

F.A. Gasquet. English Monastic Life. Methuen & Co. London, 1904.

Public Domain text transcribed and prepared "as is" for HTML and PDF by Richenda Fairhurst, historyfish.net. July 2007. No commercial permissions granted. *Text may contain errors.* (Report errors to oscar@historyfish.net)

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OBEDIENTIARIES (*continued*)

#### 7. THE INFIRMARIAN AND HIS WORK

The official appointed to have the care of the infirm and sick should have the virtue of patience in a pre-eminent degree. "He must be gentle," says one Custumal, "and good-tempered, kind, compassionate to the sick, and willing as far as possible to gratify their needs with affectionate sympathy." When one of the brethren was seized with any sickness and came to the infirmary, it was the infirmarian's first duty to bring thither the sick man's plate, his spoon and his bed, and to inform the cellarer and kitchenier, so that the sick man's portion might be assigned to him in the infirmary refectory.

Whenever there were sick under his charge the infirmarian was to be excused, as far as was necessary, from regular duties. He said Mass for the sick, if he were a priest, or got some priest to do so, if he were not. If the sick were able to recite their Office, he said it with them, provided lights, if necessary, and procured the required books from the church. Whatever volumes they needed for reading he borrowed from the aumbry in the cloister ; but he was warned always to take them back again before the cantor locked up the cupboard for the

---85---

night. If there were more than one monk sick at the same time and they could help themselves, the infirmarian was then to go to the regular meals in the refectory ; but he was to return to his charges as soon as possible and see that they had been properly served. He always slept in the infirmary, even when there were no sick actually there, and this because he was always to be ready for any emergency. Out of the revenue assigned to his office he had to find whatever might be necessary in the way of medicine and comforts for the sick. He was charged to keep the rooms in the infirmary clean, the floors sparsely covered with fresh rushes, and to have a fire always burning in the common-room where it was needed. According to one set of English directions, the infirmarian was advised always to keep in his cupboard a good supply of ginger, cinnamon, peony, etc., so as to be able at once to minister some soothing mixture or cordial when it was required, and to remember how much always depended in sickness on some such slight act of thoughtful sympathy and kindness.

The medieval rules of the infirmary will probably strike us, with our modern notions, as being strangely strict upon the sick. The law of silence, for instance, was hardly relaxed at all in the infirmary ; the sick man could indeed talk about himself and his ailment and necessities to the infirmarian at any time, and the latter could give him every consolation and advice ; but there was apparently no permission for general conversation even among the sick, except at the regular times for recreation ; even at meal times the infirm ate in silence and followed, as far as might be, the law of the convent refectory.

---86---

**F**ratr Johs de Walingford. q̄nq. Infirmari m̄t.



BROTHER JOHN OF WALINGFORD  
THE INFIRMARIAN OF ST. ALBAN'S

Illustration: Brother John of Walingford, the infirmarian of St. Alban's

---87---

The brethren who were unwell were not all received in the infirmary of treatment. There were some monks sick, as one set of regulations points out, who were ailing merely from the effect of the every monotony and the necessarily irksome character of the life in the cloister ; from the continued strain of silence ; from the sheer fatigue of choral duties, or from sleeplessness and such like causes. These did not need any special treatment under the infirmarian's care ; they required rest, not medicine ; and the best cure for them was gentle exercise in the open air, in the garden or elsewhere, with temporary freedom from the strain of their daily service. Those who had grown old in their monastic service were to find a place of rest in the infirmary, where they were to be specially honoured by all. They too, however, had to keep the Rule as far as they were able without difficulty, and were to remember, as on English Customal reminds them, that not even the pope could grant them a dispensation contrary to their vows." So they had to keep silence for instance, if possible, and especially the great night silence after Compline.

The curious practice of periodical blood-letting, regarded according to medieval medical knowledge as so salutary, formed part of the ordinary infirmarian's work. The operation was performed, or might be performed, on all, four times a year, if possible in February, April, September, and October. It was not to take place in the time of harvest, in Advent or Lent, or on the three days following the feast of Christmas, Easter, or Pentecost. The community were operated upon in batches of from two to six at a time, and the special day was arranged for them by the superior in Chapter, who would

---88---

announce at the proper time that "those who sat at this or that table were to be blooded." In settling the turns, consideration had, of course, to be paid to the needs of the community. The weekly server, for example, and the reader, and the hebdomadarian of the community Mass were not to be operated upon during the period of their service ; and when a feast day was to be kept within four days of the blood-letting, only those were to be practiced on who could be spared from the singing and serving at the necessary ecclesiastical functions of the feast.

From first to last, the operation of blood-letting occupied four days, and the process was simple. At the time appointed, the infirmarian had a fire lighted in the calefactory, if it were needed, and thither, between Tierce and Sext, if the day were not a fast, or between Sext and None if it were, the operator and his victims repaired. If the latter desired to fortify themselves against the lancet, they might proceed beforehand to the refectory and take something to eat and drink. During the time of the healing, after the styptic had been applied and the bandages fastened, the discipline of the cloister was somewhat mitigated. The patient, for instance, could always spend the hours of work and reading in repose, either lying on his bed or sitting in the chapter-room or cloister, as he felt disposed. Till his return to full choir work, he was not to be bound to any duty. If he were an obediitary or official, he was to get someone to see to his necessary duties for him during the time of his convalescence, If he liked to go to the Hours in choir,

he was to sit ; he was never to bend down or do penance of any kind, for fear of displacing the bandages, and he was to go out of the church before the others, for

---89---

fear of having his arm rubbed if he were to walk in the ranks. During the three days of his convalescence he said his Compline at night in the chapter-room or elsewhere, and then went straight to bed before the community. Though he had still to rise for Matins with the others, after a brief visit to the church he was allowed to betake himself to the infirmary and there to say a much shortened form of the night Office with the infirmarian and others. When this was done he was to return at once to bed. In the refectory the monk who had been "blooded" received the same food as the rest, with the addition of a half-pound of white bread and an extra portion, if possible, of eggs. On the second and third days this was increased in amount, and other strengthening food was given to him. In some places these meals were served in the infirmary after the blood-letting ; and it was directed that the infirmary servant should on the first day after the bleeding get ready for the patients sage and parsley, washed in salt and water, and a dish of soft eggs. Those who found it necessary to be cupped or scarified more frequently, adds one set of regulations, had to get leave, but were not to expect to stay away from regular duties on that account.

## 8. ALMONER

The conventual almoner was not necessarily a priest ; and although, as his name imports, his chief duty was to distribute the alms of the monastery to the poor, there were generally many other functions in behalf of the brethren, which he had to discharge.

"Every almoner must have his heart aglow with charity," says one writer. "his pity would know no bounds, and he

---90---

should possess the love of the others in a most marked degree ; he must show himself as the helper of orphans, the father of the needy, and as one who is ever ready to cheer the lot of the poor, and help them to bear their hard life."

In order to distribute the alms of the house the almoner might be absent from the morning Office, and although he should be discreet and careful in his charities, not wasting the substance of the monastery, he should at the same time be kind, gentle, and compassionate. He would often visit the aged poor and those who are blind or bedridden. If amongst his numerous clients for assistance he ever found some who, having been rich, had been brought to poverty, and were perchance ashamed to sit in the almonry with the other poor, he should respect their feelings, and should try and assist them privately. he should submit without manifesting any sign of impatience to the loud-voiced importunity of beggars, and

must on no account abuse or upbraid them, “remembering always that they are made to the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ.”

The general measures for the relief of poverty were in the hands of the almoner ; but he is told that should he find that his charity to any individual was likely to be continuous, he must consult the superior ; and in like manner, when anyone has been a pensioner of the house, the almoner must not stop the usual relief without permission. Whilst engaged with Christ’s poor in the almonry, in ministering to the wants of the body, he should never forget those of the soul, and should, as a priest, when opportunity served, speak to them about spiritual matters, of the need of Confession and the like. He had charge of all the old clothes of the religious, and

---91---

could distribute them as he thought fit, and before Christmas time he was enjoined not to omit to lay in a store of stockings, etc., so as to be able to give them as little presents to widows, orphans, and poor clerks.

To the office of almoner belonged the remnants of the meals in the refectory, the abbot’s apartments, the guest-house and the infirmary. At the close of every meal one of the weekly servers took round a basket to collect the portions of bread, etc., which the monks had not consumed, and after the dinner the almoner could himself claim, as left for him, anything that was not guarded by being covered with a napkin. In many places, on the death of a monk, it was the almoner’s duty to find the community an extra portion for the labour involved in the long Office for the dead, and to remind them to pray for the soul of the deceased. In some monasteries, on the other hand, the almoner daily received a loaf and one whole dish of food that the poor person who received it might pray for the founder of the monastery. In most houses, too, upon the death of any member of the establishment, a cross was put in the refectory upon the table in front of the place where the dead monk had been accustomed to sit, and for thirty days the full meal of a religious was served and given to the poor, that they might pray for the departed brother.

The almoner also superintended the daily maundy, or washing the feet of the poor selected for that purpose. At Abingdon, for example, every morning, after the Gospel of the morning Mass, the almoner went to the door of the abbey, and from the number of those waiting for an alms he chose three, who subsequently had their feet washed by the abbot, according to the approved

---92---

custom. After this maundy they were fed and sent away with a small present of money. On the great maundy, on the Thursday before Easter, it was the almoner’s duty to select the deserving poor to be entertained—sometimes they were to be equal in number to the number of the community—and after they had had their meal, the almoner furnished each religious with a penny to bestow upon the poor man he had served.

As an ordinary part of his office the almoner had also a good deal to do with any monastic school, other than the claustral school for young religious, which was connected with a monastery. There, young clerks were to have free quarters in the almonry, and the almoner was frequently to see them set to argue one against the other, so sharpen their wits. He was to keep them strictly, or, as it was called in those days of belief in corporal punishment, "well under the rod," and he had to find, out of the revenues of his office, all "discipline rods" both for the boys and for use in the monastic Chapter. In feast days, when there were no regular lessons, these young clerics were to be set to learn the Matins of the office of the Blessed Virgin ; or to practice writing upon scraps of parchment. If they did not learn, and especially if they would not, the almoner was to get rid of them, and fill their places with those who would.

As before noted, to the almoner belonged, at least partially, the duty of attending to the mortuary-rolls or notices of deaths. That is to say, he had to supervise the "breviators," or letter-carriers, who were sent to announce the death of the brethren, or who came with such rolls. He received the rolls and gave them into the hands of the cantor to copy and to notify to the com-

---93---

munity. If it were the mortuary-roll of a prelate, and especially if it announced the death of the head of any associated monastery, the superior was to be informed at once, in case he should desire to add to the roll something special about the dead ; that is, more than the mere name of the place, which was simply meant to testify that the bearer of the roll was waiting to receive back his "brief," he was to be entertained liberally in the almonry. Sometimes the almoner was to get the cantor to multiply copies of the death-notice, and these he at once dispatched far and wide by the hands of such poor people as were tramping the country and called at the monastery for assistance.

Amongst the miscellaneous duties of the office of almoner, in some places that official had to see that the mats under the feet of the monks in the choir were renewed each year for the Feast of All Saints. He had also to find the rushes for the dormitory floor. From St. Dunstan's Day, May 19<sup>th</sup>, till Michaelmass the cloister was kept strewn with green rushes, which the almoner had to find, as well as all the mats used in the cloister and on the stairs, and also in some houses the bay-leavers or "the herb-benet, or common hedge avens," to scatter in the refectory and cloister at Easter. At the time of the long processions also on the Rogation days, two of the almonry servants, standing at the church door, were want to distribute boxwood walking-sticks to such of the community who through age or infirmity needed them to walk with.

The almoner, says one Customal, would remember that from his office might be derived great spiritual gain.

---94---





of people desiring to be present at church festival and other celebrations, visits of the relatives of monks, and of those who were concerned in the business transactions of a large establishment, the coming and going of guests was probably of almost daily occurrence. The official appointed to attend to the wants of all these and to entertain them on behalf of the monastery was the *hospitarius* or guest-master.

The official guest-master had the reputation of the religious house in his hands. He required tact, prudence, and discretion in a full measure. Scribbled on the margin

---95---

of a monastic chartulary as a piece of advice, good indeed for all, but most of all applicable to the official in the charge of guests, are the following lines :—

“Si sapiens fore vis, sex serva quae tibi mando  
Quid dicas, et ubi, de quo, cui, quomodo, quando.”

Which may be Englished thus:—

“If thou wouldest be wise, observe these six things I command you,  
Before speaking think *what* you say and *where* you say it ; *about* and to whom you talk, as well as *how* and *when* you are conversing.”

On the other hand, the guest-master is frequently warned that he must certainly be neither too stand-off, silent, or morose in his intercourse with strangers. And, as it is part of his duty to hold converse with guests of all sorts and condition, with men as well as women, “it becomes him,” says one Customal, “to cultivate, “ not merely a facility of expression in his conversation, but pleasing manners and a gentle refinement which comes of and manifests a good education. All his words and doings should set the monastic life before the stranger “in a creditable light,” since it becomes him to remember the proverb “Friends are multiplied by agreeable words, enemies are made by harsh ones.”

The guest-master’s first office was to see that the guest-house was always ready for the arrival of any visitor. He was to make certain that there was a supply of straw sufficient for the beds ; that the basins and jugs were clean inside and out ; that the floors were well swept and spread with rushes ; that the furniture was properly dusted, and that, in a word, the whole house was kept

---96---

free from cobwebs and from every speck of dirt. Before the coming of an expected guest the master was personally to inspect the chamber set apart for him ; to see that there was a light prepared for him should he need it; that the fire did not smoke ; and that writing materials were at hand in case they were required. Moreover, he was to ascertain that all things were ready in the common rooms for his entertainment. When it was necessary to procure something that was needful,



the master could enter the kitchen, which was, of course, otherwise out of the enclosure for the monks generally. He was to get coal and wood and straw from the cellarer ; the cups, platters, and spoons that were required from the refectorian ; and the sub-cellarer was to arrange as to the food itself. At Abingdon the guest-master had a special revenue to be spent upon what must have been a source of very considerable expense in those days, the shoeing of the horses of travellers generally who came to the abbey, and especially of those belonging to religious and to poor pilgrims. People also at various times left small bequests for this as for other monastic charities. In the same abbey, the guest-master had also a small yearly sum, charged on a house in the town, which had been left by "Thurstin the tailor," to help to entertain poor travellers, as a memorial of the day when he and his wife had been received into the fraternity of the monastery.

When word was brought to the guest-master of the arrival of a guest, he was charged forthwith to leave whatever he was about, and to go at once to receive him, as he would Christ Himself. He was to assure him—especially if he were a stranger—of the monastic hospitality, and endeavour from the first to place him at his

---97---

ease. He was to remember what he would wish to be done in his own regard under similar circumstance, and what he would desire to be done to himself he was to do all guests. "By showing this cheerful hospitality to guests," says one English Customal, "the good name of the monastery is enhanced, friendships are multiplied, enmities are lessened, God is honored, charity is increased, and a plenteous reward in heaven is secured." The whole principle of religious hospitality, as practiced in a medieval monastery, is really summed up in the words of St. Benedict's Rule : *Hospites tamquam Christius suscipiantur*—Guests are to be received as if they were Christ Himself.

Directly the guest-master had cordially received the new-comer at the monastery gate, he was to conduct him to the church. There he sprinkled him with holy water and knelt by him, whilst he offered up a short prayer of salutation to God, into whose house he was to come safely after the perils of a journey. After this the master conducted his guest to the common parlour, and here, if he were a stranger, he begged to know his name, position, and country, sending to acquaint the abbot or superior if the guest was one who, in his opinion, ought to receive attention from the head of the house. When the guest was going to stay beyond a few hours, he was taken after the first and formal reception to the guest-house, where, when he had been made comfortable, according to the Rule, the master arranged for the reading of some passages from the Scriptures or some spiritual work. If the strangers were monks of some other monastery, and the length of their visit afforded sufficient time, he showed them over the church and house, and if they had servants

---98---

and horses he sent to acquaint the cellarer, that they too might receive all needful care. If a conventual prior came on a visit he was to be given a position and portion of food, etc., similar to that of the prior of the house, and every abbot was to be treated in all things by the monks like their own abbot. For each monk-guest the master got from the sacrist four candles, and the chamberlain found the tallow for the cressets in the guest-house. It was the master's duty to see that the guests kept the rules, which were to be made known to them on their first coming. Strangers were entertained for two days and nights by the house without question. If any of them wished to speak with one of the monks, leave had to be first obtained from the superior.

When the guest desired to say the Office, books and a light were to be provided in the guest-hall, and the master was to recite it with him if he so desired. If on great feasts guests desired to be present in the church for Matins, the master called them in ample time, waited for them whilst they rose, and then with a lighted lantern accompanied them to the choir. There he was to find them a place and a book and leave them a light to read by. Before Lauds he came to them with his lantern to take them back to their chambers that they might again return to bed till the morning Office.

Either the guest-master, or his servant, had to remain up at night till the fires were seen to be protected and the candles put out. If the guest was obliged to depart early in the morning, the master had to obtain the keys of the gate and of the parlour from the prior's bedplace. After having let the visitor out, he was charged to take care to relock the doors and to replace the keys. At all times

---99---

when guests were leaving the master was bound to be present, and before wishing them Godspeed on their journey, he was instructed to go round the chambers, "in order," says on Custumal, "to see that nothing was left behind, such as a sword or a knife ; and nothing was taken off by mistake which belonged to his charge by his Office, and for which he was responsible." With the departure of guests came the duty of seeing that everything in the guest-house was put in order again, and was ready for the advent of others.

## 10. THE CAMERARIUS, OR CHAMBERLAIN

The chief official duties of the chamberlain of a religious house were concerned with the wardrobe of the brethren. He consequently had to know what and how much clothing each religious ought to have by rule, and what in fact he had. For this purpose he was provided with an official list of what was lawful, or required, and from time to time with his servant he had to examine the clothing of the monks, removing what was past repair, and substituting new garments for the old, which were placed in the poor-cupboard to satisfy the charitable intentions of the almoner. In the distribution of these cast-off clothes, however, it was to be remembered that those who worked for the monastery had first claim, if they were in need, upon the old garments of the monks which had found their way to the poor-cupboard.

It is somewhat difficult to discover exactly the amount of underclothing considered sufficient for religious, especially as in most places there seems to have been little difficulty in furnishing more, if there was any particular reason shown for additional clothing. Three

---100---

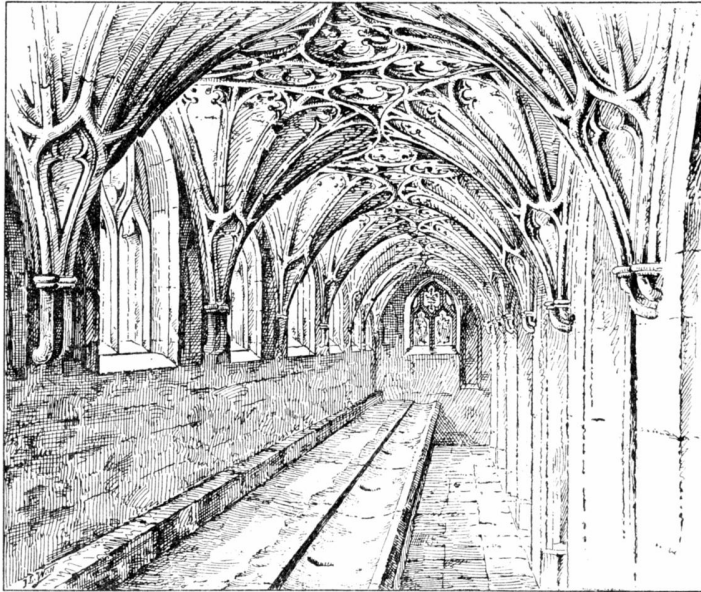
sets, however, of shirts, drawers, and socks, seem to have been an ordinary allowance for priests and deacons, and probably two sets for others; with two tunics, scapulars and hoods, and two pairs of boots. These last were over and besides the "night-boots," which were apparently made of thick cloth, with soles of some heavy noiseless material, such as our modern felt.

The chamberlain by virtue of his office had also to provide the laundresses and superintend their work. These necessary servants were to mend as well as wash all sheets, shirts, socks, etc., and all clothes that needed regular cleansing and reparation. All underclothing was to be washed, according to one set of rules, once a fortnight in summer, and once every three weeks in winter. Great care was to be taken that no losses should occur "in the wash," and all the clothes sent to the tub were to be entered on "tallies," or lists, and returned in the same way into the charge of the official.

The chamberlain, according to the amount of his work, could generally have a monk as assistant chamberlain either for a time, or continuously. Amongst the duties assigned to this assistant was that of looking to the repairs needed in the clothes, which in a large establishment were sometimes very heavy. In one of the Customals, any monk who wanted a garment repaired, had to place it in the morning in one of the bays of the cloister leading to the chapter-house. Thither each day came the assistant chamberlain to see what had been placed there, and what was wanted. He then carried what he found to the tailor's shop and fetched it again when the repairs had been executed. This necessary establishment was generally well organised. For example, at Abingdon there were

---101---

four lay officials and five helpers in the tailor's department. The first had charge of the skins and furs ; the second was the master tailor ; the third the master cutter ; and the fourth was called the "proctor of the shop" ; and his office was to see that all materials had been supplied by the camerarius, that there was a store of cloth



GLOUCESTER CLOISTERS, THE LAVATORY

[illustration: Gloucester cloisters, the lavatory]

and skins, an abundance of needles, pins, and thread, and a sufficiency of knives and scissors, and wax for the thread. The proctor of the shop also had charge of the lights and fire, and he himself slept in the shop and was responsible for its safe custody.

The camerarius by his office had to provide all the cloth and other material necessary for the house. For such

---102---

purposes he had to attend at the neighbouring fairs, whither merchants brought their goods, where he purchased what was necessary. For such matters he frequently had the use of a cart and horse, with its driver. When vendors of cloth came to the monastery the chamberlain had to interview them, and, if necessary, entertain them out of the revenue attached to his office.

In medieval times, when patent methods of heating were unknown and windows were often unglazed or badly glazed, the cold of our northern climate required the general use of skins and furs as lining to the ordinary winter garments for protection from the weather and draughts. The cloister was no exception, especially when the monks had to spend some hours each night in their great unwarmed churches ; and so we find in the *Custumals* that the camerarius was warned to prepare a store of lamb-skins and cat-skins before the cold set in, and he was granted a special supply of salt for the purpose of curing them. He had charge also of the boots of the community ; and at one place at least, three times in the year he had a right to a supply of pigs' -fat from the kitchener, in order that

he might compound the grease with which the community liberally anointed the leather of their boots to keep it supple and to make it weather-proof.

On the chamberlain of every monastic house devolved also the duty of making preparation for the baths and for the shaving, etc., of the brethren. He had to purchase linen cloth for the towels in the cloister lavatory, for the monks' baths, and for the general feet-washing each Saturday. He was charged always to keep an eye upon the lavatory, and, when it was frozen in the winter, he was told to see that there were hot water and warm dry

---103---

towels for the monks' use. He had also to buy the wood needful to warm the water for the baths, which were to be taken by all, three or four times in the year ; and he had to keep by him a store of sweet hay to spread round about the bathing tubs for the monks to stand on. From November to Easter he was to provide hot water for the general feet-washing on Saturday, and on Christmas Eve he was charged to see that a good fire was kept burning in the calefactory, so that when the monks came out from their midnight Mass and Office, they should find a warm room and plenty of hot water to wash in after their long cold vigil in the church. For all these occasions, too, the camerarius had to provide a supply of soap, as well as for the washing of heads and for shaving purposes.

In Cluniac monasteries, at least, the arrangements for shaving had also to be made by the chamberlain. The brother who undertook the office of barber kept his implements—razors, strop, soap, and brushes, etc.—in a small moveable chest, which usually stood near the dormitory door. When necessary he carried it down to the cloister, where, at any time that the community were at work or sitting in the cloister, he could sharpen up his razors or prepair his soaps. When the time of the general "*rasura*" came, the community sat silently in two lines, one set along the cloister wall, the other facing them with their backs to the windows. The general shaving was made a religious act, like almost every other incident of cloister life, by the recitation of psalms. The brothers who shaved the others, and those who carried the dishes and razors, were directed to say the *Benedicite* together before beginning their work ; all the rest as they sat there during the ceremony, except of course the individual actually being operated

---104---

upon, said the *Verba mea* and other psalms. The sick, and those who had leave, were shaved apart from the rest in the warmer calefactory. It would seem that the usual interval between the times of shaving the monks' tonsures was about three weeks ; but there was always a special shaving on the eve of all great festivals. Sometimes in monasteries situated in towns the work of shaving was performed by a paid expert. In the Winchester chamberlain's account-roll, there are entries for such payments, as, for example "for thirty-six shavings, 4<sup>s</sup>.6<sup>d</sup>."

According to custom, the chamberlain had also to find, out of his revenues, various little sums for specific purposes. For example, from the same Winchester rolls it appears that he paid 20s. to each monk, in three portions of



different amounts, apparently as pocket-money ; he also year by year paid the money for wine on Holy Innocents' Day for the boy-bishop celebration ; he kept several boys in the school, and also defrayed the cost of a student at Oxford University. At Abingdon, in the same way, from rents received by him, the chamberlain had to furnish each of the monks with threepence to give to the poor whose feet were washed on Maundy Thursday. The chief virtues which should characterize the true monastic chamberlain are stated to be, "wisdom and learning, a religious spirit, a mature judgment, and an upright honesty."

## 11. THE MASTER OF THE NOVICES

The master of the novices was, of course, one of the most important officials in every religious house. So far we have spoken of the obedientiaries, who were immediately concerned with the management of the whole monastery ; and the novice-master is placed here, not because his

---105---

was a less dignified or a less important office, but because he was officially concerned merely with those who were being proved for the religious life. The master of novices, we are told, was to be a man of wide experience and strength of character. "A person fitted for winning souls," is St. Benedict's description of the ideal novice-master. It is obvious that he should be able to discern the sprits and prove them ; to see whether their call to the higher life was really from God, or a mere passing inclination or whim.

During the year of his probation the novice was in complete subjection to his master. The postulant, who came to beg for admission into religion, usually remained in the guest-house for four days ; after that time, in some houses, he came to the morning Chapter for three consecutive days, and, kneeling in the midst of the brethren, urged his petition to be allowed to join their ranks and to enter into holy religion in their monastery. After the third morning, if his request was granted, he was clothed in the habit of a monk, and was handed over to the care of the novice-master, who was to train him, and to teach him the practice of the religious life ; whose duty it was to test him and to prove him ; and who, for a whole year, was to be his guide, his master, and his friend.

One walk of the cloister, generally the eastern side, was assigned to the use of the novices. In their work and life they were to be separated, as much as possible, from the rest of the community except in the church, the refectory, and the dormitory. Even in these places they were to be still under the immediate control and constant watchful care of their master. From the day of their reception the systematic teaching of the rules

---106---

and traditional practice of the religious life, which was imparted in the novitiate, was commenced. The first lesson given the novice was how he was to arrange the monk's habit and cowl, which were new to him ; how to hold his hands and head ;

and how to walk with that modesty and gravity which become a religious man. These minutia were not always so easy to acquire ; and to most, frequently presented some difficulty. The neophyte was next shown how he should bow, and when the various kind of bows were to be made. If the bow was to be profound, it was pointed out to him how he could tell practically when it was correctly made, by allowing his crossed arms to couch his knees. Then he was instructed how to get into his bed in order to observe due modesty, and how to rise from it in the morning, in the common dormitory. In a word, he was exercised in all the usual monastic manners and customs.

After these first lessons in the external behaviour of a monk, the novice was taught the necessity and meaning of such regulations as custody of the eyes, silence, and respect for superiors and other brethren, both outward and inward. Step by step he was drilled in the exercises of the regular life, and taught to understand that they were not mere outward formalities, but were or ought to be, signs of the inward change of soul indicated by the monk's cowl.

The cloister was the novice's schoolroom. His master assigned to him a definite place amongst his fellows, and after the morning Office he sat there in silence with the book given him, out of which he was to learn some one of the many things a novice had to acquire during the year of probation. The Rule : the prayers and psalms he had to

---107---

learn by heart : the correct method of singing and chanting and reading : and sometimes even the rudiments of the Latin language, without a knowledge of which the work of a choir brother was impossible, were some of this daily studies ; and hard work enough it was to get through it all in twelve fleeting months. His master, however, was ever at hand to help him and encourage him to persevere, if he only showed the real signs of a call to the higher life.

Before beginning their work the novices always had to recite a *De profundis* and a prayer, as an exercise in decorum and deliberation. No more than three of them were to use the same book together. At times there must have been a considerable amount of noise, for in practicing the reading, signing, and chanting they were all directed to make use of the same tone, as they would have to do in the church or refectory. The novice-master began their exercises with them, but he could pass them on for this kind of drilling to someone else, provided he was competent and a staid and true religious.

Thrice during the year of probation, if the novice persisted in his design, his master brought him to the morning Chapter, where on his knees he renewed his petition to be received as one of the brethren. At length as the end of the year approached, a more solemn demand was made and, the novice having been dismissed from the Chapter, the master gave his opinion, and the verdict of the convent was taken. If the vote were favourable to the petitioner, a day was appointed for him to make his vows, and having pronounced these with great solemnity, he received the kiss of peace from all as a token of his reception into the full charity of the brotherhood. In

---108---

some Orders, certainly amongst the Benedictines, the ceremony concluded with a formal and ceremonious fastening of the hood of the newly professed over his head. This he wore closed for three days, as a sign of the strict retreat from the world, with which he began his new life as a full religious ; and just as our Lord was buried in the tomb for part of three days to rise again, so was he buried to the world to rise again to a new life. At the morning Mass of the third day the superior with some ceremony unfastened the hood, and the late novice joined the ranks of the junior monks, who for some years after their profession still remained under the eye and guidance of an immediate superior called the junior master.

## 12. THE WEEKLY OFFICIALS

To complete the account of the officers of a monastery some few words are necessary about the officials, whose duties lasted merely for the week. The first of these was known as the *hebdomadarian*, or the priest for the week. In most places, apparently, the hebdomadarian began his labours with the vespers on Saturday and continued them till the same time the following week. It was his chief duty to commence all the various canonical Hours during his week of office. He gave all the blessings that might be required ; he blessed the holy water and, on the proper days, the candles and ashes. He gave even the blessings bestowed upon the weekly servers on the Sunday morning. Besides these duties it was his office to sing the High Mass on all days during the week, and in monasteries where there were two public Masses, during the week which followed his week of service, he took the early Mass and assisted at the second.

---109---

A second weekly official was the *antiphoner*, whose duty it was to read the Invitatory at Matins. He did so alone on ordinary days, and sang it with an assistant, or even with two or more, on greater feasts. He gave out, or intoned, the first Antiphon at the Psalms, the Versicles, the Responsorias after the Lessons, and the *Benedicamus Domino* at the conclusion of each Hour. He also read the "Capitulum," or Little Chapter, and whatever else had to be read at the morning Chapter.

Amongst the other weekly officials may be noted the servers and the readers at meals. These brethren could take something to eat and drink before the community came to the refectory, in order the better to be able to do their duty. The reader was charged very strictly always to prepare what he had to read beforehand and to find the places, so as to avoid all likelihood of mistakes. He was to take the directions of the cantor as to pronunciation, pitch of the voice, and at the rate at which he was to read in public. If he were ill, or for any other reason was unable to perform his duty, the cantor had to find a substitute. The servers began their week of duty by asking a blessing in church on Sunday morning. They were at the disposal of the refectorian during their period of service, and followed his directions as to waiting on the brethren at meal times, preparing the

tables, and clearing them after all had finished. With the reader, and other officials who could not be present at the conventual meals, they took theirs afterwards in the refectory.

---110---

-end chapter-