

CHAPTER V

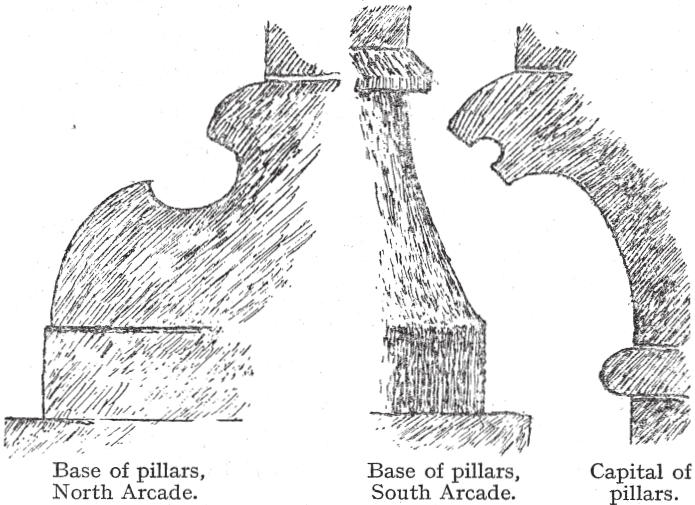
OUR CHURCH'S STORY—TO THE REFORMATION

As we have seen from the record in *Doomsday Book*, there was a priest at Milton in the time of William the Conqueror, and where there was a priest, there, too, was his church wherein he could minister. Of that little church no trace remains.

The present church was begun about the year 1160, during what is called the Transitional-Norman Period in architecture, exhibiting features both of the Norman and the Early English styles. The two lower stages of the tower are late Norman—the set-back of the two stages, the “battered” or tapering walls and their enormous thickness of over five feet, all go to prove this. It would seem as if there had once been a big window, or a great west door, in the tower, indicated by the round Norman arch in the wall, but this was changed for the present Early English doorway. The font is probably of late Norman date, the axe-work with which the sides were rounded off being plainly discernible. Its interior diameter is twenty-five inches, broad enough for a baby to be dipped in it as is ordered by the Prayer Book.

Of the same period as the tower are the walls of the nave and the lower part of the pillars in

the north arcade. Two of these pillars are of white limestone for six feet from the base moulding, about two-thirds of their height, and the original capital rested where the first course of brown stone begins. The piers are one foot eleven inches in diameter, and are massive for pillars of such short height as they were originally, and typically Transitional. The bases of the three piers have the trough moulding, an



Early English feature. These massive pillars on such moulded bases are similar to those in the choir aisle in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, which date from 1160. From the same period we can date the walls of the nave, which are devoid of buttresses.

Two of the original windows remain to us, these being the two Early English west windows, each of three lancet lights, while the little Priest's Door in the east wall of the south aisle

dates also from very early in the Early English period.

We must conclude from the foregoing that the church was at first not so lofty as it is now, since the pillars were only as high as the two taller white portions.

One feature must be carefully noticed. The chancel walls are not bonded with the east walls of the north and south aisles, which proves that the present chancel was not built at the same time as the nave, while the fact that there is a buttress at each of the eastern angles of the chancel, and no buttress anywhere else, proves that the chancel is of more recent date than the nave.

The inference to be drawn is that the church ended in an apse, as was customary in the Norman and Transitional Periods. Therefore the nave must have been longer than at present, and extended as far into our present chancel as the east wall of the aisles, that is, as far as the altar rails. Probably the apse collapsed in course of time, as it did in other churches.

Such was our church until early in the fourteenth century, a witness of many notable events, and taking its due share in the life of the nation.

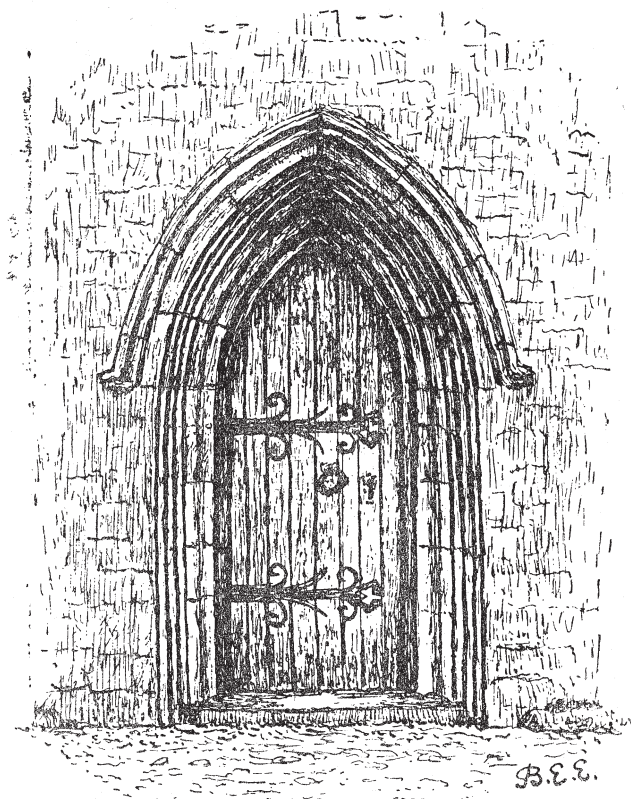
Then in 1236 something occurred which is of interest to us. It must be remembered that the water for Holy Baptism was kept in the font and renewed each Easter, being probably added to from time to time. Now, it would seem that people took away by stealth the baptismal water with which to practise incanta-

tions, or for other sacrilegious uses. Therefore, by the constitutions of Archbishop Edmund of Canterbury, issued in 1236, it was ordered that all fonts should be provided with a fitting cover, and that they should be kept locked as a precaution against sorcery.

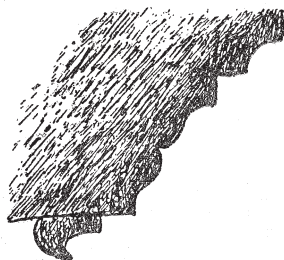
Accordingly in that same year the Rector interviewed the village blacksmith, who came to the church and drove a staple into the stone of the font, to which the cover could be pad-locked. There it remains to this day for all who wish to see, while the strong arm that fastened it in position is long since dust. On the opposite side of the font can be seen the end of a piece of iron driven into the stone, forming part either of another staple or of a hinge for the cover.

Five years after this, on February 13th, 1241, we find the great Bishop, Robert Grossete, of Lincoln, paying a special visit to Milton on his itinerary. As we know that Henry de Wycheton, Sub-Deacon, was instituted to the rectory that year, it is possible that the Bishop performed the duties of induction and institution himself at Milton, but nothing is said in the records as to the object of his visit.

About sixty years later great building operations were begun, which very probably originated through the collapse of the apse at the east end. An entirely new chancel was built, projecting into the nave, and at the same time the north arcade was made higher, three feet six inches being added in brown Duston stone to the old white limestone pillars, and they were finished off with octagonal capitals. The pillars in the



The North Door, Milton Church.



Moulding of Jamb, North Door.

south arcade were entirely rebuilt of brown stone, with octagonal capitals and with bases somewhat similar to the capitals, inverted, upon a single plinth. All the arches are acute. The difference in the styles of the bases is readily apparent, for those in the north are moulded and rest on double plinths.

About the same time, 1300, the tower received further attention. Already, a little less than a hundred years before, an addition had been built in the Early English style above the second stage. Now the octagonal lantern was built on squinches at the top and finished off with a low crocketed spire. This style is called the Decorated. The four pinnacles at the top of the tower are probably later.

Of the same style, and dating from about 1320, is the north door. This has an acutely pointed arch with very good moulding in the Decorated style.

Most of the windows in the church are of this period. The Early English windows in the west wall were left alone, but the great east window, those in the south aisle, and the large window in the Lady Chapel, the present vestry, were constructed about this time.

A singular and interesting window is that in the north wall close to the screen against the choir vestry. Such a window is commonly called a "Low-Side Window," but it used to be popularly known as a "Leper's Squint." Various theories as to the use of these peculiar windows will be found on page 236.

In the north wall of the chancel there still

exists an Aumbrie, or cupboard formed in the wall. Here in olden days were kept the chalice, paten, cruets and other things for the altar when not in use. The door is modern.

The existence of the Priest's Door in the east wall of the south aisle seems to point to the fact that the present south chapel was originally used as a vestry, for this reason. The rectory, up to 1779, was situated in a parcel of ground called Anchor Close, to the north-west of the church, where Anchor Terrace or Barrack Yard and the Post Office now stand. To reach the church, the Rector passed through the field behind his house and probably entered the churchyard through a small gate in the east wall. He would come first to the north aisle, but the Lady Chapel with Our Lady's altar stood there, so the Rector would pass on to the south aisle, where there was no altar. It is interesting to note that the right of the Rectors to take this path through the field remains to this day, the right-of-way established then still existing in a path and stile.

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries the weaving industry flourished in the neighbourhood. Accordingly, a place had to be found in Milton Church for an altar to St. Catherine, on whose festival the weavers made holiday. So the ancient vestry at the east end of the south aisle became the Chapel of St. Catherine. As this saint was put to death on a wheel, what more fitting than that her emblem should be perpetuated in the stone tracery of a window above her altar? Therefore it was done, and the beautiful "Catherine Wheel" window

took its present shape, a wheel within a square. As this part of the aisle had been screened off for a vestry, it already had, of course, a piscina fashioned in the wall. A piscina is a niche, ornamented according to the period, the bottom being in the form of a shallow basin with a hole leading through the wall into the earth. Down this drain was poured the water after cleansing the altar vessels, and hence a piscina is always found close to the altar or where an altar once stood, generally in the south wall, and also in mediæval vestries.

We can fix the date approximately when the chapel was formed by the tracery of the window. The style is Curvilinear, and the date is 1340 or thereabouts. It is mentioned in Bloxam's *Principles of Gothic Architecture*, Vol. I, page 231.

Such a perfect gem as this exquisite window that graces the Chapel of St. Catherine, was not to be alone in its beauty. Another round window, of a somewhat similar design, was put in the east wall of the north aisle above the altar in Our Lady's Chapel, where the vestry and organ chamber are.

This window in the north aisle perished in course of time. It may, of course, have been a Wheel Window such as is now there. I am, however, inclined to the opinion that the original was a Rose Window of very delicate tracery, for the reason that the Wheel Window blazons St. Catherine's emblem and so would be meaningless in the Lady Chapel, while a Rose Window would symbolise Our Lady, the *Rosa Mystica*. During the interval between its

final removal and Mr. Montgomery's gift of the present window, men's memories would become hazy as to its exact design, but they would remember it was circular and so conclude it was like the other—a Wheel Window. This, however, is mere conjecture and it is quite possible it was of a Wheel pattern.

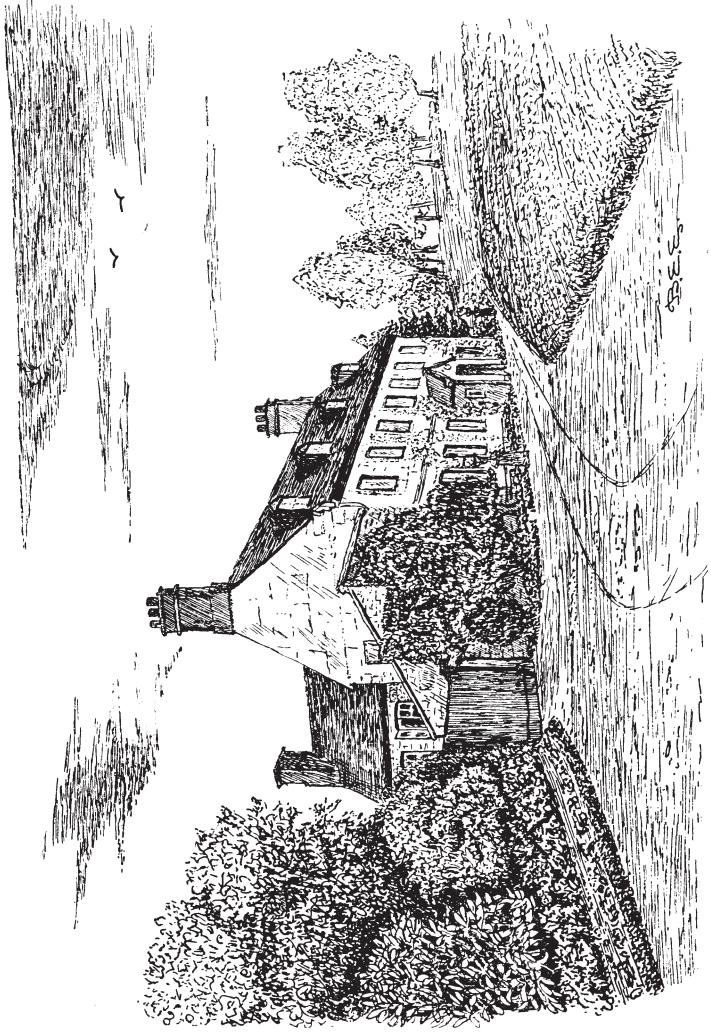
At what time the Rood-screens were erected we cannot tell, because nothing of them now remains, but it was probably during the Perpendicular Period. Had they been erected during the Decorated Period, in which the chancel was built, provision would doubtless have been made in the wall for a staircase.

Then in 1348 the terrible Black Death swept over the country and spared no class. It brought the Decorated Period to an abrupt end, for Gothic art in building received a distinct check in England. Like other places, Milton must have suffered terribly, and we find nothing more was done to the church for over a century. At last, about the year 1450, the three windows of the "Perpendicular" style were inserted in the wall of the north aisle. It is manifest that these windows were not in the original plan, for it will be seen that the most western of the three is on a lower level than the other two, in order to allow of sufficient masonry above the window to support the corbel of a roof-beam. This is interesting, as it tends to show that the north wall possessed until then the original windows of the narrow lancet pattern that first gave light to our church. As these Perpendicular windows are of the same period as the Tudor front of

The Manor, probably the same masons were employed in both places.

With the reconstruction of English life after the ravages of the Black Death, there arose a greater devotional spirit among the people, and this was manifested chiefly in the foundation of Guilds and Chantries, while the veneration of saints took on a new importance. This led to the erection of additional altars in the church, and so about this time was formed the Chapel of St. Nicholas in the south aisle (see page 64). Statues of various saints were also put up in the church (see page 65). The Rood-screens, too, were most probably erected about this time.

A feature of the church which has long since disappeared was the stone seat similar to those that are in the porch. This was about eighteen inches high and ran around the walls inside, providing seating accommodation for the congregation. Traces of its position are still left, for when the stone seat was removed the walls were plastered to meet the old plaster, as in the north and west walls where the line of demarcation is distinctly seen, or left bare as in parts of the south wall. There were no pews in those days, nor church chairs, but the people could use this stone seat, or sit on the base of a pillar, or squat on the rushes with which the floor was strewn. Sometimes they would bring cushions or stools with them to church on which to sit, and we have the historic instance of Jenny Geddes hurling her three-legged stool at the Dean in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh.



MORTIMERS, MILTON.

Very beautiful must have been the interior of the church in those days. The windows were filled with glass of glowing colours. Upon the walls were frescoes, paintings depicting some sacred story or legend. Here and there the statues of saints seemed to keep solemn watch and ward, while the lights of many candles and torches were reflected in the rich gilding of the Rood-screens.

There were many visitors to Milton who came in monkish garb to collect rents and other dues from lands given to them. About the fourteenth century the powerful Malesoure family had granted certain lands to the Abbey of St. James, Northampton, a monastic house of the Austin or Black Canons, and therefore one or more of the Regular Canons would come at times to the village on the business of the Abbey and say his office in our church before returning home. This land and its value are entered in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* as being worth 41s. and 4d. per annum.

Another house of a religious character in Northampton that possessed land in Milton was the Hospital of St. John, that ancient building at the bottom of Bridge Street. The Master and Brethren of the Hospital owned the house now known, after a family who lived there, as Mortimers, with thirty acres of land. Before the Enclosure Award, part of their land was at Stockwell. From old plans of the house and stables I am inclined to the opinion that Mortimers was probably an offshoot of the Northampton Hospital of St. John at one time, for the

house is shown as being 97 ft. long and 20 ft. 9 ins. broad, while the stables are 73 ft. long and 19 ft. 3 ins. broad. These dimensions are more suitable for a building of a monastic character than an ordinary dwelling. Parts of the house are very ancient, some of the work in the cellar windows being of fifteenth-century date, and others much older.

For some years up to the early part of last century this ancient house was partitioned off and inhabited by three families. Then it was taken by the Montgomery family, who restored it to its former dignity and afterwards purchased it from St. John's Hospital. It descended, through his mother, to the present owner, Edward Montgomery Alexander, Esq., who in recent years has greatly improved the house as a dwelling by shortening its unusual length and introducing modern conveniences, so that it is now a well-equipped country house of a convenient size. There is a fine staircase of early date in the hall.

It is almost certain that this property was held by St. John's Hospital in 1305 because in that year there is an account in the Lambeth MSS. (244, f. 72) of an ecclesiastical lawsuit in which they were involved. A dispute had arisen between St. John's Hospital and the Rectors of Blisworth and the united parishes of Milton and Collingtree, and the matter was referred to the Dean of Arches, who decided in favour of the Rectors of Blisworth and Milton. The Hospital authorities were dissatisfied with his ruling, and appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who,

in his sentence promulgated on April 27th, 1305, upheld the decision of the Dean of Arches, which was to be enforced by ecclesiastical censure. A copy of the record in the Lambeth Register is given on page 293. The sequel is interesting. The Master and Brethren refused to give way and had to suffer. In August or September the Archbishop solemnly excommunicated them, and as they still proved obstinate they were handed over to the secular arm, after being more than forty days under the sentence of excommunication. The Archbishop's writ to the King, dated October 29th, 1305, is still in existence and is preserved in the Public Record Office. An order was accordingly sent to the Sheriff of Northampton, and the Master and seven Brethren were thrown into prison, but on November 12th they were released until April 28th because the King learnt they had appealed to the Pope against the Archbishop's sentence as an unjust one. As they had not prosecuted their appeal, the sheriff rearrested them on May 4th, 1306, and they remained in prison for two months, being released in July, 1306, on their exhibiting letters in Chancery that they had taken steps to further their appeal to the Pope. What the result was is not known, as that is the end of the story so far as the records are concerned. I have corresponded with the sub-librarian of the Vatican at Rome, but a search in that famous library has proved fruitless. It is quite possible, however, that the Rectors of Blisworth and Milton still won their case, though it must have cost them a lot. What

it was all about in the first instance is not mentioned, and the records for that period of the Court of Arches have perished, but very likely it was a question of tithes due to the two Rectors on the lands in their parishes owned by the Hospital of St. John.

Some few years after this dispute there are records, that seem strange to modern minds, of cases of sanctuary in the churches of Milton and Collingtree. For a full account of these see Chapter IX.

During the next century something of great interest and importance occurred. Up to 1441 the rectories of Milton and Collingtree were one, the two rectories being regarded as two moieties. After that date they were separated and became two distinct parishes.

Another century rolls by, and we come to the reign of Henry VIII. This was the time of the rejection of the Papal Supremacy. Up till then, the profits of an ecclesiastical living for the first year after a vacancy were paid to the Pope. These are still known as the First-fruits. The Tenths, another charge on the clergy, is a tenth of the annual value of the living. Henry VIII saw to it that the First-fruits and Tenths were vested in the King, and in 1535 he caused a new valuation to be made, called the "Valor Ecclesiasticus," according to which assessment the clergy are still rated for these payments. They formed part of the Royal revenue until the second year of the reign of Queen Anne, who restored to the Church what had been taken away from it. She granted a charter by which

the First-fruits and Tenths are vested in trustees for the augmentation of poor livings. This is now known as "Queen Anne's Bounty."

To obtain the necessary particulars for King Henry VIII, his officers visited every monastery and parish church, making a list of the income payable to abbots and parish priests, and thus compiled the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. In this book are various items relating to Milton, all of course written in Latin. The following translations give an account of what St. John's Hospital and St. James' Abbey possessed in Milton :

THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN IN NORTHAMPTON.

RICHARD BIRDSALL, MASTER.

Annual value of rents and woods
in divers towns and hamlets
in Northamptonshire.

| | £. | s. | d. |
|---|----|-------|----|
| Milton | — | xxij | — |
| Deduct rents paid to the King and divers other persons, viz. The heirs of Walter Mauntell for land in Milton | — | iiiij | — |

THE ABBEY OF ST. JAMES, NEAR NORTHAMPTON.

JOHN BASSET, ABBOT.

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|------|-------|
| Colingtre | — | xvij | — |
| Milton | — | xlj | iiiij |

It is interesting to note that some two centuries before, this property had been given to the abbey by the powerful Malesoure family, who were lords of the manor.

The account for Milton is translated as follows :

MIDDELTON ALIAS MILTON, RECTORY.
EDWARD WIGAN, DOCTOR, RECTOR AND INCUMBENT THERE.

| | £ | s. | d. |
|--|---------|-----|------|
| Value in tithes and offerings, annually | xvij | vj | iiij |
| Thence in synodals and pro- curations paid to the Arch- deacon of Northampton, annually | | x | vj |
| And there remains | xvj | xv | ix |
| Thence for tenths | xxxiiij | vij | |

So we see that in 1535 the net value of the living of Milton was £15 2s. 2d. per annum, after 10s. 6d. was paid for Procurations and 33s. 7d. for tenths each year. In 1254 it was valued at six marks and a half. The procurations and tenths are still paid by the rector to the Archdeacon and Queen Anne's Bounty respectively, and the First-fruits are duly forfeited by each new rector.

Procurations represent the ancient liability of incumbents to provide hospitality on the visitation of the Archdeacon and his retinue to the church. In course of time, a fixed money payment was charged on the benefice in place of the original indefinite liability.

A few years later, 1539, saw the dissolution of the monasteries, and the lands at Milton belonging to the Abbey of St. James were confiscated to the King. A Latin charter by which Queen Elizabeth makes a grant of these lands, called the "Prior's London," or Prior's Lands, is

preserved in the British Museum, and a translation will be found on page 286. St. John's Hospital did not lose its lands, but retained possession of Mortimers until it was sold to the Montgomery family some few years ago.

There is a mystery with regard to monastic lands in Milton. The Abbey of Peterborough was of course involved in the general confiscation and its lands disposed of. Now the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, in its list of the property of Peterborough Monastery, does not mention any revenue of any sort derived from Milton. However, in the parish chest are receipts which go to show that in the reign of King Charles II the churchwardens of Milton paid rent for the occupation of land situated in the parish and which formerly belonged to Peterborough Monastery. The receipts are seven in number, for the years 1661 to 1667 inclusive, the first being reproduced here in full.

Certain
lands bying
in Milton.

—Received the 2nd. day of
October Anno Dom. 1661 Annoque
Regni domini nostri Caroli, Regis
Angliae, &c. decimo tertio of John
Manas & Edward Parker for Rent,
due to the King's Majesty, for the
year, ended at the feast of St.
Michael th' Archangel last past,
the sum of 5lb. 05. 0. 0.
per me John Ellis, D. Receptor.

The Latin portion of the receipt refers to the date and means "In the year of our Lord 1661 and in the thirteenth year of the reign of our sovereign lord Charles, King of England, &c."

“ D. Receptor ” at the end stands for Deputy Collector.

What is striking about these receipts is the marginal note on each made by the clerk. The first, as above, simply refers to certain lands at Milton. The others are given herewith :

1662. P'r—— in Collingtree & Milton p'r cell de Peterbor monaster.

1663. For rent or Xths (tenths) for ye Manor of Collingtree and Milton.

1664. For rent or Xths. of lands in Collingtree and Milton.

1665. Peterborowe, for Xths in Collingtree and Milton.

1666. Peterbor Monaster for rents in Collingtree and Milton.

1667. Peterburgh Monaster for rents in Collingtree and Milton.

All the above are receipts for £5 except that for 1666, which is for £10. Four of the seven refer to the property belonging to the great Abbey of Peterborough, but an exhaustive inquiry has failed to show that Peterborough had any possessions here. It may be contended that the marginal notes were written by a careless clerk and that the lands should have been described as formerly belonging to the Abbey of St. James. This, however, is not very probable, as those lands had been granted to others, and, besides, there were men then living who must have heard from their grandparents what properties the different abbeys held in the parish.

Much of the monastic land throughout

England was given away to his courtiers, but some of it Henry devoted to good uses, one of which was the founding of the Regius Professorship of Divinity in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Who was to be the first Regius Professor at Cambridge? Henry had his man in view. This was Eudo Wygan, sometimes called Edward Wigan, by which name he is recorded in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. He graduated B.A. at Cambridge in 1508/9, M.A. in 1514, B.D. in 1521 and proceeded to D.D. in 1524, being then sub-dean of the Chapel of Cardinal Wolsey. He had evidently been of great service to the King at the University of Cambridge by strongly supporting the cause of his divorce from Katharine of Arragon. In 1526 Henry VIII appointed him to the Rectory of Milton, the living being then in his gift. When the Regius Professorship was endowed at Cambridge, the Royal messenger arrived at the little rectory of Milton in 1540 with a letter from the King, inviting Dr. Wigan to be the first to hold the post. This was accepted, but the learned professor continued to be Rector of Milton for another five years, being assisted by his curate, Dom. John Carter. Dr. Wigan resigned the rectory in 1545, but held the professorship until his death, which occurred in or about the year 1550.

King Henry then turned his attention to a pressing need in the Church, which was the creating of new dioceses. While the majority of the great monasteries, through being totally deprived of their revenues, were brought to an

end and fell into ruin, the noble monastic church of Peterborough was spared the general fate by virtue of its being the burial-place of Queen Katharine of Arragon, and entered upon a new phase as a cathedral. So in 1541 Milton, with the rest of Northamptonshire, severed its connection with the ancient and vast Diocese of Lincoln, now to form part of the new Diocese of Peterborough. Formerly, people left money or other gifts by will to Lincoln Cathedral, the "mother church" of the diocese, as we see from the will of Thomas Rage in 1523 :

" I bequeath to the mother yn Lyncoln iiijs."

After Peterborough Abbey Church was made a cathedral in 1541, we find that Alice Campyan, of Milton, on September 18th, 1546, made the following bequest :

" I give and bequeath unto ye mother church off Pet'brough ijd."

Other Milton people made bequests to the new cathedral, and things seemed to go on much in the same way. Changes there were, it is true. The Litany was said in English and the Bible had been translated, but the Mass was still said in Latin and votive lights were still burning before the images of the saints. The authority of the Pope had been shaken off and the new diocese had been carved out of the old, but otherwise there was little to warn the people of Milton of the tremendous upheaval that was to take place in the near future.