



YAXLEY HALL IN 1905,
Before any Restoration.

YAXLEY HALL.

ITS OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS.

PART II.

THE LEEKES, 1736—1905.

This account of the Leekes of Yaxley Hall is in continuation of an article written by me, and published in the Society's Proceedings a year ago, which article dealt only with the family of Yaxley, who owned the property from about 1450 to 1736. This family was succeeded by the Leekes, who were in possession, in the male line, till 1836, but in the female line continued to reside at Yaxley Hall till about 1905. The genealogical narrative hereafter given, together with the recital of many family incidents, has almost entirely been collected together from a great quantity of old deeds, documents, family papers and letters, which are in my possession, and though I do not for one moment suppose that the result will prove of any historical value, it may be read with interest, and it must be borne in mind that the family no longer exists, and that from the old house in which they resided, all things connected with them and their history have been dispersed.

We must now take up the thread of the narrative where we dropped it a year ago: Madamè Margaret Seymour, the favourite lady of Nicholas, 4th Earl of Scarsdale, who in 1736 purchased Yaxley Hall from

Mr. Samuel Newstead, of Brome, the executor of Mrs Susan Yaxley, had a special reason for wishing to end her days in the county of Suffolk, and in the immediate neighbourhood of Eye. In the will which she made on December 1st, 1737, soon after she purchased Yaxley, she mentions two members of her own family, "Grace Suckling, widow, and Elizabeth Gardiner, widow, my sisters." Now it is a well known genealogical fact that Grace Suckling, the wife of Horatio Suckling, was a daughter of Laurence Lomax, of Eye, by his wife Mirabella, second daughter of Sir John Heydon, Kt., of Baconsthorpe, in Norfolk, Lieutenant General of the Ordnance to Charles I., and knighted by him at Whitehall, in 1638. A large picture at Yaxley represented Grace Suckling and her daughter, Elizabeth, afterwards married to John Gay. It was in bad condition, but the details and technique of it full of refinement and grace. The lady is dressed in some old gold material lined with pale blue; and her little girl stands by her side, dressed in white, with a blue scarf over the right arm, and holding flowers in the hands. Of Elizabeth Gardiner I know little. She is described in a deed of 1738 as "of Yaxley." There was a family by the name of Gardiner who declared their pedigree in the 1664 Visitation, as of Stoke Ash, the adjoining parish to Yaxley, but her name does not occur. They resided in that most picturesque old house still called "Gardiners Hall." With this evidence, I do not see how we can doubt the fact that Margaret Seymour was a daughter of Lawrence Lomax, of Eye.

Madame Seymour, as she was generally styled, certainly never married, as is proved by the first clause of her will, "The last will and testament of me Margaret Seymour, of the parish of St. George, Bloomsbury, in the county of Middlesex, single woman."

One has no difficulty in realizing the expediency of a lady in such a position of life, adopting a name other than that of her own family, but why should she have assumed a name so illustrious as that of Seymour, and, moreover, perpetuated it, unless there was some connecting link between her and it, for her second son by Lord Scarsdale was baptised Seymour Leeke, and her grandson, who in later years inherited the Yaxley property, bore the same name. I have waded through several pedigrees of the Seymours, and also that of Lomax in search of some fact to help me to solve the mystery, but all in vain. There is just one more item to record, before I proceed, which connects Margaret Seymour with Laurence Lomax, of Eye. In more than one of the legal documents drawn up and signed at Yaxley between 1736 and 1740, we find as a witness the name of Mary Haydon, doubtless one of the Baconsthorpe stock, and possibly a companion to the lady of Yaxley Hall.

Madame Margaret Seymour had three children by Nicholas 4th Earl of Scarsdale, and acknowledged by him as such, and though it is said that he had eighty living children at the time of his death, these alone were allowed to bear his name. Nicholas was the elder son, Seymour the younger son, and Margaret the only daughter. To them and their heirs, under a trust, was the Yaxley property bequeathed respectively and in order, and then in default to her two sisters before mentioned, and to their heirs.

The property is described as "the capital messuage, or mansion house, late of Susan Yaxlee, widow, deceased, commonly called or known by the name of Yaxley Hall, in Yaxley, with the stables; outhouses, buildings, dove house, gardens and orchards thereto belonging; and another messuage with the barns,

stables, gardens, orchards and farm lands," which is evidently what was described in the old Yaxley deeds, and also in some later ones as "the Hall Farm," and then "all that messuage, barns, stables, buildings, yards, gardens and lands commonly called or known by the name of Storehouse Farm, and all that tenement or cottage, called Kiln House, late in the use and occupation of Daniel Lanham." This recital proves the fact that the Leekes came into the possession of all the lands and houses formerly owned by the Yaxleys, save and except "the manor of Bulls Hall cum Blogate Hall," which passed by purchase to the Thruston Motts, and from them to the Cornwallis', and eventually to the Kerrisons and Lady Bateman.

Before we commence our account of the Suffolk Leekes, it will, I think, be well to record here somewhat about their antecedents, the Leekes of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. In the year 1869, the Rev. C. H. Clark contributed to "The Reliquary," a most interesting article entitled, "The Leekes of Sutton," in which he states, "the family held a long time a worshipful post of knights degree," and then he gives a short description of Sutton, their Derbyshire home. He says, "It is one of the most attractive sites for a manorial residence to be found in Scarsdale. Flanked on the east by the bold ridge, which is crowned by Bolsover Castle and Hardwick Hall, and on the west by the rising ground which shuts it out from the vale of Chesterfield, it commands with its fine park of nearly 300 acres, a beautifully undulating eminence, alongside of which the little river Doe-lea, from its springs near Hardwick, flows northwards towards its junction with the Rother."

Here it is, then, where stands now the mansion

called Sutton Scarsdale, built by the father of our Suffolk Leekes. The site was that on which had resided his ancestors for many generations, in fact ever since the year 1255, it had passed in descent. The family of Peter de Hareston, who owned it in that year, ended in an heiress, who by marriage with Sir Richard de Grey, of Sandiacre, brought it to that family, and their great grand-daughter and heiress married Edward Hillary, who assumed the name of Grey, and John Grey, their son, left but one daughter, Alice Grey, who by marriage brought the estate into the Leeke family. She married John Leeke, second son of Sir John Leeke, of Cotham, the head of a very ancient Nottinghamshire stock.

This John Leeke was probably the first of the name to become settled at Sutton Scarsdale. His name occurs in a list of Derbyshire gentry, drawn up in 1433. After this we get a direct line of male owners and occupiers of Sutton, even down to the builder of the present mansion. There was William Leeke, who married Catherine Chaworth, and then their son, John Leeke, High Sheriff of Derby and Notts, in 1489, and who died in 1505, succeeded by his son, Sir John Leeke, knighted at Lille in 1513, who died in 1523. He married Jane Foljambe, and was succeeded by a son, Sir Francis Leeke, whose marriage with Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Paston, of Oxnead, in Norfolk, gives him a connection with us in East Anglia. He was High Sheriff in 1548, and died in 1570. Another Sir Francis Leeke followed him, who died in 1628—9, and then came one of the same name, but more illustrious, Sir Francis Leeke, created a Baronet in 1611, and on October 22nd, 1624, made Lord Deincourt, and still further ennobled on November 11th, 1645, when he was made Earl of Scarsdale.

We must pause here for a little, for though this

nobleman had no direct connection with the county of Suffolk, a portrait of him was hanging on the walls of Yaxley Hall prior to the last sale of effects in 1905. It is a well executed picture by some 17th century artist, who, I think, certainly was taught in the school of Vandyke. The background of the picture is dark, and the face stands out conspicuously, and it seems to me to give the impression of a strong will, with a kindly disposition, whereas Clarendon says of him, "he appears to have been a boorish and ignorant man, with a very unusual and unpleasant face." If this idea formed at the time, be correct, his character is not delineated on the features of this portrait, which I have illustrated here. The same historian records a very amusing story concerning him and his neighbour, the Earl of Kingston, from both of whom King Charles was hopeful to borrow money. Each one tried to pass the King's messenger on to the other. Lord Kingston said of his neighbour, who was then Lord Deincourt, "he is good for nothing, lives like a hog, and yet cannot have less than £20,000 in that scurvy house in which he lives," whereas Lord Deincourt's description of Lord Kingston was, "he never did good to anybody, he loves nobody but himself, though he has a world of money." Anyhow, Lord Deincourt provided so largely towards Charles' war exchequer, that by it he procured his Earldom, and his devotion to the cause of his royal master was so great, that when in 1649 the king suffered death upon the scaffold, a grave was dug in Sutton church, a coffin prepared and placed therein, and every Friday for the remainder of his life, Lord Scarsdale used to stretch himself in it, wrapped in sackcloth, and spend one hour in meditation and prayer.

In a list of pictures hanging at Yaxley Hall, in 1787, there is one described as "Penelope, Lady



FRANCIS, 1ST EARL OF SCARSDALE.
About 1630



NICHOLAS, 4TH EARL OF SCARSDALE.
About 1714. By Michael Dahl.

Lucas." For artistic merit, it was far and away the best old portrait in the house, and fetched a high price in London after the 1905 sale. It represents the three-quarter length figure of a lady seated, with fair curls, and dressed in white satin. She was the youngest daughter of this first Earl of Scarsdale, and married Charles, second Lord Lucas, of Shenfield, in Essex, a nephew of that unfortunate Sir Charles Lucas, so cruelly put to death outside the keep of Colchester Castle.

The first Earl of Scarsdale married Anne, daughter of Sir Edward Carey, Kt., of Berkhamstead, co. Herts. His will made April 24th, 1651, was proved on November 12th, 1655. He left many children, and was succeeded by a son, Nicholas Leeke, as second Earl of Scarsdale, who married Lady Frances Rich, third daughter of Robert, second Earl of Warwick. He died in 1680, without having made any will, and a commission was granted to his son, Robert, to administer. This Robert Leeke succeeded to the baronetcy and also became on his father's death, third Earl of Scarsdale. He was born in 1653, and was baptised at St. Giles in the Fields, a church which we shall see later on, was much used by the Leekes of Yaxley. In February, 1671, Lord Scarsdale married Mary, daughter and co-heir of Sir John Lewis, of Ledston, co. York. Macky, in his "Characters of the Time," describes this nobleman as "of middle stature, of a sanguine complexion, very fat, and 45 years old." I should not have known that his portrait was at Yaxley but for the list of 1787. However, therein I find, "Robert, third Earl of Scarsdale." It can therefore be but one picture in the collection, the three-quarter length figure of a man in peer's robes, with long powdered wig. The appearance certainly corresponds with Macky's description. He is undeniably fat, and

his complexion decidedly rubicund. It is no doubt a specimen of the work of Michael Dahl. This picture may easily be distinguished in the engraving of the saloon at Yaxley Hall, hanging by the side of the fireplace.

A very amusing description is given in Hatton's "Correspondence," under date, February 12th, 1671-2, of the manner in which this nobleman obtained his wife. "Last night, one of Sir John Lewis, his heirs, was stolen from her mother's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields by I know not who." The question was soon solved by the marriage, of which a record has been already given. Lord Scarsdale did not live to a great age, but died at his house in Duke Street, on December 27th, 1707, aged 53, and he was buried by his father in Westminster Abbey. He left in his will, proved January 12th, 1707, "£1,000 to Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle," the well known actress. No children survived him, but he had a brother, Hon. Rich. Leeke (so named doubtless after his mother's family), who had died before him, but left by his wife, Mary, daughter of Sir John Molineux, Bart., two surviving children, the elder of whom became Nicholas, fourth Earl of Scarsdale, and a daughter sometimes called Lady Lucy Leeke (a courtesy title which may have been granted to her as an Earl's sister), but more often Hon. Lucy Leeke, who was born, February 14th, 1684. This latter date is given in a document from the Heralds College, but in the Sutton Scarsdale register it is March 14th, 1684. The name of this lady occurs very often in all the documents connected with the Sutton Scarsdale property as being the legitimate heir of her brother, the fourth and last Earl of Scarsdale.

We have now reached in the narrative, the father of the first of the Leekes to own Yaxley Hall. He was

educated at Oxford; of which University he was made D.C.L. in April 26th, 1706. From 1711 to 1744, he was Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire, and in 1712 he was sent as an Envoy to Vienna. I have been told by one who resides very near to that wonderful mansion which he erected in Derbyshire, that everything about it is decorated with his coat of arms, and as Mr. Clark says in the article which I have before quoted, "he adorned that fine house, which is a building in the Corinthian style of architecture, with everything which the taste of the age, or his own pride of rank could suggest." We need not therefore doubt the truth of that tradition which says that the representation of the aged peer, with an earl's coronet on the end of his crutch in one of Hogarth's series, styled "Marriage a la mode," is a caricature of this nobleman. Mr. Clark says, "he left his estates so encumbered that they had to be sold to pay his enormous debts." This statement is fairly accurate, but it does not quite state the case. Two years before he died he was anxious to raise money, not only to liquidate those debts, but to make a settlement on his three illegitimate children by Madame Margaret Seymour, and in August, 1734, a trust was formed for that purpose, and he made a will also, in both of which he arranged for the bringing up and maintenance of these children, and in the latter he wished that all his debts and dues being paid they should enjoy the residue of his personality. He died, July 17th, 1736, when all his honours became extinct. A full length portrait of him by Michael Dahl, painted probably about 1714, (for he is dressed in peer's coronation robes), was removed from Sutton Scarsdale to Yaxley Hall by Nicholas Leeke, his elder son. It, among the others, was dispersed at the sale in 1905, and is now in the possession of Mr. C. S. Cockburn, a trustee of the Sutton Scarsdale estate, and residing at Sutton Rock, Chesterfield.

It would take up far too much space here to recount the various arrangements made to pay the Earl's debts, and benefit these three children, more particularly as it was his express wish that Nicholas, the elder son, and his legitimate offspring, should succeed him at Sutton Scarsdale and carry on the line, and for Seymour Leeke, the younger son, he was most anxious to provide a career and a home. He was 15 when his father died, and then at Westminster School. The Earl arranged that he should take Holy Orders, and enjoy the living of Northwingfield, in Derbyshire; and for Margaret, the only daughter, he ordered that £3,000 should be raised and paid immediately after his death, together with £80 per annum for her maintenance, and £2,000 "if she marry with her mother's consent." This Seymour Leeke never took holy orders, and died young; and Margaret Seymour died unmarried on April 2nd, 1743.

After Lord Scarsdale's death an attempt was made to carry out the trust. However, some of the trustees soon died, and it was found to be absolutely unworkable, therefore about 1739, an Act of Parliament was applied for, and passed in 13-15, George II., "for vesting the seat and estates of Rt. Hon. Nicholas; late Earl of Scarsdale, deceased, in the several counties of Derby and Nottingham, and the furniture there at the time of his death, in trustees, to be sold for a speedier payment of his debts, and preserving the surplus to go according to his settlement and trust." Nicholas Leeke, the elder son, must have been about 21 years of age when his father died, for the Master of the Court of Chancery, when making his report, in December, 1740, says, "Nicholas Leeke is married, and hath issue by his present wife, one son, Henry Sebastian Leeke, an infant about six years."

This report of the Master goes on to say "that no

profit whatever has been made out of the Earl's estate since his death, none of the annuities have been paid, that Nicholas Leeke has been obliged to contract several debts for his support and maintenance, that the late Earl did but a very few years before his death lay out the sum of £30,000 and upwards on re-building his seat at Sutton, making gardens and parks, and new furnishing the house, that Nicholas Leeke finds it will be a greater charge than he can meet to keep up this place, and he proposes that another and a smaller one be bought which would better answer the purpose of the late Earl's will, and be more suitable to answer the circumstances of the said Nicholas Leeke." Much time and money were spent in trying to get the matter settled, several country houses were selected, and some even chosen, but none purchased, for Miss Lucy Leeke, represented by her lawyer, whom she afterwards married, managed to prevent any sale being completed. In the meantime, Madame Margaret Seymour having purchased Yaxley Hall, died.

To her son, Nicholas Leeke, and her legitimate heirs, this property was bequeathed and settled in trust, and as a memento he gets "my brilliant diamond ring, and the sum of £100 for mourning." To Seymour, her second son, she devises "my gold watch and the gold hook, chain and seals thereto belonging," and all the remainder of her jewels, watches, rings, plate, etc., she bequeaths to be equally divided between her three children.

I think it is quite possible that Madame Seymour died in London, but on June 25th, 1740, her body was brought down to Yaxley and placed in a vault made for that purpose, henceforth intending that it should be the burying place of the Leekes of Yaxley. A great part of the furniture, dispersed in the 1905 sale,

was doubtless brought down to Yaxley Hall by her, for in her will she wishes "all the household stuff and furniture which shall be in the house at Yaxley Hall, shall from time to time go along, and be held and enjoyed with the said house." Her portrait by Michael Dahl, was also among those dispersed, and when last heard of, was in a dealer's shop in London. It represents her when rather young, seated, and dressed entirely in blue, nor do I think she was at all old when she died, though what little of her writing which I possess was indited with a very trembling hand, especially her signature, which I have placed beneath the engraving to illustrate this article.

I do not imagine that Nicholas Leeke immediately took up his residence at Yaxley Hall. Both farms were then tenanted, the Hall Farm by William Minter, and Stonehouse Farm by Daniel Lanham. On January 1st, 1736-7, he married at St. George's, Hanover Square, Christian, the daughter of Commodore Edward Vaughan. However, Henry Sebastian Leeke was born previously, for he is thus described on the endorsement of a brief dated May 19th, 1760, "son of Nicholas Leeke, by Christian Vaughan, but born before their intermarriage." His name constantly occurs in the family deeds and law-suits, but he was certainly unable to inherit any of the Scarsdale personality by direct wording of the last Earl's will. He married, and his wife's name was Mary, and by her he had two daughters, Elizabeth Christian and Sarah. He was killed on board the *Roebuck* in America, and his will, of which I have a copy, was proved, February 6th, 1777. I also possess an interesting little poem, written by him, and in his own handwriting, inscribed to his mother when quite a boy, and also a book called, "A Gentleman's Religion, printed for Thomas Trye, near Grays Inn Gate, Holborn, MDCCXXXVII." Therein



Margaret Seymour

MADAME MARGARET SEYMOUR.
OF YAXLEY HALL.
By Michael Dahl, about 1720.



A SUTTON SCARSDALE CHAIR
OF 1730.



THE SALOON, YAXLEY HALL,
IN 1905.

is a very pretty Chippendale book plate, with the family coat of arms. Argent, on a saltire engrailed sable nine annulets or, and the crest. A peacock's tail erect supported by two eagles with wings expanded, and beneath in letters representing his handwriting, "Henry Leeke." The book was given to him when he went from London to the Royal Academy at Portsmouth, on August 22nd, 1746, by Dr. Edward Hody, of London, by whom there is a letter on the fly leaf, and the copy of another from Sir Henry Sidney to his son Philip, on the which he was asked to meditate.

Nicholas Leeke and his wife Christian had three children, who all died young and were buried in a vault in the church of St. Giles in the Fields, London, and then in 1743 was born to them a son, Seymour Leeke, who eventually succeeded to the Yaxley estate. On December 5th, 1740, Nicholas Leeke made his will, which was proved April 11th, 1760, twenty years later, in the which he bequeaths "all my estate whatsoever unto my dear wife, for the support and maintenance of such child or children as I shall have at the time of my death, and I give the guardianship of all my children unto my said wife, and do nominate her my sole executor, revoking former wills by me made." On August 20th, 1744, he and his wife were legally separated. About 1750, Nicholas Leeke was certainly a resident at Yaxley Hall, and probably not alone, for he brought to the church there to be baptised on September 12th, 1751, a son whom he named Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke.

It is around Seymour Leeke, his legitimate son, and Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke, his illegitimate son, that the remaining portion of the history of Yaxley Hall chiefly revolves. Nicholas Leeke, the father, probably died in London, and as we learn from the

diary of the younger son, was buried within the vault at the Church of St. Giles in the Fields. I am uncertain whether he was pourtrayed or not. There was a picture hanging at Yaxley of a man in the costume worn about 1745, of about the right age, and with features resembling the other Leekes; however, there was one of his wife most certainly, a small sepia or parchment, and well executed, and I have ventured to illustrate it here.

Previously to the Yaxley Hall sale of 1905, acting on behalf of the owners, I was enabled to negotiate a sale of the Sutton Scarsdale set of chairs, which possibly have by this time left the country. They were made of some light coloured wood, and decorated with ormolu, while on the back of each, painted on glass and within a frame, was the coat of arms of the Earls of Scarsdale, with the winged angels for supporters. In the set were some fine settees, and furthermore some hall chairs with similar coats of arms on the backs. I have not been able to discover through what channel this furniture reached Yaxley Hall, for though it was the express wish of the last Earl that "all furniture and household goods at Sutton should remain there and go as heirlooms," yet it was found necessary, as we shall see later on, to dispose of the place and almost everything connected with it "except twenty-nine family pictures, which, together with a set of agate knives and forks, and silver spoons, twelve of each, have been at the request of Nicholas Leeke delivered over to him." The family pictures were, I believe, all there until the 1905 sale.

With regard to the old home of the Leekes at Sutton Scarsdale, a few details occur in various documents, "ye said Trustees under ye Act of Parliament have sold ye real estate of the Earl of Scarsdale vested



Christian Leeke

MRS. NICHOLAS LEEKE,
OF YAXLEY HALL,
About 1737.

in them, and also the furniture and household goods, to the purchaser of the greatest part of the real estates and the mansion," and then further, "that the household goods and furniture at Sutton (except the pictures) fetched £120,000," and dated on Lady-day, 1743, there is a conveyance of the said premises to Godfrey Clark, Esq.

Mrs. Nicholas Leeke lived on, after her husband's death, for many years, and undoubtedly for the greater part of her life with her son, Seymour Leeke, at Yaxley and elsewhere, but when he married in 1772, she left to take up her abode with a certain Mrs. Salter, but in 1778 we find her again living with him at Groton. The Mrs. Salter would be probably the one recorded in the diary as "Mrs. Ann Salter of Stoke Ash, who died November 15th, 1787, and was buried on the Monday, at Mendlesham, Suffolk, by her husband." It is in 1782 that we get the last record of Christian Leeke. I give it verbatim as taken from that portion of the diary written by her son Seymour:—"Friday, January 4th, 1782. Returned from Colchester about half-past 3, my good mother who had been ill for about a year past with a spasm in the passages leading to the heart. I found her very poorly on my return, she seemed very lethargic, took but little notice of anything, her pulse so low I felt sure she would not live long. She complained of her legs being cold, and shortly after a pain in her body and back, and a few moments after fell into a doze, and expired without a groan at 5 minutes before 6 this afternoon in the 70th year of her age, being born January 20th, 1712. My mother was the daughter to Commodore Edward Vaughan, who was killed in the Russian service, and was by Peter the Great made an Admiral, his body is buried in the Great Church of Petersburg. The Emperor himself went chief mourner to his burying,"

and then under date January 17th, 1782, " My mother was this day inter'd in a vault in Groton churchyard, and Francis Leeke went chief mourner to the corps," and further, " For painting and glazing my mother's leaden coffin, £29 17s. 6d. I have also paid for the brickwork done to the vault, where my mother now lies until she is carry'd to Yaxley." I do not find that the removal was ever carried out. It is rather extraordinary to read that the illegitimate son of the husband from whom she had been separated for 38 years should act as " chief mourner to the corps."

Seymour Leeke was born in London, as before stated, in 1743, and though under age when his father died in 1760, he had the certain prospect of being a fairly wealthy man, for the trustees under the Act of Parliament had carried out to the best of their ability the wishes of Lord Scarsdale, and so as the only legitimate issue of his father, Nicholas Leeke, he would inherit whatever remained of Lord Scarsdale's personality, and then according to the trust created by the will of his grandmother, Madame Seymour, he would have succeeded to the Yaxley Hall estate. He was probably at school when his father died, but a little later on at the university. I had always been told by the family that he was a fellow-commoner of St. John's College, Cambridge, however, I find, in a deed dated 1764; being a grant of annuity to his mother who is styled " Christran Leeke of Knightsbridge, in the county of Middlesex, widow," that he calls himself " Seymour Leeke, of St. Peter's College, in the University of Cambridge, Esqre." He was painted some time during his academical career, standing at full length, the hair dark, and the face clean shaven, in a blue coat, with a white satin and flowered waistcoat beneath, wearing canary coloured breeches, with white stockings and thereon stripes. Over all he



Seymour Leeke

REV. SEYMOUR LEEKE,
OF YAXLEY HALL.
By J. Sanders. About 1761.



BOOKPLATE OF REV. SEYMOUR LEEKE.
About 1760.

wears a gown, which is certainly that of a fellow-commoner, and in his left hand holds a college cap with a gold tassel, and lying at his feet is a greyhound. The picture is signed "J. Sanders fecit." He certainly entered Holy Orders, for I find records in his diary of his taking clerical duty, but nowhere can I find any mention of a curacy or rectory to which he had been appointed or instituted.

In 1772, when a resident in Yaxley Hall, he married Miss Mary Rant, the daughter of Humphrey Rant, of Dickleburgh, in Norfolk, whose mother was Mary, a daughter of Nathaniel Life. The marriage settlement fills seven huge sheets of parchment, and is dated December 31st, 1772. There is a tradition in the family that his married life lasted but one month, and that then with his coach and horses, she was sent back to Dickleburgh; and, indeed, on June 7th, 1774, an equally lengthy legal document is drawn up, which is endorsed, "Deed of separation between Rev. Mr. Leeke and his wife." I find in it a reason given "that for some time past divers unhappy disputes and differences have arisen between them," so probably the change was not quite so rapid as that handed down by tradition. From a perusal of these bulky documents I gather that Miss Rant was well endowed with landed property, and so a large sum was named, and a trust formed to provide for her sufficient maintenance while life should last. I know no more about her, save that she outlived her husband, who very kindly in one of his wills, bequeaths to her "£5 for mourning."

In 1773, less than one year certainly after the day of his marriage, he had quitted Yaxley Hall for a long tour on the continent, and he has left in MS. an account of where he went and what he saw in France, more

especially in Paris, and the date of it being just twenty years before the great revolution it is really valuable as well as interesting. It is written with a strict sense of accuracy, even to the minutest details. He also visited Belgium, but his account of that portion of the tour is now missing; however, he certainly visited the Abbey of Orval, where resided a good artist, Jean Henri Gilson by name, but generally known as "Frere Abraham d'Orval." This artist, says Bryan in his "Dictionary of Painters," filled the refectory, halls, and the church with his pictures, which were sometimes purchased by visitors to the monastery, and no doubt Rev. Seymour Leeke was one of them, and the picture he brought back represents some dogs frightening swans on their nest, a very similar subject to that of Schneider's great picture in the Antwerp gallery. It is signed just simply "Abraham," as were, I think, the only two other productions of his that I am aware of, hanging at Glemham Hall.

I have no further records of the Rev. Seymour Leeke till 1778, when we find him residing at Groton, in Suffolk, where he had purchased the manor and a small estate. I give the very first entry in his diary: "July 7th, 1778. Left Deerswood. . . . February 4th, Left Horsham and came to Edwardstone Grove, visited Yaxley Hall on 6th, and returned on 9th, and took possession of Groton Farm, and named it Groton Wood, being the house belonging to the wood."

Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke, the child baptised at Yaxley in 1751, would now be 27 years of age, and he is evidently one of the family party at Groton in 1778. "March 12th, 1778. Frank and myself entered at the Boxford Club, £2 2s. 0d." and besides his mother, he had residing with him Miss Henrietta Nelson, a cousin of whom we shall hear much more later on; and

had he died at that time she would have followed his mother in the line of succession as regards the Yaxley Hall property ; but if one reads through all the various documents connected with the family, and the several wills drawn up by Seymour Leeke, some with his own hands, and some fully signed and witnessed on every page, one sees how little by little Francis Leeke wound himself around his brother's heart. At first it is but a low place which he holds in the order of succession, but in a will which Seymour Leeke made on his deathbed he takes almost all that is bequeathed.

Two or three entries from the diary at this period may prove not only of interest but a record of the time. The first relates to the owner of Edwardstone Grove. "July 15th, 1780. Walter Waring, Esq., M.P. for Coventry, died at Edwardstone Grove on Tuesday, February 1st, 1780, and on Wednesday, the 9th, he was buried at Groton Church in a vault in the chancel. The pall bearers were Sir Thomas Thoroughgood, of Kersey. Dr. Preston, of Waldingfield, Mr. Brand of Polstead Hall, the Rev. Philip Gurdon and his son, Francis and Seymour Leeke, both of Groton"; and then another, "November 6th, 1778. Held my first court for the manor of Groton at the White Hart. Miss Lifton admitted, her fine £50." In 1782, the year of his mother's death, he sold this property to Admiral Rowley, that is Admiral Sir Joshua Rowley, of Tendring Hall, Stoke by Nayland, which in one of his wills is thus described: "All that my manor of Groton near Boxford, in the county of Suffolk, with all its rights, members, royalties, fines, quitrents, heriots, and appurtenances whatsoever thereunto belonging, also all that my capital messuage commonly called Groton Lodge, with all the outhouses, edifices, buildings, barns, stables and coach houses thereto belonging, lying and being in Groton and

Lindsey, or any other town, containing by estimation 117 acres, with all timber, etc., and also my wood called Groton Wood, situated in Groton aforesaid, in the county of Suffolk, and containing 48 acres." There is also one other entry, more particularly interesting to agriculturalists. In 1779, Seymour Leeke was making the round of his estates, and visited Yaxley of course, when he records, "the farmers could not make up the cash, corn being very low, wheat 14/-, barley 7/-, oats 6/- per comb."

I do not think that the Rev. Seymour Leeke gave up Groton as a residence till the spring of 1784. During the previous winter, he and his brother Francis attended all the assemblies at Boxford and Bildeston, but during the following winter they attended others at Eye and Debenham, which shows they were in residence at Yaxley. In 1785, he takes out a licence "for my gamekeeper on my manor of Woodhall in Yaxley," paying for the same 11/-. I have quite recently met with this name for Yaxley Hall in a deed of 1685, "the lands then or late of Henry Yaxley, called Woodhall," this being doubtless its ancient name.

On the day after Christmas in this year, 1785, the Rev. Seymour Leeke quits Yaxley Hall for the last time. Places are booked in the London coach for a party of five passengers at 22/- each, with their servant "to ride inside," costing 19/-. the other expenses of the journey being £1. Of course Francis Leeke and Miss Nelson are of the party, but who the others were I cannot say. They took up their abode in a Great Queen Street, where a great fire is recorded as having taken place on January 5th, 1786, and not being at all well he was much upset. This I gather from various letters in my possession, written to him

at this time. At any rate, on the next day he records the purchase of a rope ladder costing £1 11s. 6d., which he never had the opportunity to use, for the last record of him occurs soon after in the handwriting of his half-brother, Francis Leeke. It is dated March 2nd, 1786, "Seymour Leeke departed this life at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 o'clock in the morning, without a groan. He was taken ill on Monday, the 20th February in the morning, and continued in a very poor way till 2 or 3 o'clock on Monday, the 27th, when he was seized with the most excruciating torment within him, which abated a good deal during the next day, and he seemed much easier; however, on this day he went off to the great sorrow of Mrs. Nelson and myself, who while life lasts will ever have occasion to lament him." And on the 9th of the same month he adds, "Seymour Leeke was buried in a vault under St. Giles' Church, London, by his father, according to his own desire. Nicholas Leeke, his father, had lain there about 26 years, notwithstanding which the coffin was as fresh as if it had not been placed in the vault above a week. There is likewise three children of Nicholas and Christian Leeke, and brothers to the above Seymour Leeke, who died in their infant state, and are buried in wood coffins which are now sound, one of them by the plate appears to have been buried 49 years." Mr. Francis Leeke and Miss Nelson returned at once to take up their residence at Yaxley Hall.

We must now have a look at a very important document connected with the history of Yaxley Hall. It is the last will and testament of Rev. Seymour Leeke, made during his fatal illness, and dated January 30th, 1786; and proved in London, March 6th, 1786. It is by far the shortest one he ever made. He commences by granting to "Henrietta Nelson, now residing with me at Yaxley Hall an annuity of £100 for the term

of her natural life." and then follows the bequest of all his property to "Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke, now residing with me at Yaxley Hall, for and during the term of his natural life." The property is then left in trust for 99 years to Elborough and Thomas Woodcock, his executors, with the following line of succession. Should Francis Leeke die without heirs Miss Nelson was to enjoy the same for life, and after her decease first of all to the use of Elizabeth Chrisitan Leeke, spinster, the elder daughter of Henry Sebastian Leeke, and her heirs, and then in default, Sarah Leeke, his other daughter and her heirs, and then furthermore in default "to the use of Sir John Odingsells Leeke, of the city of Norwich, co. Norfolk, Baronet, his heirs and assigns for ever."

Before we pass on to the further history of Yaxley Hall, it will be well to note some interesting facts as taken from the various wills made by Seymour Leeke between 1760 and 1786, as it is quite possible ere long such documents may be lost or destroyed. The names of two men occur in the line of succession concerning the property at Yaxley, described as "reputed sons of my late father Nicholas Leeke, deceased." Their names were "Thomas and Nicholas Leeke," and both are given as of "Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury Square." These men may have married and left descendants, but if so, they can have no claim whatever on the Yaxley Hall property, for the provisions of Seymour Leeke's will were eventually carried out in the person of the only daughter of the chief legatee, viz., Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke.

The advowson of Northwingfield in Derbyshire is described as the property of the testator in 1778. This was the living destined by Lord Scarsdale for his second illegitimate son, Seymour, who died without

ever taking Holy Orders ; and there is also mention of other property in Derbyshire "in the hamlet of Tupton, in the parish of Northwingfield, with a house thereon called Ankerboul Lodge, both in the tenure and occupation of Mr. William Barker."

Stephen Fish, "a very faithful servant," is mentioned in several wills. To him large sums were bequeathed, and in one case his name comes in the line of succession to Yaxley Hall and the estate, but I presume he was dead in 1786.

By far the most interesting clause is in a will made in 1779. In it he bequeaths Yaxley Hall and the estate to Francis Leeke, but "subject to the two following annuities. First I will and ordain that the said Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke, his heirs and assigns, shall pay or cause to be paid to Henrietta Nelson, of Yaxley Hall, in Yaxley aforesaid, the sum of £50 per annum, for and during her natural life over and above the annuity of £50 per annum she has fixt on her by a deed of partition, payable out of the said estate. Also I will and ordain that she the said Henrietta Nelson shall and may (for and during the term of her natural life) reside unmolested in those rooms of the said capital messuage called Yaxley Hall, which I and my family usually occupied when at the house, with the stable, coach house, garden, plantations, orchard, with the rail field and avenue. Also that the said Henrietta Nelson may have the liberty to use the furniture that may happen to be in the house. These to hold good for her natural life, and no longer." The deed of partition referred to is one drawn up on July 13th, 1774, and endorsed as "Demise for 99 years of two farms at Yaxley, if Mrs. Leeke and Miss Nelson lived so long." The latter is then thus described "my cousin Henrietta Nelson of Stoke Ash, in the county

of Suffolk, spinster." This does seem a most extraordinary condition to make when bequeathing a property.

The last on the list of those to receive the Yaxley property in the will of Seymour Leeke, which was proved in 1786, is a certain Sir John Odingsells Leeke, Baronet; and concerning this gentleman there appeared a lot of correspondence in Tymms's East Anglian Vol. II. (1882), from which I quote the following:—"Sir John Odingsells Leeke, Bart., called himself a descendant of the Leekes, Earls of Scarsdale, and I have heard was a son of Robert Leeke, Rector of Great Snoring and Thursford in Norfolk, from 1734 to 1762. He held a subaltern's commission in the West Norfolk Militia prior to the great revolutionary war. He owned and resided at the mansion in East Dereham known as Quebec, of which an engraving may be found in the 8th volume of Armstrong's History of Norfolk, dedicated to him. His widow made a claim for dower on some part of the Quebec estate. His baronetcy was not universally acknowledged." I have in my possession a series of letters from him to the two successive owners of the Yaxley estate, Seymour and Francis Leeke. The former certainly most thoroughly believed in the descent he claimed, and did all he could to help him prove his right not only to the Baronetcy but the Earldom also. In a letter written by Sir Henry Hunloke, of Wringeworth, on January 26th, 1786, he says, "I wish your friend Sir John Leeke success, if he could gain so old an Earldom it would be great indeed, but the Baronetage would be better than losing all. Your Ancestors were among the first made Baronets at the institution." Later on the poor gentleman fell on cruel times, and his pleading letters are quite painful to read. He describes himself as "a martyr to misfortune." Mr.

Tallack, one of the correspondents in the East Anglian, says, "He must have come down very considerably in the social scale, for at the time of his death he was hostler at the Old Lobster Inn, Norwich, and his wife was a washerwoman. I have heard persons who remembered them say that although in such humble positions, they bore unmistakeable signs of having once belonged to refined society." In the early part of the next century he raised money on his reversionary interest in the Yaxley Hall estate; for Francis Leeke was still unmarried, and though Elizabeth Christran Leeke had married a Captain Bligh, there was no issue of the marriage, and at length he sold it to a Mr. Whally. The last record of him may still be seen on a small gravestone in the churchyard of St. Stephen's, Norwich, "Beneath are deposited the remains of Sir John Odingsells Leeke, Bart., who departed this life, Feby. 5th, 1816, aged 69, and of his relict Lady Leeke, who died, Octr. 13th, 1818, aged 80 years."

I may say that I have taken great trouble to investigate this claim, and though I believe the claimant to have been the son of the Rev. Robert Leeke, Rector of Great Snoring, and thus certainly descended from the Leekes of Derbyshire and Nottingham, it was from a Sir Francis Leeke, and his second wife, Elizabeth, daughter of John Egioke, of Egioke, co. Worcester, and not from Sir Francis Leeke, the son of the above by a former wife, who was created Baronet, 1611, and afterwards Lord Deincourt and Earl of Scarsdale, from whom both Seymour and Francis Leeke were illegitimately descended; nor could he have been descended from Francis Leeke (son of William Leeke, of Newark, who died in 1651, aged 46, being a younger brother of the half-blood of Francis, 1st Earl of Scarsdale, by Elizabeth, his first wife, daughter of Sir Guy Palmes) who was created a Baronet, December 15th,

1663. He left issue, a son, Francis Leeke, who died unmarried, and was buried at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, June 19th, 1681, when that Baronetcy became extinct.

There is a document in my possession in the hand writing of the Rev. Seymour Leeke, dated October 7th, 1782, and headed, "Proposed alterations to Yaxley Hall," and then below, "Some alterations I propose to make at Yaxley Hall if ever I should live to return to that place." Certainly some of these alterations were carried out, more particularly those in the great hall, now called the saloon, as the mantel-piece therein is of the Adam type. He says, "I mean to make a passage from the kitchen to the hall," by which he evidently means the small entrance hall on the north side of the house, "the back stairs to communicate with the best stairs through the Green lobby, to lead to Frank's room, and mine, and the chapel gallery." This latter is at the east end of the house in a wing. "The hall to have a chimney built, and will be made larger, and I shall furnish it as under," and then follows a sketch which shows a billiard table at the north end of the room, with sideboards on either side of the fire place in the recesses, and two hanging lamps suspended from the ceiling across the centre of it. "And a brewhouse to be built in the yard so as to have a covered way from the kitchen, the small beer buttery to be in the scullery," and then comes another sketch of some cloisters, and as the kitchen door is indicated, this must be at the back of the house, and then he adds, "a pump to be made in this yard at the back of the cloysters, a dog kennel, a pigstye, and some necessary houses," and one further remark, "I should be inclined to make a cloyster by the side of the old parlour to hall door, it would be fully 40 feet by 12." I suppose this would be along the west-

ern front, and rather in the form of a verandah, but this latter scheme was not carried out.

From 1786, for a period of thirty years, Yaxley Hall was occupied by Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke and Miss Nelson. He would at that time be 35 years of age, and as the lady was born in 1734, she would be then 52.

I have previously quoted the diary and account book of the Leekes. It enters very fully into current events, and moreover contains certain items of expenditure; it therefore not only gives one good insight into the time with which it deals, and the life of a country gentleman of the 18th century, but the chance of comparing the value of commodities then and now.

We gather from it that Mr. Leeke and Miss Nelson maintained their position as county people, visiting and receiving guests continually. They seem to have had carriages and horses of rather an expensive and valuable type, though more often than not for long distances post horses were hired from Eye or Scole. It seems to me that social life in the country throughout the reign of George III. was much more sustained than it is to-day. I have selected just a few names of those whose residences are recorded around Eye, where dinner parties were constantly given. The Duchess of Chandos at Thornham Hall; Mr. Maynard, of Hoxne Hall (now Oakley Park); Mr. Havers, of Thelveton Hall; Mr. Chevallier, of Aspull Hall; Mr. Ray of Mickfield; Mr. Marsh, of Dickleburgh; Mr. Malyns, of Occold; Mr. Tayleur, of Eye; Mr. Dixon, of Thorndon; Mr. Rose, of Eye; Mr. Crowfoot, of Kelsale; Mr. Gostling, of Coulsey Wood (the old house of the Bedingfields); Mr. Man, of Syleham; Mr. D'Eye, of Eye; Mr. Smythe, of Mellis, and Mr. J.

Edwards, of Brockford. Some of these doubtless were clergy, others country gentlemen.

Very many of the Assemblies were attended year by year at Eye, Scole and Debenham. Plays were often "bespoke" at the Eye Theatre, for which a large number of tickets were taken. Yearly visits were made to London, as also to Norwich and other places. Mr. Leeke was evidently very much addicted to sport, more especially shooting; fresh guns are sometimes purchased, and much ammunition. However, the bags of game, which in those days would content a sportsman, would be ridiculed now. Think of this as an entry: "Went to shoot at Mr. Tayleur's, killed a leash of birds, and a hare." Both of them were much given to horse exercise, but the bridle here recorded seems an extravagant item for that day: "A double-reined, plated Portsmouth bridle for Mrs. Nelson, costing £2 7s. 0d."

The sittings of the Justices were then held at Thwaite Buck's Head, as also occasional dinners, which Mr. Leeke attended. The following entries are typical of the times: "October 27th, 1790. Bought a 16th of No. 990 in the English Lottery, and Mrs. Nelson 2 16ths in Irish do. at Mr. Beatniffe's in Cockey Lane (now London Street), Norwich. Jany. 15th, 1798. A quarter ticket in English Lottery, £3 3s. 6d. December 5th, 1799. Balance of shares, Irish Lottery, £2 6s. 0d. February 9th, 1802. An eighth share of a lottery ticket, £2 4s. 0d."

The following entry is locally historical under date, "June 29th, 1790. Expenses to Ipswich and back, 7/-. Gave my vote for Sir John Rous and Sir Charles Bunbury, who were returned members for the county, they were opposed by Sir Gerard Vanneck, who is said to have spent £30,000 in the contest."



Francis G. Y. Leeke,

FRANCIS GILBERT YAXLEY LEEKE, Esq.
OF YAXLEY HALL.

By W. Johnson. About 1795.



Henrietta Nelson

MISS HENRIETTA NELSON,
OF YAXLEY HALL.
By W. Johnson. About 1795.

From March 17th, 1794, to June 4th, 1812, numerous entries in the diary refer to the Suffolk Yeomanry. A meeting had been called by Mr. Arthur Young, when he proposed a scheme for "a horse militia of property." Subscriptions were sought, and a goodly sum obtained, to which the owner of Yaxley contributed £5 5s. 0d., and I gather from various entries that by January 26th, 1795, a troop of Yeomanry had been formed in the Hartismere Hundred, with a meeting place at Thwaite Bucks Head. A great many interesting details as to "regimentals and accoutrements" are given, too copious to record here. However, by the following autumn they were ready for service, and were actually called out to quell a disturbance at Diss. After this, for many years there are records of reviews at Thornham Park, Langton Green, Scolé Common and Rushmere Heath, and on April 23rd, 1804, they marched to Lowestoft on permanent duty for three weeks. The expenses of the same to Lieutenant Francis Leeke for the period of 17 days was £15 1s. 6d., whereas his pay only amounted to £9 9s. 0d.

I should like to add here somewhat concerning the Suffolk artist so intimately associated with Yaxley Hall, and no other place, as far as I can discover. Before the death of Seymour Leeke we find in the diary the mention of "Mr. William Johnson, painter," of whom five pictures were purchased in 1784, costing £2 12s. 6d. Where he resided I do not know, though I have heard it said it was at Dickleburgh; anyhow, it must have been in the immediate neighbourhood of Yaxley Hall, for on June 14th, 1786, it is recorded of him that "he came to tea." To him was given the commission to paint the achievement, with the family coat of arms thereon, placed in Yaxley Church in 1788, and it is recorded that soon after this he

received the sum of £5 5s. 0d., which was, I have been told, for painting the full length portrait of Francis Leeke, of which I have been enabled to give an engraving here. It is said that the canvas was purchased, and stretched upon its frame in the house, where the picture was also painted, with the favourite spaniel, "Sherry," at his feet. A picture of Miss Nelson was also executed, as well as a small one of himself, with the etching of Yaxley Hall, and these three are in my possession. There can be little doubt but that the artist must soon after this have died, otherwise he would have achieved some fame. Mr. Leeke's portrait was in the possession of Mr. Letts, a London dealer, when in 1908 he allowed me to exhibit it in a collection of pictures by Suffolk artists, at Bury St. Edmunds, and I well remember on that occasion that Mr. William Tollemache, of Risby, a great connoisseur, was amazed that one who could paint so grand a picture should have been to the world of art, unknown.

On April 4th, 1816, the long spell of domestic felicity, having lasted for 30 years, was suddenly brought to a close by the death of Miss Henrietta Nelson. A few days previously she had fallen down a short flight of stairs, from her bedroom on to the main corridor, leading from the front stairs to the chapel gallery. It will seem a strange end to such a life to record here, that her body was not laid to rest in the consecrated soil round Yaxley Church, for if tradition be true, she had an objection to repose near Madame Seymour, but quoting the words of Francis Leeke, "by her wish she was buried in a vault in our own grounds, which I have caused to be made." The cost of this was very great, and the spot chosen was, so I have been told, one near the path through the park to the church. Here her body rested in peace

till about the middle of the century, when for some reason or another, it was removed into the family vault, and the mausoleum destroyed; since then, it is said, her spirit wanders about the gardens and grounds. She has thus been seen not only by the servants of the family, but by others when the house has been let, and that, too, within the last ten years. It is also rather curious that her portrait, which hangs upon the walls of my house, has oftentimes had a disturbing effect on the minds of some of my friends, a reason for which I must leave psychologists to provide. I also give this portrait as an illustration, for without it I do not think the later history of Yaxley Hall would be complete. She was certainly a remarkable woman.

The will of Miss Nelson, dated July 10th, 1790, was proved twenty-seven years later, on June 2nd, 1817, and in it she bequeaths "all my real and personal property of whatsoever kind I may be possessed of at the time of my decease, unto Francis Gilbert Yaxley Leeke, gentleman, with whom I now reside."

On October 18th, 1818, Francis Leeke was married to Ann Osborne, the daughter of Mr. Charles Clubbe, of Hoxne; by whom he had a daughter, Henrietta Leeke. And then, after 18 years of married life, at about the age of 84, this last male representative of the Suffolk Leekes died, and was laid to rest in Yaxley Church. I have spoken to some who knew him well in his old age, and he has always been described as the most perfect pattern of an English country gentleman. One wishes that there were very many of his type owners of the soil to-day. His will dated October 30th, 1835, was proved in London, February 26th, 1836. According to the trust created by the will of Seymour Leeke, his daughter was pro-

vided for, in that she must inherit the Yaxley estate, but what personality he possessed he bequeathed it to "Anne Leeke, my dear, true, and lawful wife."

In November, 1852, a sale was advertised to take place at Yaxley Hall "of costly and magnificent household furniture, with a valuable collection of pictures, etc., etc., the property of Mr. P. R. Welch," which was to extend over "six days." Henrietta Leeke had about 1840, married Patrick Robert Welch, a barrister, and of Newtown Welch, in Ireland. I know not what happened at this sale, but certainly the furniture was in the house when I first visited it in 1882, and it certainly was all dispersed in 1905. Long before this time the property had passed into the hands of Lord Henniker, of Thornham Hall, and a little later the house was hired on a long lease by Sir George Makgill, Bart., after which extensive alterations were made in the interior arrangements and construction of the house, some of them no doubt great improvements, but I am thankful to say that the western elevation is much the same to-day as when William Johnson made his sketch in 1788, which sketch formed an illustration to my previous article, and but very little different from the photograph taken by my friend, Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, in 1905, of which I offer an illustration here.

Sir George Makgill is fortunately keen on all details of antiquity, and the coloured shields of the Yaxleys have been most carefully rearranged, and the lead settings thoroughly repaired. Yaxley Hall has taken a fresh lease of life, may it be a prosperous one.

EDMUND FARRER, F.S.A.