

SUCCISA VIRESCIT :

A STUDY OF THE BENEDICTINE HISTORY OF THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS.

OF the many eventful periods through which the world and the Church have passed, few have witnessed more changes, social, political, and religious, than that which has recently been marked by the fourteen hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict. And if the world, and, in its external circumstances at least, the Church too, have undergone many reverses during the last hundred years, what may we not be prepared to find in the history of a religious Order, to whose efficiency and existence days of turmoil and revolution are fatal, and of whose wealth and prosperity (the reward and fruit of ages of peaceful industry) a lawless generation, mad with ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, was eager to possess itself. The Benedictine Order then, from its very nature, was ill fitted to weather the storms which passed over society at the end of the last century, when Europe was abandoned to the spirit of infidelity, and scourged with the revolutionary outbreak which was its natural result.

In more ways than one the recent gathering of abbots and superiors of the various branches of the Benedictine Order round the tomb of their Founder on the holy mountain of Cassino, the Christian Sinai, is full of significance. Probably there has been no such assembly recorded in the Benedictine annals since the Monastic Council which met at Aix-la-Chapelle in 817; but at Monte Cassino in April last, and again at the Feast of Pentecost, there were gathered together from all parts of the world the descendants of St. Benedict's own children, and of many a religious family akin to his, which was unknown in the days of Louis the Débonnaire. But while we read of abbots and monks from far-off lands—from America, Australia, and Ceylon, where till recent years no son of St. Benedict had penetrated—we miss the venerable names of the once flourishing congregations of Bursfield and Clugny, of St. Maur, St. Vanne, and Valladolid. These have passed away, and, behold, all things are new! To recount some few of the events by which the present state of things monastic has been brought about, to tell briefly of the fall, and at somewhat

greater length, of the resurrection of some of the modern branches of the Benedictine Order, is the purport of the present article.

It is a sad task to have to record the action of so-called Christian, Catholic, and liberal governments against the most cherished institutions of the Church. Almost the first act of the States General, convened at Versailles in 1789, was to seize on all Church property in France, decree the suppression of all religious establishments, and tender to the clergy an oath utterly at variance with all sound principles of ecclesiastical jurisdiction: those who refused this oath were to be made to feel the fury of a new persecution. By the first and second of these decisions a great blow was struck at all the religious orders in France, community life became impossible, and dispersion, exile, or death became the fate of all who had chosen the religious life. There is no lack of soul-stirring narratives of those dark days, and of the brave confessors and martyrs who redeemed by their bright example the black guilt of their government and country. Not the least share of suffering fell to the lot of the sons and daughters of St. Benedict; besides the General of the great French Congregation of St. Maur, Dom Ambrose Chevreux, who, with Dom Barreau and Dom Massey, was a victim of the massacre at the Carmes on the 2nd of September, 1792, there were many more in various parts of France who proved by their patient endurance of suffering and death that the martyr-spirit which had animated a Whiting, a Barlow, and a Pickering in England was not wanting to the sons of St. Maur.¹ As the history of the nuns of our Order during this period hardly enters into our subject, we will content ourselves with remarking that their noble bearing, in common with so many other valiant women of all ranks and states in the Church, has received its recognition in the grateful admiration of succeeding generations.

Of the scattered French Benedictines (for of the English monks we shall have more to tell presently) it is difficult at this date to give a very precise account. Many, doubtless, remained in hiding in France; some we know were received in the Swiss

¹ At Nantes, in 1794, among those massacred or drowned by Carrier, the proconsul of Robespierre, were the Benedictines DD. Bazile, La Passeg, and Le Cerf. The names of ten monks are found in the list of those who died of the ill-treatment of which they were the victims, when under transport from Rochefort to French Guiana. See *La Foi Couronnée*, Londres, 1799. Also Fr. Marsh's account of his escape from Dieulouard, for a notice of D. Rachel, of Boizonvillers, &c.

abbeys, others found an asylum at Lambspring, others in North America, while a few found their way to England.

The condition of affairs in Germany was hardly more cheerful. The influence of Joseph II. (1765-90) had wrought much mischief in the ecclesiastical affairs of his empire. Besides the practical schism which his orders tended to bring about, "bishops were forbidden to confer orders without the previous consent of the emperor; one-half of the diocesan seminaries were closed; of the two thousand religious communities scattered over the whole face of the empire, he left only seven hundred in existence; confraternities were abolished and processions suppressed."¹ In these misfortunes, brought about by the attempt of "My brother the Sacristan," as Frederick the Great called him, to do the work which Henry II. and Henry VIII. had attempted in England, the Benedictines had their full share, but a heavier blow was in store for them and all similar institutions—a blow almost as sweeping, though not so widespread in its effects, as the "reforming" outbreak of the sixteenth century—when, in 1803, all the religious houses of Germany, save that part of it which the Austrian empire managed to retain, fell before the arms and decrees of Napoleon. One only exception did the conqueror make, and that was in favour of the Scotch Benedictine Abbey of St. James at Ratisbon, which was allowed to continue for a time its useful work of preparing candidates for the Scotch mission, though the admission of fresh members to its novitiate was interdicted. This kindness would probably not have been shown had Napoleon foreseen that a few years later, in 1808, a monk of St. James's would be the agent of the British Government in thwarting one of his most daring schemes, in a crisis which had just arisen in the affairs of Spain, "a crisis indeed upon which, in a certain sense, the fortunes of Europe and the world depended."²

Italy, or at least its northern part, shared in the havoc and devastation of the great conqueror, though the Italian monks may have derived some shadow of satisfaction from the circumstance that the See of St. Peter was filled during those eventful times by their fellow religious the saintly Pius VII. (1800-1823.)

¹ Darras, *General History of the Church*, iv. 522.

² On Father Robertson's share in the release of nearly 20,000 Spanish soldiers of Napoleon's army from the Island of Nyborg, in the Baltic, when the interests of Spain and of Europe required their presence in their native land, see an article on "Romana Robertson, an Episode of the Peninsular War," in the *Month*, vol. i. p. 127, &c.

So widespread were the calamities which almost overwhelmed the Church and Order during the revolutionary epoch of which we have been speaking, that about the year 1810 there were left only about eighteen abbeys of the Order in Italy, eight in Sicily, six in Switzerland, seventeen in Austria, and five or six in Hungary. These, with one or two in Spain, and such monasteries as the Armenian Benedictines possessed in the eastern parts of Europe, were the only homes spared to St. Benedict in that Europe which owed almost everything to his sons. Out of Europe matters were almost as bad; the monasteries in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, save a few in New Grenada, were suppressed, and in Brazil alone was to be found a flourishing congregation of eleven monasteries, all of which have been in our own time doomed to gradual suppression under the exterminating policy of the Freemasons, whose will is law in that unhappy empire. When the flood of revolution, war, and irreligion had passed over the world, there were left hardly seventy monasteries of an Order which had formerly boasted of its many thousand homes of piety and learning.

A more grateful task must now be undertaken, namely, to give some account of the gradual restoration and development of the Benedictine Order in this century; and, as the work of restoration began in England, we may be pardoned for speaking of our own history first.

In addition to the common hatred of religious establishments which prompted the act of suppression of all the monasteries of France, there was superadded in the case of English institutions a national antipathy which made the fate of their inmates doubly intolerable. One has but to read Fr. Hodgson's account of the seizure of the English Secular College of St. Augustine at Douay, and of the harsh imprisonment of its members at Dourlens—an imprisonment shared by our forefathers of St. Gregory's—to be convinced of this. The same tale is repeated in Fr. Marsh's account of the seizure of St. Laurence's at Dieulouard, in Lorraine, and the dispersion of the monks of that house; while the third English Benedictine community in France, that of St. Edmund's of Paris, fared no better; and though the religious effected their escape, the Prior, Father Henry Parker, was held a prisoner in his own cell. The Abbey of Lamspring, near Hildesheim, was suppressed by the Prussian government in 1803, and though a few of its members continued to reside there for some time in hopes of recovering the possession of the whole abbey, which in

point of size and beauty yielded, it is said, to Fulda alone, they were soon compelled to leave, and, like their fellow religious, betake themselves to England.

Nor were our religious sisters treated with more consideration. Most of their communities were forced to undergo a long imprisonment before they could gain the friendly shelter of their native land; and from their dungeons many of those chosen souls went to their reward. Of the Cambray community, now established at Stanbrook, four of the nuns died; and the grief of the survivors was intensified by the loss of their venerable chaplain, the Very Rev. Father Augustine Walker, President General of the English Benedictines, who shared their captivity, and passed to his reward on the 13th of January, 1794. The Paris Convent of Our Lady of Good Hope lost one of its members under the hardships of prison life in the Tower of Vincennes; the united communities of Pontoise and Dunkirk sent eight souls to heaven in those trying times.

But when once the religious—whether monks or nuns—reached England, the work of reconstruction commenced. For a time the two communities of St. Gregory's and St. Laurence's shared together the generous hospitality of Sir Edward Smythe at Acton Burnell, Shropshire; and though in 1804 the members of St. Laurence's found a final resting-place at Ampleforth in Yorkshire, then the simple residence of Father Anselm Bolton (almost, if not quite, the last priest who was tried under the penal laws), the monks of St. Gregory's remained at their Shropshire home till 1814, in which year, on the first of May, the community reached Downside, where their settlement was sufficiently well known to allow of the compiler of a "road book" of the period informing the public that the "English devotees of the Order of St. Benedict" had taken up their abode at the house known as Mount Pleasant.

We need not dwell on the development which has taken place both at Ampleforth and Downside since those days, and will close our notice of the re-settlement of the English Benedictine monasteries by adding that the old Paris house of St. Edmund's was set up again in the College buildings of St. Gregory's at Douay in 1823, through the zeal and devotedness of Fr. Richard Marsh, President General of the Congregation. The Lambspring refugees were not so fortunate. An attempt to re-found their community at Broadway in Worcestershire, which was made in 1832, had to be abandoned about six years later; and it has been

reserved for our day to see the brilliant inauguration of its successor in the new Monastery and College at Fort Augustus.

The English Benedictine nuns have been equally blessed, and perpetuate in the cloisters of Stanbrook, Bergholt, Oulton, Teignmouth, and Colwich, the saintly traditions of their lost continental homes.

There is one distinctive feature of Benedictine work in England during the last eighty years which should not be overlooked. The monks of the English Congregation, as is well known, are specially bound to serve the English Mission when obedience calls them to labour in the work which their founder in England and principal patron, St. Augustine, began so long ago; and that they have not neglected their sacred trust is shown by this: that of the sixty-five churches and missions which they serve in England and Wales, no less than forty have been founded by them since the beginning of the century! ¹ Nor must we neglect to mention the establishment of the Common Noviciate and House of Studies for the entire Congregation at the Cathedral Priory of St. Michael's, near Hereford, in 1859.

In the meantime matters were slowly mending on the Continent, and almost the first monastery which was restored was that of St. Paul, on the Lavant, about four-and-twenty miles east of Klagenfurt, in Carinthia. The original foundation had been made by Count Engelbert, of Sponheim, in 1091, and the piety of the Emperor Francis I. re-established the abbey in the year 1809. From that day it has flourished as of old, and now reckons between sixty and seventy professed monks, not all of whom, however, reside in the monastery, for some reside at Klagenfurt, where the care of the Imperial Gymnasium and its four hundred scholars has been entrusted to them; others direct the theological seminary of the diocese of Gurk, with its forty students; while

¹ The following list may be of interest:—1802, Stratford-on-Avon; 1803, Coventry; 1806, Wroughtington; 1809, Cheltenham; 1810, Workington; 1814, Wooten Wawen; 1821, Bungay; 1822, Clayton Green; 1824, Little Malvern and Scarisbrick; 1833, Goosnargh; 1834, Redditch; 1836, Weobly; 1838, Aigburth, Chipping Lodbury, and Cowpen; 1841, Kemerton and Maryport; 1843, St. Augustine's, Liverpool; 1845, Leyland; 1848, Barton-on-Humber; 1849, St. Anne's, Liverpool; 1851, Studley; 1853, Cleator and Walton le Dale; 1856, Abergavenny, Bridgend, and Maesteg; 1857, Hereford and Merthyr Tydvil; 1859, Lee House; 1860, Rhymney; 1861, Blyth; 1868, Great Malvern; 1873, Dowlais and Swansea (St. David's and St. Joseph's); 1874, Newton Abbot; 1875, Frizington; 1876, Bedlington; 1878, Egremont.

those who remain at the mother-house have a large field of work in the management of their own flourishing college, and of four or five parishes in the neighbourhood of the monastery.

Seven years after the second founding of St. Paul's, the Emperor Francis I. restored the Abbey of Marienberg between Burgeis and Mals, in the Tyrol, where, on a high mountain overlooking the sources of the Adige, the Counts of Matsch had founded an abbey in honour of the Mother of God towards the end of the eleventh century. In the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the Abbot Matthias, a monk of Weingarten, did so much for Marienberg—rebuilding it from the foundations, opening schools, and the like—that he is reckoned a second founder. Since 1816 the house has prospered; some of its fifty monks are employed in the Imperial Gymnasium or public school at Meran; others conduct the diocesan seminary in the same town; a few are engaged in the cure of souls in neighbouring parishes. In the world of letters the name of Dom Pius Zingerle, one of the best-known Oriental scholars of the century, has added a bright lustre to the ancient fame of his abbey.

A work which has been even more fruitful in good results than the restoration of the two abbeys which we have just related, was the revival of the monastery of Metten, in Bavaria, in 1830. Towards the end of the eighth century the Emperor Charlemagne had commenced the erection of an abbey in honour of St. Michael at Metten on the Danube, not far from the little town of Deckendorff, and by the year 802 the works were completed, and Utho of holy memory blessed the first abbot of the new monastery. Through various changes the house continued its holy and useful work, attaining special celebrity under Abbot John Nablas, who died in 1628. Readers of Abbot Gueranger's history of the Medal of Saint Benedict will perhaps recollect that the modern propagation of that devotion took its rise from Metten in the early part of the seventeenth century. Abbot Nablas had worked hard to establish in Bavaria a union or congregation of the various Benedictine houses, which, since the breaking up of the Bursfield Congregation by the wars and religious disturbances of the previous age, had been deprived of that mutual support and edification which union alone can afford. His wish, however, was realized after his death, for the Bavarian Congregation was erected by Pope Innocent XI. in 1684; and Metten held a high place among the eighteen abbeys which it comprised. In virtue of this union, the Bavarian Congregation is placed fourth on the list

given in the *Album Benedictinum* lately issued. In point of antiquity, the English Congregation, erected in 1800, the Cassinese in 1415, and the Swiss, in 1602, alone precede it.

In 1807 the seventy-eighth abbot of Metten, D. Celestine Stoeckl, died of a broken heart, after witnessing the suppression of his house, and the dispersion of his monks, and the sale of their lands and library, which had taken place four years previously. About twenty years after his death one of the old monks of Metten, D. Romanus Raith, and a monk of Andech, D. Ildephonus Nebauer, boldly resumed their religious habit, and through the generous assistance of Louis I., King of Bavaria, were enabled to recover possession of the Abbey buildings of Metten, and, in 1830, entered on their work of restoration.

(*To be continued.*)

ST. GREGORY'S CHURCH, MONASTERY, AND COLLEGE, DOWNSIDE.

WE had hoped to have received and been able to present to our readers, to accompany the view of the college buildings, the first of a series of articles in which it is proposed to give some account and history of the progress of the various additions which have, during the last sixty years, been made to the original house which formed, in 1814, the monastery and college of St. Gregory's. But although the preliminary article is nearly ready, it has been found impossible to complete it in time for the first number of the *Review*.¹ We are now obliged immediately to go to press, in order that our first issue may be ready by the 13th of July—the day of the annual meeting at Downside.

Under these circumstances our readers will perhaps pardon the crude sketch which, with the limited information at present at our disposal, we are reluctantly obliged to substitute.

Much interesting information concerning the migration of the community and school from the hospitable shelter of Acton Burnell has been already given in the memoir of the late Dr. Brown. On arrival they found the small house, a portion of which is seen to the extreme right of our view. It was, no

¹ Since this article has been in type the contribution referred to has reached us, and, though too late for this issue, will appear in our next. —ED.