

THE MONKS OF OLD.

The Monks of the West. Montalembert.

Lives of the Saints. Butler.

Francis of Assisi. Olyphant.

Legends of the Monastic Orders. Jameson.

Catholic Flowers from Protestant Gardens. Treacy.

THE word monk comes from the Greek *monos*, single, because the beginners of this manner of life lived as solitaries, without wife, children, or companions, away from human society. They were also called ascetics, from *askesis*, exercise, for that, like athletes desirous of bringing their bodily powers to perfection, these gave up all other concerns and devoted themselves in "spiritual exercises," to the strengthening and perfecting of their souls. When they formed communities under common government they were known as cenobites. Speaking generally they formed, and still form, what are called religious orders.

The institution, in one form or another, dates back to the earliest times. Thus we have the prophets, and those called sons of the prophets, the Rechabites, Nazarenes, etc., in the Old Law. Our Saviour and his disciples led a more or less monkish life. They observed celibacy, they lived on alms, and had all their money in one purse, the Apostles obeyed Christ, and he was obedient to his Father, and was led by the Spirit. The life of the first Christians was a similar communism, as it is described in the Acts. How long it lasted we know not, but all along the first centuries of Christianity we trace examples of the monastic profession. Illustrious among these are the names of Paul, the first prominent in history and called the first hermit, Anthony, who became the ruler and lawgiver of a multitude of solitaries in the deserts of Egypt, Hilarion, Macarius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen, in the East, Martin of Tours, Vincent of Lesuis, and many others in the West. At the time of St. Jerome, the religious life, so called as it were *par excellence*, was practiced by many of the most illustrious and high-born men and women of the city of Rome even, and that great doctor was himself the spiritual adviser and leader of most of these. It was not until the year 325 that the Church being at last granted autonomy, her bishops were enabled to meet in General Council and regulate doctrinal and disciplinary matters. This being the case we need not wonder at finding a great variety in monastic organizations, a lack of order and permanency, and even much that was disorderly and even scandalous in the conduct of those who, in the disturbed condition of affairs and the absence of ecclesias-

tical sanction, had from one motive or another joined the communities. This was especially noted in the East, where diversity of language, race, practical independence of the bishops, and difficulty of communication with Rome, made possible and inevitable much that needed reformation. St. Augustine, in his work *De Operibus Monachorum*, gives us a sad picture of the state of things, which was found in some parts of the West as well, for similar reasons. Mrs. Jameson, to whose books I am much indebted, presents a true though exaggerated account of the subject. "There were monks in the West from the days of St. Jerome. The example and the rules of the Oriental anchorites and cénobites had spread over Greece, Italy, and even into Gaul, in the fourth and fifth centuries; but the cause of Christianity, instead of being served, was injured by the gradual depravation of men, whose objects were, at the best, if I may use the word, spiritually selfish, leading them in those miserable times to work out their own safety and salvation only; men who for the most part were ignorant, abject, often immoral, darkening the already dark superstitions of the people by their gross inventions and fanatic absurdities. Sometimes they wandered from place to place levying contributions on the villagers by displaying pretended relics; sometimes they were perched in a hollow tree, or on the top of a column, or housed, half naked, in the recesses of a rock, where they were fed and tended by the multitude, with whom their laziness, their contempt for decency, and all the vagaries of a crazed and heated fancy, passed for proof of superior sanctity. Those who were gathered into communities lived on the lands which had been granted to them, and belonging neither to the people nor to the regular clergy, responsible to no external law, and checked by no internal discipline, they led a useless and idle, often a miserable and perverted existence. Such is the picture we have of the worst side of monachism up to the end of the fifth century." There is, however, a cloud of exceptions to this presentment, especially in the history of the Gaulish monks, as portrayed in the chronicles consulted by the illustrious Count de Montalembert.

About this period the Goths, Vandals, Huns, and other barbarians, about twenty distinct nations in all, began to burst all the barriers the decaying Roman Empire could oppose, and to overflow into Italy, Gaul, Spain, Africa proper, Egypt, and the East. The state, corrupted and weakened by five centuries of licentiousness, venality, luxury, and despotism, could resist neither morally nor physically. Everything went down before the flood. "If the mighty waves of the Atlantic had rolled over Gaul," says a writer of that day, "I do not think that the ruin would have been greater." Fire and sword were carried everywhere, the officials of the government, soldiers and all, were demoralized; society was chaos.

Yet, even in this extremity, the base descendants of the conquerors of the world did not profit by the visitation of Providence, but indulged in sensuality, drunkenness, and shows, while their country's life was at stake. They seemed to say to themselves, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we shall die." Even the fresh, vigorous, and comparatively pure Northmen, when sated with blood and spoil, began to be infected with the vices of their victims, and the element of wildness was added to the conflagration that burned up the social edifice.

It was in this desperate state of affairs that many individuals, members of the old patrician families who still retained a love of virtue and nobility, felt inspired to retire from the mass of sin, to seek in solitude and nature that freedom to worship God and save their souls which was not granted them in their native towns. They were not priests, but were lay gentlemen. The clergy, of course, remained with their flocks, as in duty bound, and constantly labored, often with partial success, for their temporal as well as spiritual safety. Distinguished amongst those who retired from social life was Benedict of the Anicii, a family very famous in the history of the latter empire. This is the great patriarch whom God raised up to regulate and perfect monastic discipline, to give a great and lasting impetus to monachism and its works, to be the chief regenerator of European society, and the preserver of its civilization. Benedict (in Latin *Benedictus*, the blessed one, and surely he was well named) was born in the little town of Norcia, in the Duchy of Spoleto, Italy, about the year 480. He was sent to Rome to study literature and science, and made so much progress as to give great hopes that he was destined to rise to distinction as a pleader; but, while yet a boy, he appears to have been deeply disgusted by the profligate manners of the youths who were his fellow-students, and the evil example around him instead of acting as an allurements threw him into the opposite extreme. The example of Anthony, Paul, Augustine, Jerome, and other great men, was doubtless known to him, and desirous of living for God alone he formed for himself a hermitage even in the palace where he dwelt, and which we had the happiness of visiting and venerating last year in Rome. Having made up his mind, at the age of fifteen, to leave the luxurious capital, he was followed by his nurse, who had brought him up from his infancy and loved him with extreme tenderness. This good woman, doubtful, perhaps, if her young master were out of his wits or inspired, waited on his steps, tended him with a mother's care, begged for him, and prepared the small portion of food which she could prevail on him to take. But while thus comforted and sustained, Benedict did not believe his penance entire or effective; he secretly fled from his nurse and concealed

himself among the rocks of Subiaco, a wilderness about forty miles from Rome. He met there a hermit, named Romano, to whom he confided his pious aspirations, and then took refuge in a cavern, where he lived for three years unknown to his family and to the world, and supplied with food by the hermit; this food consisted merely of bread and water, which Romano abstracted from his own scanty fare. In this solitary life Benedict underwent many temptations; and he relates that on one occasion his imagination almost overpowered him, so that he was on the point of abandoning his retreat. Persuaded that the devil could be overcome only by extreme measures, the holy youth rushed from his cave and flung himself into a thicket of briars and nettles, in which he rolled himself until the blood flowed. Then the devil left him, and he was never again assailed by the sting of the flesh. They show in the gardens of the monastery of Subiaco the rose-bushes which have been propagated from the very briars consecrated by the blood of the hero.

The fame of the young saint now extended through all the country round; the shepherds and the poor villagers brought their sick to his cavern to be healed; others begged his prayers; they contended with each other who should supply the humble portion of food which he required; and a neighboring society of hermits sent to request that he would place himself at their head. He, knowing something of the morals and manners of this community, refused at first, and only yielded upon great persuasion, and in the hope that he might be able to reform the abuses which had been introduced into this monastery. But when there the strictness of his life filled these perverted men with envy and alarm, and one of them attempted to poison him in a cup of wine. Benedict, on the cup being presented to him, blessed it as usual, making the sign of the cross; the cup instantly fell from the hands of the traitor, was broken and its contents spilt on the ground. He thereupon rose up, and, telling the monks that they must provide themselves with another superior, left them and returned to his solitary cave at Subiaco, where, to use the strong expression of St. Gregory, he dwelt with himself; meaning thereby that he did not allow his spirit to go beyond the bounds that he had assigned to it, keeping it always in presence of his conscience and his God. But now Subiaco could no longer be styled a desert, for it was crowded with the huts and cells of those whom the fame of his sanctity, his virtues, and his miracles had gathered around him. At length, in order to introduce some kind of discipline and order into the community, he directed them to construct twelve monasteries, in each of which he placed twelve disciples with a superior over them. Many had come from Rome and from other cities, chiefly nobles, for it is gen-

erally amongst the rich or well-to-do that these sacrifices take place even to-day, and amongst others came two Roman Senators, Anicius and Tertullus, men of high rank, bringing to him their sons, Maurus and Placidus, with an earnest request that he would educate them in the way of salvation. Maurus was at this time a boy of about eleven or twelve years old, and Placidus a child of not more than five. Benedict took them under his peculiar care, and his community continued for several years to increase in number and celebrity, in brotherly charity and in holiness of life. But of course the enemy of mankind could not long endure a state of things so inimical to his power; he instigated a certain monk named Florentius, who was enraged by seeing his own disciples attracted by the superior virtue of St. Benedict, to endeavor to blacken his reputation, and even to attempt his life by means of a poisoned loaf; and this not availing, Florentius introduced into one of the monasteries certain bad women, in order to corrupt the chastity of the monks. Benedict, whom we have always seen much more inclined to fly from evil than to resist it, departed from Subiaco, but scarcely had he left the place, when his disciple Maurus sent a messenger to tell him that his enemy Florentius had been crushed by the fall of a gallery of his house. Benedict, far from rejoicing, wept for the fate of his adversary, and imposed a severe penance on Maurus for an expression of triumph at the judgment that had overtaken their enemy.

Paganism was not yet so completely banished from Italy but that there existed in some of the solitary places, temples and priests and worshippers of the false gods. Indeed, the name Paganism is derived from the word pagus, a village, the country people being always more tenacious of national beliefs and customs than the inhabitants of cities. Such a nest of idolaters existed not far from Rome in a consecrated grove; near the summit of Monte Casino stood a temple of Apollo, where the god was still paid unholy rites. Benedict had heard of this abomination; he repaired therefore to the neighborhood of the mountain; he preached the kingdom of Christ to those deluded people, converted them by his eloquence and his miracles, and at last persuaded them to break the idols, throw down the altar, and burn up their consecrated grove. And on the spot he built two chapels, in honor of two saints, whom he regarded as models, the one of the contemplative, the other of the active religious life,—St. John the Baptist, and St. Martin of Tours. Then, higher up the summit of the mountain, he laid the foundations of that celebrated monastery which has since been regarded as the parent institute of his order. Hence was promulgated that famous rule, which became from that

time forth the general law of the monks of Western Europe, and which gave to monachism its definite form.

The rule given to the cenobites of the East comprised the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. To these Benedict added two other obligations: the first was manual labor, which was indeed enjoined in the former institution, but less systematically: those who entered his community were obliged to work with their hands seven hours in the day; secondly, the vows were perpetual, but he ordained that these perpetual vows should be preceded by a novitiate of a year: during which the entire code was read repeatedly from beginning to end, and at the conclusion the reader said, in an emphatic voice, "This is the law under which thou art to live and to strive for salvation; if thou canst observe it, enter; if thou canst not, go in peace, thou art free." The vows once taken were irrevocable, and punishment for breaking them was most severe; but the rule is recognized as humane, moderate, wise, and eminently Christian in spirit.

Toward the close of his long life, Benedict was consoled for many troubles by the arrival of his sister Scholastica, who had already devoted herself to a religious life, and now took up her residence in a retired cell about a league and a half from the convent. Very little is known of Scholastica, except that she emulated her brother's piety and self-denial, and although it is not said that she took any vows, she is generally considered as the first Benedictine nun. When she followed her brother to Monte Casino, she drew around her there a small community of pious women, but nothing more is recorded of her except that he used to visit her once a year. On one occasion, when they had been conversing together on spiritual matters till rather late in the evening, Benedict rose to depart; his sister entreated him to remain a little longer, but he refused; she then, bending her head over her clasped hands, prayed that Heaven would interfere and render it impossible for her brother to leave her. Immediately there came on such a furious tempest of thunder, rain, and lightning, that Benedict was obliged to delay his departure for some hours. "God forgive you, sister," said he, "what have you done?" "I asked you to stay, and you would not grant my prayer," she replied. "I asked my God, and He has heard me." As soon as the storm was over he took leave of his sister and returned to the monastery. It was a last meeting. Saint Scholastica died two days afterwards, and Benedict, as he was praying in his cell, beheld the soul of his sister ascending to heaven in the form of a dove.

In the year 540 Benedict was visited by Totila, King of the Goths, who cast himself prostrate at his feet and entreated his blessing. The Saint reproved him for the ravages he had committed in Italy,

and it was remarked that thereafter the ferocious barbarian showed more humanity. Shortly after this visit, Benedict died of a fever, with which he had been seized in attending the poor of the neighborhood. On the sixth day of his illness he ordered his grave to be dug, stood for a while on the edge of it, supported by his disciples, contemplating in silence his narrow bed; then desiring them to carry him to the foot of the altar in the church, he received the last sacraments, and died on the 21st March, 543. Even before his death, institutions of his order were found in every part of Christian Europe. Of his two most beloved disciples, St. Maur carried the foundation into France, and established many monasteries, St. Placidus into Sicily; the first died in his bed; the second is said to have been martyred by certain pirates, in company with his young sister Flavia and thirty companions.

Such is a brief sketch of the life and death of Benedict, condensed from the beautiful "Dialogues" of St. Gregory the Great. When visiting Monte Casino last summer, it was our privilege to witness members of his order renewing the beautiful paintings which depict the striking events in his life, and the most striking of all, his precious and wonderful death, in the very spot where it came to pass; and Young's lines revived in our memory:

"The chamber where the good man meets his fate,
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life, quite in the verge of heaven."

Before presenting the claims of Benedict and of the monks on the remembrance and gratitude of Christendom, we may be allowed to inquire into the principles that underlie their manner of life, and attempt a brief apology, in the native sense of the word, of the religious profession.

Every man of intelligence at times tires of the perpetual domination of the flesh over the soul, becomes disgusted with material pursuits and enjoyment, and longs for spiritual good and beauty. It is a reminiscence, perhaps it may be an unconscious one, of the original justice in which God created man. This taste working its legitimate results produces the monk. He falls in love with his soul and with Him whose image the soul is, and turning from perverted humanity contemplates the reflection of the uncreated beauty in nature and attempts to idealize it in art. It is well that Providence always raises up such men to make the rest remember their origin, and the high standard which God had in view when he made us. Were it not for their example we might sink further and further into things of mere sense, and become "like the horse and mule, that have no understanding." Hence, men have always recognized and honored the priesthood, and especially the monks, who

were monks indeed, have offered to support them, even that they might continue to set an example of holiness undisturbed by worldly cares, and might make intercession for the community. Some have tried to call this superstition; why, then, superstition is but another name for truth! What all men, even the most uncultivated, naturally hold, can only proceed from eternal truth evidencing itself to the soul. The monks especially set about perfection, that is, the re-establishment of the dominion of reason and grace over passion and temptation. Our Saviour counselled his followers to strive after perfection, at the same time implying that all do not take the suggestion. It stands to reason, however, that there must always be those who shall be able with His grace to follow those counsels, which certainly were not given in vain. Monks are men who make it the business of their lives to reach that ideal which our Saviour proclaimed. The rule of life laid down by Benedict, arranged all their relations and employments to attain this end. Bossuet says: "It is an epitome of Christianity, a learned and mysterious abridgment of all the doctrines of the Gospel, all the institutions of the Holy Fathers, and all the counsels of perfection. Here prudence and simplicity, humility and courage, severity and gentleness, freedom and dependence, eminently appear. Here correction has all its firmness, condescension all its charm, command all its vigor, and subjection all its repose; silence its gravity, and words their grace; strength its exercise, and weakness its support." Hence the number of saints and eminent men, not reaching that degree, whom it produced; hence its attraction for the noblest minds and most elevated souls; hence its conquests of barbarism and establishment of religion, liberty, and learning wherever it took root.

Wordsworth was a great admirer of the monks, and recalls their qualities in his beautiful poems. We cite a line or two:

"Record we too, with just and faithful pen,
That many hooded cenobites there are
Who in their private cells have yet a care
Of public quiet; unambitious men,
Counsellors for the world, of piercing ken;
Whose fervent exhortations from afar
Move princes to their duty, peace, or war;
And oftimes in the most forbidding den
Of solitude, with love of science strong,
How patiently the yoke of thought they bear:
By such examples moved to unbought pains,
The people work like congregated bees;
Eager to build the quiet fortresses
Where piety, as they believe, obtains
From heaven a general blessing; timely rains
And sunshine; prosperous enterprise, peace, and equity."

The three counsels, as distinct from commandments, recognized in the Gospel and illustrated by the lives of our Lord and His

Apostles, are poverty, chastity, and obedience. These three are essential to monachism. Let us speak first of chastity, that is, pure chastity or virginity. This has always been recognized by the Church as a higher state than the married one, and the constant teaching was expressed in dogmatic form by the Council of Trent.

"Marriage is good," says St. Chrysostom, "but virginity as far excels it as angels men, but all the excellency of this is derived from the consecration of a soul to God and her attention to please Him, without which this state avails nothing." "Silver is good," says St. Jerome, "but gold is better. I do not disparage silver because I say that gold is better; neither do I deny the excellence of marriage when I maintain that virginity is a higher state."

Lord Bacon, in one of his essays, thus expresses his opinion as regards those in society whose life should be devoted to the common service in spirituals :

"A single life," he says, "doth well with churchmen, for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool." Thorn-dyke, an eminent Protestant divine, in his book on *Just Weights and Measures*, p. 239, says: "The reason for single life for the clergy is firmly grounded, by the fathers and canons of the Church, upon the precept of St. Paul, forbidding man and wife to depart unless for a time to attend unto prayer (1 Cor. vii. 5). For priests and deacons, being continually to attend upon occasions of celebrating the Eucharist, which ought continually to be frequented; if others be to abstain for a time, then they always."

If one might be allowed to theorize a little on this subject, a professional man must be married to his books if he will attain excellence in his mental calling. Indeed, his habits of meditation and study incapacitate him, as physiologists give us to understand, for the offices of paternity. Besides this, he is divided if he marry, and his children, if he have them, will scarcely be equal to the average, while his single-minded and single-hearted devotion to his calling is interfered with. Great intellectual men and others of singular ability in other ways, are very often the last representatives of their families. There is a popular saying about preachers' sons, to which it boots not more particularly to allude, but which is akin to that one about the foot-covering of the shoemaker's wife. As for having wives in a monastery, it would simply mean suicide for the institution.

The nerve, as the Italians call it, the strength, physical at least, of a nation, resides in its middle class, and in what may be called without offence a lower one, the mechanical and agricultural. They who rise out of this by more highly developed intellect and will, exalt the mind and soul at the expense of the body. Bodily labor as a normal occupation interferes with the highest mental develop-

ment, and this with perfection of the material part. Hence the rich and educated resemble the flower of the fields, which dies and disappears forever; the populace may be compared to the trunk and roots, which show less, but remain through the seasons. The most ancient families in England are not found in what is called the peerage, which constantly requires fresh accessions from below, and out of several hundred families in it, not seventy were found there at the beginning of the last century. Illustrious men, too, seem generally to have reached the climax of their race, and leave no issue or a weak decayed shoot. For this reason there would be slight hope of benefit from the marriage of priests. Man's race as a race will not stand high education. The individual must receive it to keep the lamp of science, religion, and civilization burning, but he feeds this with his own blood, and the race must either forego his services, or be content to accept his death as the price paid for them, and look to others for the office of perpetuating the species.

Whatever may be said about this theory, it is certain that the physicians of the University of Paris, even after the Middle Ages, still professed celibacy; the clerks of the counting-houses of the Hanse-towns were also bound to it; it is universal in the vast standing armies of Europe, and recognized as desirable even in our own limited force. Besides which a great number of men and women of every religious faith are as Paul was, except the bonds, and fill worthily public and private positions, claiming for themselves that freedom which they willingly allow to others. If they are so from a good motive, not indolence or misanthropy, much more if they are so that they may cultivate their own souls in single-life, believing this to be God's will in their regard, and that they may more fearlessly and wholly serve their neighbor in hospitals, schools, asylums, and armies, they are deserving of great honor and praise. Such are the monks by their profession. It is the glory of the Church that, while recommending her chosen ones to "leave all things" and "seek the kingdom of God and his justice" only, she has provided fathers and mothers for the orphans, the helpless, and the poor, who are "always with us," preservers of the truth, devotees of science, munificent patrons of art, masters in agriculture, heralds of the Gospel, founders of great nations, pioneers and guardians of civilization, and all this without saddling society with the most odious of all castes, a sacerdotal one. The more one considers this doctrine of sacred celibacy and its results, the stronger will grow the conviction that it is a divine provision for remedying the evils incidental to that freedom of the marriage relation and the generation of children by those who, from what cause soever

are incapable of caring for and educating them, which human legislation has found it impossible to regulate.

That he may devote himself to the general good it is necessary that the preacher, the hospitaller, the teacher, the soldier, should be free from the cares of self-maintenance. This is attained by those who form communities. As to individual poverty, we have the example of our Saviour, who, with his disciples, lived on what was donated them; and the proverb has it, "No one acts the soldier at his own expense." When the young man told Christ that he had always kept the commandments, the reply was: "If thou wouldst be perfect (he left him free), go sell all thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow me." The youth was sad at this, because he had large possessions. It is a sign of great nobility of character to be detached from the goods of this world. In a community of monks, as in an army or any other institution, poverty, that is absence of private ownership, or at least of administration of one's property, is essential to brotherliness, equality, and unity. Nothing divides men so rapidly and completely as money and its use. They who would dwell and work together as brethren in one house must have the same food, dress, and lodging. Simplicity in all these things is also necessary, for intemperance is the parent of lust, and the cause of nearly all diseases and disorders which do not spring from lust. Hence the domestic discipline of the monks was more or less severe in all that regards personal needs. They rose early, slept just enough, lay on hard couches, and practiced continual abstinence from unnecessary viands. Meanwhile, by their regularity, peace of mind, and the manual labor in which every one from the abbot, who, as a writer has it, "returned home like Cincinnatus with his scythe upon his shoulder," down to him who took care of the lamps, even the professors were obliged to take part, they gained that healthy appetite which is the best sauce for plain natural food. Health, therefore, and good spirits were dominant amongst them, the term "jolly monks" became a proverb, and they attained by mortification what we all desire,—a healthy mind in a sound body, and their days were long in the land. All the while that they thus curtailed their own wants, their system and constant labor was accumulating means, wherewith they helped the poor victims of the vices contrary to their own practice.

Obedience is the third chief characteristic of the monk. Its necessity in every house, city, and state, need not be dwelt upon. The freest political institutions depend for their permanence on the obedience of the members to the law and its executive. The only liberty we have in our republic is to choose whom we must obey. The monks bound themselves to obey the abbot in all that was not evidently contrary to God's law. He had to govern accord-

ing to the rule, which they knew well before binding themselves, being on probation for a year before admission, and which was approved by the Church authorities. Besides, in any important matter the abbot had to consult a general council of all the members, and he was chosen by the monks themselves, and thus, like the president of a pure democracy, was the servant, not the lord of his subjects.

Obedience is the highest merit and praise of the soldier, and of the citizen, whose most noble epithet is law-abiding. There is nothing so popular as military glory, because it involves the sacrifice of self. "To subdue self is the secret of strength," says De Tocqueville. The monks were often styled soldiers, for that their whole life was a heroic warfare against corrupt human passion and its results. Some of them formed companies for fleshly battle as well as spiritual, and after contending against the heathen as Knights Templars or of St. John, doffed the cuirass and sang their office in choir, or tended the wounded in hospital. One of the vows of these monkish warriors forbade them to turn their backs on less than five opponents, and how well they kept it history can tell. Schiller's beautiful lines, rendered in our tongue by Bulwer Lytton, express their praise :

"Oh nobly shone the fearful Cross upon your mail afar,
 When Rhodes and Acre hailed your might, O lions of the war!
 When leading many a pilgrim horde through wastes of Syrian gloom,
 Or standing with the Cherub's sword before the Holy Tomb.
 Yet on your forms the apron seemed a nobler armor far,
 When by the sick man's bed ye stood, O lions of the war!
 When ye, the highborn, bowed your pride to tend the lowly weakness—
 The duty, though it brought no fame, fulfilled by Christian meekness—
 Religion of the Cross—thou blend'st, as in a single flower,
 The twofold branches of the palm,—HUMILITY AND POWER."

Truly is here the Scripture verified: "The obedient man shall have victories to talk of."

The practice of these virtues gave the monks a singular and powerful position in society. They became the trusted almoners of the rich, for they spent nothing on themselves. Their education and the noble birth of many of them made them equal to the aristocracy, while they levelled society up by admitting alike serf, peasant, and noble, under equal conditions, into their ranks. Their simple lives and the sacred character which many of them bore as priests made them accessible to the poor, who could hardly complain of their lot when they received alms and hospitality from those who were admittedly their superiors, yet led a harder life than they did themselves. Here lies the secret, possessed by the Church alone, of making the poor content, and bridging over the chasms of society.

Let us glance once more at the internal side of monasticism, and hear St. Bernard, translated by Wordsworth, in its praise :

“ Here man more purely lives, less oft doth fall ;
More promptly rises ; walks with nicer tread ;
More safely rests ; dies happier ; is freed
Earlier from cleansing fires, and gains withal
A brighter crown.”

“ There is,” says Jameson, “ a view of the sanctity of solitude, placed before us in the earlier monastic pictures, which is soothing and attractive far beyond the power of words. How beautiful that soft, settled calm, which seems to have descended on the features, as on the souls of those who have kept themselves unspotted from the world ! How dear to the fatigued or wounded spirit that blessed portraiture of stillness with communion, of seclusion with sympathy, which breathes from such picture ! Who at some moments has not felt their unspeakable charm ? Felt, when the weight of existence pressed on the fevered nerves and weary heart, the need of some refuge for life on this side of death, and all the real or at least the possible sanctity of solitude.”

Sir James Stephen thus alludes to the perfection of the individual as attained in the monasteries :

“ The greatness of the Benedictines did not, however, consist either in their agricultural skill, their prodigies of architecture, or their priceless libraries, but in their parentage of countless men and women illustrious for active piety, for wisdom in the government of mankind, for profound learning, and for that contemplative spirit which discovers, within the soul itself, things beyond the limits of the perceptible creation.”

These encomiums are very commonly met with in historical writers. The same author thus speaks of the mendicant orders of monks :

“ In an age of oligarchal tyranny the mendicant friars were the protectors of the weak, in an age of ignorance the instructors of mankind, and in an age of profligacy the stern vindicators of the holiness of the sacerdotal character and the virtues of domestic life.”

Their whole existence was a protest against lawlessness, violence, and sin. Their continual endeavor was for peace, order, law, and gentleness of manners. Even in their treatment of the brute creation this was illustrated, and their legends are full of the most touching and exquisite incidents of the manner in which the monks made use of these, which the admirable St. Francis of Assisi did not scruple to call his “ brothers the wolves ” and his “ sisters the little birds.” All the gentle virtues flourished within and around the monastery.

"We are outliving," says Mrs. Jameson, "the gross prejudices which once represented the life of the cloister as being from first to last a life of laziness and imposture; we know that, but for the monks, the light of liberty, and literature, and science had been forever extinguished; and that, for six centuries, there existed for the thoughtful, the gentle, the inquiring, the devout spirit, no peace, no security, no home but the cloister. There learning trimmed her lamp; there contemplation pruned her wings; there the traditions of art, preserved from age to age by lonely, studious men, kept alive, in form and color, the ideal of a beauty beyond that of earth, of a might beyond that of the spear and the shield, of a divine sympathy with suffering humanity. To this we may add another and a stronger claim on our respect and moral sympathies. The protection and the better education given to women in these early communities; the venerable and distinguished rank assigned them when as governesses of their order they became in a manner dignitaries of the Church; the introduction of their beautiful and saintly effigies, clothed with all the insignia of sanctity and authority, into the decoration of places of worship and books of devotion, did more perhaps for the general cause of womanhood than all the boasted institutions of chivalry."

Indeed, it was from the recognition of woman's proper sphere and dignity by the Church and her clergy, by their regard for her who was of Mary's sex, and which they preached and inculcated, that those warlike knights learned their somewhat excessive reverence for the weaker but yet noble complement of man, and if one would seek the highest examples of virtue, learning, executive ability, and usefulness among the sex, he must fain turn to the chronicles of monasticism, as well in the remote as in the more recent history of the Church. Let us but name Mary of Egypt, Thais, Pelagia the Pearl of Antioch, Paula, Melita, Walburga of England, Colette of France, Odilia, and coming down to later times Clare of Assisi, Angela and Teresa, not to mention the illustrious women who founded those modern orders of charity which the whole undivided world praises. Their number is so great, their lives and works so edifying and useful, that they reflect lustre on the religious institution which they chose to embrace. The same argument may be applied to monasticism which holds for religion in general. It is in its essence good and beautiful, and therefore true, because it attracts those who seek for the good, the beautiful, and the true, or because it produces in those who submit to its influence a character in which all men may recognize those three essential characteristics of perfection.

A very natural connection leads us now to speak in detail of the external influence of the monks, that is, apart from the living

force of their example, which caused their numbers to swell incredibly, and their institution to spread into every Christian land. Great deeds arise from quiet, regular, mortified lives. He who has long meditated feels an irresistible impulse to impart to others the light he has received. He who has been long under obedience is likely to develop and show forth the most brilliant qualities as a commander. We may illustrate our meaning by an argument *ad hominem*. There are those who consider the protest of the sixteenth century a great benefit to society and to civilization. They owe it to a monk, one who abandoned his profession it is true, but yet were he not a monk it is very probable he would not have become the enthusiastic leader of revolution. Human nature is restive under discipline, and the longer the waters are restrained the higher they mount, and the more desperate is their flow. Man is essentially prone to action, and the fuller he becomes of knowledge the more zealous he is to impart it. Hence the army is drilled and practiced every day in order that it may become more desirous of putting its skill to practical use, and the more severe is the garrison duty the more the soldiers long to try their lances in real combat. Hence the monks have been, as a rule, the most prolific writers, the greatest preachers and energetic missionaries, for that they were allowed to speak but rarely, were compelled to study constantly, and to keep the narrow limits of their cells. Another feature in their discipline accounts for the completeness and perfection of their works. This was the setting every individual to that work for which he had most talent and inclination. Progress may be said in a sense to lie in the line of least resistance. "This one thing I do," said a successful man. Now each monk did what his ability inclined to, did this only, and therefore became a specialist, a perfect workman. Herein, apart from the high motive of duty and the protection given by a rule, lies the secret of the shining qualities and brilliant deeds of monks as compared with the secular clergy, who, to use a homely expression, are obliged in their less fortunate but honorable and necessary calling to turn their hands to everything, to be jacks at all trades, rarely masters of any.
