

his government, and he made them live according to the ascetic rules—not in separate hermitages, but altogether in a regular community, and he is, therefore, considered the founder of the Cœnobites: that is, those who joined with others, and lived together in a regular community, with all things in common; as St. Paulus was the founder of the Solitaries or Hermits. A short time afterwards a person of the name of Pacuminus founded in the same country (Egypt) the famous monasteries of Tabonna. His disciples lived in houses, each containing thirty or forty persons; and thirty or forty of these houses grouped together composed a monastery. Each monastery was governed by an abbot, and each house by a superior. All these monasteries throughout this region acknowledged a single chief, and assembled under him to celebrate Easter, sometimes to the number of 50,000, including only these monasteries of Tabonna; besides which, there were others in other parts of Egypt,—those of Sceta, of Oxyrinchia, of Nitria, and Marcotis. St. Hilarion, a disciple of St. Anthony, established in Palestine monasteries of a nearly similar description, and his institution spread over the whole of Syria. The great St. Basil also acquired his knowledge of the monastic and ascetic system in Egypt, and toward the end of the same century (before the effects of the persecution by the heathen Emperors had ceased), founded monasteries in Pontus and Cappadocia, giving them a code of rules founded on Christian morals. From that time the monastic institutions spread over every part of the East, in Ethiopia, Persia; and even in India. The west soon followed the example of the East. St. Athanasius introduced monastic life at Rome. His praises of the Oriental monastic bodies gave great encouragement to the erection of similar Societies in Italy. St. Simplicianus accordingly erected a monastery near Milan, with the consent of Saint Ambrose, the Bishop of the See. St. Augustin also founded a monastic order on his return from Italy to Africa, where he was Bishop of Hippo. St. Martin, (a disciple and friend of St. Simplicianus) after he became bishop of Tours, introduced monachism into Gaul, about the sixth century. And St. Benedict (from whom the famous Benedictine order took their rise) a noble of Nurtia, who was born in the year 482, retired from Rome to the desert of Subiaco, where he founded several monasteries, and gave to them that code of rules, which was universally adopted and followed in the West, as those of St. Basil were in the East. Now when we consider the state of the Church during the early persecution of the Christian Emperors—and afterwards the whole state of the countries, in which Christianity had gained any footing, during the period of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire—the intestine troubles—the irruption of the heathen barbarians—the turbulence and ignorance of the various petty chiefs and barons,—we shall not wonder that earnest and faithful men were induced to adopt the means offered by these systems of life for avoiding the desolating ravages of the persecutor, and for the encouragement of learning, and preserving a seed of pure religion to transmit to future generations. Almost the only opportunities at that time for study, and specially (which was of the greatest importance) for the copying and preserving the Holy Scriptures, were in different religious houses, which were established in the different countries where the church was planted. It is not that the hermit or the monk, or the monastery were any essential part of the Church, or known in the primitive and apostolic age—but they were means of help for that church, sought out by her faithful members to suit the existing emergencies, and provide for impending dangers. They were voluntary Societies, composed for the most part of laymen, and were therefore, of course, under the authority of the Bishops, like the rest of the faithful; but the rules by which each Society was governed were merely in the nature of

bye-laws and instructions. The rule of St. Augustine, which is still observed by many societies of men and women, was only taken from a letter addressed to his sister for the government of the house over which she presided, and from his sermons on the common life of the Clergy. But the two principal rules in the early ages of the monastic institutions were the rules of St. Basil in the East, and St. Benedict in the West. They were by far the most complete and finished of any, and with that of St. Augustine, became the fundamental law of all ancient monastic orders. In subsequent times there were also established the great quasi religious orders of the Knights of St. John and the Temple, intended to aid in the recovery of the Holy Land from the infidels: the celebrated society of the Jesuits, founded by St. Francis Xavier; and the orders of the medicant Friars, the Dominicans and St. Francisans, who were meant to be as witnesses against the too luxurious and indulgent rules of the more ancient monasteries and lives of the secular clergy.

The ancient monks were so essentially laymen, that the desire to become a clerk, is mentioned by Cassian in his institutes as a temptation, which they should resist,—for he says that temptation arose from ambition and vain glory. It is clear that when a monastery happened to be at so great a distance from its proper episcopal or parochial church, the monks could not ordinarily resort there for divine service, which was the case in the monasteries of Egypt, and other parts of the East, where the monks lived in great deserts, sequestered from the rest of mankind, then some one or more of the monks were ordained for the performance of divine offices among them. But what contributed most towards the clerical character of the ancient monks, was the removal, in progress of time, as the church began to enjoy rest and freedom, of many of their communities from the deserts into towns. That removal was brought about by the necessity which the bishops felt upon the increase of their flocks for the assistance of those numerous and now important bodies. Monasteries were also founded in and near towns, as, for instance, those of St. Augustine at Hippo, St. Ambrose at Milan, and St. Eusebius at Vercelli. The monks, too, took an active part in support of St. Athanasius against the Arians; and St. Anthony left his desert and went to Alexandria to labour in favor of the orthodox belief.

But these institutions, which were thus at first the consequence of the emergencies in which the church was placed on account of the fiery persecutions to which she was subjected, and the turbulence and ignorance of the times, and which in their day did good service, became afterwards the cause of evils, which led to their suppression in England at the Reformation. The church adopted them in earlier times, because they were useful helps; she put them aside when they ceased to be so. I have said that at first they were all merely voluntary societies, and that they were formed with the consent of the bishop, in whose diocese they were placed, and were, like the rest of the faithful, subject to his authority; but in process of time, as the bishops of Rome were gradually, but surely, building up the fabric of their usurped power over the rest of Christendom, they found these different religious orders very important allies; and in return for the support they gave to the claim set up by the bishop of Rome to the supremacy, they received from him promises of certain immunities, especially exemption from the authority and supervision of their own bishops,—thus interfering grievously with the working of the church in each particular diocese, and concentrating all power in the hands of the occupant of the See of Rome. This, together with the laxity of discipline that gradually was introduced, and the corruption arising from the enormous wealth that many of these religious houses had acquired, led (as I remarked) to their total dissolution in England at the Reformation in the

reign of Henry VIII. How far Henry, or those that assisted him in this work of dissolution, were actuated by pure and simple motives of religion, or by the desire to get their share of the plunder which was thus obtained—may be very questionable. Cranmer, fully alive to the necessity of some radical change in the constitution and habits of the religious houses, was still anxious that their revenues should have been preserved to the Church and consecrated to holy uses. He found that their foundations and whole state were inconsistent with a full and true reformation. For, among the things to be reformed were these abuses, which were essential to their constitution; such as the belief of purgatory, of redeeming souls by masses, the worship of saints and images, pilgrimages, and other similar superstitious practices. And therefore Societies, whose interest it was to oppose the Reformation, were in the first place to be suppressed; and then he hoped, upon new endowments and foundations, that colleges should have been erected at every Cathedral, to be nurseries of Ecclesiastics for the whole Diocese, which he thought would be more suitable to the primitive uses of monasteries, and more profitable for the Church. He had also advised the King to erect many new Bishoprics, that the vastness of some dioceses being reduced to a narrower compass, Bishops might better discharge their duties and oversee their flocks, according to the Scriptures and the primitive rule. And honest old Latimer earnestly recommended to Cromwell, that the priory of Great Malvern, in the Diocese of Worcester, might be allowed to stand, “not in monkery, but so as to be converted to preaching, study and prayer.” Adding: “Alas! my good lord, shall we not see two or three in every shire changed to such remedy.” But such was not to be. When Henry and his courtiers set themselves to the work of demolition, because these religious houses were misapplying their wealth and not fulfilling the intents of their institution, many were the promises held out of the great public works, both religious and useful, to which their revenues were to be appropriated; but, with a very trifling exception, the whole amount of wealth thus obtained was either bestowed on royal favorites or went into the private purse of the crown.

Wordsworth alludes to this wholesale plunder and work of destruction in some beautiful lines in “The Excursion:”

“He had witnessed in his morn of life,
That violent commotion, which o’erthrew,
In town and city, and sequestered glen,
Altar, and cross, and church of solemn roof,
And old religious houses—pile after pile;
And shook the tenants out into the fields,
Like wild beasts without home! Their hour was come,
But why no softening thought of gratitude,
No just remembrance, scruple, or who doubt?
Benevolence is mild; nor borrows help,
Save at worse need, from bold impetuous force,
Fillest all to anger and revenge.
But humankind rejoices in the night
Of mutability; and airy hopes,
Dancing around her, hinder and disturb
Those meditations of the soul, that feed
The retrospective virtues.”

Henceforth in England the Church was left to depend, so far as any actual ecclesiastical organization was acknowledged, upon what is known as the parochial system alone. That is, that whereas the whole country was divided into Dioceses,—each Diocese being presided over by a Bishop—so each Diocese was sub-divided into Parishes—each Parish being under the charge of its own Rector or Minister—by which provision was made that in every place, whether in the cities or villages, or remotest parts, there was some Minister on whose services the people had a claim, and who was answerable for the duties connected with the Church. Now this parochial system in England has constituted both the strength and weakness of the Church—its strength in that it insures the ministrations of the Church everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land: not merely in the great towns and near the residences of the rich, but equally in