

## VI.—NORTHERN MONASTICISM.

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[Read on the 28th day of November, 1894.]

THIS paper was originally written some twelve months ago for the purpose of being read before the South Shields Clerical Society, and at the time I certainly had no idea that it would go further. I therefore feel somewhat diffident at the prospect of reading it before the members of a society such as the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries, and I trust that all shortcomings may be treated leniently.

I purpose to deal with some phases of monasticism more especially as it manifested itself in the work and results of the Celtic mission, to give some reason for its sudden decay, and to touch upon the somewhat extraordinary fact that since the building of the abbey at Durham there has practically arisen within the present boundaries of the county no independent monastic foundation of any account.

Monasticism, both in the early British church, and in the Celtic church, appears to have been introduced into these islands through the influence of the church in Gaul. In the northern parts of the island, with which we are more especially interested, there appears to be some firm ground for us to stand upon, when we come to the end of the fourth century. At this period community life (and throughout this paper the term monasticism is used in this general sense) appeared in the south-west of Scotland. It owed its origin to S. Ninian, who was born in Galloway about the year 360 A.D. His parents appear to have been Christians, and he was baptized in infancy, a fact which proves that the Christian faith had gained a fairly good hold about this time. In early youth he went to Rome, and about 386 A.D. returned as a bishop to his own people, having been consecrated to that office by pope Siricius. On his way home he visited S. Martin of Tours, who was the founder of monasticism in Gaul, and from him he gained his knowledge of community life. It was upon the type there presented to him that S. Ninian founded his own religious order upon his return to Scotland. He built at

Whithorn in Galloway (by the aid of French masons) a stone church, long known as 'Candida Casa,' which rapidly became the centre of a most important monastic community. It was a missionary and educational centre, in which the younger laity, together with the candidates for Holy Orders, were trained and instructed. Its influence was felt far beyond its immediate neighbourhood, and communication was established between Whithorn and Ulster, resulting in the founding of other communities in the sister isle. The main characteristic which distinguished the monasteries of the early period, and which separates them somewhat from the monasticism of a later age, was this, it was mainly practical and not contemplative. They were mission centres where the brethren lived in community life under the rule of the bishop; from these they went forth to their work and to them they returned. They were also educational centres both for clergy and laity. S. Ninian died *circa* 430 A.D.

The next point where we find ourselves able to speak with some amount of historical evidence is with regard to the mission of S. Patrick. It is possible that in him we find one of the results of the work of the mission founded by S. Ninian, though at some little distance. He is said to have been born at Dumbarton, and to have been carried off to Ireland when about 16; to have returned again to Scotland, where he was ordained priest, and then again to have journeyed back again. He was consecrated bishop when about 45, and died about 493 A.D.

S. Patrick's followers were what are known as the 'First Order of Irish Saints,' and his form of community life had special features which distinguished it both from that which preceded it and that which followed.

The proportion of bishops to presbyters was abnormally large. S. Patrick established a kind of tribal episcopacy, and every tribe, clan, and small chieftain had a special bishop. Some of the episcopate lived as recluses, some lived together in monasteries, some established schools. So great was the number of bishops in Ireland, even at a later date, that a stream of them was continually arriving in the dioceses of territorial bishops, who, at least in England, passed canons against them and the 'Orders' which they conferred. S. Patrick also founded episcopal communities, with groups of seven

bishops in each community, generally members of the same family, or of the same tribe. He died about 493 A.D.

The successor to the church of S. Patrick, at a distance of half a century, was the church of S. Columba, and with it came a change in monastic life. The number of bishops has lessened, the number of presbyters has increased. The bishops in many cases are subject to the abbots in the matter of jurisdiction, though they still rank as a superior spiritual order, with special powers. In the Columban monasteries all offshoots remain under the control of the parent foundation and under the jurisdiction of its abbot. (The abbots of Lindisfarne were appointed for some thirty years from Iona.) The election of the abbot in the head monastery followed to some extent an hereditary principle, inasmuch as it remained always in the family of the founder, as in the case of Iona, where the first nine abbots, as far as and including Adamnan, were blood relations of S. Columba.

The Columban church was entirely monastic, though there is no trace of any definite rule under which the monks lived, such as that which distinguished the Benedictine and other orders of later times, who succeeded to their place and power. Discipline remained entirely with the abbot, and the keeping of fasts and festivals was ordered by him. It is probable that the canonical hours were kept by the monks, but the personal discipline seems not to have been modelled upon any fixed rule.

This was the type of community life introduced into Iona by S. Columba, and into Lindisfarne by Aidan. It is the type of Christianity exhibited by men who are known as the 'Second Order of Irish Saints,' and it retained its place in Northumbria and other parts, until the founding of Wearmouth and Jarrow by Benedict Biscop with the Benedictine rule. In a debased form it was the rule of the community which first founded the abbey of Durham in 995, and was finally dispossessed by the Benedictines under the Norman bishop Carilef about 1083 A.D.

It is this Celtic mission under Aidan and his successors to which we of the north owe our own Christianity. It was in the summer of 635 A.D., that bishop Aidan at the invitation of the king (Oswald) came to Northumbria and settled at Lindisfarne. His home was within the monastery, and although he was bishop, and by far the

most important man of the community, yet there was a governing abbot within the monastery after the custom of the Columban foundations.

The work of this mission is one of the most brilliant in the annals of the Christian church. It possessed a vigorous life, and its development was simply marvellous in its rapidity and extent. Within fifty years foundations like Lindisfarne, Melrose, Hexham, Coldingham, Tynemouth, Whitby, Jarrow, Wearmouth, Hartlepool, Ripon, Lastingham, and others sprang into full life, and were important ecclesiastical centres. But if the life was vigorous it was of short duration, and after this period, with the exception of one very great life, St. Cuthbert's, there seems to have been a gradual falling away, until the great invasion of the Danes in the eighth and ninth centuries.

MONASTERIES.—Some idea of the rapid growth of Christianity may be obtained from a glance at the dates of the following foundations :—

Lindisfarne (635)	} between 635-652.
Melrose	
Gateshead (641)	
Hartlepool (641)	
Coldingham	
Whitby.	
Wearmouth, 673.	
Jarrow, 682.	
Hexham, 674.	

There are two points in connection with Celtic monasticism which are worthy of note.

1. It has been a question with some people as to whether the rule observed by the Columban monks was in any way connected with the 'Culdee' rule, whether they were in fact Culdee monks.

There does not seem to be any justification for assuming this, the Culdees being, I believe, the 'Third Order of Irish Saints.' They do not seem to have had any existence before the eighth century, and to have arisen as a protest against the decaying discipline of the Columban monks. The name seems to be of Irish origin *Ceile Dé*, afterwards 'Colidei,' meaning 'Servants of God.' They were ascetics and anchorites, living at first in separate cells, but in one community.

The strictness of their rule gradually relaxed, and in two or three centuries they became a secularised ecclesiastical caste. Marriage obtained a footing among them, and their offices became hereditary. They were eventually displaced by the regular bodies of canons and monks, Augustinian and Benedictine. They left no literature and were never missionary or aggressive in their work.

2. The other point of interest in the Columban church is the establishment of double monasteries, institutions which contained both monks and nuns in separate wings of the same building, living under the same rule and governed by one head—an abbess. The origin of these foundations is doubtful. Something of the kind existed in early days among the Egyptian recluses, but here the Nile separated the two bodies, as the Tyne is said to have done, the monks and nuns living under the same head at Tynemouth and South Shields.<sup>1</sup> They were almost characteristic of Celtic missions. They existed in Gaul, Belgium, and Germany, and in the seventh century there was one in Rome itself, but they were more popular in Ireland than elsewhere, and sprang up spontaneously with the first beginnings of Christianity. S. Patrick framed certain rules for the avoidance of scandal. In his days these institutions were ruled by an abbot or a bishop, but the Columban clergy declined the responsibility, and in all their ecclesiastical colonies these communities were placed under the rule of an abbess. They were brought into Britain by Saxon princesses from Gaul, whither they had been sent to be trained for the cloister. Whitby, Ely, Wimborne, and Coldingham, are prominent examples, and Montalembert states<sup>1</sup> that there was a double monastery at Tynemouth and Shields (ruled over by the abbess Verca). Archbishop Theodore forbade these foundations, but the order was not carried out, and they flourished until the Danish invasion of the ninth century, after which there is no trace of them, there being no provision made for them in the efforts of king Alfred and of Dunstan to revive the monastic life.

It is satisfactory to find that Coldingham is the only community of this kind which is open to a charge of depraved life. In some of them the chronicles relate that a liking for dress developed among the nuns, and that they wore hoods and cuffs trimmed with silk, and arranged their veils so as to form an ornament.

<sup>1</sup> Montalembert, vol. iv. p. 413 note.

We come now to the sudden collapse of the enormous work done by the Celtic mission. It was founded by Aidan in 635 A.D., and in 687 A.D. St. Cuthbert died, and with him the distinctive glory of the work. I cannot but think that the decision of the Council of Whitby, with its overthrow of purely Celtic customs, struck a severe blow at the spirit of the Celtic mission. Its bishop (Colman) as we know, refused to assent to the decision, and retired with some thirty of his monks to Iona. With the exception of the one life, the old enthusiasm seems to have gone with them, and the after record can tell us of nothing so great as the work of the first forty years. Simeon indeed states that the misgovernment and the dissension in the north was the cause of the decline of the Northumbrian church, and doubtless this is very largely true ; but I cannot help thinking that the previous reason was the first and possibly the severest blow. Be that as it may, at the end of the eighth century the Danes made their first descent upon the north, and their coming meant almost total destruction not only to the civil government, but also to the religious life of the whole of England.

Nearly every great monastery which had been built through the exertions of the Scottish missionaries was pillaged and destroyed ; the discipline of the religious life was neglected, the monks became a secularised body, and Christianity was almost swept from the land. Monasticism fell to such a low ebb that when king Alfred, after the troubles with the Danes were over, founded a monastery in Mercia, he was unable to find any one who would consent to occupy it, so weak had the religious feeling of the country become. With the nunneries he had more success. In the north, however, the Danish invasion was the death blow of monasticism. The congregation of S. Cuthbert held together indeed for two hundred years (including the period at Chester-le-Street), retaining the body of the saint with them, but with relaxed discipline and morals ; and bishop Aldhune who founded the see of Durham was a married man, and his clergy, to all intents and purposes, secular priests. Simeon of Durham states that so terrible and devastating were the effects of the Danish invasion that for two hundred years before bishop Aldhune settled in Durham no church in Northumbria was either built or restored, but with regard to Jarrow, at least, this seems not to be quite accurate. Still, so terrible was the

onslaught of the Danes, that their invasion was the deathblow to monasticism in its ancient homes of the north. In this invasion, Lindisfarne, Coldingham, Melrose, Tynemouth, Hexham, Jarrow, Wearmouth, Hartlepool, and Whitby fell. Jarrow was probably not a ruin for any great period of time. It was attacked in 794 and again in 866; it was in existence as a religious house in 1020, and in 1075 bishop Walcher gave it to some Benedictine monks who eight years afterwards were removed to Durham by Carilef. After this it became a cell to or dependent house on the great abbey at Durham, and so continued until the dissolution. Wearmouth was destroyed with Jarrow in 866, was rebuilt in 1075, and followed the fortunes of Jarrow, its monks being removed to Durham at the same time, and itself being until the dissolution a dependent house. These two, though founded by a Northumbrian member of the Celtic church, Benedict Biscop, were the first examples in the north of monks under the Benedictine rule.

#### NORMAN BISHOPS.

With the Norman bishop Carilef, the builder of the present cathedral, who came to Durham in 1083, a new era in monasticism began, but it had special features, or, perhaps it ought to be said, *one* special feature, viz., that so far at least as the present county is concerned, it was confined almost entirely to one centre, Durham, which rose to a position of the very greatest importance. But it is a very striking thing that from the year 995, in which the first church of Durham was commenced, there is no single instance (with two very minor exceptions) of the founding of any monastic institution within the county. The exceptions are the abbey at Finchale, which was really an extension of Durham, and even so was founded as a compromise, and a small Benedictine nunnery founded by Emma de Teisa at Neasham, near Darlington, at the end of the twelfth century. There is a seal and a deed of incorporation existing of the abbey of Baxtenford, near Neville's Cross, but it appears doubtful if the buildings were ever commenced. I shall have occasion to give the reason later. I have not seen any explanation of this sudden cessation, or perhaps centralisation, with regard to monastic life, but I venture to give the following reasons as possible explanations:—

1. The unique fame of S. Cuthbert.
2. The existence of the palatinate, and the enormous possessions of the bishopric.
3. A development of religious zeal, not very great, in other directions.
4. The power and jealousy of the Benedictine foundation at Durham.
5. The incursions of the Scots.

1. The great sanctity attaching to the name of S. Cuthbert drew to the congregation of the saint, and to the see connected with his name, large benefactions. Bishopwearmouth, Westoe, Silksworth, Ryhope, and Seaton were given, at one time, to the see by king Athelstan when at Chester-le-Street. Styr gave Darlington, Coniscliffe, Aycliffe, etc., and Canute gave the lands between Staindrop and Evenwood on the occasion of the building of the abbey at Durham, and many large and valuable gifts came into the possession of the see. The natural result of this was that benefactions which might have been used for founding separate communities went to swell the power and influence of the bishopric and the abbey.

2. In close connection with this point, the extreme wealth of the bishopric must be considered. The possession of so much land by the occupants of the see left less room for private benevolence, and whether the bishops, or such of them as gave benefactions, preferred to exercise their charity in other directions, to be mentioned hereafter ; whether they objected to found institutions which, to some extent, might become independent, and sources of considerable trouble to themselves ; whether they objected to increase the power of the abbey by founding branch establishments of the same order, or, on the other hand, were unwilling to rouse its enmity by introducing 'Orders' other than the Benedictine ; whether any or all of these reasons influenced their conduct, one thing is certain, that possessing enormous power they did not exercise it in the direction of developing monasticism.

3. Though there were no monastic institutions founded after the establishment of the see at Durham (with the exception mentioned), and though that period includes that in which the valleys of Yorkshire and the Lowlands of Scotland were filled with them, yet there is



a not unimportant development in other directions which may partly account for it, viz., the foundation of the collegiate churches and hospitals of the county. Bishop Auckland, Darlington, Norton, and Eekington, all became collegiate centres in 1083 under bishop Carilef and were instituted by him to provide maintenance for the secularised monks whom he ejected from the abbey at Durham. Chester-le-Street and Lanchester became collegiate churches under bishop Bek in 1286 and 1283 respectively, and Barnard Castle and Staindrop, the one founded by Guy Baliol in the fourteenth century, and the other by the Nevilles in the fifteenth (1408) complete the list. All these were dissolved by Henry VIII. There were also three hospitals, Kepier, Sherburn, and Greatham, the last two still existing, the other dissolved at the dissolution. They were built respectively by bishops Flambard, in 1112, Pudsey in 1181, and Robert de Stichel in 1272. This may account in some part for a lack of monastic foundations.

4. But the power and jealousy of the abbey at Durham was a much more serious impediment in the way. It possessed enormous property and wielded immense power. Up to the time of bishop Carilef the congregation of S. Cuthbert had been ruled by the bishop, and there was one common estate. Bishop Carilef altered this. He endowed the abbey with a separate estate out of the lands of the congregation, reserving episcopal rights to himself, and henceforth the monastery assumed a position of unique importance. That they guarded this position and their rights with extreme care, and that their tenacity resulted in keeping out other religious orders, is shown by the attempt to found an Augustinian abbey at Baxtenford, on the Browney at Durham, near Neville's Cross. Henry de Pudsey, son of the bishop, had brought from Guisborough some canons of this order, and placed them on his own estate at Haswell. Wishing to remove them he transferred them to an estate at the place above mentioned, the transfer being confirmed by the bishop. But the Benedictines of Durham objected, and after the bishop's death they succeeded in making his son express penitence for his presumption, and ask forgiveness of the prior and convent for bringing the alien 'Order' so near. Further, the following terms were arranged. The chapter presented Henry de Pudsey with the priory at Finchale, then merely an oratory with lodgings for pilgrims. He on his part

endowed Finchale with all the lands and possessions he had given to Baxtenford and presented the whole back again to the abbey, by which means the Augustinians were driven out of the county. They obtained some compensation in lands near Guisborough. With the wealth, power, and possessions of the abbey at Durham, it proved almost impossible for a rival order to find a resting place in the county, and one cannot suppose that it would have been allowed within the limits of the estates over which they ruled.

5. I come now to the last of the reasons given, viz., the incursions of the Scots, and I must confess that I have not been able to look up sufficiently the history of the time to form an opinion of the extent to which this influence prevailed. I should like also to know something of the state of monasticism in Northumberland as we know it, which insomuch as it lay as a buffer between Scotland and Durham, would be a determining factor in coming to a conclusion. Still it had an influence. In 1138 the Scots visited Finchale and nearly put an end to S. Godric; in 1306 they burned Kepier hospital; in 1296 Hexham; in 1314 they plundered Bearpark, and in 1346 they burned it. They destroyed also a Tyneside residence of the abbot of Durham, and in 1313 Durham itself was burned. Religious houses received no consideration at their hands; on the contrary, the possessions of the inmates attracted them, and it doubtless rendered monasticism difficult; but I am still inclined to think that the greatness of S. Cuthbert's name, the existence of the Palatinate, the wealth of the see, and the power and jealousy of the abbey at Durham, were the great reasons which rendered the county so comparatively destitute of religious foundations. I have, however, as I stated, been unable to find the point discussed, and as I have been forced to alter my conclusions on several matters as information came to hand, so, I doubt not that further knowledge may modify or enlarge the opinions here expressed.