

the destitute, with the infirm, with little children. 'There is misery enough in every corner of the world as well as within our convent,' Sterne's monk is made to imply by his cordial wave of the hand. But I do claim for this institution the possession of a peculiar element of pathos, such as no man who has not beheld the aged, the stricken, the helpless, the broken-down men congregated within its walls can form any idea of. . . . Ninety-three old sailors are at present lodged in the institution. The house is big enough to accommodate two hundred, but the funds of the charity are already stretched to their last limits."

On leaving Belvedere let the visitor take the road which leads over Lesnes Heath. Turning to the right, the path suddenly descends, while on one side many fine villas are in course of erection, a curious mingling of old and new, for at the bottom of the hill is an ancient hostelry, "The Leather Bottle," with a veritable ancient bottle of that nature dangling in front as its sign.

The spot to which we now find ourselves, close by on the north side of the open marshes, about a mile westward from Erith, is rapidly assuming the form and proportions of a small town, with its public hall, club, and some fairly good shops and inns. As stated above, it bears the name of Belvedere. The church of Belvedere, dedicated to All Saints, stands in the Erith Road. It is built of cut flint with stone dressings, in the Early English style, and comprises a nave and chancel, aisles, transepts, tower, and spire. There are also in the village chapels for Nonconformists of different denominations.

Abbey Wood, a little farther westward, but still within the parish of Erith, occupies part of the site of the woods belonging to Lesnes Abbey, which at one time extended eastward to Erith, and reached back to Lesnes Heath. Lesnes Abbey, of which but few fragments are now visible, was founded in 1178 by Richard de Lucy, Lord Chief Justice of England, he being then Regent of the kingdom, in the absence of Henry II. In front of the abbey might be seen the Thames some distance away across the marshes, while at the back rises a range of hills. The situation, indeed, was most delightful, showing that monks were good farmers and landscape gardeners, and that by their care and industry they could "make the desert smile." The barns in which the productions of the estate were stored remained down to a comparatively recent date, and the stews, or fish-ponds, on the east side of the Priory, may to some extent be traced to this day. The wall that enclosed the convent garden is still standing, and at the south-western corner

is a doorway, probably dating from the time of Edward I., which was formerly the principal entrance to the abbey. The walls encircling the courtyard are in excellent preservation, and we can still admire the substantial masonry of the monks, than whom no more "canny" builders have ever existed.

Considerable portions of the buildings were standing a century ago, but since that time the stones of which they were composed have been carted away piecemeal, and made to do duty in mending the roads in the neighbourhood. In the "Archæologia" for 1753 is given a view of the roofless walls of the abbey chapel, with its Early English lancet windows and doorway, as shown in our illustration. The ancient seal of the abbey is also preserved in the same antiquarian repository.

Weever, the author of "Funeral Monuments," who was rector of Erith in the reign of Elizabeth, mentions the discovery in 1630, among the ruins of Lesnes Abbey, of a "goodly funeral monument, the full proportion of a man in his coat armour, his sword hanging at his side by a broad belt, upon which the *flower-de-luce* was engraven in many places (being, as I take it, the relus or device of the Lucies). This his (Sir Richard Lucie's) representation or picture lay upon a flat marble stone. They likewise found other statues of men in like manner proportioned."

From the "Beauties of England and Wales" we quote the following account of Lesnes Abbey:—"It is remarkable that the church of this abbey was dedicated by its founder to St. Mary and St. Thomas à Becket, although this proud prelate had not been dead more than eight years, and though he had previously excommunicated De Lucy for being 'a contriver of those heretical pravities, the Constitutions of Clarendon.' The original endowments of the convent consisted of the western moiety of Erith parish, including Westwood, now called the Abbey Wood, which extends towards the south. . . . Godfrey, Bishop of Winchester, son of Richard de Lucy, increased the possessions of the monks, and their estates were further augmented by different benefactors. . . . This abbey was dissolved in 1524, under the commission for suppressing the smaller monasteries. The site of the abbey and its surrounding demesne is now tenanted as a farm."

"Few locations," observes a local antiquary (Mr. A. J. Dunkin), "were better adapted for the purposes of a monastic life than the site selected by De Lucy; for within its shady recesses might be found the seclusion favourable for study, and the quiet indispensable for pious contemplation.