

**VISITATIONS OF  
ENGLISH CLUNIAN  
FOUNDATIONS, PP. 5-51**

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Visitations of English Cluniac Foundations, pp. 5-51 by G. F. Duckett

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**G. F. DUCKETT**

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*Cluniac*

# VISITATIONS

OF

## ENGLISH CLUNIAC FOUNDATIONS

IN

47 HEN. III. (1262), 3 & 4 EDW. I. (1275-6), & 7 EDW. I. (1279),

TRANSLATED FROM

*The original records in the National Library of France; to which  
from the same source are added, in part, those of*

27 EDW. I. (1298), 13 RIC. II. (1390), 6 HEN. IV. (1405),

WITH

Ordinances in respect of the *Yche*, and *Obit-Halls* of the *Abbat*.

BY

SIR G. F. DUCKETT, BART.,

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE EN FRANCE; GREAT GOLD MEDALLIST OF "SCIENCE AND ART"  
IN AUSTRIA AND GERMANY; FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES; AND CORRESPONDING  
MEMBER OF THE "SOCIÉTÉ DES ANTIQUAIRES DE NORMANDIE."



Arms of the Abbey of Cluni.

[Gules, two keys in saltire, the wards upwards, or; surmounted by a sword in pale ppr., blade arg., hilt and pommel or.]

London:

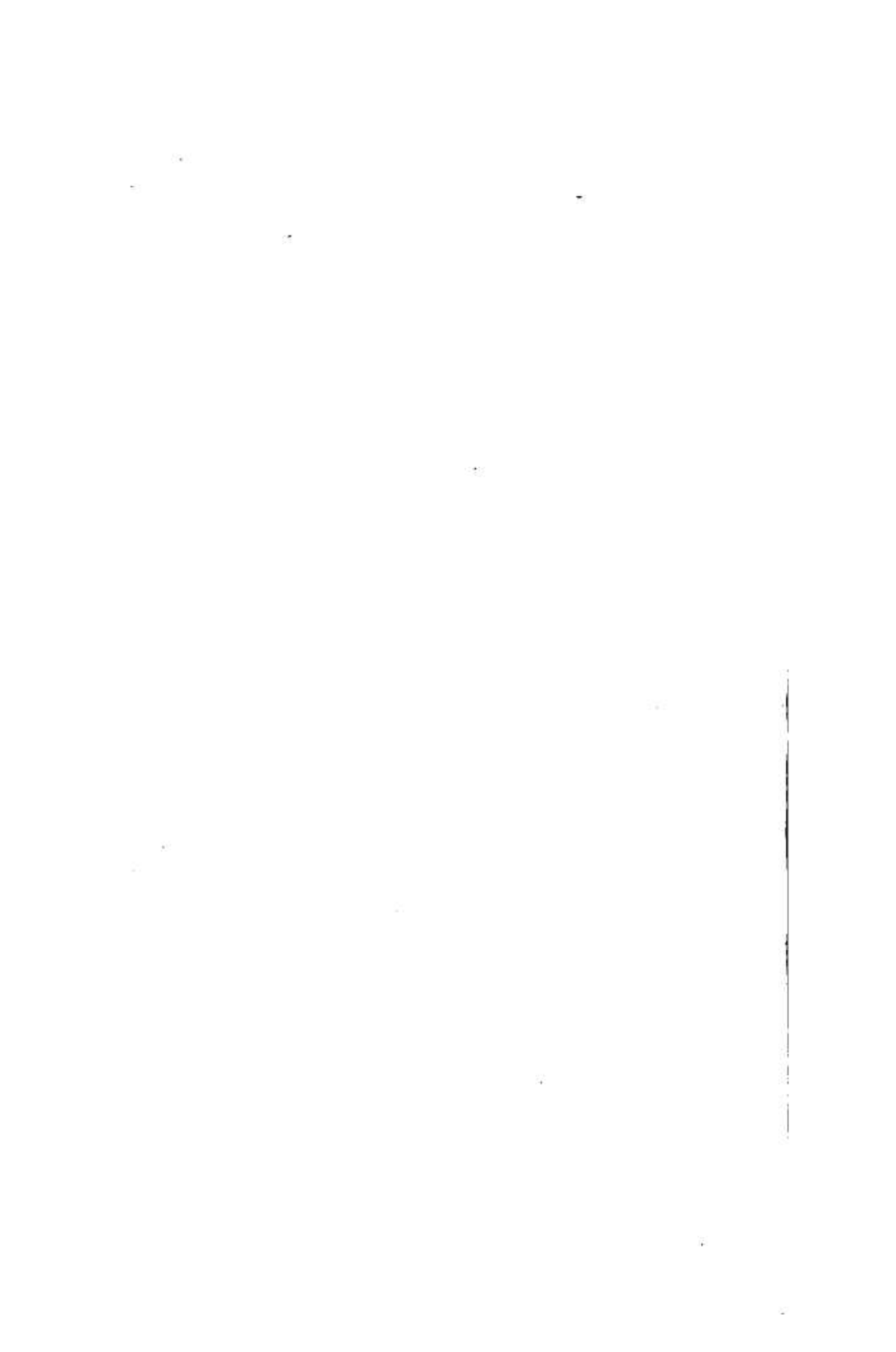
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TO  
THE HONOURED MEMORY  
OF AN  
ACCOMPLISHED WOMAN OF GREAT LITERARY ATTAINMENT,  
MY DEEPLY REGRETTED FRIEND, AND KINSWOMAN,  
**Maria Halliday,**  
WIFE OF W. H. HALLIDAY, OF GLENTHORNE, DEVON,  
AND  
DAUGHTER OF SIR THOMAS HARVIE FARQUHAR, BART.,  
THESE FOLLOWING PAGES  
ARE INSCRIBED.



## VISITATIONS OF ENGLISH CLUNIAC FOUNDATIONS.

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PERHAPS of all monastic records, those dealing with the visitation of subordinate monasteries by delegated ecclesiastics from the parent-house, are among the most interesting and characteristic of the cloister period, but it would have increased our knowledge of such personal inspections, had there been handed down to us some code of rules by which they were conducted. Nevertheless, their purport and object may be readily understood, and are generally defined. There exists, no doubt, an outline of instructions, or Memoranda for the guidance of certain abbatial visitors, sent into England in 1457, two hundred years later than the first visitation now to be recorded; but these so-called visitors were rather emissaries or commissioners from Cluni to look after the property of the Order in this country, and recover whatever they might be able, at that perilous period for alien priories. Still, as *formulae* for visitatorial duties, the Memoranda in question will supply, to some further extent, what is apparently wanting.\*

The Order of Cluni possessed 35 subordinate houses in England, irrespective of three other affiliations in Scotland, and of the former the first established was the Priory of Barnstaple.† The Vicar-General of the Order we find in almost every instance to have been the Prior of St. Pancras of Lewes, and notwithstanding there were two Cluniac abbeys in this country (those of Paisley and Bermondsey), and that this monastery was only reckoned its *second* affiliation in point of rank, it may be still looked upon as the chief establishment of the Order.

Of the several ecclesiastical provinces of the Order,

\* "Records and Charters of Cluni," ii., 83-85.

† Pignot, "Ordre de Cluni," iii., 419.



England and Scotland formed one,\* and its affiliations were those of:—Bablew (Som.); Barnstaple (Dev.); Bermondsey (Surr.); Monk-Bretton (York); Bromholme (Norf.); Careswell (Dev.); Castle Acre (Norf.); Clifford (Heref.); Daventry (N'hants); Derby; Dudley (Worc.); Hitcham (or Heacham)† (Norf.); Holme (Dor.); Horksley (Essex); Horton (Kent); Kershall (Lanc.); Lenton (Notts); Lewes (Sussex); Malpas (Monm.); Melton-Mowbray (Leic.); Montacute (Som.); Mendham‡ (Suff.); Normansberch (Suff.); Northampton; Northampton (nunnery); Pontefract (York); Preen (Salop); Prittlewell (Essex); Sleusham (Norf.); Stanesgate (Essex); St. Syriac§ (Corn.); Thetford (Norf.); Tykeford (Bucks); Wangford (Suff.); Wenlock (Salop).

The Cistercian, of all other Orders, had, however, greater charms for this country, and took deeper root therein, the number of its foundations being in excess of those of Cluni by one half or more. But, if the Cistercian Order was the most popular, it must be borne in mind, that the reformed Benedictine congregation of Cluni was its great prototype, and that the foundation of this branch of monasticism, preceded it by nearly 200 years.¶

Like all monastic institutions, after the time of its fifth abbot in 1122, Peter the Venerable, the glory of the Order having culminated in him, the inevitable fate attending its progress was ultimate decay, for as wealth increased, and with it the power of the community, so abuses crept in. The grand and original aim of the Order—the conversion of barbarism to Christianity—gradually sank into disrepute, and as time went on, this religious institution, which had done so much to civilize and enlighten mankind, became in the end, before the lapse of a few

\* The ten territorial divisions or provinces of the Order of Cluni comprised:—1, Lyon; 2, France; 3, Provence, Tarentaise, Dauphiné, Vienne; 4, Poitou, and Saintonge; 5, Auvergne; 6, Gascogne; 7, Germany, Lorraine, and Bourgogne; 8, Italy; 9, Spain; 10, England and Scotland.—"Bibliotheca Cluniacensis," pp. 1706, 1751.

† A cell to Castle-Acre.

‡ Subordinate to Lewes; founded f. Rufus by W. de Warenne.

§ Or St. Caricus; a cell to Montacute.

¶ When at the height of its glory, Cluni may be said to have covered the whole face of Christian Europe with its affiliated foundations, and stood at the head of all monastic institutions, even after the rise of other Orders. Its spiritual dominion reached at that time from the British Isles and the West of Europe, to Constantinople and the Holy Land.

centuries, a mere benefice *in commendam*, reserved for ecclesiastics and dignitaries, with the honorary title of "abbé," in favour at Court.

The subject of the visitation of religious houses is one of considerable interest, but for the most part the records dealing with this particular portion of monastic annals, is imperfect and unsatisfactory. It was one from which the monasteries of the past strained every nerve to be relieved, (we allude more particularly to the oversight and control of the diocesan), for of their own abbatial superintendence they could scarcely hope to be independent, though these last visitations were sought to be evaded, as will be seen subsequently,\* and without naming every Order which succeeded in throwing off the episcopal jurisdiction, that of Cluni was the first, we believe, which obtained the privilege of exemption from it. It was Pope Gregory VII., who had himself been a monk of Cluni, who extended to the Order this special immunity. The Præmonstratensian Order was another, which afterwards obtained a like independence, and the Chronicles of some English houses of other Orders, are found to have got rid also of episcopal superintendence. Although exempted by Papal authority from the said supervision of the diocesan, the records make it clear that as far as the Order of Cluni was concerned, its houses were in all cases still subject to a certain amount of control and interference on the part of the bishops (though to what extent is not very clear or intelligible). We find that the priors are always said to acknowledge the episcopal jurisdiction of their diocesans, e.g., "*Ordinarius, cui facit & fecit prior obedientiam.*" They submitted to his authority, apparently, on certain spiritual matters, saving, of course, the privileges granted to their Order by the Holy See. But as regards the Cluniac, and other exempted Orders, inasmuch as it was on the one hand a boon and a triumph to enjoy such independence from episcopal visitatorial oversight, so, perhaps, on the other, nothing contributed more to the decay of all religious Orders, or tended to their ultimate extinction, than such exemption, for many

\* See pp. 15 and 19, where the Visitors complain of not having had access to Lewes Priory; and the Visitation-report of Monk-Bretton, *postea*.

abuses and irregularities were overlooked (and even countenanced) by themselves, which would have been more harshly dealt with by the diocesan.

The records of such visitations (whether abbatial or episcopal)\* are a valuable illustration of monastic life and manners, and from such periodical inspections an insight is obtained into the habits of cloistered communities, and the general working of monachism, not usually found in other documentary evidence. It is probable, in the absence of any code of rules on the subject, that both were carried out in the same way, though in some partially recorded episcopal visitations of other Orders, which have been handed down, there is an amount of trifling inquiry very little to the point, and of very little moment. Those about to be given, bear on them the stamp of evident honesty and truthfulness.

Visitations (as regards the Clunian Order—and by inference in respect of all monastic Orders) were undertaken by the parent-house for the purpose of promoting uniformity in discipline throughout all its dependent foundations, for correcting abuses, for the reformation of morals, and the maintenance of sound doctrine (in conformity with Catholic views); being undertaken either at fixed or uncertain periods, according to the exigency of the moment. They had also another aim in view—the maintenance of the Convent's rights against encroachments on its estates by feudal lords, which too often involved the Convent in litigation, besides the temporal concerns and everything relating to its income, disbursements and pecuniary liabilities, the prevention of waste and dilapidation, and general watchfulness over its property, and to these may be added the colonization of new foundations. Many of these objects were subsequently attained by the "General Chapters" of the Order, for "Visitations" had an earlier origin. As the business of the parent-house increased, and its subordinate affiliations became founded, the abbot could no longer find the

\* *Partial* visitations of the Præmonstratensian house of Duresford, and of the nunnery of Easeborne are given in the "Sussex Archaeological Collections" (Vols. viii. and xi.), both from the Episcopal Register of Chichester. The record of a Norfolk visitation by Dr. Jessop was lately published by the Camden Society.