

at the time as to the inherent evil of matter, probably had not a little to do with this development. But in any case, the example of a few hermits in the Egyptian desert rapidly spread and induced many thousands to adopt the life of complete self-abnegation, almost to the limit of human endurance for the good of their souls. At a later time, these grouped themselves into religious orders under fixed rules for the better systematization of their self-denials. One must certainly respect the aims of many who gave themselves to this hermit and monastic life. One would fain hope that they found at least some part of their desires for greater holiness realized. But the whole history of the monastic movement, after allowing for all that can be said in its favor, shows that it was and is based upon a misconception. The highest type of Christian character is not to be gained that way, and the experiment has taught the Church, or at least some portion of it, the elementary truth that no one needs to impose any fictitious hardships on himself in order to live a life of self-denial. The fundamental obligations of fidelity, honesty, and love to one's kind will furnish all the occasions for self-sacrifice needful for the development of right character, and more wholesome occasions than those imposed by any rule. The crudest of all types of character is that which is built up according to arbitrary rules. Far nobler and worthier is that which constantly brings the intelligence into play to direct the application of a general principle to the varied exigencies of daily life. If it allows greater possibility of making mistakes, it at the same time affords better opportunities of correcting them and of learning useful lessons from the unfortunate experiences of the past. But it probably needed the history of monasticism to make that clear to the Church.

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Walk before God, and perfect be ;  
 Care not for human eyes,  
 Which but the outward see ;  
 To heaven's standard rise.  
 Be not afraid to let thy ways—  
 Each thought, each word, each deed—  
 Be tested by the searching rays  
 Which from His throne proceed.