

faith and ill-will towards us, like those women who "make a burse for themselves" unknown to their husband, so much do they fear that he cannot or will not leave them enough to live on.

We must, according to the delightful saying of St. Vincent de Paul, *walk alongside Providence*, thus proving that we know we shall be lead along the right path. *How sovereignly well do those honour our Lord*, he exclaimed, *who follow His holy Providence and do not outstrip it!* God knows that St. Vincent de Paul never outstripped holy Providence, he who, without a sou, covered France with the marvellous institutions of his charity whereby thousands and thousands of bodies and souls have been saved, and whereby thousands are still saved daily. He invented, almost by himself, all that is being done up to the present day for the help and comfort of the unfortunate. God knows that he did not live for, that he did not economise money, and that is why he, who possessed nothing, could dispose of millions.

To be anxious about money, to accord it any kind of importance precisely as money, it is not enough to say that it serves for nothing. It serves for evil.

Whereas to forget it is to open the door to it. Money is like coquettish women, it only seeks to attract those who pay no attention to it. If you want to be sure of never lacking it, spend what you have.

TOWARDS A PRE-HISTORY OF MONACHISM

By

JOHN MORSON, O.C.R.

The Synoptic Gospels are a fundamental document of ascetic theology. They present a way of life. Their rich dogmatic content is largely implicit. The key-note is struck from the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in words which anticipate the whole: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". In St. Matthew's nineteenth chapter is recorded the question of the rich young man, and our Lord's commendation of those who have left all for his name's sake. This passage is often claimed as the foundation charter of the religious state. Its great advantage is that it expresses far more clearly than the earlier teaching the distinction between the commandment, obedience to which is necessary for entrance into the kingdom, and the counsel offered to those who would be perfect.

In the account which we have of the infant Church at Jerusalem distinction is not clearly made between the faithful who simply obeyed the commandments and the aspirants after perfection who followed the counsels. We might gather that the converts, as a matter of course and almost without exception, entered upon a way of life not unlike that which our Lord had counselled to the rich young man, and which was to be known

as the "religious life" in the centuries to come. Yet St. Peter implied that Ananias was free to give up the price of his estate or not. His sin consisted precisely in lying about it to the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul speaks of the "saints" at Jerusalem. It is true that the word is used constantly of the faithful in general. But those of Jerusalem seem to have had a privileged position, and to have been regarded as a model and mother community of all others. Nor was their primacy merely nominal. Even Christians do not readily part with their material wealth unless there is a fairly demonstrable claim in justice, religion or charity. Although the famine foretold by Agabus was to afflict the whole world, the Christians of Antioch spontaneously deprived themselves in favour of those of Judaea. Later on the Christians of Greece and Asia Minor made generous contributions to relieve the necessities of the "saints" at Jerusalem. This was done at the very instance of that Apostle who devoted a great part of his labours to fighting the judaizing tendency in primitive Christianity. A fair case might be made for the special character and continuity of this community from St. Jerome's testimony in his *Adversus Vigilantium*. Alms were sent to Jerusalem as late as the author's time, and the "poor of the holy places" were supported as being religious, at least, in some broad sense, i.e. consecrated to the service of God. Both Cassian and St. Augustine, writing in the same period, were conscious of an interesting tradition, then fairly in possession, whatever we are to think of its historical value. They considered that the original form of the monastic life was cenobitic. The "saints" of Jerusalem, after our Lord and his Apostles, were the earliest Christian cenobites, and, from their time onwards, this form of the religious life was never unknown in the Church.

Some hundred years before these writers, Eusebius of Caesarea was becoming the Father of Church History. In his second book the historian, with his usual strict regard for sources, quotes a work on the contemplative life which he ascribes to Philo the Jew. Here are described certain "Therapeutae", who live an intensive monastic, ascetic and contemplative life, and are confidently regarded by Eusebius as Christians. When we read the still extant text of Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*, we easily understand the historian's yielding so readily to the temptation to Christianize the Therapeutae. They give away their possessions as the claims of piety or charity may dictate. We cannot sympathize with those critics who think this enough to exclude their Christianity, on the ground that the first Christians of Jerusalem gave their possessions to the Apostles as administrators of a common fund. Our Lord said, "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor". They seek solitudes, avoiding cities, the noise and disturbance of which are so little favourable to con-

templation. In words strongly reminiscent of the Gospel, they are said to leave brethren, wives and friends.

This life, shared by Greeks and barbarians, is found everywhere, but especially in Egypt around Alexandria. The best of them go beyond Lake Marea, in the direction, it would appear, of that Nitria, later to be renowned as the cradle, from time immemorial, of Christian cenobitic monachism. The Therapeutic settlement, from the description of the lake and sea breezes, seems to have been only a little way beyond Lake Marea, not far from the city itself. But successive migrations may very well, in the course of time, have led to Nitria, about sixty miles from the Southern shore of the lake.

“They have also writings of ancients, who, as founders (arkegetai) of the sect, have left many records in allegorical form”. This sentence has satisfied many critics that the Therapeutae were non-Christian Jews. The year of Philo’s death is uncertain, but should probably be placed in the fifth decade of our era. Those, therefore, who uphold the Philonian authorship, cannot understand such a sentence of the New Testament writings. But any who have learnt, especially from Pope St. Clement’s epistle and from the later anti-Marcionite polemic, of the early Christians’ strong sense of continuity with the past, from St. Justin of their assiduous application to the Old Testament books, and from St. Paul onwards of the progressing tendency to allegorical interpretation, will hardly agree that the sentence is enough to refute the Christianization of the Therapeutae. St Justin himself refers in notably similar words to the Hebrew prophets.

Those who are aware that the observance of the first day of the week was an apostolic development, the progress of which varied from place to place, and who remember from Cassian the monks’ retention of a seventh day sabbath, in addition to the Christian Sunday, even in the late fourth century, will hardly believe that observance of the Sabbath by the Therapeutae has been regarded as decisively exclusive of their Christianity.

When we hear the common assembly called a *koinos sullogos* we inevitably recall the *collecta* which figures so largely in the Pachomian Rule as known to us in St. Jerome’s Latin version. The solo chant with choral refrains sung by the Therapeutae we know from Cassian to have been the most common form of liturgical rendering among the Egyptian monks.

The abstinence of the Therapeutae is such that, like the later Christian monks, they are content with bread and water. Their fasting until sunset, and even, in rare cases, through three days or more, would make them at home among the heroes of Palladius’s Lausiac History. Their attitude in prayer vividly recalls the *Orantes* of the catacombs. Their virginity and desire of spiritual offspring earn the author’s highest commendation. As

we have already learnt that among the Therapeutae there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, so now, in the description of their common meal, it appears that there is neither bond nor free, but to serve at table is a privilege accorded to merit.

The attendance of men and women Therapeutae together, not only at a common instruction, but even at a common *meal, song and dance*, may seem, at first sight, finally to shatter all hope of making the Therapeuts into Christian monks and nuns. But even here we pause, when we notice how carefully men and women are set apart, recall the associated establishments known both to the Egyptian Pachomians and to the Northern Celts, remember the liturgical dances performed by certain Oriental Christian monks even in our day, and finally reflect upon the absurdity of demanding a post-Tridentine observance and segregation of the Therapeutae as a condition of their Christianization.

The Eusebian extracts are followed, possibly in less than a hundred years, by an Armenian version of the *De Vita Contemplativa*. This version is accompanied, in the oldest extant codex, by a scholion in which the Therapeutae are Christianized. In the wake of Eusebius followed Fathers such as St. Jerome and St. Epiphanius, and the Church historian Sozomen. This patristic interpretation was upheld in the Reformation controversies by St. Robert Bellarmine, Baronius and Petavius; was favoured, when the heat of those controversies had died down, by palaeographers as famous as Montfauçon and Muratori; and even won the support of the Anglican divines William Beveridge and John Mason Neale.

From the time of the Magdeburg Centuriators and their onslaught upon the monastic ideal, the critical view prevailed outside the Catholic Church and even commended itself to such Catholic scholars as Valesius. In the late nineteenth century a considerable party, led by Lucius, and numbering Harnack among its adherents, once again held that the Therapeutae were Christian, but this, at the cost of the Philonian authenticity of the *De Vita Contemplativa*, which was declared to be a fourth century pseudepigraphon, describing monks contemporary with the forger and even with Eusebius himself. The Oxford scholar Conybeare refuted the theory of Lucius in a work of such erudition as can receive no adequate tribute here.¹ The argument is overwhelmingly convincing, at least for the rejection of the fourth-century origin.

What are we to think of the Therapeutae? We will not pretend that their Christianity can be proved. Yet it is not easy to regard the Eusebian interpretation as decisively refuted. Even

¹ *Philo about the Contemplative Life*, Oxford, 1895. The reader is urged to consult this work for fuller bibliography and account of the controversy here summarily sketched.

if we grant as certain that they were Jews observing the law of Moses, it does not follow that they were not Christians. The first Christian Pentecost was witnessed by men from Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene. Since Alexandria was a favourite rallying point of the Dispersion—indeed a very New York of Judaism—it would be strange if the Gospel message had not reached it at an early date and resulted in a Judæo-Christian Church comparable to that of Jerusalem. From the case of the Alexandrian Jew, Apollo, we would infer that the Christian teaching first engrafted on to the Jewish stock was but rudimentary and preparatory for a further divulcation. In the mind of the writer of the *De Vita Contemplativa*, the Christians, known externally and in part, may well have been no more than an ascetic Jewish sect, just as we find Christians confused with Jews in the legislation of the emperor Claudius, and even centuries later in the conceptions of Mahomet.

Even if we gave up all thought of the Therapeutæ as Christians, we should still allow ourselves the hypothesis of a connection with the Christian monks found in not far distant Nitria from the earliest dawn of monastic history. Unless Philo's account is grossly flattering, none among the Jews can have been better prepared than his Therapeutæ for the reception of the Christian Gospel. They could not have failed to hear of it. It is difficult to believe that not a single Therapeutic community was found willing to embrace it. A corporate conversion to Christianity would by no means have involved the sacrifice of their monastic life lived hitherto.

Whoever the Therapeutæ may have been, they lived in a neighbourhood bordering upon the Nitrian desert. According to an old tradition, recorded in the *Acta Sanctorum*, under April 14th, a certain Abbot Frontonius, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, gathered together seventy brethren, and led them into the desert of Nitria, where they cultivated the ground and lived austere lives. Nitria is also mentioned in St. Athanasius's biography of St. Anthony as the abode of Blessed Ammon and other brethren. Later historians have little to say of the origins of this monastic settlement: but they seem to consider it at least as old as that of St. Pachomius at Tabenna. Palladius describes the observance of Nitria in some detail, and tells us how he had to cross Lake Marea (or Marcotis) to get there. The Nitrian monks receive the highest praise in the *Historia Monachorum* of the Pseudo-Jerome. Scete, so well known to the interlocutors of Cassian's Collations, is approximately the same neighbourhood.

The writer does not ambitiously claim to construct a history of the monks who lived before Paul, Anthony and Pachomius. *Monastic history* must still begin in the late third or early fourth century. But *monachism* certainly did not begin then. Our extant historians never tell us of first beginnings. Those who are

often regarded as the founders of monachism were indebted to a monastic idea already in possession, and received their instruction from others.

There is a kind of theological argument with which all students are familiar. In favour of some doctrine or practice it is impossible to find clear and abundant testimonies in the early centuries. Yet in a later age it is so universal, accepted by different peoples, and even by schismatics, who would never, after their separation, or indeed long before it, have taken it over from the other churches, that it can only be explained as being of apostolic or even of divine institution. Perhaps some scholar will point, by the force of such a developed argument, to the origin of the monastic state. Not only is it promoted by Anthony and Pachomius in Egypt. It is associated in Syria with Hilarion, in Asia Minor with Eustathius of Sebaste, in Mesopotamia with Mar Awgin, in Gaul with Martin. When Patrick evangelizes Ireland, he must of necessity plant it there. When Augustine takes it to Britain, he finds it established there already among the Christian Celts of Wales. In England of our day, the descendants of those who broke with tradition in the sixteenth century have discovered that their forefathers unwisely threw over something without which the fulness of Christianity can hardly be practised or conceived.

RETREAT HOUSES, RELIGIOUS AND LAY

By

BARBARA FRY.

In England there is great need for more houses where retreats can be made and quite as urgently for different types of retreat house. There is room for considerable variety, for a network of smaller and larger houses, in towns and out of them, religious and lay. There is a very clear need for a liturgical retreat house, more for women than for men, to whom the existing monasteries are open. There is need for a retreat house sufficiently contemplative and monastic for a genuine spirit of silence to rule; but there is also need for a home for a very free type of retreat where the Christian minority who love the Lord in a neo-pagan age can meet, and such retreats might be the beginning of many genuine friendships and much work for God.

In a retreat we break from our routine life and plunge for a time into another life, so as to turn right way up—if we were previously upside-down—but above all so as to plunge from a more superficial to a deeper and more fully lived Christian life. But if the plunge is not into another and more fully lived life, but into a vacuum with devotional frills, an appendage to a religious life going on behind closed doors, it is apt to lend an air of unreality to the whole, so that the effects fade before the