

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

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CHAPTER XI

THE VARIOUS RELIGIOUS ORDERS

The various Orders existing in England in pre-Reformation days may be classified under four headings (1) Monks, (2) Canons Regular, (3) Military Orders, and (4) Friars. As regards the nuns, most of the houses were affiliated to one or other of the above-named Orders.

I. Monks

i. Benedictines

St. Benedict, justly called the Patriarch of Western Monachism, established his rule of life in Italy ; first at Subiaco and subsequently at Monte Cassino about A.D. 529. The design of his code was, like every other rule of regular life, to enable men to reach the higher Christian ideals by the helps afforded them in a well-regulated monastery. According to the saint's original conception, the houses were to be separate families independent of each other. It was no part of his scheme to establish a corporation with branches in various localities and countries, or to found an "Order" in its modern sense. By its own inherent excellence and because of the sound common-sense which pervades it, the Rule of St. Benedict at once began to take root in the monasteries of the West,

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till it quickly superseded any others then in existence. Owing to its broad and elastic character, and hardly less, probably, to the fact that adopting it did not imply the joining of any stereotyped form of Order, monasteries could, and in fact did, embrace this code without entirely breaking with their past traditions. This, side by side in the same religious house, we find that the rule of St. Columba was observed with that of St. Benedict until the greater practical sense of the latter code superseded the more rigid legislation of the former. Within a comparatively short time from the death of St. Benedict in A.D. 543, the Benedictine became the recognised form of Western regular life. To this end the action of Pope St. Gregory the Great and his high approval of St. Benedict's Rule greatly conduced. In his opinion it manifested no common wisdom in its provisions, which were

dictated by a marvellous insight into human nature and by a knowledge of the best possible conditions for attaining the end of all monastic life, the perfect love of God and of man. Whilst not in any way lax in its provisions, it did not prescribe an asceticism which could be practiced only by the few ; whilst the most ample powers were given to the superior to adapt the regulation to all circumstance of time and places ; thus making it applicable to every form of the higher Christian life, from the secluded cloister to that for which St. Gregory specially used those trained under it : the evangelisation of far-distant countries.

The connection between the Benedictines and England began with the mission of St. Augustine in A.D. 597. The Monastery of Monte Cassino having been destroyed by the Lombards, toward the end of the sixth century,

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BENEDICTINE MONK

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the monks took refuge in Rome, and were placed in the Lateran, and by St. Gregory in the church he founded the honour of St. Andrew, in his ancestral home on the Coelian Hill. It was the prior of St. Andrew's whom he sent to convert England. With the advent of the Scottish monks from Iona the system of St. Columba was for a time introduced into the North of England ; but here, as in the rest of Europe, it quickly gave place to the Benedictine code ; and practically during the whole Saxon period this was the only form of monastic life in England.

ii. Cluniacs

The Cluniac adaptation of the Benedictine Rule took its rise in A.D. 912 with Berno, abbot of Gigny. With the assistance of the Duke of Aquitaine he built and endowed a monastery at Cluny, near Macon-sur-Saone. The Cluniac was a new departure in monastic government. Hitherto the monastery was practically self-centered ; any connection with other religious houses was at most voluntary, and any bond of union that may have existed, was of the most loose description. The ideals upon which Cluny was established was the existence of a great central monastery with dependencies spread over many lands, and forming a vast feudal hierarchy of subordinate establishments with the closest dependence on the mother-house. Moreover, the superior of each of the dependent monasteries, no matter how large and important, was not the elect of the community, but the nominee of the abbot of Cluny ; and in the same way the profession of every

member of the congregation was made in his home and with his sanction. It was a great ideal ; and for two

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centuries the abbots of Cluny form a dynasty worthy of so lofty a position. The first Cluniac house founded in England was that of Barnstable. This was speedily followed by that of Lewes, a priory set up by William, earl of Warren, in A.D. 1077, eleven years only after the Conquest. The last was that of Stonesgate, in Essex, made almost exactly a century later. On account of their dependence upon the abbot of Cluny, several of the lesser houses were suppressed as "alien priories" towards the close of the fourteenth century, and those that remained gradually freed themselves from their obedience to the foreign superior. At the time of the general suppression in the sixteenth century there were thirty-two Cluniac houses ' one only, Bermondsey, was an abbey ; the rest were priories, of which the most important was that which had been nearly the first in order of time, Lewes.

iii. Cistercians

The congregation of Citeaux was at one time the most flourishing of the offshoots of the great Benedictine body. The monastery of Citeaux was established by St. Robert of Molesme in A.D. 1092. The saint was a Benedictine, and felt himself called to something different to what he had found in the monasteries of France. The peculiar system of the Cistercians, however, was the work of St. Stephen Harding, an Englishman, who at an early age had left his own country and never returned thither. He struck out a new line, which was a still further departure from the ideal of St. Benedict that was the Cluniac system. The Cistercians, whilst strictly maintaining the notion that each monastery was a family endowed with the principles of fecundity, formed themselves into an Order,

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BENEDICTINE MONK OF THE CLUNIAC CONGREGATION

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in the sense of an organized corporation, under the perpetual pre-eminence of the abbot and house of Citeaux, and with yearly Chapters at which all superiors were bound to attend. It was the chief object of the administration to secure absolute uniformity in all things and everywhere. This was obtained by the Chapters, and by their visitations of the abbot of Citeaux, made anywhere and everywhere at will. The Order spread during the first century of its existence with great rapidity. It is said that , by the middle of the twelfth century, Citeaux had five hundred dependencies, and that fifty years later there were more than three times that number. In England the first abbey was founded by King Henry I, at Furness in A.D. 1127 and of the hundred houses existing at the general suppression three-fourths had been founded in the twelfth century. The rest, with the exception of St. Mary Grace, London, established in 1349 by Edward III., were founded in the early part of the thirteenth century.

iv. Carthusians

The Carthusians were founded in the eleventh century by St. Bruno. With the help of the bishop of Grenoble he built for himself and six companions, in the mountains near the city, an oratory and small separate cells in imitation of the

ancient Lauras of Egypt. This was in A.D. 1086 ; and the Order takes its designation from the name of the place--Chartreuse. Peter the Venerable, the celebrated abbot of Cluny, writing forty years after the foundation, thus describes their austere form of life. "Their dress," he says, "is meaner and poorer than that of other monks, so short and scanty and so rough that the very sight affrights one. They wear coarse hair-shirts

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next to their skin ; fast almost perpetually ; eat only bean-bread ; whether sick or well never touch flesh ; never buy fish, but eat it if given them as an alms ; eat eggs on Sundays and Thursdays ; on Tuesday and Saturdays their fare is pulse or herbs boiled ; on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays they take nothing but bread and water ; and they have only two meals a day, except within the octaves of Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, Epiphany, and other festivals. Their constant occupation is praying, reading and manual labour, which consists chiefly in transcribing books, They say the lesser Hours of the Divine Office in their cells at the time when the bell rings, but meet together at Vespers and Matins with wonderful recollection"

A manner of life of such great austerity naturally did not attract many votaries. It was a special vocation to the few, and it was not until A.D. 1222 that the first house of the Order was established in England, at Hinton, in Somersetshire, but William Langesper. The last foundation was the celebrated Charterhouse of Shene, in Surrey, made by King Henry V. At the time of the general dissolution, there were in all eight English monasteries and about a hundred members.

II. The Canons Regular

The clergy of every large church were in ancient times called *canonici*—canons—as being on the list of those who were devoted to the service of the Church. In the eighth century, Chrodegand, bishop of Metz, formed the clergy of his cathedral into a body, living in common under a rule and bound to the public recitation of the Divine

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CARTHUSIAN MONK

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CANON REGULAR OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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Office. They were known still as canons, or those living under a rule of life like the monks, from the true meaning of *êáíþí*, a rule. The common life was in time abandoned in spite of the provisions of several Councils, and then institutions other than Cathedral Chapters became organised upon lines similar to those laid down by Chrodegand, and they became known as Canons Regular. They formed themselves generally on the so-called Rule of St. Augustine, and became known, in England at least, as Augustinian Canons, Premonstratensian Canons, and Gilbertine Canons.

i. Augustinian Canons

The early history of the Austin, or Black Canons, is involved in considerable obscurity, and it is only after the beginning of the twelfth century that these Regulars are to be found in Europe. The Order was conventual, or monastic, rather than congregational or provincial, like the Friars : that is, the members were professed for a special house and belonged by virtue of their vows to it, and not to the general body of their brethren in the country. In one point they were not so closely bound to their house as were the monks. The Regular Canons were allowed in individual cases to serve the parishes that were impropriated to their houses ; the monks were always obliged to employ secular vicars in these cures. The Augustinians were very popular in England ; most of

their houses having been established in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The earliest foundation was that of Christ Church, or Holy Trinity, Aldgate, made by Queen Maud in A.D. 1108 ; and at the time of the dissolution there were about 170 houses of Augustinian Canons

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in England ; two of the abbeys, Waltham Cross and Cirencester, being governed by mitred abbots. In Ireland they were even more popular and numerous, the number of the houses of canons being put at 223, together with 33 nunneries. The Augustinian priors of Christ Church, and All Hallows, Dublin, and seen other priors of the Order, had seats in the Irish Parliament. The habit of the Order was black, and hence they were frequently known as Black Canons.

ii. The Premonstratensian Canons

This branch of the Canons Regular was established by St. Norbert in A.D. 1119 at a place called Prémontré, a lonely and desolate valley near Laon in France. Their founder gave them the Rule of St. Augustine, and they became known either as Premonstratensians, from their first foundation, or Norbertines, from their founder. The habit of these canons was white, with a white rochet and even a white cap, and for this reason they were frequently known as White Canons. Besides following the ordinary Augustinian Rule, these Canons made Prémontré into a "mother-house," and the abbot of Prémontré was abbot-general of the entire Order : having the right to visit, either by himself or deputy, every house of the congregation ; to summon every superior to the yearly General Chapter ; and to impose a tax for the use of the Order upon all the houses. This, so far as England is concerned, lasted in theory until A.D. 1512, when all the English houses were placed under the abbot of Welbeck. Previously they had been for more than thirty years supervised on behalf of the abbot of Prémontré, by Bishop Redman, who also continued to hold the office of abbot

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PREMONSTRATENSIAN CANON

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GILBERTINE CANON

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of Shap. In England, just before the dissolution, there were some thirty-four houses of the Order.

iii. The Gilbertines

The Canons of St. Gilbert of Sempringham are said to have been established in A.D. 1139, although the actual foundation as early as A.D. 1131, others as late as A.D. 1148. St. Gilbert, the founder, was Rector of Sempringham and composed his rule from those of St. Austin and St. Benedict. It was a dual Order, for both men and women ; the former followed St. Augustine's code with some additions, whilst the women took the Cistercian recension of the Benedictine Rule.

These canons, according to Dugdale, had a black habit with a white cloak and a hood lined with lamb's wool. The women were in black with a white cap. In the double monasteries the canons and nuns lived in separate houses having no communication. At first the Order flourished greatly. St. Gilbert in his lifetime founded thirteen houses, nine for men and women and four for men only. In these there are said to have been seven hundred canons and fifteen hundred sisters.

The order was under the rule of a general superior, called the master or prior-general. His leave was necessary for the admission of members, and in fact, to initiate business or at least give validity to the proposals of any house. There

were, in all, some twenty-six of these establishments in England at the time of the general dissolution. Four only of these were considered as ranking among the greater monasteries whose income was above £200 a year.

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The Military Orders

i. Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem

The Hospitallers began in A.D. 1092 with the building of a hospital for pilgrims at Jerusalem. The original idea of the work of these visiting knights was to provide for the needs of pilgrims visiting the Holy Land and to afford them protection on their way. They, too, followed a rule of life founded upon that of St. Augustine, and their dress was black with a white cross upon it. They came to England very shortly after their foundation, and had a house built for them in London in A.D. 1100. They rose in wealth and importance in the country ; and their head, or grand prior as he was called, became the first lay baron in England, and had a seat in the House of Peers.

Upon many of their manors and estates the Knights Hospitallers had small establishments name *commanderies*, which were under the government of one of their number, called the commander. These houses were sometimes known as *preceptories*, but this was a term more generally used for the establishments of the other great Military Order, known as the Templars. An offshoot of both these orders was known as "The Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem." There were a few houses of this branch in England, which was founded chiefly to assist and support lepers and indigent members of the Military Orders. They are, however, usually regarded as hospitals. The Knights of St. John of Jerusalem had their headquarters at the Hospital of St. John, near Clerkenwell, to which were attached some fifty-three cells or commanderies.

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KNIGHT HOSPITALLER

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ii. *The Templars*

The Military Order of the Templars was founded, according to Tanner, about the year A.D. 1118. They derived their name from the Temple of Jerusalem, and the original purpose of their institute was to secure the roads to Palestine, and protect the holy places. They must have come into England early in the reign of King Stephen, as they had several foundations at this time, the first being that in London which gave its name to the present Temple. They became too rich and powerful ; and having been accused of great crimes, their Order was suppressed by Pope Clement V in 1309 : an act which was confirmed in the Council of Vienne in 1312. The head of the Order in England was styled the "Master of the Temple," and was sometimes, as such, summoned to Parliament.

Upon their manors and estates the Templars, like the Hospitallers, frequently built churches and houses, in which some of the brethren lived. These were subordinate to the London house and were in reality cells, under the title of "Preceptories." On the final suppression of the Order, their lands and houses, to the number of eighteen, were handed over to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. One house, Ferriby, in Yorkshire, became a priory of Austin Canons, and four other estates appear to have been confiscated. In all there were some three-and-twenty preceptories connected with the London Temple.

IV. The Friars

The friars differed from the monks in certain ways. The brethren by their profession were bound, not to any locality or house, but to the province, which usually consisted of the entire number of houses in a country. They did not, consequently, form individual families in their various establishments, like the monks in their monasteries. They also, at first, professed the strictest poverty, not being allowed to possess even corporate property like the monastic Orders. They were by their profession mendicants, living on alms, and only holding the mere buildings in which they dwelt. 234

i. *The Dominicans, or Black Friars*

The founder of these friars was a Spaniard named Dominic, a canon of the diocese of Osma, in Old Castile, at the close of the twelfth century. They were known as Dominicans, from their founder ; "Preaching Friars," from their mission to convert heretics ; in England, "Black Friars," from the colour of their cloak ; and in France, "Jacobins," from having had their first house in the Rue St. Jacques, at Paris. Their rule was founded on that of St. Augustine, and it was verbally approved in the Council of Lateran in A.D. 1215, and the following year formally by Honorius III. Their founder, having been a secular canon of Osma in Spain, his friars at first adopted the ordinary dress of canons ; but about A.D. 1219

they took a white tunic, scapular, and hood, over which, when in church or when they went abroad, they wore a black *cappa*, or cloak, with a hood of the same color. They first came to England with Peter de Rupibus, bishop

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DOMINICAN PRIAR

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of Winchester, in A.D. 1221 and their Order quickly spread. In the first year of their arrival they obtained a foothold in the University of Oxford, and at the time of the general suppression of the religious Orders in the Sixteenth century they had fifty-eight convents in the country.

ii The Franciscan, or Grey Friars

St. Francis the founder of the Grey Friars was contemporary with St. Dominic, and was born at Assisi, in the province of Umbria in Italy, in A.D. 1182. These friars were called Franciscans from their founder ; “Grey Friars” from the colour of their habit ; and “Minorites” from their humble desire to be considered the least of the Orders. Their rule was approved by Innocent III in A.D. 1210 and by the General Council of the Lateran in A.D. 1215. Their dress was made of a course brown cloth with a long pointed hood of the same material, and a short cloak. They girded themselves with a knotted cord and went barefooted. The Franciscan Friars first found their way to England in A.D. 1224, and at the general destruction of Regular life in England in the sixteenth century they had in all about sixty-six establishments. A reformation of the Order to primitive observance was made in the fifteenth century and confirmed by the Council of

Constance in A.D. 1414. The branches of the Order which adopted it became known as "Observants" or "Recollects." This branch of the Order was represented in England by several houses built for them by King Henry VII although they are supposed to have been brought into England in the time of Edward IV.

The whole Order in England was divided into seven "Custodies" or "Wardenships," : the houses being

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grouped round convenient centres such as London, York, Cambridge, Bristol, Oxford, Newcastle, and Worcester. Harpsfield says that the "Recollects" or "Observants" had six friaries, at Canterbury, Greenwich, Richmond, Southampton, Newark, and Newcastle.

The Minoresses, or Nuns of St. Clare

The Minoresses were instituted by St. Clare, the sister of St. Francis of Assisi, about A.D. 1212, as the branch of the Franciscan Order for females. They followed the Rule of the Friars Minor and were thus called "Minoresses," or Nuns of St. Clare, after their foundress. They wore the same dress as the Franciscan Friars, and imitated them in their poverty, from which cause they were sometimes known as "Poor Clares." They were brought to England somewhere about A.D. 1293, and established in London, without Aldgate, in the locality now known as the Minories. The Order had two other houses, one at Denney, in Cambridgeshire, in which at the time of the general dissolution there were some twenty-five nuns ; and the other at Brusyard in Suffolk, which was a much smaller establishment. The nuns at Denney had previously been located at Waterbeche for about fifty years, being removed to their new home by Mary, countess of Pembroke, in A.D. 1348.

iii. Carmelites

The Carmelite Friars were so called from the place of their origin. They were also named "White Friars" from the colour of the cloak of their habit, and Friars of the Blessed Virgin. These friars are first heard of in the twelfth century, on being driven out of Palestine by the persecution of the Saracens. Their Rule is chiefly founded

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FRANCISCAN FRIAR

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FRANCISCAN NUN, OR MINORESS

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on that of St. Basil, and was confirmed by Pope Honorius III, in A.D. 1224, and finally approved by Innocent VI, in 1250. They were brought into England by John Vesey and Richard Grey, and established their first houses in the north at Alnwick, and in the south at Ailesford in Kent. At the latter place the first European Chapter of the Order was held in A.D. 1245. In the sixteenth century there were about forty houses in England and Wales.

iv. Austin Friars, or Hermits

The body of Austin Friars took its historical origin in the union of several existing bodies of friars effected in A.D. 1265 by Pope Clement IV. They were regarded as belonging to the ranks of the mendicant friars and not to the Monastic Order. They were very widely spread, and in Europe in the sixteenth century they are said to have possessed three thousand convents, in which were thirty thousand friars ; besides three hundred convents of nuns. In England at the time of the dissolution they had some thirty-two friaries. 241

V. The Lesser Friars

i. Friars of the Sack, or De Penitentia

These brethren of penance were called “Friars of the Sack” because their dress was cut without other form than that of a simple bag or sack, and made of coarse cloth, like sackcloth. Most authorities, however, represent this as merely a familiar name, and say that their real title was that of Friars, or Brethren of Penance. They took their origin apparently in Italy, and came to England during the reign of Henry III., where, about A.D. 1257, they

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opened a house in London. They had many settlements in France, Spain, and Germany, but lost most of them after the Council of Lyons in A.D. 1274, when Pope Gregory X. suppressed all begging friars with the exception of the four mendicant Orders of Dominicans, Franciscans, Austin Friars, and Carmelites. This did not, however, apply universally, and in England, the *Fratres de Sacco* remained in existence until the final suppression of the religious Orders in the sixteenth century. The dress of these friars was apparently made of rough brown cloth, and was not unlike that of the Franciscans; they had their feet bare and wore wooden sandals. Their mode of life was very austere, and they never ate meat and drank only water.

ii. Pied Friars, or Fratres de Pica

These religious were so called from the colours of their habit, which was black and white, like a magpie. They had but one house in England, at Norwich, and had only a brief existence, as the Pied Friars were obliged, by the Council of Lyons, to join one or other of the four great mendicant Orders. Their house, which, according to Blomfield, stood in the north-east corner of the churchyard of St. Peter's Church, was given to the hospital of Bek, at Billingford in Norfolk.

iii. Friars of St. Mary de Areno

These friars had likewise but one house, at Westminster, founded towards the end of the reign of Henry III. They, too, were short-lived as a body, falling under the law of suppression of the lesser mendicant Orders. They, however, continued for a few years longer, as Tanner quotes a

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CARMELITE FRIAR

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AUSTIN FRIAR

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Close Roll of 11 Edward II., to show that they were only dissolved in that year, A.D. 1318.

vi. Friars of Our Lady, or de Domina

The friars of Our Lady are said to have lived under the Rule of St. Austin. They had a white habit, with a black cloak and hood. They were instituted in the thirteenth century, and had a house at Cambridge, near the castle. Before A.D. 1290 they were also settled at Norwich, where they continued until the great Pestilence in 1349, of which they all died.

v. Friars of the holy Trinity, or Trinitarians

These religious were founded by SS. John of Matha and Felix of Valois about A.D. 1197 for the redemption of captives. They were called "*Trinitarians*," because by their rule all their churches were dedicated to the Holy Trinity, or "*Maturines*," from the fact that their original foundation in Paris was near St. Mathurine's Chapel. The Order was confirmed by Pope Innocent III., who gave the religious white robes, with a red and blue cross on their breasts, and a cloak with the same emblem on the left side. Their revenues were to be divided into

three parts ; one for their own support, one to relieve the poor, and the third to ransom Christians who had been taken captive by the infidels. They were brought to England in A.D. 1244, and were given the lands and privileges of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre on the extinction of that order. According to the *Monasticon*, they had, in all, eleven houses in this country ; but these establishments were small, the usual number of religious in each being three friars and three lay brothers. The superior was

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named "minister," and included in his office the functions of superior and procurator ; and the houses were united into a congregation under a *Minister major*, who held a general Chapter annually for the regulation of defects and the discussion of common interests.

vi. Crutched, of Crossed Friars

The Crossed Friars are said by some to have taken their origin in the Low Countries, by others to have come from Italy in very early times, having been instituted or reformed by one Gerard, prior of St. Maria di Morella at Bologna. In 1169 Pope Alexander III. took them under his protection and gave them a fixed rule of life. These friars first came to England in the year 1244. Matthew Paris, writing of that time, says that they appeared before a synod held by the bishop of Rochester, each carrying a stick upon which was a cross. They presented documents from the pope and asked to be allowed to make foundations of their fraternity in England. Clement Reyner put their first establishment in this country at Reigate, in 1245, and their second in London in 1249. This last is the better known, as it has given the name of Crutched Friars to a locality in the city of London. The friars had a third house at Oxford, and altogether there were six or seven English friaries. Besides the cross upon their staves, from which they originally took their name, the friars had a red cloth cross upon the breasts of their habits.

vii. The Bethelmite Friars

The origin of these friars is uncertain, and they were apparently only known in England, and so may perhaps

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FRIAR OF THE SACK.

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TRINITARIAN

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be considered to have had their beginning in this country. Matthew Paris says that in the year 1257 they were given a house at Cambridge, in Trumpington Street. He describes their dress as being very like that of the Dominicans, from which it was distinguished only by having a red star, or five points with a round blue centre, on the scapular. This badge recalled the meaning of their name, representing as it did the star which led the Magi to Bethlehem.

viii. The Bonshommes

These friars were apparently of English Origin. Some have thought that they were the same as the "Friars of the Sack," but this is by no means clear. Polydore Vergil says that Edmund of Cornwall, the brother of Henry III., on his return from Germany in A.D. 1257, built and endowed a fine monastery at Ashridge. This he gave "to a new order of men, never before known in England, called *Boni Homines*, the Bonshommes. They followed the rule of St. Augustine, wearing a blue-coloured dress of a form similar to that of the Augustinian Hermits." The only other house possessed by the Bonshommes was at Edingdon.

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