

Clay, Rotha Mary., The Hermits and Anchorites of England. Methuen & Co. London, 1914.

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XI. HUMAN INTERCOURSE

Let him never be alone, if he can conveniently have with him a companion or servant.—*De Vita Heremitarum*.

So ready and so buxom be thou in will for to speak with thine even-cristen when he cometh to thee ; for thou knowst not what he is, nor why he cometh, nor what need he hath of thee, nor thou of him, till thou hast assayed.—W. Hilton, *How an Anchoress shall behave Her*.

I. COMPANIONSHIP IN THE CELL

The “solitary” was not condemned to a self-centered and self-sufficing life of utter separation and silence. Companionship was permitted, and even encouraged, on the ground that to live entirely apart from human converse was positively dangerous to the soul. “He thinks himself to be that which he is not ; for this, indeed, is wont to happen to him who has not with him one who can test his work.” The Rules therefore impress the advisability of fellowship with another of like mind and purpose. That of Grimlaic has a clause (*Cap. XVII.*) directing the never less than two or three be solitaires together. Although enclosed in single cells, they could communicate through the window, and sit up one another in the service of God.

Guthlac formed one of a group of recluses who were in touch with one another. They included Tatwine (p.14) and Ecgberht, Cissa, and the clerks Beccel and Wilfrid. When a man became renowned for sanctity, other desired to dwell near him and emulate his manner of life. Thus around Roger were gathered five hermits and an anchoress (pp. 21-2). In cases of failing health, the services of a young disciple were sought. Godric joined an aged monk in Wolsingham. Entering the hermit’s cave, he received the unexpected salutation, “Welcome, Brother Godric!” to which—though as yet they were strangers—he replied : “How does thou fare, Father Aelric?”

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They lived together for two years, and when Aelric became feeble, Godric waited on him and carried him about, and at length, fetched a priest to administer the last rites. At Finchale Godric in his turn was served by a young nephew ; and in his old age he had a priest living with him. In the same way, Lucian the priest ministered to Ernald the hermit at Loughborough in Wychwood Forest.

Robert of Knaresborough was joined by Ive and by several servants, who shared his labours. The story of Ive seems to show that even in the “solitary” life, two were better than one, for the strong would lift up his fellow. One day Ive attempted to return to the world which he had renounced. In passing through the forest, however, he broke his leg with the bough of a tree, and fell into a ditch, where he sat crying “alas ! alas ! walloway !” Robert, supernaturally aware of what had happened, hastened thither, and not without mirth at his friend’s plight, pointed the moral : “No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”. Robert then blessed his leg and bade him stand. The two hermits returned to Knaresborough, and continued to live together until Robert’s death, when Ive received his last benediction and became his successor.

Brethren, however, did not always dwell together in unity. The solitaries of Farne and Coquet had their trials in the way of uncongenial companionship. Arriving at Farne, Bartholomew found the cell already occupied. Aelwin was much annoyed, and would fain have cast out the intruder ; he endeavoured to excite him to anger, but Bartholomew would not sin with his lips, and bore with patience Aelwin’s perpetual nagging. When Aelwin perceived that persecution availed nought, he retired and left Bartholomew alone. Bartholomew himself had afterwards to suffer a like trial. The new-comer was Prior Thomas, who, having been deposed from his office at Durham, was seeking seclusion. During years of solitude Bartholomew had acquired certain habits which unfitted him for society ; these he gave up, even changing his hair-shirt out of consideration for his companion. But there were limits to his complaisance. He was not prepared to linger over the pleasures of the table, such as they were, and Thomas, who enjoyed a hearty mean, made painful insinuation, questioning

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his motive in withdrawing so hastily. In such close quarters, familiarity without true fellowship became intolerable, and Bartholomew at length retired to the monastery of Durham. After he had remained there for a whole year, he was persuaded that it was his duty to return to the island. Perhaps a little social intercourse had done good to the lonely monk, whilst an interval of unbroken solitude may have refreshed the harassed ex-prior, worn out with governing a large community. At all events, it proved on Bartholomew’s return that a transformation had taken place, and hence forth the two men lived “in complete tranquility[sic] both of tongue and soul”.

A similar story is told of the relations between Henry the hermit and the keeper of the island of Coquet, with whom he had constant dealings, though probably they did not dwell together. This monk did not cease to attack Henry daily with harsh and opprobrious words ; but at length, admiring his immense

humility and holiness, he fell at his feet with tears, entreating forgiveness. Henry raised him from the ground with joy of heart, and the two men became united in the bond of spiritual friendship.

But friction did not always end in fellowship, as is shown by another Northumbrian tale. A certain Gilbert de Niddendale associated with a hermit called Seman de Botelesham. The latter was attacked by his companion, who beat him and left him on the moor for dead, taking away his clothes and a penny. Gilbert fled, but was seized by an official and taken prisoner for the robbery. In the meantime the hermit had recovered, and the King's servant caused him to behead with his own hands his former comrade, such being the custom in that wild border country when a man was caught red-handed.

Nor did the enclosed person necessarily live alone. Wulfric, for example, seems to have had the company of Brictric (p. 74). Richard le Coupe of Swepestone, priest, and Geoffrey Richard, layman, dwelt together in London in the churchyard of St. Lawrence, Jewry (1367).¹ Ela, the niece of Walter, Bishop of Norwich, had companions at Massingham. Margaret and Alice were anchoresses at St. Olave's, Norwich. Isabel and Olive lived together at Fordham. Those for whom the *Ancren*

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Riwle was written were three sisters—"of one father and of one mother".

Recluses had to avoid the pettiness, suspicion, and ill-temper which a narrow life might foster. The above-mentioned Rule comments thus upon the ungenerous person who is not willing to share her good things : "See, now, how different are the envious from our Lord ! The anchoress who reused to lend a book to another had turned her eyes of faith very far from Him" A spirit of unity was to be cultivated : "Let your dear faces be always turned to each other with kind affection, a cheerful countenance, and gentle courtesy". One must never heed a rumour whispered about another by the devil's messenger, who would separate them by anger or envy. Nevertheless, one sister should warn another sweetly and affectionately of anything that she does wrong, if she knows it with certainty ; but the person who bears such a message must repeat it often before she go out to deliver it, that she many not report it otherwise, nor patch anything more upon it. The other sister should receive such admonition humbly and readily. Should any resentment be caused, none ought to receive the Blessed Sacrament, nor even behold it, lest they should look with anger towards Him who came down to earth to make peace. A peacemaker's blessing is offered to the one who restores peace by taking the blame upon herself, although the other might be more in fault. These passages seem to show that the individuals composing the little community were living to some extent a separate life.

It was customary for the enclosed person to have servants. Loretta, Countess of Leicester (an elderly widow, p. 74) had a serving-man who was granted exemption from being put on juries, etc., during her lifetime. Katherine, anchoress of St. Michael's church at St. Albans, was attended by a certain Joan Gerard, and also by Philip Gerard (1424, 1433). The enclosed lady usually had a

confidential companion. Christina of Markyate had her maid Doet ; nor is the faithful Mabel unremembered in the story of Katherine of Ledbury (p. 75). The recluse's attendant held a responsible post. Cecile, handmade of the anchorite at St. Chad's chapel, Chester, appeared (probably to represent her mistress) as plaintiff in the Court of Piepoudre against several persons. If she were a suitable

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person, she might even succeed her mistress. Already familiar with the life, she might in turn be professed as an anchoress. An instance occurs early in the twelfth century at Wareham (p124). Agnes Vertesance who, in 1424, was one of the companions of Katherine Dytton of St. Albans, became her successor ; she died in 1478, having spent at least fifty-four years in that cell by St. Michael's church.²

Aelred describes the qualifications and duties of the waiting-women :—

“First chese an honest anxient womman in lyvyng, no jangler, ne royler aboute, noo chider, noo tidynges teller, but such oon, that may have witesse of hir good conversacyon and honesty. Hir charge shall be to kepe thyn houshold and thy lyflod, to close thy dores, and to resceyue that shuld be resceyved, and to voide that shuld be avoided. Under hir governaile shuld she have a yonger womman of age, to bere gretter charges, in fettyng of wode and water, and sethyng and greithyng of mete and drynke. And that she be ouerlooked under gret awe.”³

[Chose an attentive woman of upright living, who does not lie, is not lazy, does not scold or gossip, but one who will offer good, wholesome conversation. This person should upkeep the household, keeping the doors closed, receiving items that are delivered, and disposing of what must be avoided. If the waiting-woman is young enough, she can bear harder physical work, such as fetching wood and water, and seething and preparing of meat and drink. The waiting-woman should also treat the Anchoress with proper reverence.]

The *Ancren Riwe* ordained that the elder woman, who went out on business, should be very plain, whilst the younger one should generally stay within doors. The chapter “Of Domestic Matters” contains “The rule concerning your maids,” which has to be read to them every week until they knew it well. It was imperative that they should be well looked after : “for ye may be much benefited by them, and, on the other hand, made worse”. There was a danger lest though them the lady might hear gossip : “for people say of anchoresses that almost every one hath an old woman to feed her ears”. It was, indeed, a common saying that “From mill and from market, from smithy and from ancre-house, men bring tidings”. When upon some errand, the women were to behave with propriety, and never linger or converse ; even their attire should be such that it might be easily seen to what life they were dedicated. Should they meet with annoyance when fetching their food, they must take it meekly : “be glad in your

heart if ye suffer insolence from Slurry, the cook's boy, who washeth dishes in the kitchen". The maidens were to be considerate :—

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RECLUSE MINISTERS TO WOUNDED KNIGHTS



SIR PERCEVAL VISITS A CELL.
THE RECLUSE IN ROMANCE

[Plate XXXIII : The Recluse in Romance. Page not numbered.]

“Let them, by all means, forbear to vex their mistress ; and whenever they do so, let them before they neither eat or drink make obeisance on their knees . . . and say *Mea culpa* ; and accept the penance that she layeth on them, bowing low. And let not the anchoress ever again thereafter upbraid her with the same fault, when vexed, except she soon afterwards fall into the same, but drive it entirely out of her heart.”

The mistress, on her part, was to be affectionate and gentle, and seldom stern. “It is right that they should both fear and love you ; but that there would be always more of love than of fear. Thus it shall go well.”

II. INTERCOURSE WITH THE WORLD

Having considered the question of daily companionship, we turn to that of communication with the world outside. There was a great diversity of practice according to the character and circumstances of the individual. His love for silent contemplation might grow with the exercise of it, and his life shrink into the ever narrower isolation ; or, full of human interests, he might be constrained to social service by some pressing call. St. Cuthbert, as we have seen, passed through both these stages. It is significant that the island of Farne had two buildings—the cell and the guest-hall. Pilgrims and sailors alike found shelter in the house of hospitality by the seashore. Long after the days of St. Cuthbert, many persons crossed to Farne to receive the help of Bartholomew, or of Aelric. Bartholomew was equally ready for solitude or service. His bright, outspoken, sympathetic manner attracted people. Many were drawn to him by the report of his holiness, to whom he gave advice and consolation :—

“Troubled therefore by the throngs and crowds, and fearing lest their esteem should lead him into vanity, he proposed to be enclosed, so that in proportion as he cut himself off from the cares and gossip of men, he should grow nearer to God. But . . . he continued even to the end content with that measure of quiet which he had at first, following that word of wisdom of the apostle, who, when he had a desire to depart and be with Christ, thought it needful for the welfare of many to remain in the flesh, choosing in his loving soul not that which was better for himself but for others.”

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Godrich of Finchale was an austere reserved man, and held no intercourse with strangers unless they had been recommended by the Prior of Durham. In the early years of his retirement he maintained strict silence, even to the extent of using a code of signs for purposes of communication ; but he abandoned this practice. He was dutiful and affectionate to his family, several of whom followed him to Finchale ; namely his mother, who died there, his brother, and his nephew. His sister Burchwene lived the solitary life in a cell hard by his own, but falling ill

she was nursed until her death in a hospital at Durham. He was kindly to his servants, and was venerated by those who visited him. Godric's visitors were usually admitted to his little church, dedicated to St. John Baptist ; only a privileged few were ever allowed to enter his inner dwelling place with its oratory of the Blessed Virgin. His friends included Aelred, the saintly Abbot of Rievaulx, Robert of Newminster, Cuthbert, Prior of Guisborough, William, Bishop of Durham ; and his biographers, Prior German and the monk Reginald.

The genial, generous Robert of Knaresborough was ever surrounded by a crowd of poor pensioners and pilgrims, for which he built a guest-house near his cell :—

Heghe and lawe vnto hym hyed
In faith for to be edified.

Richard of Hample, too, was of a sociable disposition. When first the youth comes before us, at a crisis of his life, he was indeed silent. During the dinner to which he was bidden after his first sermon (p. 161) "he was such a perfect keeper of silence that no word proceeded out of his mouth". When asked by Sir John de Dalton⁴ whether he were indeed the son of his familiar friend, William Rolle, Richard, fearing lest he should be hindered in his purpose, replied, "Perchance I am" ; but he was afterwards prevailed upon to talk with his host. Friendliness was, however, his leading characteristic: he would be all things to all men if he might thereby save

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some. It was his custom to go in and out of houses, and even to eat and drink with the people. His wanderings were so habitual that his biographer makes a kind of apology for him—lest he should be confounded with these roving hermits who were in ill-repute—and explains that he moved about in order better to edify the people. Richard confesses that he was wont to go from place to place, and maintains that there is no harm in leaving the cell with good reason : "Cellis forsoth to leue for cause resonable, to harmetis is not ill, and eft, if it accorde, to the same to turn again". Some of the old fathers had done so, though they suffered man's "grutching" for it. But Richard himself speaks of "rynnars aboute, that ar sclauderers of heremytes [slanderers of hermits]".⁵ Langland, too, would give alms to some ancre and heremytes—"but Robert renne aboute shall nought have of mine".⁶ According to more than one Rule, the hermit ought not to go often about the country for his errands, but should send a servant, if he should have one, because by unlawful wandering or straying he might lose devotion by negligence.

Whilst the hermit might leave his dwelling and mix with men, the anchorite abode always in one place, and conversed only with those who came to his window. Some considered it wrong for the enclosed person even to extend a hand out of the window for the purposes of healing. Wechelen, the Welsh recluse of Llowes, was advised by Cistercian monks not to put forth his hand to cure the blind, lame, and sick who resorted to him ; but he was persuaded by the famous

archdeacon of Brecknock to make use of his healing touch.⁷ Wulfric is said to have exercised a similar power (p 152).

Although recluses were permitted to speak at discretion, they bore the reputation of being taciturn ; “little will they speak”. A sixteenth-century critic refers to the iron grating through which they peep “when they will vouchsafe to speak with any man at whose hand they hope for advantage”. Silence, however, was by no means a thing to be condemned in one supposed to be dead to the world. Many are the counsels how a recluse should speak, and when. Only at

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stated hours was she permitted to talk with visitors, and even with her fellow-inmates. In Lent she must be silent altogether, or if that were impossible, speak seldom, with her confessor and her maidens only, unless some reverend person should come from afar.

The anchoress was expected to confine her very thoughts within the cell. It was not enough to keep her body and limbs within walls whilst her mind and senses were frittered away by wandering thoughts, wasted with care and weariness, even stirred up by unworthy desires ; or her tongue, maybe, ran idly to and fro the lifelong day through streets and cities, market-places and fairs.⁸ She was therefore shielded from everything that could engross her mind or excite her emotions. She was not to become a teacher, almoner of the poor, or guardian of church property. Aelred strictly forbids access to children, condemning a practice which he touchingly describes :—

“Let not boys or girls approach thee. There are some recluses who undertake the teaching of girls and turn their cell into a school. She sits at the window and they settle down into the porch. She watches them one by one, and according as each behaves, now she is angry, now she laughs, now she threatens, now she beats them, now she coaxes them, now she kisses them, now calls a weeping child to come nearer to be beaten, she strokes her face, she draws up her head, and eagerly embracing her, calls her now daughter, now darling”.⁹

The *Ancren Riwle* permits to the solitary woman at least a link with child-life. “Her maiden may, however, teach any little girl concerning whom it might be doubtful whether she should learn among boys, but an anchoress ought to give her thoughts to God only.”

Aelred says moreover : “Let not the poor cry out around the cell, nor orphans weep, nor widow lament”. If she ask how this can be prevented, he replies, that she must sit still, keep silence, and restrain herself until they depart worn out, perceiving that they will receive nothing. “Thou mayest exclaim that this is cruel : but if though hast aught besides food and clothing, thou art not a nun.” Prayer and pity she ought to give, but not alms.

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The canon formulated by St. Richard of Chichester (1246) ordains not only that recluses should have narrow and suitable windows, and avoid communication with persons concerning whom sinister suspicions might arise, but forbids that they be entrusted with the charge of vestments.¹⁰ A similar warning occurs in the *Ancren Riwe* against the use of the cell as a depository of goods ; “ neither receive under your care the church vestments, nor the chalice . . . for oftentimes much harm has come of such caretaking”.

The recluse’s one regular visitor was her father-confessor. If the cell were dependent upon some monastery, the abbot would appoint to that office. A secular chaplain nominated by the abbot said mass for the recluse of Whalley and her two servants.¹¹ When Emma Stapilton was professed as a Carmelite anchoress, the Provincial appointed as her advisers and protectors the prior and subprior of Norwich and three others of that convent.¹² Not infrequently the recluse held the bishop’s licence to select her own ghostly counsellor. The name of Alice, anchoress of Hereford, occurs amongst those to whom papal indulgences were granted to choose confessors, who should give them, being penitent, plenary remission at their hour of death.¹³ It was a matter of great importance what manner of person was sent to her, or summoned by her. The Rules direct that the shrift-father be a priest of good life, prudent, and not young—“not young of wit, nor yet foolish old men”. Without his direction, the recluse was advised to speak with no visitors, except a bishop, or abbot, or prior of high character, and even then, it should be in the presence of some other person. She was bidden never to allow messengers to run to and from between her and any man under colour of charity or spiritual friendship, neither should she receive or send gifts and letters without leave. She was warned to accept “not so much as a race of ginger” from any man whom she distrusted.

In conversation with visitors, the anchoress was to exercise restraint and discretion :—

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“When you have to go to your parlour window, learn from your maid who it is that is come ; for it may be some one whom you ought to shun. . . Say first, *Confiteor*, and then *Benedicite*, which he ought to say ; hear his words and sit quite still, that when he parteth from you, he may not know either good or evil of you Some one is so learned and of such wise speech, that she would have him to know it, she sits and talks to him and gives him word for word, and becomes a preceptor who should be an anchoress, and teaches him who is come to teach her ; and would, by her own account, soon be celebrated and known among the wise. Known she is well ; for from the very circumstance that she thinketh herself to be reputed wise, he understands that she is a fool For, at last, when he is gone away, he will say, ‘This anchoress is a great talker’.”

Many a recluse was perplexed because she could not prevent worldly people from coming and telling tales, sometimes of vanity. One woman confided her difficulty to a friend, probably Walter Hilton, who wrote a letter advising her

how she should conduct herself. He tells her that intercourse ought to be a help, not a hindrance. Although she ought not to go out of her house to seek occasion to do deeds of mercy, she should love her fellow-Christians, and be ready to help them ; she must “speke gudely, gladly, and meekly to thaim all”. Even should she be called away from her devotions to the visitor, let her not think that in so doing she is leaving God for the sake of any man. “Methinks not so in this case,” declares the writer, “for if thou be wise, thou shalt not leave God but thou shalt find Him and have Him and see Him in thine even-Christian as well as in prayer—but in another manner thou shalt have Him.” Discretion was of course needful. If a man came to tell some trouble, suffer him to ease his heart. When he is done, comfort him gladly and charitably, but soon break off ; should he then fall into idle talks of others men’s deeds, discourage him by answering shortly, and he will soon take his leave. If a man of holy church come, hear him in a lowly, reverent manner, but do not attempt to get to know him. It falls not to thee to reprove any for his faults ; when possible, however, profit him spiritually, if he will take it. “And of all other things kepe silence als mykel as thou may.”¹⁴

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But in the excitement of receiving a great visitor, the anchoress did not always keep silence. The celebrated prior, called St. John of Bridlington, went to see over the property of the monastery in Richmondshire, and took this opportunity of visiting a certain recluse. The story, which occurs in detail in the saint’s life, is thus quaintly told by Fuller :—

“Going to view their lands in Richmondshire, he gave a visit to a woman lately turnd to Ancorist and renowned for her holiness ; she told him, that now her vision was out, who the night before dreamt that an Eagle flew about her house with a label in his bill, wherein was written *Jesus is my love* ;¹⁵ ‘and you,’ saith she, ‘are the person who so honour him in your heart, that no earthly thing can distract you’. To whom our John returned : ‘I came hither to hear from you some saving and savoury discourse, but seeing you begin with such idle talk, farewell ;’ and so waved any further converse.”¹⁶

The anchoress seldom received visitors within her cell. Margaret Kirkby, the devoted disciple of Richard the hermit, lived at Ainderby in Richmondshire, twelve miles from the place where Richard was then dwelling. Receiving word that she was suffering from a terrible disease, and had been now speechless for thirteen days, he came to see her. He does not seem to have entered her house, however, in spite of their close friendship. Much comforted by the sight of her teacher, Dame Margaret fell asleep at the window, and leaned upon him. She was seized with a convulsion and seemed to desire to break open the window ; then she suddenly awoke, having recovered her power of speech. With fervent devotion she immediately bust forth in these words: *Gloria tibi Domine*, and the Blessed Richard went on, *Qui natus est de Virgine*, and so forth. Then he said : “Now speech is restored to thee, use it like a woman who talks sensibly”.¹⁷

The subject of hospitality is dealt with by Aelred, who set forth “that a Recluse shulde not haue to do of hospitalyte anempst Religious gastes, for it longeth not to hir”.¹⁸ Guests

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were occasionally admitted within the anchorite’s house, but they rarely entered the inner chamber of seclusion, or stayed the night. According to the *Ancren Riwele*, the maid ought to receive and entertain the visitors with glad cheer ; and the recluse should have leave to open her window once or twice, to make signs of gladness at seeing her friends. She was not to eat with them, for “there are anchoresses who make their meals with their friends outside the convent,” but that is too much friendship, she being quite dead to the world. Sir John de Beauchamp made a petition to the Pope in 1363 that his wife Elizabeth might visit her mother, an enclosed Minoreess, accompanied by six fit persons. The request was granted, but Elisabeth was forbidden to eat or spend the night with her mother.¹⁹ Without open and manifest cause, secular persons were on no account to stay in the houses of anchorites.²⁰ Nor were men to be received as guests : “Let no man sleep within your walls. If great necessity should cause your house to be used, have with you a woman of unspotted life day and night.”

The Franciscan Chronicle of Lanercost tells how some such occasion of necessity once arouse at a cell six miles from Shrewsbury. It was in the year 1296, on the eve of St. Francis, to whose Order belonged the nun who was enclosed by the parish church of the village. This pious woman, Emma by name, was accustomed to receive visits from holy men, and on the vigil of the saint she admitted two Minorite friars to hospitality. At midnight she rose from her bed, called her handmaid, and bade her bring a lamp for early worship. The lamp was twice set upon the altar of the oratory, but was as often extinguished by a gust of wind, the place being at the same moment brightened by rays coming through the window of the oratory of St. John Baptist which was next the church. This light “surpassing the radiance of the sun, beautified with a heavenly luster the features of her maidens, who lay in a distant part of the house, notwithstanding that the maidens themselves were weeping because of the abundance of the celestial illumination”. A vision of saints was then manifested. The blessed Virgin bade the anchoress rouse her slumbering

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guests that they might see the wondrous light wherewith that dwelling had been purified. Desiring to know the source of this light, one of the friars looked through the window of the church, and saw what seemed to be a torch burning before the image of the Blessed Baptist, the herald of Eternal Light.

III. CONSTANCY OF ABODE

The recluse might never leave her cell “except only by necessity and fear of death, obedience to her bishop or superior”. There is one recorded instance of an anchoress refusing to abandon her dwelling even to save her life. This horrible event took place when William the Conqueror sacked Mantles in 1087. The woman enclosed at St. Mary’s Church remained therein and was burnt to death :—

An auncre godes spouse
That nolde vor no thing fle out of hire house.²¹

The word immured is sometimes applied to the solitary in the sense that he never left his four walls ; but he was seldom walled in or sealed up with no means of egress. Grimlaic’s rule, indeed, directs that the bishop seal the door with his ring after performing the solemn act of induction, the chamber being unfastened only in time of sickness. Sometimes even in mediaeval England the entrance was actually blocked up. A petition was made to the bishop by Thomas, a Franciscan brother enclosed in the hermitage of Oath in Aller. Since the time of his enclosing no one had visited him, or seen how ill he was, and he therefore entreated that a door might be made in his dwelling so that some one might come and hear his confession. The vicar of Muchelney (four miles away) was therefore charged to make a door and keep the key for his visits to Thomas and his companion. Again, when Bishop Grandisson of Exeter gave permission for Beatrice of Colyford, he directed the Abbot of Newenham “to shut her up in the cell or house aforesaid, and, when she is enclosed, block up the door of her house and do all other things which are fitting and convenient in this case”. The Exeter Office certainly implies the building up of

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the entrance. According to the Sarum Use the door was to be “firmly closed from the outside”. Doors and locks are mentioned in other documents. When the Abbot of Thornton, on behalf of the Bishop of Lincoln, set apart Beatrice Franke at Winterton, he described it as “shutting her up in a certain house and enclosure . . . and securing the door of the same with bars, bolts, and keys”.

The recluse, according to civil law, “is so mured or shut up that he is always alone and remains in his enclosure and can never come out of his place.”²² It was a matter of conscience rather than of keys. In some cases the inmate was able to quit the cell if she chose ; the anchoress who should go to the play in the churchyard does not escape censure in the *Ancren Riwele*.

In the life of Wulfric it is recorded that on one memorable occasion he did leave his chamber to enter the adjoining church. This deliberate act of self-mortification evidently created a profound impression. On the feast of Pentecost, in the face of all his neighbours, this sensitive saint openly denounced himself on account of the evil thoughts by which had been assailed the night before :—

“When morning was come and all the congregation were assembled, he came forth in public from his cell and opening his mouth spoke this

speech against himself. ‘Thus,’ said he, ‘it has happened to this miserable Wulfric, that on this most holy night my sins have pressed upon me, so that my enemy has led me, an unhappy one, astray. I confess my sin to God and to you. I pray for pardon from God through your intercession.’ . . . So this bold follower of humility did not spare in any degree his own shame, or the respect of those who stood round, nor, lastly, the reputation for holiness which spread far and wide. When he had said these things, he returned to his cell.”

The enclosed person remained in the same spot for life unless a change of domicile became necessary. The reason for removal is not recorded in the case of Simon, who was translated in 1222 from Lichfield to Dunstable where, six years later, he died. In the case of Margaret de Kirkby, permission to change her bode was sought in order to obtain

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facilities for worship. Archbishop Thoresby therefore issued a commission (January, 1356-7) to the abbots of Jervaulx and Eggleston to transfer Margaret from Layton to “a place near the parish church of Aynderby, where, according to the desire expressed in her petition, she may see and hear the solemn sacrament of the Lord’s altar, which in her present place of enclosure she is unable to do, and to dispense her from her vow of dwelling perpetually at Laton”. It is related in the life of Richard the hermit that after he died (as is supposed, in 1349²³), the anchoress, Dame Margaret Kirkby, transferred herself (*se transtulit*) from Ainderby to Hampole. Whilst her spiritual father lived, his presence had caused her to recover from illness. She therefore sought to dwell near his place of burial : and never thereafter was she oppressed with that horrible sickness.

Another left under compulsion, exchanging her stone walls for a veritable prison. Matilda, enclosed in the churchyard of St. Peter’s, Leicester, was cited as one “infected with the pestiferous contagion of heretics and Lollards”. Examining Matilda, Archbishop Courteney found her not to answer plainly and directly, but sophistically and subtilely ; whereupon he commanded the abbot that the door of her cell should be opened, and the inmate put in custody. On his return to Leicester, she answered his questions humbly, and retracted any unorthodox opinions which she might have held. Wherefore the archbishop placed her again in her *reclitorium*. Lest the anchoress should suffer from a loss of prestige, the archbishop issued a mandate *pro anachorita reducta ad viam veritatis*, setting forth that she had confessed her errors and was penitent, and offering indulgence to those who should come to her aid with gifts by way of charity. Possibly, the *Matilda* of 1388 is *the nostre bienaimé Maude Wardesdale Ankores recluse en leglise de saint Pierre* who in 1400 received six marks a year from the Duchy of Lancaster.²⁴

In cases of necessity or expediency, a dispensation for de-

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parture could be obtained from the bishop or from the pope. In 1402, a Dominican friar of Arundel sought to quit his cell in the friary, pleading its inconvenience and the extreme poverty of the community. About the same time (1401), a woman at Pontefract obtained permission to change her dwelling-place. This Emma was a privileged person and enjoyed a liberty unknown to most.

“To Emma Scherman, of the diocese of York. Indult to her—who formerly took a vow of a recluse and has had herself for many years enclosed in a cell in the place of Pontefract, with a little garden contiguous thereto for the sake of taking fresh air—on account of the tumults and clamours of the people in the said place, to have there another cell with a like garden, and to leave her cell yearly for the purpose of visiting churches and other pious places, and of gaining the indulgences granted there, without requiring licence of the diocesan or other.”

When the monastery of Syon by Sheen was founded, several solitaries left their dwellings and entered the community. Margaret, an anchoress dwelling near Bodmin, obtained her bishop's consent to migrate thither, and to join the order of St. Bridget. Matilda Newton, a nun of Barking, was appointed to rule this house, but difficulties arose, and she was not elected abbess. In 1417 she returned to Barking as a recluse. The accounts of the earliest father-confessors are somewhat confusing. According to the foundation charter (1415), it seems that Brother William Alnwyk, a recluse monk of Westminster, together with others, presided over the care of the women;²⁵ “but in the course of a year, worn out by weariness and old age, he returned to the cell whence he had gone forth”. Another priest, Thomas Fyschbourn, who had been an anchorite by St. German's chapel at St. Albans, succeeded him as confessor-general at Syon. He died in 1428, and his obit was kept yearly, for he, as counsellor and confessor of Henry V, had promoted the King's benevolence towards that house.

There was one particular sphere of labour for which it was commonly accounted justifiable to abandon the solitary life.

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“They maye by no meanes bee suffered to come oute of their houses excepte it bee to take a straighter and an harder life uppon them, which is to be a bishop.”²⁶ Elsewhere we have seen how St. Cuthbert and others were drawn from solitude to undertake arduous posts of responsibility and care. In continental history, there is the notable instance of Pietro Morone, the aged peasant, taken from his cave at Sulmona to become pope (1294). An English copy of the Rule ascribed to St. Celestine refers to him as a hermit chosen for his holiness to be pope, who afterwards returned to the wilderness again.²⁷ To Dante this act of resignation may have been *il gran refuto*, but the anchorite felt himself under a moral obligation to return ultimately to the life to which he had been dedicated by solemn vows. In truth, the simple solitary was rarely fitted for strenuous social work, though he might on occasion emerge from his solitude as a counsellor, and even a leader, of men.

Footnotes~

1. *Reg. Wykeham* (Hants Rec, S.), II. 122-3.
2. B.M. Cotton. Nero. D. VII. f. 137.
3. Bodl. MS. 423 f. 179.
4. A certain John de Dalton (*militis, armiger*) and Margery his wife, of Kirkby Misperton, are mentioned in 1371, when their son, John, was dealing with the property (Final Concords of Lands, 44 Edw. III) Bodl. MS. Dodsworth, i. f. 505. R. Rolle's birthplace was Thornton, probably Thornton le Dale, between Pickering and Kirkby Misperton.
5. *Officium*, col. 792-3 ; Fire of Love (E.E.T.S. 106), 32, 35.
6. *Piers Plowman* (E.E.T.S. 38), Text B, pass. VI. 1. 150.
7. Giraldus Cambr., *Opera* (Rolls, 21) I., 92.
8. *Aelred*, Cap. II.
9. *Ibid.* Cap. VI.
10. Wilkins, *Concilia*, I, 693.
11. Towneley's MS. Transcripts from Monastic Cart, p. 151, penes W. Farrar.
12. B.M. Harl., 1819, f. 197* [per Rev. B. Zimmerman] [sic].
13. Pap. Lett., III. 504.
14. Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. The tract "How an ancre should have her" is also found in MSS. ascribed to R. Rolle, see Horstman, I. 106-7.
15. A popular religious watchword ; chalices, seals, etc., were engraved *Jhesus est amor meus*.
16. Fuller's *Worthies*, ed. 1662, *Yorks*, p. 193 ; also *Nov. Leg.*, Life of St. John of B.
17. *Officium*, col. 801.
18. Bodl. MS. 423, f. 192.
19. Pap. Reg. (Petitions), I. 457.
20. Lyndwood, *Provinciale*.
21. Wm. Malm. *Gest. Reg.* (Rolls, 90), II. 336. ; *Chr. Robert of Glos* (Rolls, 86) II. 562.
22. Coke, Littleton's *Institutes*.
23. The dates present difficulties, it is true. There was some connexion between the East Layton cell and Hampole, for in 1348 Margaret la Boteler, nun of Hampole, was enclosed there. Possibly she was Margaret la Boteler of Kirkby. [Marginalia: There was the Wake/Stuteville/Foliot connexion.]
24. P.R.O. Duchy of Lanc. Misc. Bks. 15, f. II.
25. St. Bridget's own confessor had been a hermit.
26. Thos. Becon, *Reliques of Rome*, ed. 1563, f. 54.
27. Bristol City Library MS. 6.

-end chapter-