

lies all monastic repression and we live in a humanistic age. But we must be on our guard against making St. Benedict responsible for what seem now the evils of his system. Asceticism was in the air in the sixth century. St. Benedict turned it to the advantage of European society. By the use of strong common sense he prevented fantastic extravagances and made his followers "helpers and friends of mankind." The corner-stone of Benedictine monasticism is the institution of the three vows, Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The end proposed is spiritual perfection,—or its nearest human approach: the means, contemplation, prayer and work. The Rule became the written constitution or charter of thousands of houses all over Europe. It was more than once reformed in the sense of increased stringency, but it remained the undisputed western type till the rise of the Carthusian order. Nothing is easier than to make game of monks or to censure monasticism. Boccaccio has done the one pretty effectively, and Luther the other. The fact remains that during the critical period of our civilisation, the Dark Ages, the time when the indispensable link between classical and modern was almost broken, the monks of the Benedictine order spreading from Monte Cassino were the truest friends of social stability and intellectual culture. Charlemagne, the political genius of the period, based his whole educational system on the recognition of their superiority.

But to return. At the beginning of this digression we were waiting outside the gates of Monte Cassino. Besides general reflections on Benedictine history comes the further reflection that only by a chance is Monte Cassino a monastery at the present day. Technically speaking it is not a monastery but a "national monument" in the ownership of the Italian government. During the years immediately following the battle of Novara, 1849, Piedmont found herself in severe straits for money. A large part of the land was in the hands of religious corporations and exempt from taxation. Through the efforts

of D'Azeglio and Cavour a policy of "secularisation" was adopted and the Piedmontese policy has been followed in Italy since 1862. When Garibaldi was dictator at Naples after his conquest of Sicily with the immortal "Mille" the fate of Monte Cassino hung in the balance, for Garibaldi was strongly anti-clerical. Then, and in later doubtful times, Mr. Gladstone and Lord Acton have been able to befriend the Benedictines of Monte Cassino and to save them from extinction. Sixty monks are still permitted to reside in their old home and to conduct a school. They are expected to admit no new novices, but I have heard that a moderate breach of this rule is winked at by the government.

One goes up a steep slope to the very gate of the convent and on entering is first impressed by the eighteenth century appearance of the cloister. It is not a question of finding sixth or even twelfth century architecture. In actual structure we have older monasteries in Canada. The reason why all traces of earlier buildings on the same site have disappeared is that about once a century an earthquake destroys cloister and church. The convent is large, far too large for its present needs, but it is hardly more beautiful than a barrack. One has to go to the Library to be reminded of the days when the abbot of Monte Cassino could afford, in a worldly way, to decline the Papacy.

The manuscripts, running back to the sixth century, are extraordinarily fine. Just before my visit the prior had discovered some marginal annotations made by St. Thomas Aquinas when he was a student at Monte Cassino, and he showed them to me with as much pride as if the "angelic doctor" had been a Benedictine instead of a Dominican. The archives proper are more remarkable still. An unbroken series of papal bulls and letters relating to the monastery forms, the impressive centrepiece of a collection containing hundreds of imperial, royal, and princely letters. These documents are well housed and cared for. I should think that a list of the ten