

MONACHISM

THE word Monachism, or Monasticism, primarily meaning the act of "dwelling alone" (*μοναχός, μονάζειν, μόνος*), has come, by an easy and natural transition, to denote the corporate life of religious communities living a life of poverty, celibacy, and obedience, under a fixed rule of discipline. The root-idea of monachism, in all its varieties of age, creed, and country, is the same—namely, retirement from society in search of some ideal of life which society cannot supply, but which is thought attainable by abnegation of self and withdrawal from the world. This definition applies to all the forms of monachism which have left their mark on history, whether amongst Bráhmans, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Moslems, or the communistic societies of the present day, even when theoretically anti-theological.

This broad general conception of monachism is differentiated in the following ways:—It may take the form of absolute separation, so far as practicable, from all human intercourse, so as to give the whole life to solitary contemplation—the anchoritic type; or, contrariwise, it may seek fellowship with kindred spirits in a new association for the same common end—the cœnobitic type; it may abandon society as incurably corrupt, as a City of Destruction out of which the fugitive must flee absolutely—the Oriental view, for the most part; or it may consider itself as having a mission to influence and regenerate society—which has been, on the whole, and with minor exceptions, the Western theory of the monastic life.

The question has been warmly debated whether monachism be an evil or a good,—whether a natural, perhaps a necessary, part of Christianity (as being, indeed, the strict logical issue of the triple vow of baptism, literally construed), or a foreign element introduced into it with unfortunate results, and rather an excrescence on its system than an orderly and healthy development. Unlike many other institutions which have needed the lapse of centuries and the gradual approach of decay and degeneracy to show their weak places, monachism in its Christian form displays some of its most unlovely features while yet almost in its cradle, whereas not a few of its best achievements belong to a late period in its history; and it has throughout displayed a singular elasticity and power of taking a fresh departure, after seeming to have exhausted its energies. Its champions and its opponents have thus always had ample materials for their briefs, and there is little probability of the controversy ever coming to an end. But the most philosophical mode of viewing its relation to Christianity is to recognize that monachism has made a part of every creed which has attained a certain stage of ethical and theological development; that there is a class of minds for which it has always had a powerful attraction, and which can otherwise find no satisfaction; and consequently that Christianity, if it is to make good its claim to be a universal religion, must provide expression for a principle which is as deeply seated in human nature as domesticity itself, albeit limited to a much smaller section of mankind.

Three main factors combined to produce the phenomenon of monachism in early Christianity, each of them set in motion by the general dissolution of morals in the pagan society of the time, of which we get a sufficient glimpse from the Christian standpoint in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and from the pagan standpoint in the sixth Satire of Juvenal. These three factors were—(1) the Oriental tendency towards retirement, contemplation, and asceticism, influencing the infant Christian church through the agency of those Jewish ascetics, the Essenes

and Therapeutæ, who had begun long before the gospel times both the solitary and the common life in Palestine and Egypt, and who probably contributed many converts to Christianity, and became practically merged therein, as they disappear from history in the first century of the Christian era; (2) the Hellenic teaching of the Alexandrine Neo-Platonists on the purification of the intellect by abstention from physical indulgence; and (3), perhaps a more powerful influence than either, that old Roman spirit of austerity and discipline which, while looking back regretfully to the memories of the simpler habits of republican times, could find nothing amidst the social luxury and administrative weakness of the decaying empire which presented its ideal, save the monastic system with its rigid proscription of luxury, and even of comfort, in every form. The first-named of these three factors was, however, necessarily the earliest to operate. The Scriptures attest clearly the existence of a body of ascetics in the persons of the Nazarites, leading always for a certain period, and sometimes for life, a stricter existence than the ordinary Jew; Elijah and John the Baptist furnished examples of the solitary hermit type; the Schools of the Prophets at least seem to have been celibate and cœnobitic communities, living by a fixed ascetic rule; and it is familiar to all that such was the actual discipline of the Essenes (see ESSENES). The sect of the Therapeutæ, known to us only from the book *De Vita Contemplativa* (ascribed to Philo), and described as chiefly, though not exclusively, established in Egypt, bore much resemblance to the Essenes, differing from them for the most part by greater austerity in the matter of food, and by their preference for the solitary life over the common fellowship of the Essenes; for their custom was that each member confined himself to his lonely dwelling (called by the afterwards famous name of *μοναστήριον*) throughout the week, while all assembled on the Sabbath for joint worship, and for instruction from the senior of the society. So closely does this polity resemble that of several of the earliest Christian societies of the kind that Eusebius devotes a chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History* (ii. 17) to asserting their identity, holding that Philo could have been speaking of none save Christian ascetics, a view in which he is followed by Sozomen and Cassian in ancient times, as also by many moderns. This view has been rendered much more probable by recent inquirers, who seem to have made out that the *De Vit. Cont.* is spurious, and was written about 300 A.D.;¹ for there is a general agreement amongst the fathers that the monastic life did not begin till nearly two hundred years after Philo lived; and Tertullian (160-240 A.D.) declares explicitly that Christians in his time did not withdraw from society,—“We are not Indian Bráhmans or Gymnosophists, dwellers in woods, and exiles from life; . . . we sojourn with you in the world” (*Apol.*, xlii.). Yet there is no reason to doubt that the leaven of Essenism was at work in the church from the earliest time, and helped to form the temper which issued in monachism. Still, the process was slow and gradual, passing through very much the same stages as can be traced by careful inquiry in the case of the Essenes. That is to say, the new converts to Christianity, being for the most part dwellers in cities, were in necessary and daily contact with the heathen society around, whose relaxation was such as to induce an even greater recoil from habits of self-indulgence than the stricter morality of their new creed enjoined, so that a body known by the name of “Ascetics” sprang up very soon within the church, and

¹ See especially Lucius, *Die Therapeuten*, 1879.

MONACHISM

were urged on to still greater severity of life when the rapid progress of Christianity brought large numbers of merely nominal converts in, whose practice fell too conspicuously below their profession. The desire of protest against such a state of things led to the gradual separation of the devotees into a kind of order within the main body, and to their actual withdrawal from habitual intercourse with their less strict fellows, which led in turn to their departure from the towns into more secluded places, even before any formal conception of the monastic life had shaped itself in their minds. But the first glimpse obtainable of the “common life,” and that only an indistinct one, is in the New Testament, and applies to women alone. There is mention in the pastoral epistles (1 Tim. v. 9-12) of a class of widows, apparently not as mere recipients of relief, but as constituting an ecclesiastical grade; while in Acts ix. 39 it appears as if a number of women belonging to this order were united in some kind of community under the headship of Dorcas, for the narrative rather implies that they were her assistants in making clothing for the poor than themselves the objects of her bounty. This conjecture receives some confirmation from the mention of “the virgins who are called widows” (*τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας*) in the shorter recension of the Ignatian Epistle to the Smyræans, and from the statement of Athanasius, that Anthony, when himself about to begin the solitary life which he is regarded as having instituted, first placed his sister in a convent of virgins (*παρθενώνα*),—facts which prove the organization of women at an earlier date in community life than of men, and lend some probability to the notion that it may have begun very soon indeed, especially when the prominence given to the virgins as a separate and seemingly long-established order in the church by such early writers as Tertullian and Cyprian is borne in mind.

Two other causes must be taken into account as tending to stimulate monachism when once it began. First is the theological opinion, early formulated, and never since without many advocates, that two distinct standards of life and holiness are set forth in the gospel: that of precept, and that of “counsels of perfection,”—the former binding all Christians without exception, the latter being voluntary, and merely offered for acceptance to such as aim at especial sanctity. The second, and even more powerful, agent was Gnosticism, not only in its earlier forms and in the kindred spirit of Montanism, but still more in its Manichæan development, when its dualism led to exaggeration of the antagonism between flesh and spirit, and the human body was regarded no longer as a servant to be trained, but as an enemy to be crushed and beaten down with unrelenting hostility. But in every age of monachism, from the earliest to the latest, social disorders and insecurity have proved the chief feeders of the cloister, never widely popular in times of healthy and orderly national life, but eagerly resorted to as a place of shelter from social turbulence.

There are five main classes of monastic institutions, each of which approximately marks a new departure in the history of Western monachism (for the East has never had more than the first), as they succeed one another in chronological order, without in any instance involving the abandonment of the previous foundations. They are—(1) Monks; (2) Canons Regular; (3) Military Orders; (4) Friars; (5) Clerks Regular. All of these have communities of women, either actually affiliated to them, or formed on similar lines.

There is no doubt as to the time and the person, when, and by whom, the first decisive step was taken which left a marked interval for all time between those ascetics who continued to live in family life, if not really part of it, or who at least dwelt close to some ordinary church, to which they

resorted habitually, and the seekers after some more retired and separate mode of life, whether singly or in communities. During the stress of the Decian persecution (249-250 A.D.) Paul, a native of the Lower Thebaid, born of wealthy parents about 228, was denounced by his brother-in-law to the authorities as a Christian, and fled for safety into the desert, where he established himself in a cavern, shaded by a palm-tree, and with a spring of water close by. There he remained till extreme old age, dying, if we may accept Jerome's chronology, in his hundred and thirteenth year, about 342. Although he did not collect any band of disciples around him, nor even, so far as is recorded, attract any casual visitors, except his more famous successor, Anthony, who is alleged, in a narrative containing many legendary details, to have had an interview with him when himself a very old man, the day before Paul's death; yet there seems reason to believe that the fame of his example spread sufficiently to induce imitation of it, and that anchoritic cells began to be set up sparsely in the deserts even before Anthony adopted that mode of life. Anthony's career differed in various respects from that of his precursor. In the first place, it was voluntary choice, not fear of persecution, which sent him into solitude. He was born about 250 at Coma in Upper Egypt, of wealthy Christian parents, and was left at eighteen years of age in possession of a large fortune and of the guardianship of a younger sister. He had received what was probably a fair vernacular education, but distaste for study, or perhaps more probably that difficulty which contemplative intellects experience in the acquisition of languages, left him unacquainted with Greek or Latin; yet the intimate knowledge of Scripture which he afterwards displayed cannot be satisfactorily accounted for in any other way than as the result of attentive perusal, since no mere listening to the lectures in church would suffice to convey it; and we must therefore take Athanasius's statement of his ignorance of letters to denote the absence of culture, not as implying actual illiteracy. One day, hearing the gospel read, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, and follow Me,” he took it as a direct address to himself, and at once returned home, distributed his property amongst his neighbours, reserving only a small sum for the support of his sister whom he placed in charge of some Christian virgins, and then betook himself to a solitary life, first visiting the most eminent ascetics and anchorites he could find, in order that he might learn the peculiar merit of each, and imitate it. He fixed his dwelling first in a tomb, then in a ruined fort near the Nile, where he remained for twenty years, leaving it but once, in 311, to encourage the Christians of Alexandria during the persecution of Maximin; and lastly in a small grove of date-palms, a few miles west of the western coast of the Red Sea, near the base of Mount Kolzim, where he made an enclosure and planted it as a garden. He quitted this retirement but once in his remaining life, when he again visited Alexandria in 335, at the request of Athanasius, to preach against the Arians. Yet his fame drew not only frequent visitors to his cell, but numerous disciples and imitators around him, attracted not alone by his pious austerities, but by his cheerful and courteous manners and shrewd practical judgment. He made the solitary life honourable and popular, fully justifying Jerome's phrase in comparing him with Paul, “Hujus vitæ avctor Paulus, illustrator etiam Antonius.” When Anthony died in 365, aged one hundred and five, the desert was already studded with hermitages in every direction, and the second great step in the development of monachism had been long taken by Pachomius, who stands out in history at once as the founder of the cœnobitic life amongst Christians and as the author of the first formal monastic rule. Born about 292,

and converted to Christianity in early manhood while serving in the army, he was baptized on obtaining his discharge, and at once adopted the ascetic life under the direction of the hermit Palæmon, with whom he retired to Tabennæ, an island in the Nile, between Farshoot and Dendarah. Here he began his new institute, whose distinguishing features were as follows. The monks were distributed into cells, each of which contained three inmates, known in this relation as *syncelli* (the usual number in other Egyptian foundations was two in each cell, while in Syria the tenant had no partner). A large number of such cells clustered near each other formed a *laura*, and each such *laura* had but one common place for meals and other assemblies. Work and food were apportioned to each inmate according to his physical strength, and such as were permitted exceptional strictness in fasting were not to undertake the heavier tasks of bodily labour. Their dress was to be a close linen tunic, with a white goatskin by way of upper garment, which they were not to lay aside at meals or in bed, but only when they assembled for the eucharist, when they wore their hoods only in addition to the tunic. They were divided into twenty-four groups or classes numbered according to the letters of the Greek alphabet, into which they were distributed according to their intellectual and spiritual proficiency, the least intelligent being placed in class α , the letter of simplest form, and the ablest in class ξ , the most complicated. Each group was subdivided into bands of ten and a hundred under decurions and centurions, and all subject to the Abbot, who was himself in turn, when the institution spread and ramified, subject to the Superior (or Archimandrite) of the mother-house; while the finance of each house was managed by a steward (*οἰκονόμος*), who was similarly accountable to the treasurer or steward at Tabennæ. Their usual food was bread and water; their luxuries, oil, salt, and a few occasional fruits or vegetables, chiefly pulse; frugal meals which they ate in strict silence—sometimes broken by the voice of a reader, appointed to recite lectures from the Bible—each man so wearing his hood or cowl as to hide his face from his companions. They assembled twice daily for common prayer, and met further for communion on Saturdays and Sundays. A strict probation of three-years was imposed on postulants for admission, during which they were confined to simple tasks of labour, and were not permitted to enter upon actual study till they had satisfactorily passed through this term. Their work was tillage for their own immediate wants, and weaving mats or baskets for sale, to procure such necessities as their direct labour was insufficient to provide; and, as time went on, other handicrafts were practised in the cloisters, such as those of smiths, tailors, boat-builders, tanners, and so forth. Pachomius induced his sister to found a convent of nuns governed by very similar rules, and subject to the authority of a visitor appointed by himself, as superior of the whole institute. Such was the success of the Pachomian rule that before the founder died (between 348 and 360) he had no fewer than fourteen hundred monks in his own cenobium, and seven thousand altogether under his authority. Nor was its influence confined to Tabennæ and its dependencies. Ammon carried the rule into the Nitrian desert, where five thousand monks were soon collected; Hilarion bore it into Syria and Palestine, Eustathius of Sebaste into Armenia, Ephraem Syrus into Mesopotamia, Basil the Great into Cappadocia and Pontus (though a rule of his own framing supplanted it later); and, above all, it was brought by Athanasius himself into Italy, whence it spread over the West till modified in various ways by subsequent legislation, and finally displaced by the Benedictine institute. And such was its popularity, meeting as it did a need of

the time, that its votaries in Egypt alone amounted by the 5th century to more than a hundred thousand, of whom three-fourths were men. This rule has come down to us in two very different forms: an earlier and probably original one, preserved for us in the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis (367-430)—a great storehouse of details on Egyptian monachism, which is very brief, and has been summarized above—and a much longer recension, extending to 194 heads or chapters, preserved in a translation by Jerome, in whose time the monks governed by it had increased to fifty thousand. It had not, however, a complete monopoly, for there were also similar rules in local use, going by the names of famous ascetics such as Paphnutius, Macarius, and Serapion; nor was it uncommon to find communities wherein two or three different rules were followed simultaneously by the various inmates. The rule of Basil, however, proved to the East what that of Benedict did to the West, in that it practically absorbed or supplanted all its predecessors, while, unlike the great Western reform, it has had no subsequent competitors, and remains to this day the single monastic code of the Oriental Church. This rule is embodied in the *Ascetic Sermons* of Basil, and also in two recensions, a longer and a shorter one, of the actual provisions of his code, which are marked with not a little of the shrewd practical sense, as well as lofty piety, which characterized the founder,—being especially noticeable for their discouragement of the solitary mode of life, and for their recommendation of labour. The development of Oriental monachism thus ceases with the Basilian rule, and there are only two seeming exceptions to this fact: the institution of the *Ascemeti* (*ἀκοίμητοι*), or “sleepless” monks in the 5th century, for the purpose of keeping up unbroken prayer day and night—a system copied much later in the West by the communities founded for “perpetual adoration;” and the erection, for these very monks, of the great monastery of the Studium at Constantinople (named from Studius, its founder), which was the Cluny of its time and country, as a centre of the more intellectual monastic life, and as the model of stateliness in ecclesiastical ceremonial.¹ Greek monachism, as an institute, has no history later than the 5th century. The monks indeed constantly appear as factors in the controversies of the centuries which followed, at once the polemical and the political disputes showing them equally fierce and eager partisans (notably in the Iconoclastic controversy, which found them the most ardent champions of images); but they cannot be said to have exerted much influence upon society till a very late period of their history, when they were instrumental in keeping the national spirit and the national religion alive in Russia when suffering under the Tatar yoke, and they performed a like service for Greece during the centuries of Turkish oppression. It may further be added that, however low the intellectual life of Eastern monasteries may appear when judged by a Western standard, the clergy who are trained in them, technically known as the “Black clergy,” stand much higher in character, acquirements, and general influence than the secular or “White clergy” of the parishes, whether in Greece or in Russia.

It has been already mentioned that the bad side of monachism appears almost as early as its good side.

¹ This great abbey, at the height of its prosperity, contained more than a thousand monks, and the following list of its staff of office-bearers, due to Theodore the Studite, may be usefully compared with the Western monastic hierarchy.—*Ἡγούμενος* (abbot), *ἱποστατικός* (prior), *οἰκονόμος* (treasurer), *ἐπιστημονάρχης* (ceremoniarius), *ἐπιτηρητής* (inspector), *κανονάρχης* (precentor), *ταξίαρχης* (seneschal), *κελλάρης* (cellarer), *ἀρσιτηγάρος* (refectioyer), *βεστίαρος* (sacrist), *ἀφύπνιστής* (evigilator), *νοσοκόμος* (infirmarer). One or two of the offices do not quite correspond in East and West, but the general resemblance is close.

While the system won the admiration of all the most eminent Christian teachers of the age which saw its birth and early growth, and while we are met by a still more remarkable fact that from the time when monachism was fairly established till we enter on the Middle Ages there are but two or three names of distinction amongst the clergy, whether as writers or administrators, to be found outside the ranks of monachism, amongst whom the most famous are Ambrose and Leo the Great, nevertheless, there is a heavy account on the other side. Not only did the institute speedily find itself caricatured by the Messalians, Euchites, Gyrovagi, Sarabaites or Remoboth, Circumcellions, and other companies of professed ascetics, wild in doctrine, vagrant in habits, and turbulent in conduct, but the more genuine societies had scarcely fewer faults in too many cases. Lay in their origin, and for the greater part of their earlier history having but rarely ecclesiastics amongst them (a single priest ordained for each monastery to minister to its inmates being the utmost allowed for a considerable time), they were not subject to the same strict inspection and discipline as the clergy, in case a whole community chose to disregard its rule; though of course it was easy to deal with an offender who had the tone of his monastery against him. The clergy were subject to the direct control of the bishops, and many disciplinary canons of councils laid down rules for their conduct; but this was not the case with the monks for a considerable time—nor indeed ever effectively in the East—and their lay character gave them practical independence of any authority external to their abbot. And, despite the stringency of the monastic rule itself, which, even before actual vows began to be introduced (probably on the recommendation of Basil), always involved during compliance with it the three engagements to the observance of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which make up the staple of the monastic principle, and though pains were taken to exclude unfit applicants (such as criminals, slaves who had fled for reasons other than ill-treatment, or persons who had kindred dependent on them), while a long probation was exacted from all who were accepted, yet it was impossible that more than a small proportion of the many thousands who flocked in during the first enthusiasm for the new movement should have had any real sympathy with the restraints and aspirations of such a mode of life. Severe asceticism operates differently on different natures, and while there are some whom it does but discipline and refine these are more whom it tends to coarsen and to brutalize, even apart from the many whom it is apt to affect with morbidness, if not actual insanity. And it is unquestionable that vast numbers of those who entered on the monastic life came from the poorer classes, in search of some less toilsome mode of existence than they had previously led, preferring the contemplative societies, wherein almost no labour, certainly none of a severe and trying cast, was practised, to those where agriculture and other active employments, requiring more energy than mat and basket weaving, were enjoined. Such men, uneducated and undisciplined, were liable to be thrown entirely out of gear by the complete revolution in their mode of life,—especially when the community they joined was not only contemplative, but situated in some place where the ungrateful soil made tillage nearly impracticable, and the vast numbers crowded together were far too numerous for any tasks which could be assigned them. From the bosom of such societies came not only single examples of exaggerated spiritual pride, bitter fanaticism, avaricious greed of the scanty articles whose usufruct was permitted, fierce sensuality, and wild religious delusions, but they gave birth to companies like the *βοσκοί*, or “grazing monks,” of Mesopotamia and Palestine, who roved about shelter-

less and nearly naked, as Sozomen and Evagrius tell us, in the mountains and deserts, grovelling on the earth, and browsing like cattle on the herbs they casually found; and to those fierce bands of Nitrian and Syrian ascetics who, reared in the narrowest of schools, treated any divergence from their own standard of opinion as a crime which they were entitled to punish in their own riotous fashion, two instances of which have left an indelible brand on their history—the murder of Hypatia in Alexandria, and that of the patriarch Flavian at the Robber Synod of Ephesus. An equally singular, but more sporadic and temporary, form of asceticism was that of the Stylites or Pillar-hermits (*στυλίται, κιονίται*), who followed a fashion first set by Simeon, a Syrian monk who spent almost half of the 5th century on the summit of a column 60 feet in height. This unwonted kind of austerity at first gave rise to strong objections, even from hermits themselves, and a messenger was sent to Simeon, bidding him in the name of a synod of bishops to descend from his pillar, but with instructions to permit him to remain if he showed himself ready to comply. Such proved to be the case; and, having thus assured themselves that he was not influenced by spiritual pride, they left him to follow his own devices. And we have the direct personal testimony of the wise and temperate Theodoret that he exercised a strong and salutary influence over the nomadic Saracen tribes, converting many hundreds and even thousands to Christianity, besides being the shrewd and trusted adviser, not only of the peasants who flocked to him for counsel, but of Arab princes, Persian kings, and even Roman emperors. He cannot be judged, therefore, by ordinary standards, and it is more than likely that a less extraordinary mode of life would have given him less power for good; but he is the only eminent figure in the class to which he belongs, and the fashion he set may be said to have died out with his namesake, the younger Simeon, a century later. Even when the healthier side of monachism as it appeared in Egypt and Syria is dwelt upon, and the fullest weight is allowed to the contemporary pictures drawn by great Christian writers of the monasteries as schools of a philosophy truer and purer than that of the Porch or the Academy, as places where the equality and brotherhood, merely dreamed of as unrealizable fancies in the outer world, could be seen in living action—where children, deserted by their parents or otherwise orphaned, were carefully reared—where the sick were lovingly tended—where calmness, piety, and self-forgetfulness were the rule of all,—it must be confessed that the complaint of the Government, embodied in the hostile legislation of the emperor Valens in 373, subjecting monks to the conscription (which drew forth an indignant protest from Chrysostom), that monachism was injurious to society and to the healthy condition of civil life by draining off so large a fraction of the population into the backwater of the cloister, was perfectly well founded. And no small part of the overthrow of Christianity in Egypt and Syria by Islam is due to the practical withdrawal of all the devout from family and public life, leaving no spiritual energy to cope with the Koran in the towns and villages whither the conquering Arabs came to settle and proselytize.

The history of monachism in the West is far more varied, chequered, and interesting than in the East. It takes its beginning from the visit of Athanasius to Rome in 340, during his second term of exile, when he brought with him his *Life of St Anthony*, and pressed his example on the Roman Christians who mourned as patriots, not less than as devotees, over the lax and enervated habits of society. The popular imagination was caught at once, and not only was the basis of monachism successfully laid in Rome itself, but Eusebius of Vercelli introduced it

into northern Italy, where it was fostered a little later by the illustrious Ambrose at Milan. From the very beginning a marked difference shows itself in the spirit of Western monachism as compared with the parent institute in the East. Partly from dissimilarity of climate, but still more from that of racial and national temperament, there has always been less tendency in the West to either abstract contemplation or severe self-torture, such as is equally common to many of the Egyptian or Syrian ascetics and to the Jogis of Hindustan. Hard work, with due intervals for food and recreation, occupied all that part of a Western monk's time which was not devoted to prayer or study, and a careful apportionment of his duties throughout the day gave each hour its appointed task to be fulfilled, leaving very few loose ends of time to be wasted. It is true that the Basilian rule aimed at this same end, and that a very minute time-table forms a part of their early Eastern codes; but, as already remarked, the work was neither hard enough nor abundant enough to provide really healthy labour, or to occupy the mind sufficiently to keep it from vague speculation or morbid brooding during the hours of so-called toil. From this fundamental unlikeness springs the broad distinction between the two types of the monastic life, in that the West did not merely provide shelter for such as felt unable to endure the storms of the world, leaving secular society to take care of itself as best it could, but, contrariwise, employed the cloister far more as a training-school for the strong, as the standpoint whence to work the lever which moved a world. Even the more remotely secluded monasteries of the West, instead of serving as refuges wherein the inmates might effectually cut themselves off from all intercourse from without, were rather military outposts and frontier forts of civilization, which taught the arts of peace, the processes of agriculture, and at least the rudiments of social morality, to the rude and almost nomadic hunters and forayers, of whom many of the wilder tribes in outlying districts consisted. And if such was the case even where the conditions seemed least favourable, it may readily be understood what an ample field for exertion the more settled regions provided.

It would seem that it was some modification of the Pachomian rule which first made its way into Europe, but the interest excited by the movement led to variety of choice on the part of the teachers who aimed at spreading its influence in Italy. Thus, Ursus, abbot of Pinetum (probably near Ravenna), translated the Basilian rule into Latin, and it soon took root in southern Italy, where it continued to hold its ground for a considerable time. But a far more important part in the propagation of the monastic institute in the West was taken by Jerome, who, after spending a considerable time, beginning in 374, first as a hermit in the desert of Chalcis, and later at Constantinople, returned to Rome in 382, where he was secretary to Pope Damasus. He acquired much influence over a distinguished group of Roman ladies of high social position, the most celebrated of whom are Paula, and her daughters Blesilla and Eustochium, and employed that influence in urging the adoption of the monastic life upon them. Blesilla died early, it was said and believed in consequence of austerities pressed upon her which her constitution was unable to bear; and the unpopularity which this report brought upon Jerome, co-operating with the death of his patron Damasus and other causes, drove him back to the East, whither Paula and Eustochium also betook themselves, finally settling down in Bethlehem, where the elder lady built three convents, of one of which she was superior, while Jerome, who similarly erected a monastery for monks in the immediate vicinity, acted as chaplain and director to the community.

As the taste for pilgrimages had already become deeply rooted, the convent at Bethlehem was ere long a favourite resort of pilgrims, and exerted considerable influence in prompting the erection of similar foundations in the West. Quite another impulse was given to the furtherance of monachism by Augustine. While, amongst the many documents which have been ascribed to him, the only one which is of the nature of a monastic code is his 109th Epistle, addressed in terms of severe reproof to the nuns of a convent he had himself founded at Hippo, but which had fallen away from discipline, his personal example gave rise to a new type of the common life, in that he formed a sort of college of priests, who shared the episcopal house with him, ate at a common table, and copied in other particulars the observances of monasteries, but without losing their secular character. This was the origin of the institute afterwards famous as the Austin Canons, a foundation of the 11th century. It is true that Eusebius of Vercelli had anticipated Augustine by collecting the clergy of his cathedral (and, as it would seem, the remaining ecclesiastics of the city) into a common dwelling, but the difference in his case was that he obliged them to adopt the habit and style of monks, and thus was in no sense the originator of a new institute. Another important contribution of Augustine's to the history of the common life is his treatise *De Opere Monachorum*, wherein he sets forth the imperative need of making hard work an invariable factor of the monastic profession, notably on the ground that most of the monks in Africa came from the lower ranks of society, such as freedmen, farm-labourers, and artisans, who were spiritually injured by being raised into a grade viewed with more general respect than that from which they had sprung, while they were actually subject to fewer privations and lighter employment than they had been accustomed to. And he adds that amongst other evil consequences of this idleness was that they were found tramping the country selling sham relics, which they palmed off on the unwary, extorting money in other fashions also, and bringing discredit on their profession by their hypocrisy and vices—a picture only too faithfully repeated by the Mendicants a thousand years after the date of this treatise. The 5th century was one of rapid progress in the spread of monachism in the West. Chief amongst those who helped to popularize it stands the name of John Cassian (350-433), a monk of Bethlehem, who made a long and careful study of the Egyptian forms of monachism, of which he has bequeathed us valuable details in his *De Institutione Cenobiorum* and *Colationes Patrum*, the former of which is a treatise on the monastic life, and indeed virtually a rule, though a somewhat prolix one, mainly derived from Macarius, while the latter is a record of the teachings of some hermits of the desert of Scete. Both of these works exercised a powerful influence in their own day, and the second retained its repute much longer, having been warmly approved and recommended for study by Benedict, Bruno, Dominic, and Ignatius Loyola, all four founders of celebrated orders. Cassian fixed himself at Marseilles, where he founded a famous monastery of which he was probably abbot, and which was the centre whence monachism, uniting the peculiarities of East and West, was propagated in southern Gaul, and notably planted in the island of Lerins, which became the seat of one of the most eminent monasteries of the early Middle Ages. Northern Gaul had received the institute earlier through the agency of Martin, bishop of Tours (316-397), who founded monasteries near Poitiers and in his own diocese, which were soon thronged, so that his funeral was attended by two thousand monks. Spain was even earlier in the field than Gaul, but there is some obscurity as to the history

of the introduction of monachism there, all that is certain being that it had made its footing good before 380, the date of a council of Saragossa (Caesaraugusta) which forbade priests to assume the monkish habit. Still more obscurity hangs over the first establishment of monachism in Britain, as to which no trustworthy records have come down to us, though all probability points to its importation from Gaul in some variety of the Pachomian rule; while Germaany did not receive the institute till the following century.

It must not be supposed, however, that the principle of monachism met with no opposition in the course of its progress. Apart from the opposition of those who disliked it precisely for its merits, for its protest against the dissolute morals and enervated habits of a luxurious and rotting society, and for the manner in which it won to itself many of the noblest and most promising of the young and ardent of both sexes, and without taking into account the more reasonable objections of statesmen, there were not lacking warnings of the dangers attending exaggerations of the principle of monachism, uttered by some of its most eminent upholders. Augustine's sharp censures have been already mentioned, and to them may be added the decrees of the council of Gangra in 363, or thereabouts, which anathematize those who adopt a celibate life on the ground that marriage is evil, who wear a peculiar dress as a mark of holiness, condemning such as use ordinary clothing, or who desert their parents or children dependent on them under the plea of desiring to lead an ascetic life. So, too, the great Chrysostom, himself a warm advocate of monachism, found himself obliged to teach his flock the sanctity of Christian family life, and the truth that there was often as much selfishness as piety in retirement to a hermitage from the cares and duties of society. These arguments and decisions were, however, aimed only at abuses and exaggerations of the monastic idea. It remained for Jovinian and Vigilantius to assail the actual principle. Their writings have not survived, and we can judge of their arguments only from the account given of them by their chief opponent Jerome, whose eminent gifts, however, did not include either moderation or controversial fairness, so that it is not safe to assume that we have all their case before us. As regards Vigilantius, he accurately represents the Puritan type of mind protesting against the external part of the popular religion of his day, often with good reason, but also showing equal intolerance for harmless, if not useful, practices; so that his condemnation of monachism is only part of his general objection to the temper of his time. But Jovinian's objections seem to have gone deeper. He had been himself a monk (and indeed never resumed secular life), but he disputed absolutely the thesis that any merit lay in monachism, celibacy, fasting, and asceticism considered in themselves, save in so far as they contributed to foster the Christian temper and life, which might and did flourish equally, he urged, under quite different conditions, while it was by no means unfrequent for spiritual pride, if not Manichean error, to lay hold of those who devoted themselves to the ascetic profession. This was, in fact, going very little further than Chrysostom had done, or than Nilus did a short time later. But Jovinian's divergence from the standard of his day was not confined to practical questions; it extended to theological doctrines also, and accordingly his strictures on monachism, probably more incisive and less qualified than those of its other critics, were involved in his condemnation as a heretic by synods at Rome and Milan in 390. The reaction, of which he may be regarded as the mouthpiece rather than as the sole representative, was thus effectually crushed, and that for centuries. And though Jovinian is undoubtedly mere

in accord than his opponents with the modern temper on the subject of monachism, and while it may be allowed that his teaching might have been a useful corrective in Eastern Christendom, where family life was all but overborne by asceticism, yet the impartial historian must admit that his success would have been an irreparable misfortune for civilization in the West. Such a dispassionate estimate of asceticism as his, if widely entertained, would have been fatal to the spread of monachism, and thus one of the most important conservative and statical forces in the preservation of the older culture, one of the most powerful dynamical forces in reducing the chaotic materials of early mediæval society to order and coherence, would have been lost to Europe; nor is it easy to conjecture what effectual substitute could have taken its place. As it was, the movement was not checked for a moment by this partial reaction; and not only did the older communities thrive and spread during the 5th and early 6th centuries, but new ones were established,—chief among which stand those of Cæsarius of Arles and of Donatus of Besançon in southern Gaul, that of Isidore of Seville in Spain, and the early Celtic code, of which only traditional fragments survive, but which seems in Britain to have been strongly affected by tribal influences, so that a monastery was often recruited from a single clan, and the abbacy became hereditary in the family of the chieftain, a fact which is noticeable even in the succession of the abbots of Iona, who for ten elections after Columba were of his family in the tribe of Conall Gulban.¹

But, swiftly as monachism spread in Europe during the breaking-up of the Western empire, some of the causes which hastened its progress also tended to its rapid decay. The disturbed state of society, and, in particular, the prevalence of petty warfare, drove many thousands of persons to seek a quiet refuge in the cloister without any more directly religious motive. When once there, they found in every place some rule in force which was either imported directly from Egypt or Syria, or else, like that of Cæsarius, modelled on Eastern lines, and therefore ill suited to the severer climate of Europe and the more active habits of the people. The austerities were thus too oppressive for general observance, and the result was a widespread neglect of rules which continued nominally in force, while at the same time the very monks who had ceased to keep them laid claim to special sanctity on the pretence of their strict way of life. The time was ripe for a reform, or rather for a wholly new departure in the shape of a rule devised to meet Western needs, and not merely adapted more or less clumsily from Oriental asceticism. The fitting man to accomplish this difficult task appeared in the person of Benedict of Nursia, author of the most famous of all monastic codes. Born of a respectable family about 480, he adopted the ascetic life at fourteen in a cave near Subiaco, not far from Rome, where he remained for three years, at the expiration of which he was chosen abbot of a neighbouring convent, then in a very relaxed state. His rule proved too stern for his new subjects, who attempted to poison him, whereupon he resigned his office and returned to Subiaco, around which he soon erected twelve monasteries, each peopled by an abbot and twelve monks. Fresh attempts on his life and on the discipline of his society drove him out again in the year 528, when he fixed his dwelling at Monte Cassino, the place where his celebrated rule was drafted in the following year, and which has ever since prided itself on its rank as the cradle of the Benedictine Order and the premier abbey of Western Christendom. The famous institute which he devised

¹ Adamnan, *Vit. Columbae*, ed. Reeves.