

**GASQUET
FRANCIS
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ENGLISH MONASTIC LIFE

Francis Gasquet
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English Monastic Life:

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Francis Aidan Gasquet

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PREFACE

This volume does not appear to call for any lengthy preface. It should introduce and explain itself, inasmuch as, beyond giving a brief account of the origin and aim of each of the Orders existing in England in pre-Reformation days, and drawing up a general list of the various houses, all I have attempted to do is to set before the reader, in as plain and popular a manner as I could, the general tenor of the life lived by the inmates in any one of those monastic establishments. In one sense the picture is ideal; that is, all the details of the daily observance could not perhaps be justified from an appeal to the annals or customs of any one single monastery. Regular or religious life was never, it must be borne in mind, such a cast-iron system, or of so stereotyped a form, that it could not be, and for that matter frequently was, modified in this or that particular, according to the needs of places, circumstances, and times. Even in the case of establishments belonging to the same Order or religious body this is true; and it is of course all the more certainly true in regard to houses belonging to different Orders. Still, as will be explained later, the general agreement of the life led in all the

monastic establishments is so marked, that it has been found possible to sketch a picture of that life which, without being perhaps actually exact in every particular for any one individual house, is sufficiently near to the truth in regard to all the houses in general. The purposes for which the various parts of the monastery were designed and were used, the duties assigned to the numerous officials, the provisions by which the well-being and order of the establishment were secured, the disposition of the hours of the day, and the regulations for carrying out the common conventual duties, etc., were similar in all religious bodies in pre-Reformation days; and, if regard be paid to the changed circumstances, are still applicable to the monastic and religious establishments now existing in England.

It remains for me to publicly record my thanks to those who have assisted me in the preparation of this volume.

In regard to the list of the ancient religious houses, which it is to be hoped may be found of use to the student of monastic archæology, I have to acknowledge the kind help of the Rev. Dr. Cox, the general editor of the series; of Mr. W. H. St. John Hope; of Mr. R. C. Fowler, of the Public Record Office; of the Rev. R. M. Serjeantson; and of the Rev. H. J. D. Astley. My readers are also indebted to Mr. St. John Hope and to Mr. H. Brakspear for permission to reproduce three plans giving the typical arrangement of different religious houses; and lastly, my thanks are due to Dom H. N. Birt for various suggestions, and for his careful reading of the proofs for me.

LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS AND PRINTED BOOKS

By the advice of the editor of this series, the present list of the principal manuscripts and books used in this volume to describe the life of an English mediæval monastery is here printed, in place of giving multitudinous references at the foot of every page. In the case of the MSS. full transcripts have been made of most of them, in order that all the available evidence bearing on the subject might be fully considered.

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Consuetudinarium Abbatiae S. Petri Westmonasteriensis (Abbot Ware's). (4th part only, much burnt.) Cott. MS. Otho c. xi.

Constitutiones pro monasterio de Abingdon. Harl. MSS. 209, ff. 11-12, 85-87.

Ordinale S. Edmundi de Burgo. MS. Harl. 2,977.

Ordinale ecclesiae S. Augustini Cantuariensis: de disciplina Monachorum, etc. Cott. MS. Vitellius D. xvi.

Consuetudines quædam Abbatiae S. Edmundi Buriensis. (Stated in a Papal letter in the Marini transcripts). Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 15,358, f. 439 *seqq.*

Traditiones patrum O.S.B. in Liber albus of Edmundsbury. Harl. MS. 1005.

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Traditio Generalis Capituli super mores et observantias monachorum Ordinis S. Benedicti. Cott. MS. Faustina C. xii. f. 181.

Consuetudines Elemosinæ ecclesiæ Sti. Petri et S. Swithune, Winton. Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 29,436, f. 72 d. seqq.

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Apostolatus Benedictinorum in Anglia. Reyner, Clemens.

Antiquiores Consuetudines Cluniacensis Monasterii — *Collectore Udalrico Monacho.* Migne, Patr. Lat. vol. 149, col. 635 *seqq.*

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De Antiquis Ecclesiae Ritibus. Martène, III. pp. 253 *seqq.*

Ordinale Conventus Vallis Caulium. ed. W. de Gray Birch. 1900.

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ii. (Rolls Series). ed. R. Howlett.

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Processus electionis Abbatum S. Albani. Mon. Angl. II. 191, note.

De Consuetudinibus et Ordinationibus officialium separalium in Abbatia de Evesham. Mon. Angl. II. 23-5.

Literæ Constitutionum Hugonis, Lincoln. Episcopi, Visitatione Monalium de Cotun. Mon. Angl. V. 677.

Tractatus Statutorum Ordinis Cartusiensis pro Noviciis, etc. Mon. Angl. VI. pp. v., xii.

De Canonorum Ordinis Origine, etc. Mon. Angl. VI. pp. 39-49.

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Ordinatio pro officiis Prioris et Subprioris ibidem. Mon. Angl. VI. p. 112.

Institutiones beati Gilberti et successorum ejus, per Capitula Generalia institutæ. Mon. Angl. VI. p. 2, pp. *xxix. – *xcvii.

Regula Monachorum S. Trinitatis. Mon. Angl. VI. p. 3, p.

1,558 seqq.

De primordiis et inventione sacrae Religionis Iherosolimorum. Mon. Angl. V. p. 2, pp. 787 seqq.

De Canonorum Ordinis Præmonstratensis Origine, etc. Mon. Angl. V. p. 2, pp. 857 seqq.

Consuetudines Abbatiae Eveshamensis. Mon. Angl. II. 27-32.

De officiis Præcentoris. Mon. Angl. II. p. 39.

De Sacrista. Mon. Angl. II. p. 40.

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The Durham Household Book. ed. J. Raine (Surtees Soc.).
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Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis. ed. J. Booth (Surtees Soc.).
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Durham Account Rolls. ed. J. T. Fowler (Surtees Soc.). 3 vols.
1898-1900.

CHAPTER I

THE MONASTIC LIFE

The regular or monastic life was instituted to enable men to attain with greater security to the higher ideals of the Christian life proposed to them in the Gospel. In the early ages of the Church the fervour of the first converts, strengthened and purified by the fierce persecutions they had to endure for religion, enabled them, or a considerable number of them, to reach this high standard without withdrawing from the world, its business, or society. The belief that, by the means of regulated labour and strict discipline of the senses and appetites, it was in the power of man to perfect his moral nature and rise to heights in the spiritual order, not otherwise attainable, seems almost inherent in man's nature. Well-regulated practices founded upon this principle have been existent in all forms of religious worship other than Christian, and they can be recognised no less in the observances of ancient Egypt than in those of the lamas of modern Thibet. In the pagan world this doctrine seems to have dictated much of the peculiar teaching of the Stoics; and among the Jews the Essenes governed their lives in theory and practice upon this belief. Even among the early Christians there were some, who by striving to master their lower nature desired to attain the true end of human life as the Gospel taught them, the

knowledge and love of God and obedience to His will. These were known as *Ascetae*, and in one of the earliest Christian documents they are mentioned as a class of Christians between the laity and the clergy. They were, however, in the world though not “of the world,” and strove to reach their goal whilst living their ordinary life by means of perseverance in prayer, voluntary chastity and poverty, as well as by the exercise of mortification of all kinds.

Though the practice of seeking seclusion from the world for the purpose of better carrying out these ideals was apparently not unknown in the third century, it was not until after the conversion of Constantine that it can be said to have become general. The triumph of Christianity not only freed Christians from the spiritual stimulus of persecution, but it opened the door of the Christian home to worldly habits and luxury which were hitherto unknown, and which made the practice of the higher ideals of the spirit difficult, if not impossible, in the ordinary surroundings of the family life. To use the expression of Walter Hilton, the baptism of Constantine “brought so many fish into Peter’s net that it was well-nigh rent by the very multitude.” Henceforth it became necessary for Christians, who would satisfy the deeply seated instinct of human nature for the higher life, to seek it mostly in the solitudes of the desert, or later within the sheltering walls of the monastery.

For a right understanding of monastic history and monastic practices in the West generally, and even in England, it is

necessary to have some idea at least of the main features of Eastern monachism. It has been pointed out by Dom Butler, in his masterly introduction to the *Lausiatic History of Palladius*,¹ that monachism developed along two lines in Egypt. The first was the system initiated and directed by St. Anthony, when about the year A.D. 305, after living a life of seclusion for some twenty years, he undertook the direction and organisation of the multitude of monks which the reputation of his sanctity had drawn to his neighbourhood. The second was due to St. Pachomius, who, just about the same time, at the beginning of the fourth century, whilst yet quite a young man, founded his first monastery at Tabennisi in the far south of Egypt.

The first system came to prevail over a great portion of the country by the end of the first century after its foundation by St. Anthony. The monks were mostly hermits in the strict sense of the word. They lived apart and “out of earshot of one another,”² coming together at certain times for divine worship. In other districts the religious lived together in threes or fours, who, on all days but the Saturdays and Sundays when all assembled in the great church, were used to sing their songs and hymns together in their common cells. Of this system Palladius, who is the first authority on the matter, says: “They have different practices, each as he is able and as he wishes.” Dom Butler thus describes it: —

“There was no rule of life. The Elders exercised an

¹ *Texts and Studies*, Cambridge, vol. vi., No. 1, p. 233.

² *Ibid.*

authority, but it was mainly personal... The society appears to have been a sort of spiritual democracy, ruled by the personal influence of the leading ascetics, but there was no efficient hold upon individuals to keep them from falling into extravagances... A young man would put himself under the guidance of a senior and obey him in all things; but the bonds between them were wholly voluntary. The purely eremitical life tended to die out, but what took its place continued to be semi-eremitical.”³

The second system introduced at the beginning of the fourth century may be described as the cenobitical or conventual type of monachism. Pachomius’ monks lived together under a complete system of organisation, not, indeed, as a family under a father, but rather as an army under a discipline of a military character. This form of the monastic life spread with great rapidity, and by the time of its founder’s death (c. 345) it counted eight monasteries and several hundred monks.

“The most remarkable feature about it,” says Dom Butler, “is that (like Citeaux in a later age) it almost at once assumed the shape of a fully organised congregation or order, with a superior general and a system of visitation and general chapters – in short, all the machinery of centralised government, such as does not appear again in the monastic world until the Cistercians and the Mendicant Orders arose in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.”⁴

³ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

The various monasteries under the Rule of St. Pachomius existed as separate houses, each with a head or *præpositus* and other officials of its own, and organised apparently on the basis of the trades followed by the inmates. The numbers in each house naturally varied; between thirty and forty on an average living together. At the more solemn services all the members of the various houses came together to the common church; but the lesser offices were celebrated by the houses individually. Under this rule, regular organised work was provided for the monk not merely as a discipline and penitential exercise, as was the case under the Antonian system, but as a part of the life itself. The common ideal of asceticism aimed at was not too high.

“The fundamental idea of St. Pachomius’ Rule was,” says Dom Butler, “to establish a moderate level of observance which might be obligatory upon all; and to leave it open to each – and to, indeed, encourage each – to go beyond the fixed minimum, according as he was prompted by his strength, his courage, and his zeal.”⁵

Hence we find the Pachomian monks eating or fasting as they wished. The tables were laid at midday, and dinner was provided every hour till evening; they ate when they liked, or fasted if they felt called on so to do. Some took a meal only in the evening, others every second or even only every fifth day. The Rule allowed them their full freedom; and any idea of what is now understood by “Common Life” – the living together and

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

doing all things together according to rule – was a feature entirely absent from Egyptian monachism.

One other feature must also be noticed, which would seem to be the direct outcome of the liberty allowed in much of the life, and in particular in the matter of austerities, to the individual monk under the systems both of St. Anthony and St. Pachomius. It is a spirit of strongly marked individualism. Each worked for his personal advance in virtue; each strove to do his utmost in all kinds of ascetical exercises and austerities – in prolonging his fasts, his prayers, his silence. The favourite name used to describe any of the prominent monks was “great athlete.” They loved “to make a record” in austerities, and to contend with one another in mortifications; and they would freely boast of their spiritual achievements. This being so, penances and austerities tended to multiply and increase in severity, and this freedom of the individual in regard to his asceticism accounts for the very severe and often incongruous mortifications undertaken by the monks of Egypt.

Monachism was introduced into Western Europe from Egypt by way of Rome. The first monks who settled in the Eternal City were known as “Egyptians,” and the Latin translation of the *Vita Antonii* (c. 380) became “the recognised embodiment of the monastic ideal.” It preserved its primitive character in the matter of austerities during the fourth century, and St. Augustine declares that he knew of religious bodies of both sexes, which exercised themselves “in incredible fastings,” passing not merely

one day without food or drink, which was “a common practice,” but often going “for three days or more without anything.”

During this same century the monastic life made its appearance in Gaul. About A.D. 360 St. Martin founded a religious house at Ligugé, near Poitiers; and when about A.D. 371 he became Bishop of Tours, he established another monastic centre in a retired position near his episcopal city, which he made his usual residence. The life led by the monks was a simple reproduction of that of St. Anthony’s followers. Cassian, the great organiser of monachism in Gaul, also followed closely the primitive Egyptian ideals both in theory and practice, whilst what is known of the early history of the monastery at Lerins, founded by Honoratus, to whom Cassian dedicated the second part of his *Conferences*, points to the fact that here too the eremitical life was regarded as the monastic ideal. On the whole, therefore, it may be said that the available evidence “amply justifies the statement that Gallic monachism during the fifth and sixth centuries was thoroughly Egyptian in both theory and practice.”⁶

It is now possible to understand the position of St. Benedict in regard to monasticism. The great Patriarch of Western monks was born probably about A.D. 480, and it was during that century that the knowledge of Eastern rules of regular life was increased greatly in Italy by the translation of an abridgment of Saint Basil’s code into Latin by Rufinus. St. Basil had introduced

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

for his monks in Cappadocia and the neighbouring provinces certain modifications of the Egyptian monastic observances. There was more common life for his religious: they lived together and ate together; and not when they pleased, but when the superior ordained. They prayed always in common, and generally depended upon the will of a common superior. About the same time St. Jerome translated the Rule of Pachomius, and the influence of these two Rules upon the monastic life of Italy at the period when St. Benedict comes upon the scene is manifest. Whatever changes had been introduced into the local observances, and however varied were the practices of individual monasteries, it is at least certain that at this period the monastic system in use in Italy was founded upon and drew its chief inspirations from Egyptian models. What was wholly successful in the East proved, however, unsuitable to Western imitators, and, owing to the climatic conditions, impossible. This much seems certain even from the mention made of the Gyrovagi and Sarabites by St. Benedict, since he describes them as existing kinds of monks whose example was to be avoided. That he had practical knowledge and experience of the Egyptian and the Eastern types of monachism clearly appears in his reference to Cassian and to the Rule of "Our Holy Father Saint Basil," as he calls him, and in the fact that he made his own first essay in the monastic life as a solitary.

When, some time about the beginning of the sixth century, St. Benedict came to write his Rule, with full knowledge and

experience both of the systems then in vogue and of the existing need of some reconstitution, it is noteworthy that he did not attempt to restore the lapsed practices of primitive asceticism, or insist upon any very different scheme of regular discipline. On the contrary, "he deliberately turned his back on the austerities that had hitherto been regarded as the chief means for attaining the spiritual end of the monastic life." He calls his Rule "a very little rule for beginners" —*minima inchoationis regula*, and says that though there may be in it some things "a little severe," still he hopes that he will establish "nothing harsh, nothing heavy." The most cursory comparison between this new Rule and those which previously existed will make it abundantly clear that St. Benedict's legislation was conceived in a spirit of moderation in regard to every detail of the monastic life. Common-sense, and the wise consideration of the superior in tempering any possible severity, according to the needs of times, places, and circumstances were, by his desire, to preside over the spiritual growth of those trained in his "school of divine service."

In addition to this St. Benedict broke with the past in another and not less important way, and in one which, if rightly considered and acted upon, more than compensated for the mitigation of corporal austerities introduced into his rule of life. The strong note of individualism characteristic of Egyptian monachism, which gave rise to what Dom Butler calls the "rivalry in ascetical achievement," gave place in St. Benedict's code to the common practices of the community, and to the entire

submission of the individual will, even in matters of personal austerity and mortification, to the judgment of the superior.

“This two-fold break with the past, in the elimination of austerity and in the sinking of the individual in the community, made St. Benedict’s Rule less a development than a revolution in monachism. It may be almost called a new creation; and it was destined to prove, as the subsequent history shows, peculiarly adapted to the new races that were peopling Western Europe.”⁷

We are now in a position to turn to England. When, less than half a century after St. Benedict’s death, St. Augustine and his fellow monks in A.D. 597 first brought this Rule of Life to our country, a system of monasticism had been long established in the land. It was Celtic in its immediate origin; but whether it had been imported originally from Egypt or the East generally, or whether, as some recent scholars have thought, it was a natural and spontaneous growth, is extremely doubtful. The method of life pursued by the Celtic monks and the austerities practised by them bear a singular resemblance to the main features of Egyptian monachism; so close, indeed, is this likeness that it is hard to believe there could have been no connection between them. One characteristic feature of Celtic monasticism, on the other hand, appears to be unique and to divide it off from every other type. The Celtic monasteries included among their officials one, and in some cases many bishops. At the head was the abbot,

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

and the episcopal office was held by members of the house subordinate to him. In certain monasteries the number of bishops was so numerous as to suggest that they must have really occupied the position of priests at the subordinate churches. Thus St. Columba went in A.D. 590 from Iona to a synod at Drumcheatt, accompanied by as many as twenty bishops; and in some of the Irish ecclesiastical meetings the bishops, as in the case of some of the African synods, could be counted by hundreds. This Celtic system appears to be without parallel in other parts of the Christian Church, and scholars have suggested that it was a purely indigenous growth. One writer, Mr. Willis Bund, is of the opinion that the origin was tribal and that the first "monasteries" were mere settlements of Christians – clergy and laity, men, women, and children – who for the sake of protection lived together. It was at some subsequent date that a division was made between the male and female portions of the settlement, and later still the eremitical idea was grafted on the already existing system. If the tribal settlement was the origin of the Celtic monastery, it affords some explanation of the position occupied by the bishops as subjects of the abbots. The latter were in the first instance the chiefs or governors of the settlements, which would include the bishop or bishops of the churches comprised in the settlement. By degrees, according to the theory advanced, the head received a recognised ecclesiastical position as abbot, the bishop still continuing to occupy a subordinate position, although there is evidence in the lives of the early Irish saints to show that

the holder of the office was certainly treated with special dignity and honour.

The Celtic monastic system was apparently in vogue among the remnant of the ancient British Church in Wales and the West Country on the coming of St. Augustine. Little is known with certainty, but as the British Church was Celtic in origin it may be presumed that the Celtic type of monachism prevailed amongst the Christians in this country after the Saxon conquest. Whether it followed the distinctive practice of Irish monasticism in regard to the position of the abbot and the subject bishops may perhaps be doubted, as this does not appear to have been the practice of the Celtic Church of Gaul, with which there was a close early connection.

It has usually been supposed that the Rule of St. Columbanus represented the normal life of a Celtic monastery, but it has been lately shown that, so far as regards the Irish or Welsh houses, this Rule was never taken as a guide. It had its origin apparently in the fact that the Celtic monks on the Continent were induced, almost in spite of themselves, to adopt a mitigated rule of life by their close contact with Latin monasticism, which was then organising itself on the lines of the Rule of St. Benedict.⁸ The Columban Rule was a code of great rigour, and “would, if carried out in its entirety, have made the Celtic monks almost, if not quite, the most austere of men.” Even if it was not actually in use, the Rule of St. Columbanus may safely be taken to indicate the tendencies

⁸ *The Celtic Church of Wales*, J. J. Willis Bund, p. 166.

of Celtic monasticism generally, and the impracticable nature of much of the legislation and the hard spirit which characterises it goes far to explain how it came to pass that whenever it was brought face to face with the wider, milder, and more flexible code of St. Benedict, invariably, sooner or later, it gave place to it. In some monasteries, for a time, the two Rules seem to have been combined, or at least to have existed side by side, as at Luxeuil and Bobbio, in Italy, in the seventh century; but when the abbot of the former monastery was called upon to defend the Celtic rule, at the Synod of Macon in A.D. 625, the Columban code may be said to have ceased to exist anywhere as a separate rule of life.

For the present purpose it will be sufficient to consider English monasticism from the coming of St. Augustine at the close of the sixth century as Benedictine. There was, it is true, a brief period when in Northumberland the Celtic form of regular observance established itself at Lindisfarne and elsewhere. This was due to the direct appeal made by King Edwy of Northumbria to the monks of Iona to come into Northumbria, and continue in the North the work of St. Paulinus, which had been interrupted by the incursions of Penda. Iona, the foundation and home of St. Columba, was a large monastic and missionary centre regulated according to the true type of Celtic monachism under the abbatial superior; and from Iona came St. Aidan and the other Celtic apostles of the northern parts. In one point, so far as the evidence exists for forming any judgment at all, the new

foundation of Lindisfarne differed from the parent house at Iona. At the Northumbrian monastery the bishop was the head and took the place of the abbot, and did not occupy the subordinate position held by the bishops at Iona and its dependencies.

CHAPTER II

THE MATERIAL PARTS OF A MONASTERY

1. THE CHURCH

In any account of the parts of a monastic establishment the church obviously finds the first place. As St. Benedict laid down the principle that “nothing is to be preferred to the *Opus Dei*,” or Divine Service, so in every well-regulated religious establishment the church must of necessity be the very centre of the regular life as being, in fact no less than in word, the “House of God.”

In northern climates the church was situated, as a rule, upon the northern side of the monastic buildings. With its high and massive walls it afforded to those who lived there a good shelter from the rough north winds. As the northern cloister usually stretched along the nave wall of the church and terminated at the south transept, the buildings of the choir and presbytery and also the retro-chapels, if there were any, gave some protection from the east wind. Sometimes, of course, there were exceptions, caused by the natural lie of the ground or other reason, which did not allow of the church being placed in the ordinary English position. Canterbury itself and Chester are examples of this, the

church being in each case on the southern side, where also it is found very frequently in warm and sunny climates, with the obvious intention of obtaining from its high walls some shelter from the excessive heat of the sun. Convenience, therefore, and not any very recondite symbolism, may be considered to have usually dictated the position of "God's house."

Christian churches, especially the great cathedral and monastic churches, were originally designed and built upon lines which had much symbolism in them; the main body of the church with its transepts was to all, of course, a representation of Christ upon the cross. To the builders of these old sanctuaries the work was one of faith and love rather than a matter of mere mercenary business. They designed and worshipped whilst they wrought. To them, says one writer, the building "was instinct with speech, a tree of life planted in paradise; sending its roots deep down into the crypt; rising with stems in pillar and shaft; branching out into boughs over the vaulting; blossoming in diaper and mural flora; breaking out into foliage, flower, and fruit, on corbel, capital, and boss." It was all real and true to them, for it sprang out of their strong belief that in the church they had "the House of God" and "the Gate of heaven," into which at the moment of the solemn dedication "the King of Glory" had come to take lasting possession of His home. For this reason, to those who worshipped in any such sanctuary the idea that they stood in the "courts of the Lord" as His chosen ministers was ever present in their daily service, as with the eyes of their simple faith

they could almost penetrate the veil that hid His majesty from their sight. As St. Benedict taught his disciples, mediæval monks believed “without any doubt” that God was present to them “in a special manner” when they “assisted at their divine service.” “Therefore,” says the great master of the regular observance, “let us consider in what manner and with what reverence it behoveth us to be in the sight of God and of the Angels, and so let us sing in choir, that mind and voice may accord together.”

So far as the religious life was concerned, the most important part of the church was of course the presbytery with the High Altar and the choir. Here all, or nearly all, public services were performed. The choir frequently, if not generally, stretched beyond the transepts and took up one, if not two, bays of the nave; being enclosed and divided off from that more public part by the great screen. Other gates of ironwork, across the aisle above the presbytery and in a line with the choir screen, kept the public from the south transept. Privacy was thus secured for the monks, whilst by this arrangement the people had full access to all parts of the sacred building except the choir and the transept nearest to the monastery.

The choir was entered, when the buildings were in the normal English position, from a door in the southern wall of the church at the juncture of the northern and eastern walks of the cloister. At the western end of the same northern cloister there was generally another door into the church reserved for the more solemn processions. The first, however, was the ordinary entrance used

by the monks, and passing through it they found themselves in the area reserved for them within the screens which stretched across the choir and aisle.

In the centre of the choir stood the great raised lectern or reading-desk, from which the lessons were chanted, and from which, also, the singing was directed by the cantor and his assistant. The stalls were arranged in two or more rows slightly raised one above the other. The superior and the second in command usually occupied the two stalls on each side of the main entrance furthest from the altar, the juniors being ranged nearest to the presbytery. This was the common practice except at the time of the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, or during such portion of the Office which preceded the Mass. On these occasions the elders took their places nearest to the altar, for the purpose of making the necessary oblations at the Holy Sacrifice. In many monastic choirs, for this reason, the abbot and prior had each two places reserved for their special use, one on either side near the altar, and the others at the entrance of the choir. Besides the great lectern of the choir there was likewise a second standing-desk for the reading of the Gospel at Matins, usually placed near to the steps of the presbytery. In some cases, apparently, this was always in its place, but more frequently it was brought into the choir for the occasion, and removed afterwards by the servers of the church.

There were in every church, besides the High Altar, several, and frequently numerous, smaller altars. The *Rites of Durham*

describes minutely the nine altars arranged along the eastern wall of the church and facing the shrine of St. Cuthbert.

“They,” says the author, “each had their several shrines and covers of wainscot over-head, in very decent and comely form, having likewise betwixt every altar a very fair and large partition of wainscot, all varnished over, with very fine branches and flowers and other imagery work most finely and artificially pictured and gilded, containing the several lockers or ambers for the safe keeping of the vestments and ornaments belonging to every altar; with three or four aumbries in the wall pertaining to some of the said altars.”

It would be now quite impossible to describe the rich adornments of an English mediæval monastic church. The *Rites of Durham* give some idea of the wealth of plate, vestments and hangings, and the art treasures, mural paintings and stained windows, with which generations of benefactors had enriched that great northern sanctuary. What we know of other monastic houses shows that Durham was not an exception in any way; but that almost any one, at any rate of the greater houses, could challenge comparison with it. A foreign traveller almost on the eve of their destruction speaks of the artistic wealth of the monastic churches of England as unrivalled by that of any other religious establishments in the whole of Europe.

2. THE CLOISTERS

In every monastery next in public importance to the church came the cloisters. The very name has become a synonym for the monastery itself. The four walks of the cloister formed the dwelling-place of the community. With the progress of time there came into existence certain private rooms in which the officials transacted their business, and later still the use of private cells or cubicles became common, but these were the exception; and, at any rate, in England till the dissolution of the religious houses, the common life of the cloister was in full vigour.

In the normal position of the church on the north side of the monastic buildings, the north cloister with its openings looking south was the warmest of the four divisions. Here, in the first place, next the door of the church, was the prior's seat, and the rest of the seniors in their order sat after him, not necessarily in order of seniority, but in the positions that best suited their work. The abbot's place, "since his dignity demands," as the Westminster Custumal puts it, was somewhat apart from the rest. He had his fixed seat at the end of the eastern cloister nearest to the church door. In the same cloister, but more towards the other, or southern end, the novice-master taught his novices, and the walk immediately opposite, namely, the western side of the cloister, was devoted to the junior monks, who were, as the Rule of St. Benedict says, "*adhuc in custodia*": still under

stricter discipline. The southern walk, which would have been in ordinary circumstances the sunless, cold side of the quadrangle, was not usually occupied in the daily life of the community. This was the common position for the refectory, with the lavatory close at hand, and the aumbries or cupboards for the towels, etc. It was here also that the door from the outside world into the monastic precincts was usually to be found. At Durham, for example, we are told that —

“there was on the south side of the cloister door, a stool, or seat with four feet, and a back of wood joined to the said stool, which was made fast in the wall for the porter to sit on, which did keep the cloister door. And before the said stool it was boarded in under foot, for warmth. And he that was the last porter there was called Edward Pattinson.”

The same account describes the cupboards near to the refectory door in which the monks kept their towels —

“All the forepart of the aumbry was thorough carved work, to give air to the towels.” There were “three doors in the forepart of either aumbry and a lock on every door, and every monk had a key for the said aumbries, wherein did hang in every one clean towels for the monks to dry their hands on, when they washed and went to dinner.”

We who see the cold damp-stained cloisters of the old monastic buildings as they are to-day, as at Westminster for example, may well feel a difficulty in realising what they were in the time of their glory. Day after day for centuries the cloister

was the centre of the activity of the religious establishment. The quadrangle was the place where the monks lived and studied and wrote. In the three sides – the northern, eastern, and western walks – were transacted the chief business of the house, other than what was merely external. Here the older monks laboured at the tasks appointed them by obedience, or discussed questions relating to ecclesiastical learning or regular observance, or at permitted times joined in recreative conversation. Here, too, in the parts set aside for the purpose, the younger members toiled at their studies under the eye of their teacher, learnt the monastic observance from the lips of the novice-master, or practised the chants and melodies of the Divine Office with the cantor or his assistant. How the work was done in the winter time, even supposing that the great windows looking out on to the cloister-garth were glazed or closed with wooden shutters, must ever remain a mystery. In some places, it is true, certain screenwork divisions appear to have been devised, so as to afford some shelter and protection to the elder members and scribes of the monastery from the sharper draughts inevitable in an open cloister. The account given in the *Rites of Durham* on this point is worth quoting at length: —

“In the cloister,” says the writer – and he is speaking of the northern walk, set apart for the seniors – “in the cloister there were carrels finely wainscotted and very close, all but the forepart, which had carved work to give light in at their carrel doors. And in every carrel was a desk to lie

their books on, and the carrel was no greater than from one stanchell (centre-bar) of the window to another. And over against the carrels, against the church wall, did stand certain great aumbries of wainscot all full of books, with great store of ancient manuscripts to help them in their study.” In these cupboards, “did lie as well the old ancient written Doctors of the Church as other profane authors, with divers other holy men’s works, so that every one did study what doctor pleased him best, having the Library at all times to go and study in besides these carrels.”

In speaking of the novices the same writer tells us that —

“over against the said treasury door was a fair seat of wainscot, where the novices were taught. And the master of the novices had a pretty seat of wainscot adjoining to the south side of the treasury door, over against the seat where the novices sat; and there he taught the novices both forenoon and afternoon. No strangers or other persons were suffered to molest, or trouble the said novices, or monks in their carrels while they were at their books within the cloister. For to this purpose there was a porter appointed to keep the cloister door.”

In other monasteries, such for example as Westminster and St. Augustine’s, Canterbury, these enclosed wooden sitting-places seem to have been very few in number, and allowed only to those officers of the house who had much business to transact for the common good. At Durham, however, we are told that “every one of the old monks” had his own special seat, and in each

window of the south cloister there were set “three of these pews or carrels.”

3. THE REFECTORY

The refectory, sometimes called the *fratry* or *frater-house*, was the common hall for all conventual meals. Its situation in the plan of a monastic establishment was almost always as far removed from the church as possible, that is, it was on the opposite side of the cloister quadrangle and, according to the usual plan, in the southern walk of the cloister. The reason for this arrangement is obvious. It was to secure that the church and its precincts might be kept as free as possible from the annoyance caused by the noise and smells necessarily connected with the preparation and consumption of the meals.

As a rule, the walls of the hall would no doubt have been wainscotted. At one end, probably, great presses would have been placed to receive the plate and linen, with the salt-cellars, cups, and other ordinary requirements for the common meals. The floor of a monastic refectory was spread with hay or rushes, which covering was changed three or four times in the year; and the tables were ranged in single rows lengthways, with the benches for the monks upon the inside, where they sat with their backs to the panelled walls. At the east end, under some sacred figure, or painting of the crucifix, or of our Lord in glory, called the *Majestas*, was the *mensa major*, or high table for the superior. Above this the *scylla* or small signal-bell was suspended. This was sounded by the president of the meal as a sign that the community

might begin their refecton, and for the commencement of each of the new courses. The pulpit, or reading-desk, was, as a rule, placed upon the south side of the hall, and below it was usually placed the table for the novices, presided over by their master.

“At which time (of meals),” says the *Rites of Durham*, “the master observed this wholesome order for the continual instructing of their youth in virtue and learning; that is, one of the novices, at the election and appointment of the master, did read some part of the Old and New Testament, in Latin, in dinner-time, having a convenient place at the south end of the high table within a fair glass window, environed with iron, and certain steps of stone with iron rails of the one side to go up into it and to support an iron desk there placed, upon which lay the Holy Bible.”

In most cases the kitchens and offices would have been situated near the western end of the refectory, across which a screen pierced with doors would probably have somewhat veiled the serving-hatch, the dresser, and the passages to the butteries, cellars, and pantry.

Besides the great refectory there was frequently a smaller hall, called by various names such as the “misericord,” or “oriel” at St. Alban’s, the “disport” (*deportus*) at Canterbury, and the “spane” at Peterborough. In this smaller dining-place those who had been bled and others, who by the dispensation of the superior were to have different or better food than that served in the common refectory, came to their meals. At Durham, apparently,

the ordinary dining-place was called the “loft,” and was at the west end of a larger hall entered from the south alley of the cloister, called the “frater-house.” In this hall “the great feast of Saint Cuthbert’s day in Lent was holden.” In an aumbry in the wainscot, on the left-hand of the door, says the author of the *Rites of Durham*, was kept the great mazer, called the *grace-cup*, “which did service to the monks everyday, after grace was said, to drink in round the table.”

4. THE KITCHEN

Near to the refectory was, of course, the conventual kitchen. At Canterbury this kitchen was a square of some forty-five feet; at Durham it was somewhat smaller; and at Glastonbury, Worcester, and Chester the hall was some thirty-five feet square. A small courtyard with the usual offices adjoined it; and this sometimes, as at Westminster and Chester, had a tower and a larder on the western side. According to the Cluniac constitutions there were to be two kitchens: the one served in weekly turns by the brethren, the other in which a good deal of the food was prepared by paid servants. The first was chiefly used for the preparation of the soup or pottage, which formed the foundation of the monastic dinner. The furniture of this kitchen is minutely described in the *Custumals*: there were to be three *caldaria* or cauldrons for boiling water: one for cooking the beans, a second for the vegetables, and a third, with an iron tripod to stand it upon, to furnish hot water for washing plates, dishes, cloths, etc. Secondly, there were to be four great dishes or vessels: one for half-cooked beans; another and much larger one, into which water was always to be kept running, for washing vegetables; a third for washing up plates and dishes; and a fourth to be reserved for holding a supply of hot water required for the weekly foot-washing, and for the shaving of faces and tonsures, etc. In the same way there were to be always in the kitchen four spoons:

the first for beans, the second for vegetables, the third (a small one naturally) for seasoning the soup, and the fourth (an iron one of large size) for shovelling coals on to the fire. Besides these necessary articles, the superior was to see that there were to be always at hand four pairs of sleeves for the use of the servers, that they might not soil their ordinary habits; two pairs of gloves for moving hot vessels, and three napkins for wiping dishes, etc., which were to be changed every Thursday. Besides these things there were, of course, to be knives, and a stone wherewith to sharpen them; a small dish to get hot water quickly when required; a strainer; an urn to draw hot water from; two ladles; a fan to blow the fire up when needed, and stands to set the pots upon, etc.

The work of the weekly cooks is also carefully set out in these constitutions. These officials were four in number, and, upon the sign for vespers, after making their prayer, they were to proceed to the kitchen and obtain the necessary measure of beans for the following day. They then said their vespers together, and proceeded to wash the beans in three waters, putting them afterwards into the great boiling-pot with water ready for the next day. After Lauds on the following day, when they had received the usual blessing for the servers, after washing themselves they proceeded to the kitchen and set the cauldron of beans on the fire. The pot was to be watched most carefully lest the contents should be burnt. The skins were to be taken off as they became loosened, and the beans were to be removed as they were cooked.

When all had been finished, the great cauldron was to be scoured and cleaned "*usque ad nitidum.*" Directly the beans had been removed from the fire, another pot was to be put in its place, so that there might always be a good supply of water for washing plates and dishes. These, when cleaned, were to be put into a rack to dry; this rack was to be constantly and thoroughly scoured and kept clean and sweet.

When the cooking of this bean soup had progressed so far, the four cooks were to sit down and say their Divine Office together whilst the hot water was being boiled. A third pot, with vegetables in cold water, was to be then made ready to take its place on the fire, after the Gospel of the morning Mass. When the daily Chapter, at which all had to be present, was finished, the beans were again to be put on the fire and boiled with more water, whilst the vegetables also were set to cook; and when these were done the cooks got the lard and seasoning, and, having melted it, poured it over them. Two of the four weekly cooks now went to the High Mass, the other two remaining behind to watch the dinner and to put more water into the cooking-pots when needed. When the community were ready for their meal, the first cook ladled out the soup into dishes, and the other three carried them to the refectory. In the same way the vegetables were to be served to the community, and when this had been done the four weekly cooks proceeded at once to wash with hot water the dishes and plates which had been used for beans and vegetables, lest by delay any remains should stick to the substance of the plate and be

afterwards difficult to remove.

5. THE CHAPTER-HOUSE

The chapter-hall, or house, was situated on the eastern side of the cloister, as near to the church as possible. Its shape, usually rectangular, sometimes varied according to circumstances and places. At Worcester and Westminster, for example, it was octagonal; at Canterbury and Chester rectangular; at Durham and Norwich rectangular with an apsidal termination. Seats were arranged along the walls for the monks, sometimes in two rows, one raised above the other, and at the easternmost part of the hall was the chair of the superior, with the crucifix or *Majestas* over it. In the centre a raised desk or pulpit was arranged for the reader of the Martyrology, etc., at that part of Prime which preceded the daily Chapter, and at the evening Collation before Compline.

6. THE DORMITORY

The position of the dormitory among the claustral buildings was apparently not so determined either by rule or custom, as some of the other parts of the religious house. Normally, it may be taken to have communicated with the southern transept, for the purpose of giving easy access to the choir for the night offices. In two cases it stood at right angles to the cloister – at Worcester on the western side, and at Winchester on the east. The *Rites of Durham* says that “on the west side of the cloister was a large house called the Dortor, where the monks and novices lay. Every monk had a little chamber to himself. Each chamber had a window towards the Chapter, and the partition betwixt every chamber was close wainscotted, and in each window was a desk to support their books.”

The place itself at Durham, and, indeed, no doubt, usually, was raised upon an undercroft and divided into various chambers and rooms. Amongst these were the treasury at Durham and Westminster, and the passage to the chapter-hall in the latter. The dormitory-hall was originally one open apartment, in which the beds of the monks were placed without screens or dividing hangings. In process of time, however, divisions became introduced such as are described by the author of the *Rites of Durham*, and such as we know existed elsewhere. The cubicles or cells thus formed came to be used for the purpose of study

as well as for sleeping, which accounts for the presence of the “desk to support their books” spoken of above. The dormitory also communicated with the latrine or *rere-dortor*, which was lighted, partitioned, and provided with clean hay.

For the purpose of easy access, as for instance at Worcester, the dormitory frequently communicated directly with the church through the south-western turret; at Canterbury a gallery was formed in the west gable-wall of the chapter-house, over the doorway, and continuing over the cloister roof, came out into an upper chapel in the northern part of the transept; at Westminster a bridge crossed the west end of the sacristy, and at St. Alban's and Winchester passages in the wall of the transept gave communication by stairs into the church.

7. THE INFIRMARY

In the disposition of the parts of the religious house no fixed locality was apparently assigned by rule or custom to the infirmary, or house for the sick and aged. Usually it appears to have been to the east of the dormitory; but there were undoubtedly numerous exceptions. At Worcester it faced the west front of the church, and at Durham and Rochester apparently it joined it; whilst at Norwich and Gloucester it was in a position parallel to the refectory. Adjoining the infirmary was sometimes the *herbarium*, or garden for herbs; and occasionally, as at Westminster, Gloucester, and Canterbury, this was surrounded by little cloisters. The main hall, or large room, of the infirmary often included a chapel at the easternmost point, where the sick could say their Hours and other Offices when able to do so, and where the infirmarian could say Mass for those under his charge. According to the constitutions of all religious bodies the care of the sick was enjoined upon the superior of every religious house as one of his most important duties.

“Before all things, and above all things,” says St. Benedict in his Rule, “special care must be taken of the sick, so that they be served in very deed, as Christ Himself, for He saith: ‘I was sick, and ye visited me’; and, ‘What ye did to one of these My least Brethren, ye did to Me.’”

On this principle not only was a special official appointed

in every monastery, whose first duty it was to look to the care and comfort of those who were infirm and sick, but the officials of the house generally were charged with seeing that they were supplied with what was needed for their comfort and cure. Above all, says the great legislator, "let the abbot take special care they be not neglected," that they have what they require at the hands of the cellarer, and that the attendants do not neglect them, "because," he adds, "whatever is done amiss by his disciples is imputed to him." For this reason, at stated times, as for instance immediately after the midday meal, the superior, who had presided in the common refectory, was charged to visit the sick brethren in the infirmary, in order to be sure that they had been served properly and in no ways neglected.

8. THE GUEST-HOUSE

The guest-house (*hostellary*, *hostry*, etc.) was a necessary part of every great religious house. It was presided over by a senior monk, whose duty it was to keep the hall and chambers ready for the reception of guests, and to be ever prepared to receive those who came to ask for hospitality. Naturally the guest-house was situated where it would be least likely to interfere with the privacy of the monastery. The guest-place at Canterbury was of great size, measuring forty feet broad by a hundred and fifty feet long. The main building was a big hall, resembling a church with columns, having on each side bedrooms or cubicles leading out of it. In the thirteenth century John de Hertford, abbot of St. Alban's, built a noble hall for the use of guests frequenting his abbey, with an inner parlour having a fireplace in it, and many chambers arranged for the use of various kinds of guests. It had also a *pro-aula*, or reception-room, in which the guest-master first received the pilgrim or traveller, before conducting him to the church, or arranging for a reception corresponding to his rank and position.

In the greater monastic establishments there were frequently several places for the reception of guests. The abbot, or superior, had rooms to accommodate distinguished or honoured guests and benefactors of the establishment. The cellarer's department, too, frequently had to entertain merchants and others who came

upon business of the house: a third shelter was provided near the gate of the monastery for the poorer folk, and a fourth for the monks of other religious houses, who had their meals in the common refectory, and joined in many of the exercises of the community.

The *Rites of Durham* thus describes the guest-house which the author remembered in the great cathedral monastery of the North: —

“There was a famous house of hospitality, called the Guest Hall, within the Abbey garth of Durham, on the west side, towards the water, the Terrar of the house being master thereof, as one appointed to give entertainment to all states, both noble, gentle, and whatsoever degree that came thither as strangers, their entertainment not being inferior to any place in England, both for the goodness of their diet, the sweet and dainty furniture of their lodgings, and generally all things necessary for travellers. And, withal, this entertainment continuing, (the monks) not willing or commanding any man to depart, upon his honest and good behaviour. This hall is a goodly, brave place, much like unto the body of a church, with very fair pillars supporting it on either side, and in the midst of the hall a most large range for the fire. The chambers and lodgings belonging to it were sweetly kept and so richly furnished that they were not unpleasant to lie in, especially one chamber called the ‘king’s chamber,’ deserving that name, in that the king himself might very well have lain in it, for the princely linen thereof... The prior (whose hospitality was

such as that there needed no guest-hall, but that they (the Convent) were desirous to abound in all liberal and free almsgiving) did keep a most honourable house and very noble entertainment, being attended upon both with gentlemen and yeomen, of the best in the country, as the honourable service of his house deserved no less. The benevolence thereof, with the relief and alms of the whole Convent, was always open and free, not only to the poor of the city of Durham, but to all the poor people of the country besides.”

In most monastic statutes, the time during which a visitor was to be allowed free hospitality was not unlimited, as, according to the recollection of the author of the *Rites of Durham*, appears to have been the case in that monastery. The usual period was apparently two days and nights, and in ordinary cases after dinner on the third day the guest was expected to take his departure. If for any reason a visitor desired to prolong his stay, permission had to be obtained from the superior by the guest-master. Unless prevented by sickness, after that time the guest had to rise for Matins, and otherwise follow the exercises of the community. With the Franciscans, a visitor who asked for hospitality from the convent beyond three days, had to beg pardon in the conventual chapter before he departed for his excessive demand upon the hospitality of the house.

9. THE PARLOUR OR LOCUTORIUM

In most Customs of monastic observance mention is made of a *Parlour*, and in some of more than one such place. Here the monks could be sent for by the superiors to discuss necessary matters of business, when strict silence had to be observed in the cloister itself. Here, too – it may be in the same, or in another such room – visitors could converse with the religious they had come to see. Sometimes, apparently, among the Cistercians, the place where the monastic schools were held, other than the cloister, was called the *auditorium* or *locutorium*. At Durham, the room called the parlour stood between the chapter-house and the church door, and is described as “a place for merchants to utter their wares.” It apparently had a door which gave access to the monastic cemetery, as the religious were directed to pass through it for the funeral of any of the brethren. During the times of silence, when anything had to be settled without unnecessary delay, the officials could summon any of the religious to the parlour for the purpose; but they were warned not to make any long stay, and to take great care that no sound of their voices disturbed the quiet of the cloister.

10. THE ALMONRY

No religious house was complete without a place where the poor could come and beg alms in the name of Christ. The convent doles of food and clothing were administered by one of the senior monks, who, by his office of almoner, had to interview the crowds of poor who daily flocked to the gate in search of relief. His charity was to be wider than his means; and where he could not satisfy the actual needs of all, he was at least to manifest his Christian sympathy for their sufferings. The house or room, from which the monastic relief was given, frequently stood near the church, as showing the necessary connection between charity and religion. In most of the almonries, at any rate in those of the larger monasteries, there was a free school for poor boys. It was in these that most of the students who were presented for Ordination by the religious houses in such number during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, (as is shown by the episcopal registers of the English dioceses), were prepared to exercise their sacred ministry in the ranks of the parochial clergy.

11. THE COMMON-ROOM OR CALEFACTORY

The common-room, sometimes called the calefactory or warming-place, was a room to which the religious resorted, especially in winter, for the purpose of warming themselves at the common fire, which was lighted on the feast of All Saints, November 1st, and kept burning daily until Easter. On certain occasions, such as Christmas night, when the Offices in the church were specially long, the caretaker was warned to be particularly careful to have a bright fire burning for the community to go to when they came out of the choir. The common-room was also used at times for the purpose of recreation.

“On the right hand, as you go out of the cloisters into the infirmary,” says the *Rites of Durham*, “was the Common House and a master thereof. This house was intended to this end, to have a fire kept in it all the winter, for the monks to come and warm them at, being allowed no fire but that only, except the masters and officers of the house, who had their several fires. There was belonging to the Common House a garden and a bowling alley, on the back-side of the said house, towards the water, for the novices sometimes to recreate themselves, when they had leave of their master; he standing by to see their good order.

“Also, within this house did the master thereof keep his *O Sapientia* once a year – namely, between Martinmas and Christmas – a solemn banquet that the prior and convent did use at that time of the year only, when their banquet was of figs and raisins, ale and cakes; and thereof no superfluity or excess, but a scholastical and moderate congratulation amongst themselves.”

12. THE LIBRARY

“A monastery without a library is like a castle without an armoury” was an old monastic saying. At first, and in most places in England probably to the end, there was no special hall, room, or place which was set aside for the reception of the books belonging to the monastery. In the church and in the cloister there were generally cupboards to hold the manuscripts in constant use. It was not till the later middle ages that the practice of gathering together the books of an establishment into one place or room became at all common. At Durham, about 1446, Prior Wessington made a *library*, “well replenished with old written doctors and other Histories and Ecclesiastical writers,” to which henceforth the monks could always repair to study in, “besides their carrels” in the cloister. So, too, at St. Alban’s, Michael de Mentmore, who was abbot from 1335 to 1349, besides enriching the presses in the cloister with books, made a collection of special volumes in what he called his study. This collection grew; but it was not till 1452 that Abbot Whethamstede finally completed the *library*, which had long been projected. About the same time, at Canterbury, Prior Thomas Goldstone finished a library there, which was enriched by the celebrated Prior William Sellyng with many precious classical manuscripts brought back from Italy. In the same way many other religious houses in the fifteenth century erected, or set apart, special places for their collections of books,

whilst still retaining the great cloister presses for those volumes which were in daily and constant use.

In addition to the above-named parts of every religious house, there were in most monasteries, and especially in the larger ones, a great number of offices. The officials, or obedientiaries, for instance, had their chequer or *scaccarium*, where the accounts of the various estates assigned to the support of the burdens of their special offices were rendered and checked. There were also the usual workrooms for tailors, shoemakers, etc., under the management of the chamberlain, or camerarius, and for the servants of the church, under the sacrist and his assistant. The above, however, will be sufficient to give some general idea of the material parts which composed the ordinary English religious house. More, however, will be learnt of them, and especially of their use, when the work of the officials, and the daily life led by the monks in the cloister is discussed.

CHAPTER III

THE MONASTERY AND ITS RULERS

The monastic rule, at least after the days of St. Benedict, was eminently social. Both in theory and in practice the regular observance of the great abbeys and other religious houses was based upon the principle of common life. Monks and other religious were not solitaries or hermits, but they lived and worked and prayed together in an association as close as it is possible to conceive. The community or corporation was the sole entity; individual interests were merged in that of the general body, and the life of an individual member was in reality merely an item in the common life of the convent as a whole. This is practically true in all forms of regular life, without regard to any variety of observance or rule. Some regulations for English pre-Reformation houses lay great stress upon this great principle of monastic life. To emphasise it, they require from all outward signs of respect for the community as a whole, and especially at such times and on such occasions as the convent was gathered together in its corporate capacity. Should the religious, for example, be passing in procession, either through the cloister or elsewhere, anyone meeting them, even were it the superior himself, was bound to turn aside to avoid them altogether, or to

draw on one side and salute them with a bow as they went by. When they were gathered together for any public duty no noise of any kind likely to reach their ears was to be permitted. When the religious were sitting in the cloister, strangers in the parlour were to be warned to speak in low tones, and above all to avoid laughter which might penetrate to them in their seclusion. If the superior was prevented from taking his meals in the common refectory, he was charged to acquaint the next in office beforehand, so that the community might not be kept waiting by expecting him. So, too, the servers, who remained behind in the refectory after meals, were to show their respect for the community by bowing towards its members, as they passed in procession before them. For the same reason officials, like the cellarer, the kitchener, and the refectorian were bound to see that all was ready in their various departments, so that the convent should never be kept waiting for a meal. In these and numberless other ways monastic regulations emphasised the respect that must be paid to the community as a corporate whole.

As the end and object of all forms of religious life was one and the same, the general tenor of that life was practically identical in all religious houses. The main features of the observances were the same, not merely in houses of the same Order, which naturally would be the case, but in every religious establishment irrespective of rule. A comparison of the various Customals or Consuetudinaries which set forth the details of the religious life in the English houses of various Orders, will show that

there is sometimes actual verbal agreement in these directions, even in the case of bodies so different as the Benedictines and the Cistercians on the one hand, and the Premonstratensians or White Canons and the Canons Regular on the other. Moreover, where no actual verbal agreement can now be detected, the rules of life are more than similar even in minute points of observance. This is, of course, precisely what anyone possessing a knowledge of the meaning and object of regular life, especially when the number of the community was considerable, would be led to expect. And, it is this fact which makes it possible to describe the life led in an English pre-Reformation monastery in such a way as to present a fairly correct picture of the life, whether in a Benedictine or Cistercian abbey, or in a house of Canons Regular, or, with certain allowances, in a Franciscan or Dominican friary.

This is true also in respect to convents of women. The life led by these ladies who had dedicated themselves to God in the cloister, was for practical purposes the same as that lived by the monks, with a few necessary exceptions. Its end, and the means by which that end was sought to be obtained, were the same. The abbess, like the abbot, had jurisdiction over the lives of her subjects, and like him she bore a crosier as a symbol of her office and of her rank. She took tithes from churches impropriated to her house, presented the secular vicars to serve the parochial churches, and had all the privileges of a landlord over the temporal estates attached to her abbey. The abbess of

Shaftesbury, for instance, at one time, found seven knights' fees for the king's service and held her own manor courts. Wilton, Barking, and Nunnaminster as well as Shaftesbury "held of the king by an entire barony," and by the right of this tenure had, for a period, the privilege of being summoned to Parliament. As regards the interior arrangements of the house, a convent followed very closely that of a monastery, and practically what is said of the officials and life of the latter is true also of the former.

In order to understand this regular life the inquirer must know something of the offices and position of the various superiors and officials, and must understand the parts, and the disposition of the various parts, of the material buildings in which that life was led. Moreover, he must realise the divisions of the day, and the meaning of the regulations, which were intended to control the day's work in general, and in a special manner, the ecclesiastical side of it, which occupied so considerable a portion of every conventual day. After the description of the main portion of the monastic buildings given in the last chapter, the reader's attention is now directed to the officials of the monastery and their duties.

In most Benedictine and Cistercian houses the superior was an abbot. By the constitution of St. Norbert for his White canons, in Premonstratensian establishments as in the larger houses of Augustinian, or Black, canons, the head also received the title and dignity of abbot. In English Benedictine monasteries which were attached to cathedral churches, such as Canterbury, Winchester, Durham and elsewhere, the superiors, although hardly inferior

in position and dignity to the heads of the great abbeys, were priors. This constitution of cathedrals with monastic chapters was practically peculiar to this country. It had grown up with the life of the church from the days of its first founders, the monastic followers of St. Augustine. No fewer than nine of the old cathedral foundations were Benedictine, whilst one, Carlisle, belonged to the Canons Regular. Chester, Gloucester, and Peterborough, made into cathedrals by Henry VIII., were previously Benedictine abbeys.

In the case of these cathedral monasteries the bishop was in many ways regarded as holding the place of the abbot. He was frequently addressed as such, and in some instances at least he exercised a certain limited jurisdiction over the convent and claimed to appoint some of the officials, notably those who had most to do with his cathedral church, like the sacrist and the precentor. Such claims, however, when made were often successfully resisted, like the further claim to appoint the superior, put forward at times by a bishop with a monastic chapter. So far, then, as the practical management of the cathedral monasteries is concerned, the priors ruled with an authority equal to that of an abbot, and whatever legislation applies to the latter would apply equally to the former. The same may be said of the superior of those houses of Canons Regular, and other bodies, where the chief official was a prior. This will only partially be true in the case of the heads of dependent monasteries, such as Tynemouth, which was a cell of

St. Alban's Abbey, and whose superior, although a prior ruling the house with full jurisdiction, was nominated by the abbot of the mother house, and held office not for life, but at his will and pleasure. The same may be said of the priors of Dominican houses, and of the guardians of Franciscan friaries, whose office was temporary; and of the heads of alien monasteries, who were dependent to a greater or less extent upon their foreign superiors.

Roughly speaking, then, the office of superior was the same in all religious houses; and if proper allowance be made for different circumstances, and for the especial ecclesiastical position necessarily secured by the abbatial dignity, any description of the duties and functions of an abbot in one of the great English houses will be found to apply to other religious superiors under whatever name they may be designated.

1. THE ABBOT

The title abbot (*abbas*) means father, and was used from the earliest times as a title appropriate to designate the superior of a religious house, as expressing the paternal qualities which should characterise his rule. St. Benedict says that “an abbot who is worthy to have charge of a monastery ought always to remember by what title he is called,” and that “in the monastery he is considered to represent the person of Christ, seeing that he is called by His name.” The monastic system established by St. Benedict was based entirely upon the supremacy of the abbot. Though the Rule gives directions as to an abbot’s government, and furnishes him with principles upon which to act, and binds him to carry out certain prescriptions as to consultation with others in difficult matters, etc., the subject is told to obey without question or hesitation the decision of the superior. It is of course needless to say that this obedience did not extend to the commission of evil, even were any such a command ever imposed. Upon this principle of implicit obedience to authority depended the power and success of the monastic system, and in acknowledging the supreme jurisdiction of the superior, whether abbot or prior, all pre-Reformation religious Orders agreed.

It is useful at the outset to understand how the abbot was chosen. According to the monastic rule, he was to be elected by the universal suffrages of his future subjects. In practice

these could be made known in one of three ways: (1) By individual voting, *per viam scrutinii*; (2) by the choice of a certain number, or even of one eminent person, to elect in the name of the community, a mode of election known as *electio per compromissum*; and (3) by acclamation, or the uncontradicted declaration of the common wish of the body. Prior, however, to this formal election there were certain preliminaries to be gone through, which varied according to circumstances. Very frequently the founder or patron, who was the descendant of the original founder of the religious house, had to be consulted, and his leave obtained for the community to proceed to an election. In the case of many of the small houses, and, of course, of the greater monasteries, the sovereign was regarded as the founder; and not unfrequently one condition imposed upon a would-be founder for leave to endow a religious house with lands exempt from the Mortmain Acts, was that, on the death of the superior, the convent should be bound to ask permission from the king to elect his successor. This requirement of a royal *cong   d'  lire* was frequently regarded as an infringement of the right of the actual founder, but in practice it appears to have been maintained very generally in the case of houses largely endowed with lands, as a legal check upon them, rendered fitting by the provision of the Mortmain Acts. Moreover, on the death of the superior, the king took possession of the revenues of his office, which were administered by his officials till, on the confirmation of his successor, the temporalities were restored by a royal writ. In

some cases this administration pertained only to the portion of the revenues specially assigned to the office of superior; in others it appears to have included the entire revenue of the house, the community having to look to the royal receiver for the money necessary for their support.

In practice the process of election in one of the greater monasteries on the death of the abbot was as follows. In the first place the community assembled together and made choice of two of their number to carry their common letter to the king, to announce the death and to beg leave to proceed to the election of a successor. This *cong   d'  lire* was usually granted without much difficulty, the Crown at the same time appointing the official charged with guarding the revenues of the house or office during the vacancy. On the return of the conventual ambassadors to their monastery, the day of election was first determined, and notice to attend was sent to all the religious not present who were possessed of what was called an "active voice," or the right of voting, in the election. At the appointed time, after a Mass *De Spiritu Sancto* had been celebrated to beg the help of the Holy Ghost, the community assembled in the chapter-house for the process of election. In the first place was read the constitution of the General Council —*Quia propter*— in which the conditions of a valid election were set forth, and all who might be under ecclesiastical censure or suspension were warned that they not only had no right to take part in the business, but that their votes might render the election null and void.

After this formal preparation the community determined by which of the various legitimate modes of election they would proceed, either the first or second method being usually followed. When all this actual process of election had been properly carried out and attested in a formal document, the community accompanied the newly chosen superior in procession to the church, where his election was proclaimed to the people, and the *Te Deum* was sung. The elect was subsequently taken to the prior's lodgings, or elsewhere, to await the result of the subsequent examination as to fitness, and the confirmation. Meantime, if the newly chosen had been the acting superior, he could still continue to administer in his office, but could not hold conventual chapter, or perform other functions peculiar to the superior, until such time as he had been confirmed and installed. If he was not the acting superior, he was required to remain in seclusion, and to take no part in administration until after his installation.

Immediately after the process of election had been duly accomplished and the necessary documents had been drawn up, some of the religious were despatched to the king to obtain his assent to the choice of the community. In the event of this petition being successful, the next step was to obtain confirmation from the ecclesiastical authority, which might either be the bishop of the diocese, or in the case of exempt houses, the pope. In either case the delegates of the community would have to present a long series of documents to prove that

the process had been carried out correctly. First came the royal licence to choose; then the formal appointment of the day of election; the result of the election, and the method by which it was effected; the letter signed by the whole community, requesting confirmation of the elect in his office, and sealed by the convent seal; the royal assent to the election, and finally an attested statement of the entire process by which it had been made.

The ecclesiastical authority, upon the reception of these documents, proceeded to an examination of the formal process, and questioned the delegates both as to this, and as to their knowledge of the fitness of the elect for the office. If the result was not satisfactory, the pope or bishop, as the case might be, either cancelled the election or called for the candidate in order to examine him personally as to "doctrine and morals," and as to his capability of ruling a religious house in spirituals and temporals. In the event of the election being quashed, the authority either ordered a new election, or, on the ground of the failure of the community to elect within a definite period a fit and proper superior, appointed someone to the office.

The ecclesiastical confirmation of the election was followed, after as brief an interval as possible, by the installation. In the case of an exempt abbey, a delay of some weeks was inevitable, sometimes until the return of the messengers from the Curia, and thus occasionally the office of superior was necessarily kept a long time vacant. If the superior was to hold the abbatial dignity, before his installation he received the rite of solemn benediction

at the hands of the diocesan. This was generally conferred in some other than the monastic church, probably because until after installation, which was subsequent to the abbatial blessing, the new abbot was not supposed legally to have any position in the house he was afterwards to rule.

On the day appointed for the solemn installation, the abbot, walking with bare feet, presented himself at the church door. He was there met by the community and conducted to the High Altar, where, during the singing of the *Te Deum*, he remained prostrate on the ground. At the conclusion of the hymn, he was conducted to his seat, the process of his election and confirmation was read, together with the episcopal or papal mandate, charging all the religious to render him every canonical obedience and service. Then one by one the community came, and, kneeling before their new superior, received from him the kiss of peace. The ceremony was concluded by a solemn blessing bestowed by the newly-installed abbot standing at the High Altar.

The position of the abbot among his community may be summed up in the expression made use of by St. Benedict. He takes Christ's place. All the exterior respect shown to him, which to modern ideas may perhaps seem exaggerated, if not ridiculous, presupposes this idea as existing in the mind of the religious. Just as the great Patriarch of Western monachism ordered that obedience was to be shown to a superior as if it were obedience paid to God himself, and "as if the command had come from God," so reverence and respect was paid him for Christ's love,

because as abbot – father – he was the representative of Christ in the midst of the brethren. In all places, for this reason, external honour was to be shown to him. When he passed by, all were to stand and bow towards him. In Chapter and refectory none might sit in their places until he had taken his seat; when he sat in the cloister no one might take the seat next to him, unless he invited him so to do. In his presence conversation was to be moderated and unobtrusive, and no one might break in upon anything that he might be saying with remarks of his own. Familiarity with him was to be avoided, as it would be with our Lord himself; and he, on his part, must be careful not to lower the dignity of his office by too much condescending to those who might be disposed to take advantage of his good nature; nor might he omit to correct any want of respect manifested towards his person. He was in this to consider his office and not his natural inclinations.

The abbot is to occupy the first place in the choir on the right-hand side. During the Office his stall is to be furthest from the altar, the juniors being in front of him, and placed nearest to the sanctuary steps. At Mass, however, the position is changed, the abbot and seniors being closest to the altar, for the purpose of making the oblations at the Holy Sacrifice, and giving the blessings. Whenever a book or other thing is brought to him, the book and his hand are to be kissed. When he gives out an Antiphon, or sings a Responsory, he does so, not as the others perform the duty in the middle of the choir, but at his own stall; and the precentor, coming with the other cantors and his

chaplain, stand round about him to help him, if need be, and to show him honour. When the abbot makes a mistake and, according to religious custom, stoops to touch the ground as a penance, those near about him rise and bow to him, as if to prevent him in this act of humiliation. He reads the Gospel at Matins, the Sacred Text and lights being brought to him. He gives the blessings whenever he is present, and at Mass he puts the incense into the thurible for the priest, and blesses it; gives the blessing to the deacon before the Gospel, and kisses the book after it has been sung. The altar, at which he offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is to be better ornamented than the other altars, and he is to have more lights to burn upon it during the Holy Sacrifice. If his name is mentioned in any list of duties all bow on hearing it read out in the Chapter, and they do the same when he orders any prayers to be said or any duty to be performed, even should he not be present when the order is published.

The whole government of every religious house depended upon the abbot, as described by St. Benedict in the second chapter of his Rule. He was the mainspring of the entire machine, and his will in all things was supreme. His permission was required in all cases. All the officials, from the prior downward, were appointed by him, and had their authority from him: they were his assistants in the government of the house. In the refectory he alone could send for anything, and could allow anyone to be admitted to the common table. The meal was not

to begin till after the reading had commenced and he had given the sign to the refectorian to ring the signal-bell. He might send a dish to any one of the brethren whom he thought stood in need of it, and the brother on receiving it was to rise and bow his acknowledgment.

In early times the abbot slept in the common dormitory in the midst of the monks. His duty it was to ring the bell for the community to rise; and, indeed, when any ringing was required for a public duty, he either himself rang the call, or stood by the side of the ringer till all were assembled for the duty, and he gave the sign to cease the signal. To emphasise this part of his duty, in some Orders, at the abbot's installation the ropes of the church bells were placed in his hands. It was naturally the abbot's place to entertain the guests that came to the monastery, and he frequently had to have his meals served in his private hall. To these repasts he could, if he wished, invite some of the brethren, giving notice of this to the superior who was to preside in his place in the refectory. On great days in some houses, like St. Mary's, York, after the abbot had been celebrating the Office and Mass in full pontificals, it was the custom for him to send his chaplain to the door of the refectory to ask the sacred ministers who had served him, with the precentor and the organists, to dine with him.

When the abbot had been away from the monastery for more than three days, it was the custom for the brethren to kneel for his blessing and kiss his hand the first time they met him after

his return. When business had taken him to the Roman Curia or elsewhere, for any length of time, on his home-coming he was met in solemn procession by the entire community who, having presented him with holy water, were sprinkled, in their turn, by him. They conducted him to the High Altar, chanting the *Te Deum* for his safe return, and received his solemn blessing.

Whilst all reverence was directed to be given to him, he on his part was warned by the Rule and by every declaration, that he must always remember the fact that all this honour was paid not to him personally, but to his office and to Christ who was regarded and revered in him.

He, above all others, was to be careful to keep every rule and regulation, since it was certain that where he did not obey himself, he could not look for the obedience of others; and that though he had no one set over him, he was, for that reason, all the more bound to claustral discipline. As superior, he had to stand aloof from the rest, so as not unduly to encourage familiarity in his subjects. He was to show no respect for persons; not favouring one of his sons more than another, as this could not fail to be fatal to true observance and to religious obedience. "In giving help he should be a father," says one Custumal; "in giving instruction, he should speak as a teacher." He should be "ever ready to help those who are striving after the higher paths of virtue." He should not hesitate "to stimulate the indifferent to earnestness, and to use every means to rouse the slothful." To him specially the sick are committed, that he may by his visits console and strengthen

them to bear the trials God has sent them.

He must, in a word, “study with paternal solicitude the character, actions, and needs of all the brethren; never forgetting that he will one day have to render to God an account of them all.”

2. THE CLAUSTRAL PRIOR

The prior, or second superior of the house, is above all things concerned with the observance and internal discipline of the monastery. He is appointed by the abbot after hearing the opinions of the seniors. Sometimes, as at Westminster and St. Augustine's, Canterbury, he was chosen with great deliberation. In the first place, three names were selected by the precentor and by each of the two divisions of the house, the abbot's side of the choir and the prior's side. These selected names were then considered by a committee of three appointed by the abbot, who reported their opinion to him. Finally, the abbot appointed whom he pleased.

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