

The Sale of Bishops' Lands during the Civil War and the Commonwealth.

IN the *Cambridge Modern History*, iv. 457, in the course of a discussion of the financial position of the government of the Commonwealth it is stated by Dr. W. A. Shaw that 'of the sale of bishops' lands no account has survived.' Nevertheless details of these transactions may be found in the manuscript Close Rolls in the Public Record Office. One specimen may be given as an illustration.

In the autumn of 1646 parliament passed an ordinance for the sale of the 'manors, lands, and possessions of the late archbishops and bishops.'¹ A list of about twenty names, headed by those of Thomas Adams, Sir John Wollaston, and Sir George Clark, was adopted, and the persons named therein were appointed trustees for the sale. Any five trustees were authorised to dispose of those lands for which purchasers were forthcoming. Hence the records of the sales are indexed under the names of the purchasers and of one or other of the trustees.

On 3 January 1648/9 an indenture was made between Sir John Wollaston and others of the one part and Nathaniel Whetham, of London, Esq., of the other part, whereby the trustees sold the lordship and manor of Chard and borough of Chard, in the county of Somerset, together with about seven hundred acres of land, the property of the bishop of Bath and Wells. The purchase price was fixed at three thousand seven hundred pounds; half the price was 'acknowledged to be satisfied and paid according to several ordinances of parliament,' and the other half was to be paid within six months.² Nathaniel Whetham was a Dorset man—a younger son who came to London early in life. At the outbreak of the war he took service for the parliament as major in a regiment of dragoons, and soon was appointed governor of Northampton, with the rank of colonel of militia.

The manor of Chard remained in the possession of Colonel Whetham until the Restoration, when it reverted to the bishopric of Bath and Wells. It happens that its further history can be traced by means of a roll of chancery depositions for 1668.³ The bishop granted a lease for three lives to John, Lord Poulett, for the sum of five thousand pounds, of which one thousand was to be left in the hands of Lord Poulett to be paid to Colonel Whetham. The money was still unpaid in 1668, when Whetham brought an action for its recovery, alleging that the payment was allowed by the bishop

¹ *Commons' Journals*, iv. 677, 684.

² Close Roll 3415, 24 Charles I, part 23.

³ Chancery Depositions before 1714; Collins, 201–33.

unconditionally, in consideration of the improvements he had made on the property and of the 'good service he had done to the king.' This refers to the part played by Colonel Whetham in 1659, when as governor of Portsmouth he declared with General Monck against the committee of army officers who had ejected the remains of the Long Parliament. Lord Poulett, on the other hand, contended that the payment was conditional on the signature by Whetham of a release of his interest in the property and a renunciation of all claims thereto. In former years Whetham had sold various estates in the property, with a guarantee of quiet enjoyment, and was advised that signing a release would make him liable under those agreements. Consequently he had refused to sign, and Lord Poulett had not paid the money. The depositions do not tell us how the suit was decided.

It is unlikely that the history of many bishops' lands can be traced through their vicissitudes in this way; but the sales, at any rate, are recorded in the Close Rolls. W. C. D. WETHAM.