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ART. IV.—A MEDIÆVAL MONASTERY.

WHEN, at the time of the Great Rebellion, Waller's troopers took possession of Winchester, they twice ransacked the Cathedral library and scattered its treasures to the winds. John Chase, the worthy Chapter Clerk, who places this spoliation of the library on December 14, 1642, afterwards succeeded, with much labour and expenditure of money, in recovering many of the most valuable MSS., some from the hands of local tradesmen, and some from the gutters and waste places of the city. Among the documents thus recovered and returned to the Cathedral library, many of them still bearing traces of the dirt out of which they were rescued, were a series of rolls, known as "Obedientiary Rolls," relating to the convent of St. Swithun. These rolls, some sixty-four in number, have been transcribed and edited by Dean Kitchin, whose labours deserve the gratitude of all students of Church history. They are, we believe, the first collection of obedientiary rolls ever printed, and they are of exceptional interest as throwing much light on the inner life and management of a Benedictine monastery.

It is uncertain at what period the system of "Obedientiaries" first came into general use among the Benedictines, but at the time when we meet with it in these rolls of St. Swithun's, in the early part of the fourteenth century, it is in full organization and exercising a beneficent influence on all around. The time was long since passed when the monks framed their lives on the grand doctrine of *Laborare est Orare*, when all work was regarded as sanctified by Christ's blessed example, when every morning from the chapter-house they set forth cheerfully, two and two, to their varied and laborious duties in the convent or the fields. As time went on wealth and position clustered round the ancient buildings; the monastic *land-owner* became, as Dean Kitchin says, "a *land-lord*, and no longer won a blessing for himself by tilling the soil. He preferred to sit in cloister, torpid in winter, and in summer drowsy, while the lands were let out on farm on easy terms." And thus there grew up about a great conventual body a large number of servants or lay-brethren, to whom were deputed the humbler and more menial duties of the establishment, while the more important offices were distributed among the monks themselves. These monks were known as *Obedientiaries*, the name signifying that they were under special obligation of obedience to the Lord Prior. They may be roughly divided into those who were responsible for the conduct of Divine worship, and those whose duties were connected with the estates and internal arrangements of the

establishment. The full number of Obedientiaries in a well-ordered house would be from eighteen to twenty, but there was nothing to prevent the same brother from holding more than one office. Of some of these offices, as the Precentor, the Infirmarian, who looked after the sick in hospital, the "Circa," or "Roundabout," who acted as policeman to the brethren, the Refectorian, who had charge of the Refectory, the Porter, the Hortulanus, or gardener, no rolls exist at Winchester. Among those, however, transcribed by Dean Kitchin will be found the Sacristan's; the Anniversarian's, the monk entrusted with the care of the anniversaries or obit-days of benefactors; the Receiver's, who received the rents of the estates belonging to the priory; the Hordarian's, the brother set over the "Hoard," or common stock of the convent; the Almoner's, whose office it was to seek out and to relieve the sick and needy, and the Chamberlain's; together with two "Diet Rolls," which reveal to the curious what manner of food the monks were wont to enjoy.

Under the guidance of the learned Dean we propose to examine these rolls more closely, as they throw a curious light on the customs and manners of a mediæval monastery. It will be well to notice in passing that the plea on which the income of St. Swithun's was apportioned was the complex one of assigning certain definite estates, or charges, to the different offices, each Obedientary being responsible to the community for the management of his stewardship.

Let us glance first at the Prior. We catch sight of him in the rolls as a great noble or feudal prince, sometimes moving about the country from place to place, accompanied by a large retinue of followers, and not above enjoying the sports of hunting and falconry. In the year 1311 we find an entry of 3d. in a Comptus Roll for bread bought to feed the Prior's hounds, he being then on his way to hunt in the forest of Savernake. In the same year we find a serving-man at Crondal with seven hares awaiting the Prior's arrival for a few days' coursing over the wilds of Aldershot. At another time we read that the convent built the Prior "a new house for his dogs within the precincts." There is an entry of the purchase of spurs for the Prior at the cost of 3d., *i.e.*, about 3s. of our money, in the Receiver's Roll of 1337-38. "And of sport we hear something, too, when he buys nets to catch foxes, rabbits and partridges, at the large outlay of 22s. 6d. John le Coucherier we also find 'existens in patria,' out in the country parts from time to time to catch partridges; and there is an item in the same roll of 8d. for gloves for the same person, and for bells for the falcons." But we must not think of this great ecclesiastic as wholly engrossed in the pleasures

of the chase. Other and more important matters occupied the attention of the Prior. A large part of the administration of the convent fell to his lot. He presided at the daily chapters; he took the chief place in the solemn services of the Church; he entertained with due hospitality the great barons and princes who chanced to be passing through the city. Every September, on the occasion of the famous St. Giles' Fair, he "went up the hill in state and took possession of a richly-fitted chamber, with new robes for himself and his suite, fresh furniture and a delightful change in food and hospitality, hard by the booths and stalls at which the convent kept shop, and sold their wines, their furs and spiceries." In addition to the almost unceasing calls of hospitality, we find that the Prior had to provide the whole body of monks with bread, butter, cheese and beer, and to strew the refectory with clean rushes seven times in the course of the year, thrice in winter and four times in summer. Unfortunately no roll of the Prior's estates has come down to us, but his rent-roll must have been considerable in order to enable him to meet the many calls on his property. Besides his official income, it was customary for him to receive a number of small gifts from the various Obedientiaries of the priory. Thus the Almoner sent him wine five times a year, and a "Courtesy"—the original "curtsey" was in money, not, says the Dean, in "a graceful female salutation"—at the time of St. Giles' Fair. The Chamberlain and the Warden of the Works also sent wine five times yearly, and in addition the Hordarian provided two pigs and two calves at Christmas-time.

The Receiver's Roll of 1335 gives us a vivid picture of the business arrangements of the convent. The Receiver at this time was one John de Merlawe, who afterwards succeeded to the dignity of Prior, and apparently a man of sound practical ability. And he needed whatever capacity for business he possessed. The liabilities on the office were so great, that though the receipts from all sources amounted to £1,266 (equal to about £15,000 of our money), he was forced, before the year was over, to borrow from a foreign merchant—one Guy of Lucca—the sum of £192 3s. 2d., or in money of to-day of about £2,305. Some of the items of expenditure, even when we remember that at this time the priory contained sixty-four monks, strike us as enormous. The wine-bill—forty casks of red wine and two pipes of white—came to over £90. It seems likely, however, that part of this £1,000 worth of wine was intended for sale at St. Giles' Fair. This may also have been the case with the spices, which came to £47. Some of these items are curious. Almonds are bought in large quantities, a drink known as "milk of almonds" being

in high favour among the monks. Ginger, cinnamon, pepper, saffron, are mentioned, and several kinds of sugar. Six pounds of "galengi" is purchased, a plant which grows in Java, the root of which is used in medicine, especially for disorders of the stomach. Indeed, "the spiceries so largely used were part of the old botanic medicines, in which spices, and pepper, and sugar were not articles of diet, but part of the pharmacy. The principal ailments of the monastic and cathedral life were neuralgia, rheumatism, sciatica, rheumatic gout, and kindred diseases, brought about by living and serving in the great damp and unwarmed buildings through the winter-time; hence the reason for furs—a large item in the expenditure of the convent. Fasting also led to much illness; and our great comforters, tea, coffee, and cocoa, were unknown, and drugged and spiced wines had to take their place, when the chilled and congested liver, kidneys, and stomach were unable to take the gross food of the age."

The Receiver's Roll also deals with the expenses of the kitchen. From Michaelmas, 1334, to Michaelmas, 1335, the weekly bills came to £104 11s. 10d., or almost exactly £2 (*i.e.*, £24) a week. In addition to this, the house consumed 536 sheep, 11,300 white herrings, 42,000 red herrings, 222 salt salmon, etc., besides the bread and cheese and beer provided by the Prior. Exclusive of this last item, the kitchen expenses, taken as a whole, came roughly to about £58 of our money weekly. This cannot be considered a mean allowance for sixty-four monks, even when we remember the calls of hospitality and the number of lay brethren attached to the house. The Diet Rolls, to which we have referred, give us a very clear notion as to the manner of food enjoyed by the good monks of St. Swithun's towards the end of the fifteenth century. At this time the number of brethren was reduced, from various causes, from sixty-four (as in 1335) to not more than thirty-five; but the average cost of living per head seems to have been about the same. These rolls, it should be remembered, take no account of the bread and beer provided by the Prior, nor of the supply of vegetables, which came from the convent garden; and they refer only to the two chief meals of the brethren—namely, breakfast and supper. The Dean gives us one or two days as specimens, of which we will take the following: "On the Monday next before Christmas, 1492, the brethren at their two meals sat down to the following fare. They had moile (a dish of marrow and grated bread); 170 eggs; nombles (the flesh of a deer, taken from the tenderest parts, usually from the inside of the thigh), as a kind of *entrée*; beef; mutton; calves' feet; meat for a special dish for the Third Prior and Hordarian, as well as for the Sub-Prior.

These extra dishes set apart for the officials were a kind of perquisite and reward, and a sign of dignity in return for their toil, so making their posts enviable and desired. The total cost of the day's dinner was 8s. 4d., or about £5 in our money." The average allowance of butcher's meat seems to have been about a pound and a half per head; on fast-days, of course, no meat was allowed. The fare, however, was not contemptible. On one Good Friday the brethren consumed the enormous number of 1,000 eggs, besides 5s. worth (£3) of red herrings, and figs as an *entrée*. Eggs were eaten in the monastery in huge quantities. In spring-time, when hens lay freely, it was nothing uncommon for as many as 250 to 300 to be used daily. Even in November, when (with us, at least) eggs are luxuries, the good monks would somehow manage to obtain 140, or perhaps 160, two or three times weekly. Another item that sets one wondering is that of mushrooms, which were largely used at St. Swithun's on fast-days, even in winter. It was nothing uncommon for 3s. 4d. (*i.e.*, £2 in our money) to be spent on mushrooms in a single day. The downs around Winchester no doubt produced them in abundance, and it is possible that a supply was in some way preserved for the winter. The charge for mustard (1½d.) runs through all the fast days, the brethren, as Dean Kitchin suggests, no doubt needing something to warm and stay their poor stomachs. The cost of fish was very heavy. "Drilynge," or salt cod-fish, would sometimes come to 5s. 7d. (£3 7s.) for the day, with perhaps minnows as *entrée*, or mussels, or oysters, or eels. Now and then, for supper, a dish of lampreys was provided. They were formerly abundant in the clear chalk streams of Hampshire. Minnows were apparently a favourite dish; they were sometimes made into a "sew" (a sort of soup) for supper! Mussels, too, were dressed in the same way. Once or twice we find the brethren enjoying tripe for supper; and in one roll we come across the entry: "Paid to the woman who cleaned and prepared the intestines of pigs, 2s. 10d." Pork seems only to have been eaten on the three days following Martinmas. At Michaelmas the Almoner would send a goose for the sick brethren in the infirmary. Nor were tarts and puddings unknown in the refectory. "Batir" pudding, with meat in it, was a common dish. "Tartes" were made of fish as well as of fruit. The items "flavons" (perhaps cheese-cakes) and "lagana" (a pancake) now and then occur, and "tansey" pudding is once mentioned. On All Souls' Day, and sometimes on other festivals, a little treat was given to the monks in the shape of "crisps," a cake or biscuit so baked as to become *crisp*. "These trifling indulgences," adds the Dean, "seemed very important to them, for their life was

monotonous, and their feelings very like those of school-boys."

From the Chamberlain's Roll we learn, among other things, that he paid the brethren, apparently as pocket-money, the sum of 13s. 4d., in four instalments, yearly—this would be about £2 quarterly in our money. He also defrayed the cost of shaving and keeping trim the tonsures and beards of the monks. There were only thirty-six "Rasturæ," or shaving-times, in the year, so the brethren could only have been made clean and comfortable about once in ten days! The entire cost of this shaving business only came to 4s. 6d. (£2 14s.) for the year ending Michaelmas, 1417! According to Archbishop Lanfranc's decrees the Chamberlain was responsible for changing the hay in the monks' pallets once a year, and also for cleaning out the dormitory once a year. "The general condition and odour of this chamber, in which thirty or forty monks, sometimes many more, slept for a year on the same hay, must," as the Dean says, "have been *terrible*."

Among the duties assigned to the Cellarer, we come across one which throws light on the tastes of some of the brethren. He had to feed and look after "*animalia a diversis fratribus per multa tempora adquisita*." It is strange to think of such creatures in a convent, probably bears, apes, and peacocks as pets of the brethren; and, moreover, it reveals, not only the existence of expensive habits, but also, as the Dean points out, "a singular development of private property," for these beasts are distinctly said to be bought, not by the brethren collectively, but by "divers brethren," each man for himself.

Another Obedientiary, whose rolls have been preserved in the Cathedral Library, was the Almoner. His business it was, at least in theory, to seek out and relieve the sick and needy; but in going through the numerous Almoners' Rolls of St. Swithun's—no less than thirty-two are extant—one cannot, says Dean Kitchin, help feeling a certain sense of surprise and disappointment at finding how little they show of any such benevolent care for the sick and suffering. In the Roll of Adam of Hyde, who was Almoner in 1312, there is the usual annual payment to the sisters of the Susterne Spital, Winchester, and to their chaplain, and other charges for wax and incense. There are also doles of 1s. 1d. at the funerals of Emma Claverle and of Christina de Coombe, two of the poor sisters above alluded to, and various gifts of beer and wine to the sub-prior, on the occasion of blood-letting, to the Boy Bishop, and other officials. The Almoner, too, had an attack of illness, and his expenses in the infirmary came to 15s. (£9). The Prior's horse also was sick, and had to be bled and plastered up. All these items we find, together with many

"courtesies," and similar expenses; but of actual charity to the poor there is hardly a trace. The Almoner's manor was at Hinton, some eight miles from Winchester, and here the brethren of St. Swithun's were wont to ride over on horseback for a day's holiday. In some years the Almoner appears to have spent a considerable time at the manor-house. The rolls reveal to us the stock on the farm and the provision made for the brethren's entertainment. In addition to the poultry and the live stock, large quantities of cheese and bacon were always in readiness. Much, too, of the produce of the estate was sent into the convent. Oatmeal for their porridge was sent to the good ladies of the Susterne-Spital; the geese, however, went to St. Swithun's, and capons and hens 129 in number, and pigeons more than 200. Cider, too, was made on the farm, perhaps for the labourers who got in the harvest. Of these there were no fewer than seventy in the early autumn of 1345, when they were fed on red herrings.

In 1404 a great disaster fell on the Almoner's estate. Hinton manor-house was burnt down, and most of the stock perished. The consequences appear in the payments. The poor sisters' allowance is cut short, and they get nothing whatever towards their clothing, "because," says the roll, "*of the inability of the office*, due to the fact that the manor-house, with the exception of the chamber and the kitchen, had by mischance been burnt down, with forty quarters of corn, three horses, two oxen, and five carts with all their gear, on the 13th of April in the preceding year." It is significant, however, that the Prior, the sub-prior, the chaplain, and the other obedientiaries, received their accustomed dues, and that the boys got their beer-money. At the end of the year the deficit only amounted to £4 15s. 3d., which the Almoner appears to have made good out of his own resources.

On many points on which we would gladly have some information the Rolls of St. Swithun's are silent. They tell us nothing of the monastic library, which was doubtless of considerable size and interest, and nothing of the labours of the Scriptorium. There is only one allusion to art—in the Hordarian's Roll for 1405-6—where we find one John Langreed spending the sum of 10s. on three linen "dossors," painted with the "Five Joys of Mary." It is pleasant to think, as the Dean says, of this pious and intelligent monk intent on beautifying the walls of his chamber. The rolls are also silent on many of the curious customs of a Benedictine priory. Nothing is told us about the teaching of the boys, which went on daily in the cloister, or about the training of the novices. Of the arrangements for tonsuring and blood-letting we have no details, and the summer "meridiana," or snooze in the

dormitory after dinner, a privilege much valued by the brethren, is not alluded to. Neither, unfortunately, do we catch a glimpse of the "Circa," or "Roundabout," whose duty it was to creep about the cloisters, keeping a wary eye on erring and gossiping brethren. At service, too, after supper, he was to patrol the choir, lantern in hand, "and if he found a brother oppressed with sleep, he was to set down the lantern before the culprit, and return to his place. The light in the erring brother's face, and maybe a little friendly shaking, soon opened the sleeping eyes, and then the offender, 'throwing off drowsiness,' was bidden to fall on his knees and pray for pardon; then he had to take up the lantern, and in his turn 'pergyret et ipse chorum,' till, if he had the luck to find another brother drenched in sleep, he might treat him likewise, and so return to his own place." Of the world outside the cloister walls there is, naturally, very little mention. The monks were self-centred, and had few interests beyond the daily round of conventual duties. The rolls throw no light on the social, and political, and religious changes which the country underwent during the long period which they cover. There is not so much as an allusion to the Wars of the Roses, and even the troubles in connection with Lollardism are not mentioned.

In concluding this brief notice of the Obedientiary Rolls of St. Swithun's Priory, which, under the able editorship of Dean Kitchin, form a most important contribution to the history of monastic life in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is satisfactory to notice that in one particular our monastery compares most favourably with similar establishments of the time. It appears to have enjoyed, and, as the Dean says, to have merited, an excellent character. The graver scandals which disgraced so many of the monastic houses found no entrance within the venerable walls of St. Swithun. If in the matters of learning and personal industry the brethren had fallen far short of their ancient and nobler predecessors in the early days of Benedictine rule, yet as regards morality they might at any rate "look the world in the face without fear."

JOHN VAUGHAN.

