the utmost respect and good-will, he begs to be excused from interference in the matter. He says that he would thereby offend his fellow-suffragans by acting independently of them, and make himself odious to his clergy, already overtaxed by Papal and royal exactions. However, shortly afterwards, perhaps in consequence of the King's strenuous opposition, we find Grosseteste acceding to the request of Boniface, upon which Henry was forced once more to give way through fear of the sturdy Bishop.

Almost at the same time Pope Innocent himself was compelled to demand a subsidy. Upon this particular point we defer for the present any commentary. Later on will be seen an apology for the Holy See in this and similar appeals to the English purse. Once more the King was enraged beyond measure, and wrote to each Bishop peremptory orders forbidding them to levy the "tallage,"² as it was called. The reply of Grosseteste to the King is memorable, and gives us proof positive, that at any rate six years before his death his loyalty to the Holy See is unimpaired. The great change in the Popery of the Bishop, as alleged by Canon Perry, is yet to be. We quote from the Bishop's letter :³

The Bishops are bound to collect the tallage [he writes], for they as well as I myself are compelled by the authority

¹ Luard, p. 276.

² Derived from an obsolete French word, *tailage* or tax.

³ Letter cxix. Luard, p. 341.

and precepts of the Sovereign Pontiff, whom not to obey "is the sin of witchcraft," in whose wish not to acquiesce is like the "crime of idolatry."¹ . . . For we see our spiritual father and mother,² to whom we are bound incomparably more than to our parents in the flesh—by way of honour, obedience, and reverence and every kind of relief in their necessities—relegated to exile, persecuted, despoiled, and deprived of wherewith to be sustained according to their state.

He goes on to threaten the King with the evils that are sure to fall upon the kingdom, unless they succour the "spiritual father of all upon earth." Once more the King is foiled and Holy Church triumphs under the leadership of "Lincolniensis."

In 1248 we find Grosseteste present in the Parliament convened in London for the real, though not expressed, purpose of obtaining supplies for the King's impoverished condition.

The Parliament refused to comply with the King's demand for the present. It would seem that for three or four years the royal subsidies remained in abeyance. In October, 1252, the King produced a Papal mandate, authorizing him to receive for three years an entire tenth of the revenues of the Church in England to provide for the necessities of the royal pilgrimage to the Holy Land under the banner of the Cross. According to Matthew Paris, and, as far as can be seen, to no other author, Grosseteste protested against this demand of Pope and King, even whilst some of the prelates were inclined to give way. The ground of Grosseteste's objection was that the exaction was excessive, and would

¹ 1 Kings xv. 23.

² By these words, which occur frequently in the Bishop's letters, he means the Pope and the Roman Church.

become a dangerous precedent. Whilst refusing to give credence to the exaggerated account of Paris, it is probably true that the Bishops, with Grosseteste as their guiding spirit, at first refused compliance. We see no reason why they should not have done so, nor what point is gained by our opponents in such an admission. Eventually, however, the Bishops met in council and offered to come to terms with the King. They proposed to concede the grant of money on condition that he would keep inviolate Magna Charta. Besides which he was to grant a charter undertaking that this exaction should not be used as a precedent, and that the money should be applied *bona fide* to the exact purpose for which it was demanded. The King swore that he would not submit to such slavery, whereupon the Council and Parliament broke up with the matter unsettled.

In May of the next year, 1253, another Parliament was held in which, at the instance chiefly of Grosseteste, the King was forced to submit to the terms offered him ; and once more the royal arbitrariness was kept at bay. And what does the weary recurrence of friction between mitre and crown prove? What would have been the history of the English people all along the line of Norman, Angevin, and Plantagenet Kings—sad enough as it is—without the benign and effective power of Holy Church to roll back the ever-recurring tide of arbitrary and despotic kinghood? What was it that made the tyrant Tudor possible, but the gradual withdrawal, by the Black Death, Lollard fanaticism, and civil wars, of the restraining power of the Catholic Church? The yoke of Jesus Christ was cast off, and exchanged for the

yoke of Cæsar. When will mankind learn the lesson that a yoke of some kind they cannot escape? It must be either that of Christ "which is sweet,"¹ or else that of Cæsar: unless indeed it be that of Demos, more terrible still.

We have no space here to narrate in detail the different acts of Grosseteste in the administration of his diocese. It will be sufficient to state that he was chiefly occupied in making visitations² with his characteristic thoroughness and severity: that in consequence he was in perpetual conflict with Chapter and beneficed clergyman, with abbot and prior, with monk and nun. Indeed, so frequent were the complaints about the conduct of "the terrible" Bishop, that Luard³ is obliged to remark several times in his Preface that he cannot acquit him of hastiness, intemperate zeal, and lack of judgment in many of his transactions; whilst Matthew Paris, in support of the rights of monasteries, occasionally pours forth the vials of his wrath upon him.

It only remains for us to give an account of the dealings of our good Bishop with the Holy See. We have reserved this part of our history to the conclusion of our tract, because it is of supreme importance, as determining mainly the estimate we shall have finally to make of the character and orthodoxy of Robert Grosseteste. We shall confine our attention almost entirely to the letters of the Bishop

¹ St. Matt. xi. 30.

² *E.g.*, of Godstow, where the Abbess is deposed *propter culpas suas*: of Dunstable and Caudwell, where the Priors were likewise degraded: of Oxford, Lichfield, and Coventry, &c. (Luard, Preface, pp. lxix. seq.) At Ramsey he inspected the dormitories, "forcing open anything that was shut." (*Ibid.* p. lxxv.)

³ *E.g.*, pp. lxxi. lxxv. See also p. xlvi.

as the incontestable sources of evidence ; whilst, for reasons already stated, we discard in great measure the biassed and indeed fabulous narrative of Matthew Paris.

First, let us see from the said letters what was the faith of Grosseteste from the beginning *to the end of his life* as regards the See of Rome.

The first reference made to that See is in a letter¹ written to William de Raleigh, treasurer of Exeter in the year 1236 : *i.e.*, in the sixty-second year of his age, and the first of his episcopate.

The princes of this world [writes the Bishop] ought to know that either sword,² the temporal as well as the spiritual, is the sword of Peter. But it is the Heads of the Church, who occupy the place and office of Peter, who of themselves use the spiritual sword ; it is the same Heads of the Church who use the material sword by the hand and ministry of secular princes ; who ought to unsheath or sheath it according to the design and disposition of ecclesiastical chiefs.

In epistle xxix. of the same year Grosseteste writes to King Henry to say that the Pope has taken under his protection the Crusaders, and has commanded the Archbishops and Bishops likewise to befriend them ; and threatens with punishment those

¹ No. xxiii. Luard, p. 76.

² The Bishop here uses the famous similitude of the two swords, as St. Anselm did before him (*Comm. in Matth.* c. xxvi.), and as Boniface VIII. did in the Bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302), which has given such widespread offence. The first sword is the spiritual power, the second sword is the material power, to be drawn in support of the spiritual power. The spiritual sword is drawn by the Church, the civil sword *directly* by the State, but *indirectly* by the Church, when she calls upon the State to draw it in her interests, as she has the right to do. For the temporal authority, though perfectly distinct from it, yet must be subject to the spiritual authority ; because the spiritual order is of its very nature superior to the temporal, as the soul is to the body. If it could be shown that the Pope anywhere asserted as his prerogative, direct power over the

prelates who disobey the Papal command. Therefore, to avoid the charge of negligence and disobedience, he begs the King to release from prison Richard Syward, the Crusader. To this letter the same date may be assigned.

In letter xxxv.,¹ written to Pope Gregory IX. (date uncertain) we find expressions of extraordinary devotion.

Although [he writes] from the general debt of subjection, by which not only the entire Christian people but the whole human race is bound, and without the payment of which no one can gain salvation, I also am a debtor to your most holy paternity: yet the special prerogative of your virtues and the singular refulgence of them stimulates me intensely and strongly urges me to show forth the plenitude of obedience, of reverence, honour, and fear, &c.

At the end of the letter he asks for some bodily task by which he may prove his devotion.

Epistle xlix.² is of special value for our history, for it shows how Grosseteste thought it proper to act when a Papal legate proposed to supersede his episcopal rights. Otho, the Cardinal Legate, had appointed his own clerk, Atto, to the prebend at Lincoln, which had been previously held by Warminster. Grosseteste not unnaturally found this appointment most objectionable—first, because he had himself filled up the vacancy before Otho's letters reached him; secondly, because of the interference with his rights as patron of the benefice.

temporal order, then offence might justly be taken. But nowhere has the Pope done this. It should be remembered that the claim of Boniface had its origin in the public law then in force. See Hergenröther's *Church and State*, vol. ii. p. 120. English Translation.

¹ Luard, p. 123.

² *Ibid.* p. 144.

But, in writing back, he has no thought of resisting, and even acknowledges expressly that "the Pope and the Holy Roman Church have power freely to dispose of all ecclesiastical benefices." What he claims is only the right to protest against a use of this supreme power, which he says "tends to the destruction rather than to the edification of the Church." And he finishes by "asking suppliantly, and prostrate at the feet of your Holiness, that in your kindness you will revoke the appointment to this prebend."

In letter lviii., addressed to Gregory IX. (1238), we find the same loyalty to the Holy See, with an earnest request that the Pope will not suffer the light of the Franciscan Order to be extinguished. Another letter, No. lviii., to the same Pope, is in a similar strain. (1238.)

Letter cxxvii. is one of great importance. It is in reality a pamphlet, written in 1239, to his Chapter at the beginning of the quarrel which, as we have seen, lasted so long a time. We have already called attention to its intensely Scriptural character. Moses, he writes, was advised by Jethro to appoint assistants in his work, but he did not thereby give up or diminish his power, but reserved to himself the more important cases.¹ The same is true of prelates: and prelates only can deal with the whole diocese or Chapter if they go wrong. Further, as the prelates are to their Chapter and diocese, so is the Pope to the prelates. As is each Bishop to his diocese, so is the Pope to the whole Church. Special exemptions may be given by the Pope to rural deans, abbots, chapters, &c., but

Exodus xviii. 13, seq. ; Numbers xi. 1, seq.

where an exemption has not been given, as is the case with the Lincoln Chapter, then that Chapter must be subject to the Bishop's visitation: and the Bishop cannot diminish his own powers, neither can the Pope his own. This is shown in various passages of Scripture,¹ in which the Bishop's duty to his flock is laid down, and threats are quoted to neglect on their part. Now this duty cannot be done without visitation. The parish priests are *visores*, *i.e.*, continually resident, and eye-witnesses of their flock. The Bishops alone are *visitatores*, or itinerant and special shepherds of the flock. The Dean is always resident, and therefore is only a *visor* not *visitor*. The *visores*, or pastors, are stimulated to zeal by the fact of their being visited by the Bishops. So St. Bernard writes,² and many other examples of Holy Scripture prove.³ It is impossible within our limits to analyze the entire letter. Enough is here set forth to supply complete evidence of the exalted ideas of Papal prerogative and his own duty of reverence and obedience, which pervaded the mind of Grosseteste up to his sixty-fifth year.

In letters lxxvii. to Pope Gregory, lxxx. to S. de Arden, his proctor at the Roman court, and lxxxii. again to the Pope (all of 1239), which were written during the progress of his contention with his Chapter, there are to be found fervid protestations of his utter dependence on the Pope, "whose health,"

¹ Ecclus. xxxiii. 19—24; Exodus xxix. 44; Jerem. xi. 1—4; St. John x. 12; Jerem. xxiii. 1, 2; Jerem. xxiii. 2; Ezech. xxxiv. 4, 16, and 11, 12, 15, 17; Isaias x. 15, &c.

² St. Bernard, *De Officio Episcoporum*, 35, opp. i. col. 1127.

³ *E.g.*, The parable of the Prodigal Son: David, Samuel, Adam and Eve, Abel, Abraham, &c.

he thus concludes, "may the most High preserve for me and the Church for a long time."¹

We have now arrived at the year 1243 and the Pontificate of Innocent IV. (1241—54.) To him in letter cxi., Grosseteste writes fervent congratulations and requests for help in his sufferings with his Chapter. We must bear this letter in mind because we shall presently have occasion to compare it with the famous letter cxxviii. for the purpose of showing the difference of style between a letter of the Bishop to the Pope, and one to his notary.

Letter cxvii., to Innocent IV., written in 1245, is of special importance. This year, be it remembered, is the tenth of Grosseteste's episcopate, and the eighth before his death. We give the literal translation of the greater part of this notable document. The inscription is as follows :

To our most holy Father and Lord in Christ, Innocent, by the grace of God Supreme Pontiff, his own devoted Robert, by the Divine pity the humble minister of the Church of Lincoln, with most devout kisses of his blessed feet.

After my return to England, I met our Lord the King returning from the districts of Wales : and in a private conversation with him, whilst, among other things, I said, as well as I could, certain persuasive words about obedience, fidelity, and devotion to your Holiness and the Holy Roman Church—to be shown and observed and firmly and constantly maintained, especially now, when some people are trying, but by the help of God in vain, to attempt some disturbance of the prevailing tranquillity—the King replied to me thus : "My Lord Bishop, those things which belong to the crown and our royalty we intend, as indeed we ought, to preserve inviolate :² and we desire that our lord the Pope and the Church may help us so to do : and take

¹ Luard, p. 261.

² See above, note, p. 153.

it for certain, that, altogether and at all times, we will show and observe obedience, fidelity, and devotion to our lord the Pope, as our spiritual father, and to the holy Roman Church, as our mother. . . .”

This reply of my lord the King I have thought fit to send to your Holiness, that it may plainly appear to you, what devotion the said lord bears towards you and the Roman Church. May the most High (Lord) of the Church maintain your health for many a day.

There can be no question then, that at this period, which it is to be remembered is the seventieth year of the Bishop's life, his devotion to the Chair of Peter leaves nothing to be desired.

In the following year, 1246, we have still more striking evidence of the same devotion. In letter cxix., Grosseteste writes to the King, to justify his action in the matter of the tallage imposed by the Pope upon the clergy. Henry is astonished that Grosseteste himself proposes to collect the tallage. Grosseteste replies thus :

Be it known to you that we do nothing in this matter of ourselves, *i.e.*, by our own authority, nor independently ; for our venerable brethren in the episcopacy are doing the same thing ; according to the form given to them by Master Martin, the nuncio of our lord the Pope : and both they and I are compelled by the authority of the supreme Pontiff, whom not to obey is like the sin of witchcraft and like the crime of idolatry.² It is therefore not to be wondered at that we, the bishops, are acting thus in the matter. But it would be most worthy of the utmost astonishment and indignation if we refused to do so much or even more. For we see our spiritual father and mother to whom we are bound incomparably more than to our parents according to the flesh, to render honour, obedience, reverence, and help of all kinds

¹ Luard, p. 340.

² 1 Kings xv. 23.

in their necessities, relegated to exile, distressed by persecutions and troubles from every quarter, despoiled of their patrimony, and without means of their own whereby to obtain proper sustenance. If then, to these our spiritual parents in such circumstances we do not give help, it is certain that we transgress the commandments of God concerning the honour due to parents, nor shall we be long-lived in the land.¹

With reference to the action of Grosseteste in this matter, Dom Wallace writes :²

Men like St. Edmund and Bishop Grosseteste, unworldly men, with singleness of view, having at heart only the glory of God and salvation of souls, were prepared to make any sacrifice on behalf of the common father of Christendom, in the straits to which he was reduced.³ . . . St. Edmund himself cheerfully paid whatever demands were made upon him by the Holy See without murmur or remonstrance.

We now come to the famous letter cxxviii,⁴ which alone, as Luard remarks, has kept the memory of Grosseteste green in the English mind and memory. It is represented by Luard and almost all authors as written to Innocent IV. We shall see shortly that it was not so. The circumstances which led to its composition were as follows.

Innocent IV., in a letter dated Perugia, January 26, 1253 (nine months before the death of Grosseteste), ordered the Bishop to induct the Pope's nephew, Frederick of Lavagna, into a canonry at Lincoln, by provision, any exemption or privilege of the Church of Lincoln notwithstanding. Grosseteste peremptorily refused, and wrote the famous letter under considera-

¹ Exodus xx. 12.

² *St. Edmund of Canterbury*, p. 313.

³ What those straits were, see *ibid.* p. 314.

⁴ Luard, *Letters of Grosseteste*, p. 432; and *Burton Annals*, p. 311.

tion, which by its outspoken defiance of the Holy See plainly shows, according to Canon Perry, that the mind of the Bishop was radically altered in its allegiance to Rome.

We will give at considerable length the contents of this letter. First, let us notice its title. This, as it stands in the pages of Luard, is not easy to translate.¹ It is as follows: "*Robertus Lincolnensis episcopus magistro Innocentio domino Papæ salutem et benedictionem*—Robert, Bishop of Lincoln, to Master Innocent, the Lord Pope, health and benediction." In a note² Luard writes: This letter is usually preceded by another commencing:

Robert by the permission of God, bishop of Lincoln to the Archdeacon of Canterbury and master Innocent the Notary of our Lord the Pope health and benediction.

If we turn to the *Burton Annals*³ we find that this is also the true title of the letter we are considering. How then are we to account for the untranslatable Latin title which is given above, and is always prefixed to this letter? How, indeed, except that the force and sting of this letter would be greatly impaired, if it appeared as it really is, to be not a letter to the Pope at all, but to Innocent, the Pope's Notary! We cannot but think that Luard has failed in his usual impartiality here. Dr. Creighton too, notwithstanding his great reputation, falls into the same mistake. It is indeed difficult to acquit these writers entirely of

¹ For we cannot suppose that Grosseteste addressed Innocent IV. as Master Innocent.

² Luard, p. 432.

³ Rolls Series, p. 311.

want of proper care. For if we refer to the *Burton Annals* we read :¹

In the same year (*i.e.* 1253) there having been given certain provisors by the Apostolic authority, *viz.*, the Archdeacon of Canterbury (Hugo De mortuo Mari) and a certain Roman, *by name Innocent*, to provide for a certain Roman youth the first vacant prebend in the cathedral Church of Lincoln : Robert, our lord and master, bishop of the same place, on the receipt of letters executory in this same business from the said (provisors), wrote *to them* in these words.

Then follows the letter cxxviii. with the introduction given in English on the preceding page of this tract, with the addition of the following :

We have understood that you have received letters from our lord the Pope to this effect : “ Innocent, Bishop, &c., to our beloved sons in Christ, the Archdeacon of Canterbury and master Innocent our secretary, dwelling for the present in England, health,” &c.

The letter then proceeds as we have it in Luard's Epistles of Grosseteste. The *Burton Annals* go on to tell us that the Archdeacon and Innocent sent at once the Bishop's letter to Innocent IV. It was not unnatural that they should do this, but there is not a word in the letter directing them to do it. With these facts before us, why do Mr. Luard, Dr. Creighton, and all non-Catholic authors, style this a letter of Grosseteste to the Pope? One would have thought that a scholar of very moderate pretensions would have been aware of the fact, that no suffragan Bishop would dream of sending “health and benediction” to the Sovereign Pontiff, nor even to his Metropolitan or brother suffragans. The reader's attention has

¹ P. 311, Luard's Edit. Rolls Series.

already been drawn to the language of Grosseteste when really addressed to the Pope. See letters cxi. and cxvii.¹

This fact, that letter cxxviii. is written to the Papal notary and not to the Pope, nor meant, so far as we can see, for the eye of the Pope, removes much of the sting of the Protestant indictment. Father Rickaby, S.J., in *The Month* of August, 1880, pertinently remarks, that a Bishop writing to a notary might well enough pen words that he would not dream of sending to the Pope.

And now, when we come to examine the contents of the letter, we shall be surprised to find that instead of curses it contains blessings. We venture to remark that nowhere does Grosseteste show livelier faith and allegiance to the Holy See.

You know [he writes] that I obey the Apostolic commands with filial affection and all devotion and reverence; and those things which are adverse to Apostolic commands, being zealous for the parental honour [of the Holy See], I oppose or withstand; being bound to obedience or opposition equally by Divine command. For Apostolic commands are not, nor can be, anything else but consonant to the doctrine of the Apostles and of Jesus Christ our Lord Himself, the Master and Lord of Apostles, whose type and person our Lord the Pope in the highest degree represents in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. For our Lord Jesus Christ Himself says: "He that is not with Me is against Me;" but against Him the most Divine sanctity of the Apostolic See neither is nor can be. The tenor of the above-mentioned letter is not consistent with Apostolic sanctity, but quite the reverse.² In the first place, in the letter, and

¹ See above, p. 157.

² Luard justly observes that the style of this letter is scarcely equal to its fame. It is almost impossible to give the exact English equivalent of its more turgid and intemperate passages.

in others like it spread widely abroad, the “notwithstandings” (*non obstante*) which are heaped up in such vast quantity, being not drawn from any necessity in observing the law of nature, produce a wide deluge of fickleness, audacity, and shameless insolence of lying and deceiving, a distrust in believing or giving faith to anybody, and all the vices which follow from those things which are innumerable, disturbing and confusing the purity of religion and the social intercourse of men. Moreover, after the sin of Lucifer, the same with that of Antichrist, the Son of Perdition in the latter times, whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of His mouth (2 Thess. ii. 8), there neither is, nor can be, any sort of sin so adverse and contrary to Apostolic and Evangelical teaching, so odious and detestable to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, so abominable and destructive to the human race as to kill and destroy, by robbing them of the pastoral office and ministry, those souls which are to be vivified and saved by the office and ministry of the pastoral care. . . .

He goes on to say that the sin of those who send such unworthy ecclesiastics is greater than that of those who are sent, referring of course to the Sovereign Pontiff, and concludes as follows :

No one who is subject to the Apostolic See, and faithful in immaculate and sincere obedience, and not cut off from the Body of Christ and the same Holy See by schism, can obey commands, or precepts, or attempts of any description of such a character as this, from whatever quarter they come, even if it should be from the highest order of angels, but must of necessity contradict and rebel against them with all his strength. Therefore, reverend sirs, out of the debt of obedience and fidelity by which I am bound to the Most Holy Apostolic See, as to both my parents and by the love of union with it in the Body of Christ, these things which are contained in the said letter, because they most evidently tend to the sin which I have mentioned, are most abominable to our Lord Jesus Christ, and most pernicious to the human race, and are altogether opposed to the holiness of

the Apostolic See, and are contrary to Catholic unity, I filially and obediently disobey, contradict, and rebel against. Nor can your wisdom institute harsh measures against me, because every word and action of mine in the matter is neither contradiction nor rebellion: but filial honour due by Divine command to my (spiritual) father and mother.¹

Such are the salient points of this letter, upon which non-Catholics are wont almost entirely to rely in their endeavour to prove the Protestantism of Grosseteste.

It is usually stated, though solely on the authority of Matthew Paris, that Innocent IV. was furious on the receipt of this letter from the notary, burst out into intemperate language, and was only prevented by the Cardinals from at once placing Grosseteste under excommunication. Other writers affirm that he actually did so. But Luard says that he can find no authority for the fact;² and we need not trouble ourselves about the highly-coloured story of Matthew Paris. Doubtless the Pope was displeased; but he knew very well his man, and loved and respected him, and actually ordered the vehement protests of the Bishop to be read aloud in a consistory of Cardinals.³

Neither need we be concerned with the ordinary account of the Bishop's death, in which he is made

¹ *Sed filialis divino mandato debita patri et matri honoratio*; which Canon Perry translates thus: "But the filial honour due to the Divine commandment as to (?) my parents." This is feebleness itself. It will be observed that Grosseteste throughout his letters is perpetually writing about his "spiritual father and mother," meaning thereby the Pope and the Roman Church.

² Preface to Epistles of Grosseteste, p. lxxxi. in note, where he gives his reason for discrediting the excommunication.

³ Lingard, vol. ii. p. 248, note.

to pour forth violent complaints and accusations against the Holy See. Canon Perry has wrought this episode of Grosseteste's career into high relief. An illustration is given of the death-bed, and five or six pages are devoted to the last words of the dying prelate. He is made by the Canon to define the sin of heresy, and to convict the Pope of that sin, and to condemn him to everlasting flames.

The avarice, simony, usury, and cheating, the lustfulness, gluttony, vanity, and worldliness which reigned in the Papal Court were present in sad array to the thoughts of the Bishop. At last, worn out with his vehement protests, the voice and breath together ceased, the eloquent tongue was still, the zealous and earnest heart ceased to beat, and the great Bishop went to receive his reward.¹

Let us hope that there were not wanting other thoughts to the dying man, such as those of contrition, and faith, and hope, wherewith to meet his particular judgment. However, as the Canon has taken every word from Matthew Paris, and from him alone, we need not trouble ourselves to make further comment upon them. So, also, as regards the famous ghost story, according to which Robert of Lincoln appeared to Innocent IV., when that Pontiff was thinking of casting the bones of the Bishop outside the church; and in which we are told that the ghost pummelled poor Innocent with the butt-end of his pastoral staff. Here, again, Paris is responsible for the story.² To all of this, and such as this, enlightened scholarship will give but sparse credence.

One epistle alone remains to be noticed, viz., that

¹ Perry, pp. 284—290.

² For further amusing embellishments see Dr. Milman's *Latin Christianity*, bk. x. ch. 5.

which is numbered cxxxi. in Luard's edition. In this document, the Bishop is represented as calling upon the nobles of England, the citizens of London, and the whole community "to resist with arms, the various oppressions, provisions, impositions of the Apostolic See."

Before dealing with the attitude towards the Holy See adopted by the writer of this letter, one would like to have some evidence that Grosseteste himself was the writer. This document is not found along with the other letters of Grosseteste, but comes to us from a wholly disconnected source. It is to be found in a bundle of other ancient letters in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. We have fortunately been able to secure the services of a friend who has recently examined the document. He reports that it occupies but one sheet of paper, is thrown casually among other miscellaneous writings, is not in the form of a letter at all, and has a title which is quite unique. Every letter of Grosseteste (that has been published, at any rate) has the prefix of "Robert, by the grace of God Bishop of Lincoln," or of words to that effect; this letter alone is without it. It is styled *Lincolniensis proceribus Angliæ*. Till further research, if any is possible, has established the authorship of Grosseteste, we need not concern ourselves with any serious apology for it. At the most it is of a piece with other letters of the same kind, which do not affect Papal prerogative, but merely certain acts of Papal administration. Besides which, being written, according to Luard, in 1252, it is not the last expression of the mind and attitude of Grosseteste towards the Holy See.

What then is our final conclusion upon the various controversial points which have arisen in our short history of Robert Grosseteste?

I. As to foreign holders of benefices. Whence the universal condemnation of these, but either from ignorance or bigotry? In this indictment we include even Luard, notwithstanding his manifest and honourable attempts to avoid partiality and passion. For instance, on page xlvi. of his Preface, he writes thus:

The same year, 1240, is remarkable for the audacious attempt of the Pope to attach the Roman citizens to himself by giving them English benefices.

He then quotes Matthew Paris, who declares the number of such foreigners to be three hundred. If this be true, and here again Paris is our sole informant, we do not find any author whom we have consulted attempt to judge the matter from the Pope's point of view. Nor do we find any mention of a Bull of Innocent IV. in which he speaks of his great reluctance to impose such burdens on the people of England, but pleads his own distress as compelling him so to do.¹ We maintain that, in these days of enlightened historical research, we have a right to complain of such one-sided presentment of facts. The truth is, the Popes were not free in such matters. It must never be forgotten that the Pope is Supreme Head upon earth of the Catholic Church, that is to say, the Church gathered into one unity out of all nations. In this capacity he has the right, and sometimes the duty, to require one part of his flock

¹ Wilkins' *Concilia*, vol. i. p. 700; Rymer's *Fœdera*, vol. i. p. 471.

to bear the burdens of another. Now, at this period, the hostility of the German Emperor, the feuds of Guelph and Ghibelline, the consequent relaxation of morals and discipline, the impoverishment of Church endowments, the decrease in the offerings of the faithful—all these things had thrown upon the Pope's hands a multitude of starving ecclesiastics. Innocent IV. himself was an exile for ten years at Lyons, without any resources but contributions from the clergy. What then was he to do? Is it wonderful that he should have cast his eyes upon England, already a wealthy nation,¹ and called upon it to help him in his distress? If, beyond merely appealing, he also by his authority demanded, or even exacted relief, and used his supreme jurisdiction in the disposition of benefices, was he not acting within his rights? As regards subsidies demanded from the nation at large, as distinguished from the clergy, it must be remembered that, whether we approve of it or not, England had been made over as a fief to the Holy See, *by the express will of the barons*, as well as of the clergy and King John.

No one can justly blame the Pope for holding the English nation to their compact. Doubtless abuses arose both in the amount of the subsidies demanded, their mode of collection, and oftentimes in the number² and fitness of foreign ecclesiastics for tenure of English benefices. But abuses will arise, and cannot be avoided; and wherever Grosseteste

¹ That he was ignorant of the true financial condition of England is clear from the Burton Annals. (Rolls Series, second edition, p. 280.)

² For the statement that the incomes of foreigners in 1252 amounted to 70,000 marks, upon which so much stress is laid by Protestant authors, Matthew Paris alone is responsible.

opposed a genuine abuse, he was perfectly right in what he did, as we should be to-day in similar circumstances.

The Papacy [it has been well said] would not be the most tremendous burden upon earth, as indeed it is, if the Pope were divinely preserved from making a mistake in the conduct of his business, or committing a sin by the abuse of his power. Catholics are not bound to uphold every Papal act in history as wise, considerate, or even justifiable.¹

But what is proved by resistance to an unjust Papal demand? Does it mean the denial of Papal right to make any demand? Does resistance to an unjust taxation involve the denial of the power of the State to impose taxes? or is resistance to unkind treatment on the part of a parent the same thing as the denial of parental authority? This confusion of thought runs through the pages of almost all non-Catholic historians, in particular those of Canon Perry, whose *Life of Grosseteste* is before us. He is simply throwing dust into the eyes of his Anglican readers. Let him show, if he can, one solitary instance where Grosseteste ever denied the Papal *prerogative* among his not infrequent acts of resistance to Papal *administration*.

II. We do not however justify every act of Grosseteste in his work of reform. The fact is that, as Luard frequently remarks, intense zeal for souls was not always tempered with discretion. His was a rugged and somewhat imperious nature. He was not distinguished for over-refinement, nor would patience be reckoned as his predominant virtue. The

¹ *The Month*, August, 1880.

maxim—"things will right themselves"—is about the very last he would acknowledge; and yet who that is versed in government does not recognize its wisdom in a variety of cases?¹ Contrast Grosseteste with his contemporary, St. Edmund of Canterbury. There was a mediæval saying upon this point: *Dilexit Dominus Edmundum in odorem benignitatis, et dilexit Dominus Robertum in odorem fidelitatis*—"The Lord hath loved Edmund for an odour of sweetness, and Robert for an odour of fidelity." St. Edmund was raised to the altars of the Church, and Grosseteste was not. May it not be that there was wanting to the latter that patient endurance of evils which cannot be remedied, that toleration of wrongs which cannot be redressed; that spirit of, *In Te Domine speravi: non confundar in æternum*; that absolute unconsciousness of being necessary, or, indeed, of any consequence to the welfare of Holy Church; in short, that utter effacement of self which distinguishes the Saint from the holy Bishop?

III. As regards the excommunication of Grosseteste, we have already shown that Luard denies it. But, as Dr. Felten remarks on this point, is it not quite certain that Matthew Paris would be sure to pounce upon the fact, and turn it to his own anti-Papal partisanship, if it had been true? whereas Paris makes no mention whatever of it.²

Again, the Primate with two other Bishops, several abbots, and an immense multitude of the faithful,

¹ See this point very well put by Miss Allies: *History of the Church in England*, pp. 231, seq.

² Collier (*Church History*, vol. ii. p. 509) refers to the Annals of Lanercost for the excommunication, and seems to connect Matthew Paris with the statement. But Matthew Paris has not a word about it.

assisted at Grosseteste's funeral; and the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's in the year 1307, petitioned his canonization.¹ These facts are irreconcilable with his excommunication.

IV. As regards the famous letter cxxviii., we finally remark as follows :

(i.) It is the very last expression of the mind of Grosseteste about the Holy See; being written in the spring of 1253, a few months before his death, which fell on October 9 of that year. Luard, in his article upon Grosseteste in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, affirms that, "this letter expresses the utmost reverence for the Pope and the Roman See." We say rather that something more than mere reverence is manifested by it; that the argument which pervades the letter, is the most absolute demonstration of his consummate faith. He says that this proposed appointment by the Pope of his nephew to the Lincoln canonry is an unrighteous one; therefore it does not come from the Apostolic See, *which cannot, as such, do unrighteous acts*. And considering the irritation of the Bishop as he penned this epistle, we cannot conceive or desire stronger proof of his Papal orthodoxy. To say then with Canon Perry that this letter is an evidence of the Bishop's change of mind and faith in Rome is about as true as that yes is no, or that light is darkness. But once more: *fas est et ab hoste doceri*. Luard in his Preface to the Epistles of Grosseteste writes thus:²

Grosseteste has been styled one of the harbingers of the Reformation. . . . If this implies that he had any tendency towards the doctrinal changes then brought about in the

¹ Wilkins' *Concilia*, vol. ii. p. 287.

² P. xiv.

Church, or that he evidenced any idea of a separation of the Church of England from that of Rome, a more utterly mistaken statement has never been made. . . .

To judge him by the ideas prevalent in the sixteenth century, or to expect to find him influenced by similar motives to those which were influencing men's minds then, is to do him great injustice : and such a view of his character can only arise from ignorance of the actual facts.

(ii.) The absurd blunder, by which Innocent the Notary is confounded with Innocent the Pope, has been pointed out. Therefore this famous Epistle of Grosseteste to Innocent IV. is a myth, and must never do duty again among scholars.

V. Not only by words or letters, but by acts all through his life, did Grosseteste proclaim his Papal allegiance. He made two painful seven-weeks' journeys to the Pope's presence—the second when he was an old man of seventy-five and over. Further, in his differences with the Canterbury monks, with his own Chapter, and with Boniface of Canterbury, that is to say *three times*, he appealed to Rome. He exhorted Henry as we have seen to fidelity to Rome ; he championed the Papal subsidy. If this is not to uphold Papal Supremacy, we are at a loss to know what is.

And now, we think, that enough has been written to vindicate the Papal orthodoxy, from beginning to end, of our most holy, and zealous, and unmistakeably Catholic Bishop, Robert Grosseteste.

NOTE A (see p. 141).

The controversy between Grosseteste and his Chapter is plainly a case of conflict between the *jus commune* (or *General Law*) of the Church (of which a remarkable revival took place in the twelfth century) and the old Norman and English "customs" which dated from a period before that revival. By the *jus commune* the Bishop had from earliest times the right to visit his Chapter; by the "customs" spoken of, certain exemptions from such visitation came to be attached to particular Chapters. This was due, it is supposed, to the fact that St. Osmund of Salisbury before his death gave to his Chapter a considerable amount of autonomy with which the Bishop was expected not to interfere. These privileges became extended to the other two great secular Cathedrals of York and Lincoln. By degrees these powers of self-government, extending to the vicars and prebendaries, were looked upon as a body of rights, and were vaguely known as "customs and liberties." Indeed, we are told by Henry Bradshaw in his memorandum to the *Liber Niger* of Lincoln, that the chapters thus constituted had granted to them immunities "by Bishop after Bishop, confirmed too by successive Popes, until by A.D. 1250, even the Bishop's ordinary duty of visitation had come to be looked upon as an intolerable infringement of the right of the Chapter."¹ There do not, however, seem to be any instances of Papal grants explicitly exempting the Chapters from visitation. Grosseteste stood upon the ground of the *jus commune*, and *potestas episcopalis*, which no Bishop could diminish, or renounce, or forfeit by neglect. He declares that the Pope could exempt anybody from visitation: which shows he thought that in this instance the Chapter could not plead such exemption. Grosseteste was evidently

¹ *Lincoln Cathedral Statutes*, p. 37, by Bradshaw and Wordsworth. Cambridge University Press, 1892.

in the whole transaction reviving his undoubted rights, while the Chapter was pleading the prescriptive force of "customs and liberties."

NOTE B (see p. 146).

Before the Council of Trent, Primates or Archbishops had powers to suspend, inhibit, or excommunicate their suffragans. This was generally regarded as part of their ordinary jurisdiction.

A Chapter, when the see is vacant, succeeds to the ordinary power of episcopal jurisdiction (with certain reservations), and has power to inflict censures and to excommunicate. In this particular case the Chapter of Canterbury, the see being vacant, considered that, inheriting the ordinary jurisdictional power of the late Archbishop, they could like him excommunicate throughout the *province*. Grosseteste contended that, whilst this principle held true with regard to the Archbishop's own diocese, it did not extend to the archiepiscopal powers over his suffragans. He¹ distinguishes between the Archbishop as Bishop of his own see, and the same as Archon, or head of the Bishops. So far as we know, there is not any recorded instance of the recognition of this claim of the Canterbury Chapter by the Holy See, although its action in this very case shows that it treated it as not altogether impossible. Shelving, as has been explained, the controversy just then, the Pope preferred to use his own higher authority and supersede the Chapter's excommunication.

¹ Letter cxxvii., which is well worthy of attentive study.

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