

**THE REVIVAL OF THE
CONVENTUAL LIFE IN THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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RALPH W. SOCKMAN

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The Revival of the Conventual Life
in the Church of England in
the Nineteenth Century

By
RALPH W. SOCKMAN, M.A.

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PREFACE

The field of monastic study has been furrowed so often by research that it would appear to have lost its productivity. While this may be true within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church, the flood of religious enthusiasm in the last century has left a rich deposit of conventual life in the Church of England. The fertility of this new soil is indicated in a statement of which the present Archbishop of Canterbury is one of the authors: "When the time hereafter comes for estimating and comparing the various church movements of this century in England, it is probable that the first place as regards utility and strength will be assigned to the revival of Sisterhood life as an active constituent in the church's work."¹ Since that estimate was made, several monastic communities of men are now established.

It might seem that the story of this revival should be written by an Anglican, perhaps by a member of a monastic community. Although the need of such a history has often been recognized by them, yet it has not been undertaken in any serious or comprehensive way. The present writer has the disadvantage, but also the advantage of distance. While he is deprived of some details that make the account intimate and interesting, he is enabled to study the movement with a perspective that should furnish true proportions. Nearly all the source material to which any reference could be found has been available in the various libraries of New York. Moreover, the main part of this story is devoted, not to the immediate communities now in existence, but to the preparation of England for their rise, a subject which appar-

¹ Davidson and Benham, *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait*, 2 vols. (London, 1891), i, 449.

ently antedates the treatment or the concern of the present monastics.

The attempt to trace this growing interest begins with the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII; and if it seems to lead too far afield in the opening chapters, the arguments and citations of the actual promoters of the conventual communities in the nineteenth century will show their connection with, and dependence on, the movements of the earlier periods.

In the preparation of this study, the author has been particularly indebted to Professor William Walker Rockwell of Union Theological Seminary for his suggestion of the theme, for his patient, encouraging counsel, and for his keen, kindly criticism throughout. Words are but weak messengers to express the writer's gratitude to the following, also: To Professor James T. Shotwell of Columbia University for his guidance and inspiration during the years of historical study and for his advice in this specific undertaking; to Professor F. J. Foakes Jackson for the intimate glimpses which he has given into the inner circles of the movements discussed and for the great amount of time he has so generously spent in reading the manuscript; to the Order of the Holy Cross, West Park, New York, for its kindness in admitting the writer to its institution and library; to the librarians of the General Theological Seminary, Columbia University, Union Theological Seminary, and the New York Public Library for their courteous consideration; to Miss Cornelia T. Hudson and Miss Laura S. Turnbull of the Union Theological Seminary staff of librarians for their voluntary assistance, far exceeding the requirements of official courtesy; and finally to Mrs. Ralph W. Sockman, whose encouragement in the preparation of this work and her untiring labor in reading the proof have made the task more pleasant and the story more readable.

CHAPTER I

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ANTECEDENTS OF THE MONASTIC REVIVAL

Novelty has little charm for a Churchman. He demands that projected reforms bear the stamp of authority imprinted by the past. Hence the nineteenth century advocates of monasticism in the Church of England knew that they must invoke the sanction of that authority. The church of the first centuries was studied to prove the harmony of the conventual life with Catholic Christianity; but the practical Englishman had also to be shown that these institutions were feasible in his own land, even since the days of Henry VIII. Could this be shown?

The very Act which suppressed the lesser monasteries paid tribute to the greater. In its preamble it directed that the members of the smaller institutions be distributed among the "great and honorable monasteries of the realm, where, thanks be to God, religion is right well kept and preserved."¹ These words must not be taken too seriously, but they do have a significance. Granted that they were intended to cajole Henry's future victims, they indicate also a popular sentiment in many quarters against the total abolition of the monasteries. Even Latimer desired to retain some of their practical features. "He entreated that two or three in every shire should be continued, not in monkery, but as establishments for learned

¹ 27 Henry VIII, c. 28, *Statutes of the Realm*, iii, 575.

men and such as would go about preaching and giving religious instruction to the people, and for the sake of hospitality."¹ In the cases of some of the greater monasteries, the neighborhoods petitioned that they might be spared, and the Visitors themselves represented them as beneficial.² The Pilgrimage of Grace incorporated among other grievances a plea for a restoration of the monasteries.³

How effective the partition of the property of the abbeys proved in silencing the demand for the restoration of the religious houses is shown in the reaction under Mary. When this queen desired to restore the papal supremacy, Parliament made the confirmation of the titles of the occupants of monastic estates part of the Act.⁴ Mary, however, succeeded in restoring a number of convents and monastic orders.⁵

At first Elizabeth did not molest these monastic establishments, even summoning Prior Tresham and Abbot Feckenham to take their seats in her first parliament. "But they had hardly sat down on their seats before they were raised up and dissolved, with all the rest of the late-restored Orders."⁶ The thoroughness with which Elizabeth sup-

¹ Southey, *Book of the Church*, 2nd ed. (London, 1825), ii, 68. Cf. Twysden, *Monastic Life* (1645), p. 31, quoted in *British Critic*, Oct., 1842, p. 364.

² *Ibid.*, p. 68; cf. a letter of George Gifford, an investigator, quoted in *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxv, 770.

³ Patterson, *A History of the Church of England* (London, 1909), p. 232.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270; cf. Fuller, *The Church History of Britain from the Birth of Christ until the Year 1648* (1837 ed.), ii, 279. For Act 1 and 2, *Phil. and Mary*, c. 8, *vide* appendix i.

⁵ For locations *vide* Fuller, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 281; cf. Fosbrooke, *British Monachism, or Manners and Customs of the Monks and Nuns of England* (London, 1802), 2nd ed. (1817), p. 398.