On the chancel floor is a large ledger stone with the following inscription, somewhat difficult to translate, kindly copied out for me by the Vicar, the Rev. A. Hawkins :—

HENRICUS BECK
ECCLESIÆ HUIUS XXIV PLUS MINUS AN. RECTOR
EX CUJUS ANNUO MENSURÆ MEDIOCRIS PROVENTU
MENSURAM ULTRA MEDIOCRE AUXIT PATRIMONIUM
PROVIDE ELOCATIS NUMIS EMPTISQ LATIFUNDIJS.
QUORUM ALTERA SEMPER CÆLEBS FRATERNA
PARTE ALTERA SORORIAM DONAVIT DONUM
GRATIAM DIVINAM. PRORSUS GRATUITAM
QUAM VIVUS ALIJS PERSPICUE PRÆDICAVIT
SPERANDUM EST IPSUM SENSISSE MORIENTEM
MENS AUGUST DIE XXII ANO APART VIRGIN
MDCLXX ÆTAT LXXVIII.

The Octicentenary of Reading Abbey

The eight hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Reading Abbey is too important a landmark in history to pass unnoticed in our columns. The following article deals with a somewhat fresh aspect of the Abbey, namely, its connection with the reform of the Benedictine Order which originated at Cluny.

READING ABBEY AND CLUNY.

By JAMIESON B. HURRY, M.A., M.D.

THE year 1121 must for ever be an *annus mirabilis* in the history of Reading, for it witnessed, on June 18th, the foundation by King Henry Beauclerc of a famous Abbey which has filled an important *rôle* in the annals of England. William of Malmesbury, writing only a few years later, thus describes the historic occasion :

> 'Henry I built this monastery between the rivers Kennet and Thames, in a spot calculated for the reception of almost all who might have occasion to travel to the more populous cities of England, where he placed monks

of the Cluniac Order, who are at this day a noble pattern of holiness, and an example of unwearied and delightful hospitality.'

The association of an English monastery with Cluny confers a distinction of which any religious house may be proud. The Abbey of Cluny was founded in A.D. 910 by William I the Pious, count of Auvergne, and in the course of a few years became one of the most noted religious institutions of the Middle Ages. Its spiritual dominion extended from the British Isles to Constantinople and to Palestine, its aim being the conversion of the world to Christianity. Many of its Abbots were saintly and learned men, consulted by Popes and Kings on the questions of the day, and frequently acting as arbiters of peace or war. The brethren were renowned for their good works, their boundless hospitality, and their missionary enthusiasm.

The vast monastic basilica, only less in length by 10 feet than St. Peter's at Rome, was a masterpiece of architecture and beauty, to the building to which many Sovereigns of Europe contributed: gifts and legacies made it the most splendid reliquary in existence.[1] Cluny was also a great school of science and art, as well as the home of letters. The Library embraced works on every branch of human knowledge—literature, science and art. The catalogues of manuscripts compiled during the 12th and 13th centuries are still extant, and show that the works of more than a thousand sacred and profane writers were copied by its transcribers and sent to distant schools of learning.

Cluny was also characterised by its charitable activities, which were on a lavish scale, hospitality being extended to all, whether rich or poor. The monastic resources may be illustrated by the fact that in 1245 the Abbey simultaneously entertained Pope Innocent IV, accompanied by twelve cardinals and their suites, together with King St. Louis, his queen, his mother, his sister, his brother, the emperor of Constantinople, and other less important princes. Yet this multitude of guests caused no inconvenience to the brethren,

[1] The Cluniac missionaries imported their architecture into every country which they reached. This is shown by the styles of remaining ecclesiastical buildings in England as well as in France, and shows the architectural skill of the monks.—*Duckett, Charters and Records of Cluni*, I, p. 12.

who occupied all their monastic buildings in their usual manner.[2] Indeed, when at its height Cluny was one of the chief centres of the Christian world. In the words of Pope Urbanus II: 'Congregatio Cluniacensis, divino charismate ceteris imbuta plenius, ut alter sol enitet in terris'—*The Congregation of Cluny, more richly endowed with divine favour than the rest, illumines the earth like a second sun.*

The prestige attaching to Cluny is largely based on the reforms it introduced into Benedictine monasteries, reforms which related partly to internal organisation, and partly to external polity. As regards the former the manual labour formerly practised by the brethren was to a great extent abandoned, while in compensation the church services were prolonged until they came to occupy nearly the whole twenty-four hours. The daily psalmody included over a hundred psalms; emphasis was also laid on elaborate ritual and liturgical splendour.

As regards its external policy Cluny introduced a strongly centralised government whereby the daughter houses of the Order came more or less under the direct control of the Abbot of Cluny. The heads of the off-shoots (generally termed priors, not abbots) were his nominees; even the numerous monks had to pass some of the early years of their monastic life at the mother Abbey. These reforms were in the first place adopted by the Benedictine convents of France. Ere long, however, the contagious enthusiasm for the new form of control overflowed into the surrounding countries. Even St. Benedict's own monasteries at Subiaco and Monte Cassino came under the spell, while affiliated houses actually sprang up in the Holy Land. By the middle of the twelfth century Cluny had grown to be head of a vast Order embracing 314 monasteries.

Our Norman Kings were strongly attracted by the lofty ideals which animated the great Cluniac Congregation. Thus only a few years after the battle of Hastings William the Conqueror applied to Cluny for assistance in raising the moral and religious tone of the English monasteries and (*ca.* 1072) in response received from its Abbot St. Hugh, as *envoy*, one of the brethren named Warmond, who afterwards became

[2] *Millénaire de Cluny*, I, p. 16.

Archbishop of Vienna. A story has come down to us which throws an interesting light on the reverence felt by the Conqueror towards Cluny.

On his arrival Warmond informed the King that St. Hugh had sent him his blessing, whereupon the English King uncovered himself and bowed almost to the ground in token of his profound respect. When the astounded courtiers not unnaturally enquired why his majesty showed such condescension to a mere monk, the King replied: 'I value the blessing I have received more than even the conquest of England. Everything I possess must one day be left behind; but the blessing of the holy community of Cluny will last throughout eternity.

As a token of his gratitude the King sent to St. Hugh the present of a cope embroidered with gold and silver thread, enriched with pearls and precious stones, and lined at the bottom with little golden bells. The Queen added the further gift of a chasuble, made of such a heavy material that it could not be folded.[3]

William Rufus also patronised the Cluniac foundations in England, and more especially the monastery of St. Pancras at Lewes, the earliest of the English Cluniac settlements.

His successor, Henry I, however, was a still more liberal benefactor. He contributed generously to the great basilica in course of erection at Cluny, and granted his protection to the priory of St. Pancras already referred to. But his principal benefaction was the Abbey at Reading which he built at his own cost, and in which he placed monks of the Cluniac Order.

The houses affiliated to Cluny at the time of Henry I may be arranged in three groups, according to the closeness of the bonds connecting them with the mother Abbey.[4]

Group I included a number of priories, which were in direct dependence on the mother house; they were looked upon as her direct offspring or children. When only containing a few monks they were known as cells or 'obediences.' Some of these priories had been actually founded by Cluny.

At other times already existing religious houses were handed over to Cluny. Indeed some houses that had previously

[3] J. H. Pignot, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Cluny*, II, p. 298.
[4] J. H. Pignot, l.c. II, pp. 313-15.

enjoyed the rank of abbey consented to be reduced to priories in return for the privilege of joining the famous community. In these cases the prior of the daughter house was appointed by the Abbot of Cluny, who retained all spiritual and temporal authority.

Group II included those Abbeys which received spiritual directions from the mother house, while retaining control of their temporal affairs. They were termed 'subordinate houses' (maisons assujetties ou ordonnées) and were subject to regular inspection. Sometimes the Abbot of Cluny visited such houses in person, and endeavoured to stimulate them to lofty standards of life and work. On other occasions he might send a deputy who was known as co-Abbot or pro-Abbot. But such an arrangement was only a temporary one, and these monasteries retained the right of electing their own head whenever a vacancy occurred. Moreover they adhered to the title of Abbey as evidence that they controlled their own temporal affairs. Many of them indeed eventually became entirely independent.

Group III included a certain number of Abbeys which were affiliated to Cluny by the voluntary adoption of its ordinances; they were under no obligation to take part in the Chapters-General of the Order. From time to time such monasteries sent some of their members to gain fresh spiritual inspiration and to consult the Abbot of Cluny; but here the connection ended. Each Abbey retained complete autonomy and the management of all its affairs, both spiritual and temporal; they were not subject to visitation. To this group belonged Hirsauge, in the Black Forest, La Cava, in Italy, Sahagun, in Spain, Saint Epvroul, in Normandy, and Reading in England.

Bearing on this point is an interesting letter sent to the writer by Monsieur Léopold Delisle, who says:

> 'Il est constant que des moines de Cluni furent appelés par le roi Henry I pour introduire à Reading les institutions de Cluni, qui passaient alors pour le type le plus parfait des pratiques de la vie monastique d'après la règle de Saint Benoit. Mais il ne s'ensuit pas que l'abbaye anglaise ait été mise sous la jurisdiction de Cluni. Je ne vois par que les visiteurs de Cluni aient jamais mis le pied à Reading, ni que les abbés de Reading aient été convoqués aux chapitres généraux.'

These three Groups, consisting of priories, of subordinate and of affiliated Abbeys constituted what is known as the Congregation or Order of Cluny.[5]

It appears therefore that Henry Beauclerc did not wish his great foundation to be controlled by Cluny; in fact it was probably too big and influential for any subordinate position. This is clear from the words of the Foundation Charter: 'At the death of the Abbot of Reading all the possessions of the monastery, wheresoever situated, shall remain free and entire, with all rights and customs, in the hands, and at the disposal, of the prior and monks of the chapter of Reading.' The founder did however desire that the lofty ideals of the famous Burgundian house should inspire the monastic community at Reading.

Nor did the autonomy of the Abbey detract from its prestige among Cluniac foundations, for in Pignot's words:

> 'Toutes les misères trouvèrent un soulagement dans cette riche et puissante maison qui devint le type des abbayes clusiennes en Angleterre. Henri I y prit sa sépulture. Une ville considérable se forma autour; . . . . et, peu à peu, la cité créée par les moines devint une des plus populeuses et des plus actives du royaume.'[6]

Moreover Cluny played a great part both in the erection and in the early history of Reading Abbey. In the first place Pontius, the Abbot of Cluny, lent to Henry Beauclerc the services of Peter, his prior, with seven brethren, who initiated the building operations, being assisted by some monks from St. Pancras, at Lewes. Later on, when building operations had advanced sufficiently for the organisation of the monastery, this was entrusted to Hugh de Boves, a man *full of faith and good works,* who had been educated at Cluny and had won golden opinions from his superiors.[7] He was one of the learned theologians of the day, and had recently been Prior of St. Pancras, at Lewes. On April 15th, 1123, he was appointed first Abbot of Reading, Prior Peter resigning his charge and returning home.

[5] Some authorities speak of the Cluniac Order as only including the Groups I and II mentioned above. *Cf. Millénaire de Cluny,* I, p. 331.

[6] Pignot, l.c. III, p. 36.

[7] For further particulars *cf.* Hébert, *Revue des Questions historiques,* 1898, Oct.; *The First and Last Abbots of Reading,* by J.B.H., p. 9.

It is interesting to note that the head of St. Pancras, one of the closely attached Cluniac houses in England, was willing to be transferred to another house beyond the direct control of Cluny, and where only the Cluniac customs were observed. Doubtless the influence of the royal founder and the prestige of the new monastery secured the transference.

When Abbot Hugh was promoted to the Archbishopric of Rouen, he was succeeded by Aucherius, who had also been prior of St. Pancras.

Another interesting link between the two great Abbeys was forged when in 1199 Hugh II, the eighth Abbot of Reading, who also had received his religious education at Cluny, was appointed Abbot of Cluny, where he became known as Hugh V or Hugh d'Anjou. This appointment reflected singular honour on Reading and proved highly popular at Cluny, where the new Abbot became famous for his piety, his learning and his graciousness to all classes with whom he came into contact.[8] Hugh d'Anjou made his tenure of office memorable by promulgating a revised set of Statutes which are still extant, and which seek to strengthen monastic life against the temptations of wealth, evil habits and subservience to temporal authorities.

During its later history Reading ceased to be regarded as Cluniac, and is generally classed among the Benedictine houses, its Abbot taking part in the triennial Benedictine Chapters, which were enjoined by the fourth General Council of Lateran in 1215. Indeed the fifth of these Chapters appears to have been held at Reading in 1228, under the presidency of the Abbots of Westminster and Peterborough. For nearly a century longer, however, the designation Cluniac is still occasionally applied, and as late as 1309 the Pope addresses a letter to 'the Abbot and convent of the Cluniac monastery of Reading.'

It must for ever remain a distinction of the monastery of Reading that its brethren had as their ideal the high standard of life and work that characterised the Cluniacs, and further that it had the honour of supplying one of the learned and saintly Abbots who reigned at Cluny.

[8] *Cf.* 'Hugh II, Eighth Abbot of Reading,' by J.B.H., *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal*, Jan., 1917.