# THE MONASTIC CHRONICLER AND THE EARLY SCHOOL OF ST. ALBANS. A LECTURE

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The Monastic Chronicler and the Early School of St. Albans. A Lecture by Claude Jenkins

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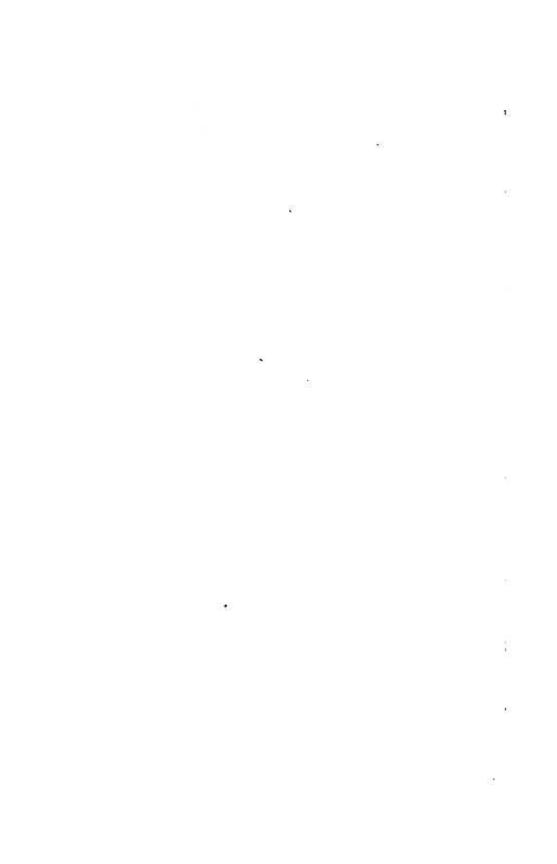
#### **CLAUDE JENKINS**

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#### A LECTURE

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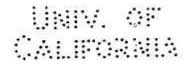
#### CLAUDE JENKINS

Professor of Ecclesiastical History, King's College, London Lambeth Librarian and Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury

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### The Monastic Chronicler and the Early School of St. Albans

I

Six hundred years ago, in the second decade of the fourteenth century, the great Italian poet whose fame the world has just been celebrating anew, saw in that Paradise of elect souls of every age and clime which is described in the last section of the Divina Commedia,1 the radiant spirit of a great Englishman who was also perhaps the most famous of monastic his-The six centuries that separated Dante himself from the time of the Venerable Bede were charged even beyond bearing with those happenings in national and local life which are the materials of history. It is these which the annalist records and the chronicler describes and illustrates with reflexions and stories grave or gay, a comedy of manners if sometimes, it must be added, of errors too. But while many moralized there were few who could add to the student's discipline of patient research in the establishment of facts, the historian's insight into causes, his appraisement of values, his sense of a just perspective. Nor

1 Paradiso, x. 130-31.

# 2 The Mondstic Chronicler

need we wonder that it should be so, whether we hold that the historian is born not made, or follow the depressing opinion propounded by Beatus Rhenanus to the Emperor Charles V that judgement is wont to be the very last addition to consummated learning.1 Materials may be scanty or intractable or even, it may be suggested, unreliable. These are the problems of the historical student in all ages. "An historian," said Horace Walpole, in regard to the War of Independence of the American Colonies, "who shall consult the Gazettes of the times, will write as fabulous a romance as Gargantua." But those of us who have listened lately with discreet admiration to the account of a Transatlantic seminar on Sinn Fein based apparently on the collation of accounts in journals and periodicals by students ignorant of Erse, if not of Ireland, may feel a kindlier sympathy for the men who wrote the earliest annals of our Church and nation without these advantages, and may estimate their achievements in the light of a juster appreciation of the opportunities they enjoyed and the difficulties that they tried to overcome.

The subject assigned to this lecture is the Monastic Chronicler, and even so few will be surprised if the temerity of the attempt is speedily safeguarded, though not removed, by restriction to a particular school. But if our story is to finish at St. Albans, at the end, as has been said, of the first day's journey from London on the Great North Road, we can scarcely

Op. Epp. Des. Erasmi, ed. P. S. Allen (Oxon, 1906), i. 69.
 Sept. 17, 1778. Letters of Horacs Walpole, ed. Toynbee (Oxford, 1904). x. 322.