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Author: Constance Stoney

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EARLY DOUBLE MONASTERIES ***

EARLY DOUBLE MONASTERIES

A Paper read before the Heretics' Society
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BY

CONSTANCE STONEY

NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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EARLY DOUBLE MONASTERIES.

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THE system of double monasteries, or monasteries for both men and women, is as old as that of Christian monasticism itself, though the phrase "monasteria duplicia"^[1] dates from about the C6. The term was also sometimes applied to twin monasteries for men; Bede uses it in this sense with reference to Wearmouth and Yarrow, while he generally speaks of a double monastery as "monasterium virginum."

The use of the word "double" is important. The monastery was not mixed; men and women did not live or work together, and in many cases did not use the same Church; and though the chief feature of the system was association, there was in reality very little, when compared with the amount of separation. In time, the details of organisation varied, such, for example, as whether an abbot or an abbess ruled the whole monastery, though it was generally the latter. Details of the rule of the community naturally altered at different times and in different places, but the essential character remained the same.

As to the object of such an arrangement, opinions differ. Some have regarded it as a sort of moral experiment; others have seen in it only the natural outcome of the necessity for having priests

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close at hand to celebrate Mass, hear confessions and minister in general to the spiritual needs of the nuns. There is, too, the practical side of the plan—namely, that each side of the community was economically dependant on the other, as will be seen later. However this may be, the practice of placing the two together under one head seems to be as ancient as monasticism itself.

The double monastery in its simplest form was that organisation said to have been founded in the C4 by S. Pachomius,^[2] an Egyptian monk. He settled with a number of men, who had consecrated themselves to the spiritual life, at Tabenna, by the side of the Nile. About the same time, his sister Mary went to the opposite bank of the Nile, and began to gather round her women disciples.

This settlement soon became a proper nunnery under the control of the superior of the monks, who delegated elderly men to care for its discipline. With the exception of regulations concerning dress, both monks and nuns observed the same rule which S. Pachomius wrote for them^[3]. It was very simple. There were to be twelve prayers said during the day, twelve at twilight, twelve at night, and a psalm at each meal. Mass was celebrated on Saturday and Sunday. Meals were to be eaten all together and the amount of food was unlimited. A monk could eat or fast as he pleased, but the more he ate, the more work must he do. They were to sleep three in a cell. No formal vows were to be taken, but the period of probation before entry into the community, was to be three years. The men provided the food, and did the rough work for the women, building their dwellings, etc., while the women made clothes for the men. When a nun died her companions brought her body to the river bank and then retired; presently some monks fetched away the body, rowed back across the Nile, and buried it in their cemetery.^[4]

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That the communities of S. Basil and his sister Macrina (also in the C4) were of this type, may be seen from the rule of S. Basil. The communities, like those of Pachomius, were on opposite banks of a river—in this case, the Iris; and Macrina's nunnery is supposed to have been in the village of Annesi, near Neo-Caesarea, and founded 357 A.D. In her nunnery lived her mother and her younger brother Peter, who afterwards became a priest. The life of this saintly family and the relation between the two communities may be learned from the charmingly written Life of S. Macrina by her brother Gregory of Nyssa.^[5]

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The Rule of S. Basil is written in the form of question and answer, and much of it refers to the relations between monks and nuns, while all impress upon the religious the duty of giving no occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. "May the head of the monastery speak often with the abbess? May he speak with any of the sisters other than the abbess, on matters of faith? May the abbess be angry if a priest orders the sisters to do anything without her knowledge? If a sister refuses to sing the psalms, is she to be compelled to do so?" All the answers urge both parts of the community to avoid giving ground for scandal. The nuns, in this case, seem to have had a separate church, for Gregory speaks of the "Chorus of Virgins" who awaited him when he came to visit his sister Macrina on her death bed. There were, too, schools for boys and girls attached to S. Basil's house, for he makes regulations concerning their education.

There is practically no evidence for double monasteries in the C5, but at the opening of the C6 we find them again. In the West the earliest monastic communities had been founded by S. Martin of Tours, first at Milan in 371 and afterwards in Gaul, which from then became the chief monastic centre.

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It is here, then, that another brother and sister figure as the founders of a double monastery. S. Caesarius, Bishop of Arles,^[6] persuaded his sister Caesaria to leave Marseilles, where she was in a convent, and join him at Arles to preside over the women who had gathered there to live under his guidance; and the rule which he afterwards wrote for these nuns is the first Western rule for nuns, and was afterwards followed in many double monasteries.^[7] He arranged it, as he himself says, according to the teachings of the fathers of the Church. He stipulates that all joining the community shall, on their entry, renounce all claims to outside property. Only those women are to enter who accept the rule of their own accord and are prepared to live in perfect equality and without servants. Much attention is paid in the rule to the instruction of the nuns; they were to devote considerable time to music, as being an art through which God could fittingly be praised; to be taught reading and writing; to practice cooking, and weaving both of Church vestments and their own clothing.

They were to attend to the sick and infirm, and above all they were not to quarrel. They were not entirely cut off from the outside world, since they were permitted to entertain women from other convents; but, says the Rule, "Dinners and entertainments shall not be provided for churchmen, laymen and friends." We have only indirect evidence that Arles was a double monastery. The confusion, for example in Caesarius's will between his two foundations of S. John's and S. Mary's, resolves itself, if we suppose that the monks were at the one, and the nuns at the other, and that they associated in the great church in the monastery, described by the authors of the Life of S. Caesarius, as being dedicated to S. Mary, S. John and S. Martin.^[8] Such an arrangement was common in later double monasteries.

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Another famous C6 monastery in Gaul now supposed to have been double was that of S. Rhadagund at Poitiers about 566.^[9] S. Rhadagund was married to King Clothair against her will, and their life together was a series of quarrels. She was so devoted to charitable work, we are told, that she often annoyed the King by keeping him waiting at meals, left him whenever possible and behaved in such a way that the king declared that he was married to a nun rather than a queen. Finally the murder of her young brother, at the instigation of the king, determined

her to leave the court, and flying to the protection of Bishop Medardus, she demanded to be consecrated a nun.^[10]

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After some natural hesitation on the part of the Bishop, she was made a Deaconess—a term applying to anyone who, without belonging to any special order, was under the protection of the Church.^[11] She devoted herself to the relief of every kind of distress, bodily and spiritual; and at length the desire came to her to provide permanently for the men and women who came to her for help. So, on an estate which she owned at Poitiers, she founded a nunnery dedicated to the Holy Name, and, probably at the same time, the house for men, separated from the convent by the town wall and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was in S. Mary's that Rhadagund was buried and after her death, her name was added to the dedication. Beside this evidence of association between the two houses, the only other is the correspondence of Rhadagund and the Abbess Agnes with the poet Fortunatus, who was probably a monk of S. Mary's. He certainly seems to have been the director and counsellor of the nuns, and to have been often engaged in business for them; but he did not live in the same house with them for in one of his letters he laments the fact. His letters and verses addressed to the two women throw a strong light on the friendship, and real affection which existed among the three friends. He says that he will work day and night for Rhadagund, draw the water, tend the vines and the garden, cook, wash dishes, anything, rather than that she should do the heavy and menial work of the house. He begs the abbess Agnes to talk often of him with the sisters that he may feel more really that she is his mother. He sends gifts of flowers for their sanctuary, and baskets which he has plaited; and with a basket of violets he sends the following charming verses.^[12] (I give a translation which must necessarily be inadequate.)

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"If the season had yielded me white lilies, according to its wont, or red roses with sweet smelling savour, I had plucked them from the countryside, or from the turf of my little garden, and had sent them, small gifts for great ladies! But since I lack the first, I e'en pay the second, for he presents roses in the eyes of love, who offers only violets. Yet, these violets I send are, among perfumed herbs, of noble stock, and with equal grace breathe in their royal purple, while fragrance with beauty vies to steep their petals. May you, likewise, both have each charm that these possess, and may the perfume of your future reward be a glory that blooms everlastingly."

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The nuns of Ste. Croix, too, seem not to have been lacking in generosity. Fortunatus frequently thanks them for gifts of eggs, fruit, milk, etc.; and on one occasion he receives more dishes than one servant could carry. He must have stood in some official relation to Rhadagund, for such freedom of intercourse to be possible; and if his verses sometimes suggest the courtier rather than the monk, it must be remembered that they are the work of a poet who had first been a friend of princes and was among the most fashionable men of letters of his day in Ravenna; and that they are addressed to a woman who was, after all, a queen.

In 587 Rhadagund died and Bishop Gregory of Tours tells how greatly she was mourned by the whole community, and how some 200 women crowded round her bier, bewailing their loss. One of them, the nun Baudonivia, several years afterwards, cannot, she says, even speak of the death of Rhadagund without being choked with sobs.^[13]

It will be seen from these examples, that in all probability, the origin of the double monastery need not be sought, as has been supposed, in Ireland, since it seems to have been known in Gaul before S. Columbanus and his Irish disciples landed there and preached a great religious revival, at the end of the C6. Indeed, though there are scattered notices in the lives of the Irish saints, which seem to suggest that there were double monasteries in Ireland in very early times, there is no definite evidence until the description in Cogitosus's "Life of S. Bridget," of one at Kildare, probably in the C8. The monasteries actually founded by S. Columbanus himself, were all for men.

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On the other hand, the double monastery seems always to have flourished wherever the fervour of the Irish missionaries penetrated. Perhaps, as Montalembert^[14] suggests, the ideal atmosphere of divine simplicity and single-mindedness which characterised them, was particularly favorable to the growth of such an institution.

S. Columbanus dedicated Burgundofara, or Fara, as a child, to the religious life; and she afterwards founded the monastery of Brie to the south-east of Paris, which we learn from Jonas, who was a monk there, and from Bede, was a double monastery.

It is clear that this house was one of those ruled by an abbess, for Jonas says that no distinction was recognised between the sexes, and that the abbess treated both alike. The discipline here, however, seems to have been very severe, for he adds that some of the new nuns tried to escape by ladders from the dormitory. Brie is interesting to us as forming one of the links between Continental and English monasticism at this time. Bede says of the daughter of Erconberht, King of Kent, "She was a most virtuous maiden, always serving God in a monastery in France, built by a most noble abbess, Fara by name, at a place called Brie; for at that time, but few monasteries being built in the country of the Angles, many were wont, for the sake of monastic conversation, to repair to the monasteries of the Franks or Gauls; and they also sent their daughters there to be educated and given to their Heavenly Bridegroom, especially in the monasteries of Brie, Chelles, and Andelys."^[15]

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He adds that two daughters of King Anna of East Anglia, "though strangers, were for their virtue made abbesses of the monastery of Brie."

Little is known of Andelys, except that it was founded by Queen Clotilda. At Chelles, founded by Queen Bathilda in 662, ten miles from Paris, on the river Marne, many famous persons, both men and women, received their education. Among them was a Northumbrian princess, Hereswith, whose sister was Hild, the most famous of English abbesses.

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The prevalence and influence of the double monastery in England may perhaps be better understood by a reference to the position of women generally in Anglo-Saxon society. Nothing astonished the Romans more than the austere chastity of the Germanic women, and the religious respect paid by men to them, and nowhere has their influence been more fully recognised or more enduring than among the Anglo-Saxons. This fact largely accounts for the extreme importance attached by them to marriage alliances, particularly those between members of royal houses.^[16] These unions gave to the princess the office of mediatrix; in Beowulf she is called Freothowebbe, "the peace-weaver."^[17] From this rose the high position held by queens. Their signatures appear in acts of foundation, decrees of councils, charters, etc. Sometimes they reigned with full royal authority, as did Seaxburg, Queen of the West Saxons, after the death of her husband.^[18] From the beginning of Christianity in England, the women, and particularly these royal women, were as active and persevering in furthering the Faith, as their men. "Christianity," says Montalembert,^[19] "came to a people which had preserved the instinct and sense of the necessity for venerating things above," and "they at least honoured the virtue which they did not themselves always practise."

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Consequently, when the young Anglo-Saxon women, having been initiated into the life of the cloister abroad, returned to England to found monasteries in their own land, they were received by their countrymen with reverence and respect. This respect soon expressed itself in the national law, which placed under the safeguard of severe penalties the honour and freedom of those whom it called the "Brides of God."

Princesses, royal widows, sometimes reigning queens, began to found monasteries, where they lived on terms of equality with the daughters of ceorls and bondmen; and perhaps it is fair to say that it was not the lowest in rank who made the greatest sacrifice.

But the influence of these women did not cease with their retirement to the cloister. When one of them, by the choice of her companions, or the nomination of the bishops, became invested with the right of governing the community, she was also given the liberties and privileges of the highest rank. Abbesses often had the retinue and state of princesses. They were present at most great religious and national gatherings, and often affixed their signatures to the charters granted on these occasions.^[20]

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I have already referred to one of the greatest of these abbesses, Hild of Whitby. She was the grandniece of Edwin, the first Christian King of Northumbria and had been baptised with her uncle at York in 627 by the Roman Missionary Paulinus.^[21] Bede says that, before consecrating her life to religion, "she had lived thirty-three years very nobly among her family." When she realised her vocation, she went into East Anglia where her brother-in-law was king, intending to cross over to the continent and take the veil at Chelles. She spent a year here in preparation, but before she could accomplish her purpose, Bishop Aidan invited her to the north, to take charge of the double monastery of Hartlepool, which had been founded by Heiu, the first nun in England. "When," says Bede, "she had for some years governed this monastery, wholly intent upon establishing the regular life, it happened that she also undertook the construction or arrangement of a monastery in the place which is called Streonesheal (Whitby), and diligently accomplished the work enjoined upon her. For in this monastery, as in the first, she established the discipline of the regular life, and indeed, she taught there also, justice, piety, chastity, and other virtues, but especially the guarding of peace and charity; so that, after the example of the primitive church, no one there was rich and none poor, all things were common to all and no one had property. So great was her prudence, moreover, that not only ordinary persons in their necessity, but even kings and princes sought and received counsel of her. She made those who were under her direction give so much time to the reading of the Divine Scriptures, and exercise themselves so much in the works of righteousness, that many could readily be met with there, who were fit to take up ecclesiastical office, that is, the service of the altar." Bede goes on to mention six men from Hild's monastery, who afterwards became bishops. The most famous was perhaps S. John of Beverley, who was first bishop of Hexham, and afterwards of York, and who was noted for his piety and learning. Aetta held the see of Dorchester for a time. Bosa, another scholarly disciple of Hild, became Archbishop of York, and Tatfrith was elected bishop of the Hwicce, though he died before his consecration.

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None of these, however, have a greater claim to be remembered than the cow-herd Caedmon, the first English poet, and the story as given by Bede is perhaps one of the most charming in his Ecclesiastical History.^[22] Apart from the literary interest attaching to the story, his life shows some of the details in outward organisation of these great double monasteries. Before his entry into the monastery, says Bede, he was advanced in years, and yet had so little skill in music that he was unable to take his turn at feasts in singing and playing on the harp, an accomplishment common to high and low among the Anglo-Saxons and kindred nations.

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The story is familiar: on one occasion when the feast was over, he left the hall as soon as he saw the harp being passed, according to custom, from hand to hand. He went out to the cattle-sheds, tended the beasts and lay down to sleep. In a dream he heard a voice, "Caedmon, sing me something." He answered, "I know not how to sing; and for this cause I came out from the feast and came hither because I knew not how." Again he who spoke with him said, "Nevertheless,

thou canst sing me something." Caedmon said, "What shall I sing?" He answered, "Sing me the Creation." Then Bede relates how the cow-herd sang songs before unknown to him, in praise of "the Creator, the Glorious Father of men, who first created for the sons of earth, the heaven for a roof, and then the middle world as a floor for men, the Guardian of the Heavenly Kingdom." When the abbess Hild heard of the miracle, she instructed him in the presence of many learned men to turn into verse a portion of the Scriptures. He took away his task and brought it to them again "composed in the choicest verse." Thereupon the abbess, says Bede, "embracing and loving the gift of God in the man, entreated him to leave the secular, and take upon him the monastic life, and ordered him to be instructed in sacred history." So he was received into Whitby monastery with all his family "and," continues the story, "all that he could learn he kept in memory, and like a clean beast chewing the cud, he turned it all into the sweetest verse, so pleasant to hear, that even his teachers wrote and learned at his lips."

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The story throws a good deal of light on the way in which a large double monastery was organised. One gathers from it that not only isolated monks and nuns were received into the community but sometimes whole families. Caedmon entered "cum omnibus suis," which is generally taken to mean that his whole family were received with him. We see from it, too, how earnest was the desire of the superiors of the monasteries to instruct the ignorant; how rich and poor alike in the C7 might aspire to the monastic life, the only passport being the honest desire to serve God in the best possible way.

Again in the latter part of the story, dealing with Caedmon's sickness and death, there is evidence of how the aged, the sick and the dying were tended with special care.

Whitby was not only an important religious but also political centre and the abbesses took by no means a small part in controversy. At the Synod of Whitby^[23] held here in 664, when the respective claims of Irish and Roman ecclesiastical discipline were discussed, Hild took the side of the Irish Church; while her successor, Aelflæd, interested herself in the doings of her brother, King Egfrith. Hild reigned thirty years at Whitby and died after many years of suffering, during which she never failed to teach her flock, both in public and in private. All that we know of her character, indicates a strong and vivid personality, a mind keenly alive to the necessities of the age, and a will vigorous enough to be successful in providing for them where opportunity occurred. She had a worthy successor in Aelflæd, a friend of the holy S. Cuthbert. Bede says of her that "she added to the lustre of her princely birth the brighter glory of exalted virtue," and that she was "inspired with much love toward Cuthbert, the holy man of God."^[24]

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On one occasion she had fallen seriously ill, and expressed a wish that something belonging to S. Cuthbert could be sent to her. "For then," she said, "I know I should soon be well." A linen girdle was sent from the Saint, and the abbess joyfully put it on. The next morning she could stand on her feet and the third day she was restored to perfect health. Later, a nun was cured of a headache by the same girdle, but when next it was wanted, it could nowhere be found. Bede argues quaintly that its disappearance was also an act of Divine Providence, since some of the sick who flocked to it might be unworthy, and, not being cured, might doubt its efficacy, while in reality, their own unworthiness was to blame. "Thus," he concludes, "was all matter for detraction removed from the malice of the unrighteous."

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A contemporary of Hild's was Aebbe, a princess of the rival dynasty of Bernicia, and sister of the royal saint, King Oswald, and of Oswy, the reigning king. Her brother intended to give her in marriage to the king of the Scots, but she herself was opposed to the alliance. Her family had embraced the Christian religion in exile, and she determined to follow the monastic life.

Accordingly, she built a double monastery, apparently in imitation of Whitby, at Coldingham on the promontory still called S. Abb's Head. She does not seem, however, to have maintained, like Hild, the discipline and fervour of which she herself gave an example; for Bede notes here a rare example of those disorders of which there were certainly far fewer in England at this time than anywhere else.^[25] Aebbe was apparently in ignorance of the relaxation of discipline in her monastery until she was warned of it by an Irish monk of her community, named Adamnan.

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As he was walking with the abbess through the great and beautiful house which she had built, he lamented with tears, "All that you see here so beautiful and so grand will soon be laid in ashes!" The astonished abbess begged an explanation. "I have seen in a dream," said the monk, "an unknown one who has revealed to me all the evil done in this house and the punishment prepared for it."

And what, one naturally asks, are these crimes for which nothing short of total destruction of the splendid house is a severe enough visitation from Heaven? Adamnan continues "The unknown one has told me that he visited each cell and each bed, and found the monks, either wrapt in slothful sleep, or awake, eating irregular meals and engaged in senseless gossip; while the nuns employ their leisure in wearing garments of excessive fineness, either to attire themselves, as if they were the brides of men, or to bestow them on people outside." One must admit that here and there in the writings of the period, there are references to this worldliness in some monasteries; but whatever may have been the state of things at a later date, there does not seem to be evidence of graver misdeeds in these early years of monasticism in England. Bede uses perhaps unnecessary severity in speaking of renegade monks and nuns so-called, since he is admittedly speaking from hearsay and not about disorders which came under his own observation. Whatever the sins of Coldingham may have been, the community at a later date atoned for them, for in the C9, when the Danes invaded Northumbria, and killed the men of this monastery, among others,

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the nuns are said to have mutilated their faces in order to escape the marauders. The Danes, in fury at the loss of their prey, burned the monastery to the ground, and all that remains to mark the site is a small ruined chapel.

At Ely there was also a double monastery founded by Aethelthryth,^[26] later known as S. Awdrey. She was the daughter of Anna, King of the East Angles, and therefore a niece of the great abbess Hild. She was married, for the second time, probably for political reasons, when over thirty years old to King Egfrith of Northumbria, then a boy of fifteen. After living with him for twelve years, she left him and went to Coldingham, where she received the veil. Whether Egfrith agreed to this or not, it is impossible to say. There are reasons for believing that he was, at any rate, unwilling; for Bede says that she had long requested the king to permit her to lay aside worldly cares and serve God in a monastery and that she at length, with great difficulty, prevailed.

She remained at Coldingham for a year and then went to Ely, the island in the fens given to her by her first husband; and there she built a monastery, of which she became abbess. [24]

She renounced all the splendours and even ordinary comforts of her former royal life. Bede says that from the time that she entered the monastery, she wore no linen, but only woollen garments, rarely washed in a hot bath, unless just before any of the great festivals, such as Easter, Whitsuntide, and the Epiphany; and then she did it last of all, after having, with the assistance of those about her, first washed the other nuns.

After presiding over the monastery six or seven years, she died of a tumour in her throat, which she used to say was sent as a punishment for her excessive love of wearing necklaces in her youth. Hence the "tawdrey lace" of "The Winter's Tale" and elsewhere, which was a necklace bought at S. Awdrey's Fair, held on the day of her festival, October 17th. She was succeeded by her sister, Seaxburh, the widow of Erconberht, King of Kent, who had founded a double monastery at Sheppey, of which she was the first abbess. There is no mention of monks as well as nuns before her reign. Her daughter, Ermengild, succeeded her as Abbess of Sheppey, and at her mother's death, of Ely. Ermengild's daughter, Werburh (the famous S. Werburh of Chester), also became abbess of Sheppey and Ely in succession.

In the same way, Minster in Thanet remained in the family of its foundress, Eormenburg or Domneva, as she is sometimes called, the wife of the Mercian prince Merewald. According to tradition she received the land from Egbert of Kent, as wergild for the murder of her two brothers. She asked for as much land as her tame deer could cover in one course, and she thus obtained about ten thousand acres, on which she built her monastery. Her daughter, Mildred, who succeeded her as abbess, acquired greater fame. She was educated at Chelles, and was there cruelly ill-treated by the abbess, who was inappropriately named Wilcona, or Welcome. She wished to marry Mildred to one of her relatives, and when the girl refused, she put her into a furnace. When that punishment failed, she pulled her hair out. Mildred adorned her psalter with the ravished hair and sent it to her mother. Finally she escaped and returned home. Her name is among the five abbesses who signed a charter granting church privileges at a Kentish Witanagemot.^[27] Her successor, Eadburg, or Bugga, built a splendid new church in the monastery, which is described in a poem attributed to Aldhelm.^[28] The high altar was hung with tapestries of cloth of gold, and ornamented with silver and precious stones. The chalice, too, was of gold, and set with jewels; there were glass windows, and from the roof there hung a silver censer. Mention is made of the united singing of the monks and nuns in the church. [25]

Eadburg and her mother, a certain Abbess Eangyth, were both friends of Boniface, the great English missionary bishop of Mainz, the "Apostle of Germany." Eangyth writes to him of her troubles as abbess of a double monastery, of the quarrels among the monks, the poverty of the house, and the excessive dues which had to be paid to the king and his officials. In one letter Boniface thanks Eadburg for books and clothes, and asks if she will write out for him in gold letters the Epistles of S. Peter, that he may have the words of the Apostle before his eyes when he preaches.

Repton was another double monastery under an abbess, though nothing is known of its foundation. Some information about it is gained from the Life of S. Guthlac by Felix. Guthlac was a noble of Mercia, and in his youth a great warrior; but at the age of twenty-four, he went to Repton and received the tonsure under the abbess Aelfthryth. Her rule was apparently very strict, for we find Guthlac getting into trouble for breaking a rule by *not* drinking wine.

Several chapters in Bede's Ecclesiastical History are devoted to stories of the double monastery at Barking, which was one of the most famous. It was founded by Erconwald, who afterwards became bishop of London. He built one for himself at Chertsey, and one for his sister Aethelburg at Barking, and, as Bede says, "established them both in regular discipline of the best kind." This monastery included both a hospital and a school, under the energetic rule of its first abbess. [26]

Hildelith succeeded Aethelburg, and it was for her and her companions that the scholar Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne, wrote his work, "De Laudibus Virginitatis."^[29] He speaks of the nunnery as a hive where the nuns work like little bees, for they collect everywhere material for study. Their industry is not confined to the study of Holy Scripture. He speaks of them as searching carefully into the writers of history, as having a knowledge of ancient law and chronography, and in writing, of the rules of grammar and orthography, punctuation, metre, together with the use of allegory and tropology; all of which goes to prove that the field of secular knowledge was not particularly limited for nuns in those days. Aldhelm enlarges on the charms of their peaceful life in the nunnery, and the opportunities for thought and study it affords them. He recommends the [27]

works of Cassian and Gregory for their reading, and warns them against pride, a special temptation to those who have adopted the religious life.

Again there comes the warning against worldliness in both monk and nun. Some of the men, he says, contrary to the rule of the regular life, wear gay clothing. "The appearance of the other sex, too, corresponds: a vest of fine linen of hyacinth blue is worn, and above it a scarlet tunic with hood and sleeves of striped silk; on the feet are little shoes of red leather; the locks on the forehead and temples are waved with a curling-iron; the dark grey head-veil has given place to white and coloured head-dresses, the folds of which are kept in place by fillets and reach right down to the feet; the nails are pared to resemble the talons of a falcon." Aldhelm condemns all this, but hastens to add that of course he is addressing no one in particular. The work closes with an affectionate greeting to those whom he calls the Flowers of the Church, Pearls of Christ, his monastic sisters and scholarly pupils, whose prayers he always desires. [28]

In Wessex the double monastery of Wimborne was the most important of its time, and most famed for its literary activity. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,^[30] it was founded by Cuthburg, sister of Ine, king of Wessex. Most of our knowledge of the community comes from the Life of S. Lioba^[31] ('the beloved'), who was educated there during the reign of the Abbess Tetta, another sister of the royal founder. The author of S. Lioba's Life describes the arrangement at Wimborne. He says that there were two monasteries there, one for clerks and the other for women. The two houses were surrounded by high walls and the monastery was well endowed. No nun could obtain permission to go to the monks' house, and no man might enter the nuns' convent, except the priests who came to celebrate in their church. One gathers from this that there was not a common church for both sides of the community, as was often the case. The abbess gave any necessary orders to the monks through a window. No woman was admitted to the community unless she undertook not to attempt to leave it except for very urgent reasons and by permission of the abbess. [29]

Some idea of its size may be gathered from the fact that there were five hundred nuns at Wimborne. That strength and tact were needed to rule them is shown by one amusing if lamentable episode.

A very religious virgin was placed in authority over the novices, and she was so hated by them on account of her severity that even after her death the young nuns could not forget; and rushing out, they trampled upon her grave, with curses, until the mound became a hole half a foot deep. The abbess Tetta rebuked them for their unchristian behaviour, and ordered a three days' fast and penance, after which the culprits apparently recovered their senses.

Lioba herself seems to have had an attractive personality, and to have gained the affection both of the abbess and the other nuns. A little letter of hers is extant, wherein she writes to Boniface recalling herself to his mind and claiming relationship with him through her mother. She also encloses some Latin verse for his criticism. She says, "This too, I ask, that you will correct the mistakes of this letter, and send me a few words as a proof of your goodwill. I have composed the little verses written below, according to the rules of prosody, not from pride, but from a desire to cultivate the beginnings of a slender genius, and because I wanted your help. I learnt the art from Eadburga, my mistress, who devotes herself unceasingly to searching Divine Law." [30]

When Boniface was establishing religious houses in Germany he sent to Abbess Tetta, asking that Lioba might be allowed to come over and help him. She went, and Boniface put the monastery of Bischofsheim on the Tauber, a tributary of the Main, under her care. Here she carried on the traditions of Wimborne, for she taught and encouraged learning in every way. Her rule was sane and wise. Her biographer says of her, "She was careful always not to teach others what she herself did not practise. Neither conceit nor overbearing found any place in her disposition; but she was gentle and kind to everyone without exception. She was beautiful as an angel and her conversation was charming. Her intellect was renowned, and she was able in counsel. She was catholic in faith, most patient in hope, and of widespread charity. Though her face was always cheerful, she never broke into hilarious laughter. No one ever heard an ill-natured remark fall from her lips, and the sun never went down upon her wrath. Though she provided food and drink with the greatest liberality for others, she was very moderate herself; and the cup from which she used to drink was called by the sisters, on account of its size, 'darling's little mug.'" [31]

She knew that a heedful mind is necessary for both prayer and study, and so she insisted upon moderation in holding vigils. She allowed herself, and the sisters under her, a short rest after dinner, especially in the summer time; and would never willingly allow people to stay up late; for she maintained that loss of sleep meant loss of intelligence, especially in reading. Her methods were undoubtedly successful, for Rudolf says that among the other convents for women in Germany, there was scarcely one which had not teachers trained under Lioba, so eagerly sought after were her pupils.

Here this account of some early double monasteries must end. In England they probably existed right up to the Danish invasions of 870, and disappeared in the general devastation of the country during the succeeding years. The organisation, however, appears again in this country in the C12, and even as late as the C15. The order of S. Gilbert of Sempringham in the C12 was a double one, and the only order which actually had birth in England. It was, however, entirely lacking in that intellectual activity which was a special feature of the earlier double monasteries, among both men and women, and which, from the secular point of view, gave to the Anglo-Saxon nunneries a place not incomparable with the women's colleges of the present day. The latest [32]

double monastery in England was that of S. Bridget of Sion, near Isleworth, on the Thames.

Reference has been made only to the more important early double monasteries in England; but there are others which may or may not come under this category. Of these some are Whiterne in Galloway, Carlisle, Caistor in Northamptonshire, Gloucester, Strenshall in Staffordshire, and Lyminge in Kent.

It is uncertain whether Bischofsheim, in Germany, under the abbess Lioba, was a double monastery, but the arrangement is known to have existed in Germany in the C8 and later. There are also traces of them in Italy, and considerable evidence for the same sort of system in Spain, but time does not allow of dealing with them here.

Finally, the double monastery did not flourish or find much favour in the more sophisticated ages of Christianity, but generally followed an outburst of religious enthusiasm in the earlier centuries of the Faith. "It was," says Montalembert, "a peculiarity belonging to the youth of the church, which, like youth in all circumstances, went through all the difficulties, dangers, and storms of that age, and which in maturer times gave way before a more practical, if less ideal, outlook on life."^[32]

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] "Monasteria duplicia ut appellantur." Corp. Jur. Civ. (Krueger) Codex I. iii., 43.
- [2] Vita Pachom. Migne, Pat. Lat., tom. 73, cap. 28, col. 248. Paris, 1849.
- [3] Regula S. Pachomii. Gallandius Bib. Vet. Pat., tom. 4, p. 718. Venice, 1765.
- [4] Vita Pachom. Migne, Pat. Lat., tom. 73, cap. 28, col. 248. Paris, 1849.
- [5] Lives of Women Saints. Translated by an early author (unknown) probably 1610-1615. Edited by C. Horstmann (E.E.T.S.), 1886.
- [6] Migne, Pat. Lat., tom. 67, col. 1001.
- [7] Bateson, Mary, "Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries." Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Vol. XIII., p. 141.
- [8] Bateson, Mary, op. cit., p. 143.
- [9] Gregorius Turon, Hist. Franc., Lib. 3, cap. 7.
- [10] Nisard, Vie de Fortunat, chap. 52. Paris, 1887.
- [11] Eckenstein, Lina, Woman under Monasticism. Page 54. Cambridge, 1896.
- [12] Tempora si solito mihi candida lilia ferrent
Aut speciosa foret suave rubore rosa,
Haec ego rure legens aut caespite pauperis horti
Misissem magnis munera parva libens;
Sed quia prima mihi desunt, vel solvo secunda,
Profert qui violas, fert et amore rosas.
Inter odoriferas tamen has quas misimus herbas
Purpureae violae nobile germen habent,
Respirant pariter regali murice tinctae
Et saturat foliis hinc odor, inde decor.
Hae quod utrumque gerunt pariter habeatis utraque
Et sit mercis odor flore perenne decus.
(Nisard, Poésies de Fortunat, Lib. 8, vi. Paris, 1887.)
- [13] Gregorius Turon, De Gloria Confessorum, cap. 106.
- [14] Moines d'Occident. Tom. V., cap. 4. Paris, 1867.
- [15] Bede, Hist. Eccles., Lib. III., cap. 8. Ed. C. Plummer. Oxford, 1896.
- [16] This applies to the Germanic peoples generally.
- [17] Line 1942. Ed. F. Holthausen. Heidelberg, 1906.
- [18] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, under 672. Ed. C. Plummer. 1892.
- [19] Moines d'Occident. Tom. 5, page 241. Paris, 1860.
- [20] Haddan and Stubbs, Councils, iii., 238. Abbesses Mildrith, Aetheldrith, Aette, Wilnoth, Hereswyth, sign the privilege granted to the churches and monasteries of Kent, by King Wihtried, 696/716.
- [21] Bede, Hist. Eccles., Lib. IV., cap. 23. (Cp. II. 14.) Ed. C. Plummer. Oxford, 1896.
- [22] Lib. IV., cap. 24. Ed. C. Plummer. Oxford, 1896.
- [23] Bede, Hist. Eccles., Lib. IV., cap. 25.
- [24] Bede, Vita S. Cuthberhti, cap. 23. Ed. C. Plummer. Oxford, 1896.
- [25] Bede, Hist. Eccles., Lib. IV., cap. 25. Ed. C. Plummer. Oxford, 1896.
- [26] Bede, Hist. Eccles., Lib. IV., cap. 19. Ed. C. Plummer. Oxford, 1896.

- [27] Haddan and Stubbs, Councils, iii., 238.
- [28] S. Aldhelmi opera. Migne, Pat. Lat. Tom. 89, col. 289.
- [29] S. Aldhelmi opera. Migne, Pat. Lat. Tom. 89, cols. 103-162.
- [30] Under 718.
- [31] By Rudolf of Fulda, a monk. He wrote about 836. A. SS. Boll., Sept. 28.
- [32] Moines d'Occident. Tom. 5, page 320. Paris, 1860.

Transcriber's Note: Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note. Punctuation has been normalised.

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