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The economic and social influences of the monastic movements in medieval Europe

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SENIOR THESIS

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
INFLUENCES OF THE MONASTIC MOVE-
MENTS IN MEDIAEVAL EUROPE.

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THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IN-
FLUENCES OF THE MONASTIC
MOVEMENTS IN MEDIAEVAL EUROPE

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"All history is a seamless web," In other words the record of the past is not a series of detached segments, but one fabric. It is a unity containing interacting parts. The truth of this fact is not universally realized. Men in the ordinary walks of life refuse in any wholehearted manner to accept it. They view the past from an individualistic standpoint, from that of science, or of art, or of commerce. Yet to one who makes a purposeful study of the past in the attempt to separate one thread from another, it is very soon evident that there are not isolated channels of development, but that the past is one mighty stream within which currents cross currents, now joining and now dividing. It is quite impossible, then, to view history from the standpoint of economics without considering social and religious factors, not to study it from the viewpoint of the church without reference to science and politics.

To boldly affirm, therefore, that wealth has been the sole agency in determining the destiny of humanity is to be guilty of a gross historical blunder. For religion and art and industry have all had a share in

moulding humanity's fortunes. To refer specifically to this historical interaction we have only to call to mind the economic decadence of Spain, due almost entirely to the expulsion of the religious forces in the country - Moors, Christians, dissenters - just those very elements which possessed the energy and initiative necessary to a national expansion of an industrial and commercial sort. Aside from this somewhat isolated example, we find especially in the monastic movements of Europe a notable instance of this interplay of great historical forces, the pressure born of immense spiritual energy so working as to very greatly mould the outward fortunes of men, both as individuals and as social groups. It is our purpose, then, to show by chronological analysis and a final summary the effects upon industry, commerce, and society which resulted from those bursts of spiritual enthusiasm within the Christian Church known as the monastic movements.

It has well been said that monasticism is a system of living which has its roots in the desire of the soul for union with the Deity in this life and the conviction that this can be attained only by a renunciation not merely of sin but by a self-denial of even lawful

satisfactions. Hence it is not difficult to realize that with two such instincts in the human heart monasticism did not originate within the circles of Christian faith. Indeed, before the Christian era it existed in easily recognizable forms both in Judaea and in Egypt. But it required the fire and fervor of minds and hearts quickened by a Christian zeal before monasticism found itself in anything like a health condition.

Within the Christian Church the movement first made an organic appearance in Egypt in 250 A.D. In the early part of the fourth century it spread into Syria and the Orient, and shortly afterward the ideal was implanted also in Asia Minor. But altho work was an integral part of monastic life in Southern Egypt and in Asia Minor, and altho a religious order was actually instituted in the former country, the influence of non-European movements of this nature had practically no effects upon the later and more important monastic developments in Europe itself. As a matter of fact, the oriental climate was such as to develop a purely speculative rather than a self-supporting and aggressive type of mystical asciticism.

It was St. Athanasius who brought the monastic ideal, with its Egyptian characteristics, first to western Europe, at about the middle of the fourth century. But here the climate and racial temperaments militated strongly against anything that savored of Orientalism, and in about a century this type of religious life fell into a disorganized condition. It was St. Benedict who first initiated in Europe a monastic movement which effected any considerable economic and social results. These, be it understood, were to come in a general way not merely from the Benedictines themselves, but from the various orders which found their source in the Benedictine movement.

Early in the sixth century St. Benedict of Nursia, eschewing the eremetical type of cloistered life, but keeping close to Catholic usage in his subordination of individuality, founded the order which has since borne his name. The rules whereby the Benedictines lived became the standard for western Europe, and this was surely altogether fitting if, as its founder intended, the institute was to be "a school of the service of the Lord." In contrast with the eastern type of ascetic mysticism this new religious group followed a carefully

prepared daily program, six hours being set aside for manual labor and toil, and two for study and meditation. "Indolence," said the practical monk of Nursia, "is the enemy of the soul." Therefore labor in the fields and woods was a matter of course with Benedictines. Indeed their monasteries took on the aspect of family groups in the distribution of necessary toil. The ideal underlying this plan was not that work be performed because obligatory to maintenance, but because it was something to be sought in itself.

The outward accomplishments of this order fall into two general groups, the religious and the socio-economic. But they cannot be entirely separated. As regards the former, the Benedictines, altho confined almost wholly to the northwestern part of Europe, served as the one evangelizing force against the Barbarians who were crushing out the last vestiges of civilization on the continent. It has well been said that in order to preserve Europe at this time two invasions were necessary, that of the Barbarians and that of the monks. These rendered incalculable service in restoring devastated regions to a semblance of order and quiet. In fact, so great was the lawlessness of Rome's conquer-

ers that only the monastics' rules kept the monks themselves within bounds.

But altho the ideal and aim of these men was undoubtedly primarily spiritual, some of the means and results were economic and social. It is true that they converted rovers, outlaws, and robbers. It is a fact that they were the only truly efficient missionaries among the Teutons. But it is yet more true and more to the point that these monks set before the people of that age the ideal of work, lifting it from a despised social status to one of laudable honor. As Wishart says, "Care was taken that councils should not be called when ploughing was to be done or wheat to be threshed. Benedict bent himself to the task of teaching the rich and the proud, the poor and the lazy the alphabet of prosperity and happiness. Agriculture was at its lowest ebb. Marshes covered once fertile fields, and the men who should have tilled the land spurned the plough as degrading, or were too indolent to undertake the tasks of the farm. The monks left their cells and their prayers to dig ditches and plough fields. The effect was magical. Men once more turned back to a noble but despised industry. Peace and plenty supplanted war and poverty.*"

We can better realize the worth of the social service thus rendered when we recall to mind that the previous Roman misrule with its burdensome taxation had been greatly reenforced by the barbarian invasion, so that nearly all the farmers had been driven from their lands. Herein the Benedictines rendered a double benefit for they both removed the cause of devastation and at the same time obliterated the devastation itself. By the force of their example, their method of presenting object lessons in organized work, they laid the basis for a stable society, with sound agricultural methods and the promise of developing arts, sciences, and the principles of a wellordered government.

It was impossible that these monks should kill reptiles and wild animals, clear forests and moors, irrigate fields, construct road and bridges, drain swamps, breed cattle, and build huts, churches and cathedrals without, to a small degree at least, starting the wheels of industry and the currents of trade and commerce. Doubtless this tendency received impetus from the fact that St. Augustine accompanied by a few fellow monks went to England in 596, and established the order there, and that in the seventh and eighth centuries mission-

aries from the stations thus established came back into Europe and did valient service in the northern part, especially in Germany. Be that as it may, there remains the fact that in the seventh century importation from the Continent to England thru monastic influences.

Despite terrible hazards, one Benedict Biscop made four journeys to Rome during this period. The last was made in the interests of literature, and the ardent monk brought back many books, some of them of considerable value. Because of his ability he was presented with an estate by King Egfrid. No soener was Benedict possessed of this tract which he called Wearmouth than he went to France and on returning brought masons and later glass-makers in order that a monastic church of approved Roman style might be erected there. Before the edifice was completed and the necessary library accumulated, the enthusiastic churchman had made his fifth and sixth trips to Rome. These journeys yielded pictures and holy relics in addition to more artisans - printers and mosaicworkers. Thru his efforts a Roman abbot, well versed in the music of the church was brought and in this way ecclesiastical music was given a place in England.

From these few details which were repeated in the

building of other churchly edifices, including that at Canterbury, it can easily be seen that the purely monastic movement stimulated trade and the introduction into England of many articles and trades which would not have otherwise found their way there for a long time. The full economic and cultural results of these importations cannot be estimated with accuracy. According to the writer in the Encyclopedia there was apparently no glass manufacture in England from the Roman period to the thirteenth century except that which the English learned from these French Craftsmen.* The benefits conferred upon agriculture on the continent were repeated here in England. Vast estates were soon made fruitful, irrigation and drainage systems were established, while the interests of travel and commerce were furthered by the building of roads, bridges, dikes, and lighthouses.

The only rivals of note which the Benedictines encountered in Northern Europe during the seventh and eighth centuries were the followers of St. Columban. This order rendered much the same general service to civilization as that given by the Benedictines, tho to a smaller extent. It is said that Wilfred taught the

* See article on Glass, Ency. Brit. Vol. 12 pp604

Anglo-Saxons, in time of famine, to fish by using nets. To him is also attributed the honor of furthering social justice by freeing the slaves on the domain of his abbey of Selsey to the number of 250. On the Continent the Columbans cultivated fruit trees and grape vines, cared for bees, and did the work of carpenters, masons, wood cutters, and gardeners. Here too the populace were stimulated to imitation. Some of the richest districts of France trace their prosperity to this origin, as for example, that portion of La Brie which lies between Meaux and Jouane. Once covered by a vast forest, it was cleared by the Irish monk Fracre, who induced the peasants to become industrious. ** Then, too, the monks of this order performed noble missionary work both in England and on the Continent, but on meeting the Benedictines they lost prestige and finally were absorbed by them.

In England the influence which the Benedictines possessed was more thoroly social than economic. From the time of St. Augustine on the monks in England adhered unswervingly to the policy of treating the Anglo Saxons with kindness, patience, and toleration, thus winning them to the Christian faith. It could not but ** Montalembert, Monks of the West.

follow that the simple peasants were filled with a great love for their spiritual leaders. There ensued an amicable alliance between church and state. Economic effects were forthcoming. As Montalembert affirms, "The distant places to which they (the monks) had first been led by a love of solitude changed rapidly, and as if by force of circumstances, into cathedrals, cities, towns, or rural colonies, and served as centers, schools, libraries, workshops, and citadels to the scarcely converted families, parties, and tribes. Around the monastic cathedrals towns which are still in existence formed rapidly, and municipal liberties soon dawned into life among them." *

From the end of the seventeenth century on, the various councils in England granted more and more rights and privileges to the monasteries, thus revealing the social influence which the latter possessed. Clerical property was freed from political oversight by King Wilfred in 694, and the monastic hospitality was decreed an almost sacred thing. At this time also, monastic prestige laid the foundation for those ecclesiastical liberties which later led to the antagonism

* Vol. 2, "Monks of the West " -- 604

between church and state which has marked many and many of the pages of English History. Moreover, there early appeared, as it were, an affinity between the Anglo-Saxon nobles and the humble monks. No class of persons ever accepted so heartily the teachings of Christ as did the national and tribal leaders at the hands of the Benedictines prelates. The former soon became monks, abbots, and bishops, while the latter arose to positions of social responsibility and seats of influence in the assemblies. They were guides spiritual in affairs temporal. Indeed, the legislation of the day dealt with both secular and religious matters. From their new vantage point the monks brot about further social adjustments. Not only was Sunday rest scrupulously regarded by many regulations, but a new note of social justice and humanity was injected into legislation. As landlords the Benedictines treated the humblest peasant with love and parental kindness. Then too, the monks, as a rule, were directly responsible for the ever diminishing number of slaves. Their cognizance and pity for human suffering of every kind gave impetus to the development of individualism in an age when the Anglo Saxons were in sore danger of the growth

of a caste system. Against this tendency as Montalembert says, "the monastic missionaries, while they transformed the morals and faith of the Anglo-Saxon conquerors, did nothing to change the native genius of the Teuton race."*

There existed a striking agreement between the monastic order and the spirit of Anglo-Saxon institutions. This feeling induced an attitude of lavishness on the part of the nobles toward the orders. Valuable gifts were bestowed on the monks and the foundations laid for unhappy economic reactions in later years. Not only were false grants of land made, and worldly monks put in possession of an easy living, but the peasants on the tracts of land thus held, being exempt from military service, caused a lack of soldiery in the land. Indeed, all the moral evils which later befell the monasteries were caused by the "too much and too sudden wealth which had been introduced in them." A whole chapter could easily be written concerning the interplay of economic forces caused by these churchly accumulations of wealth. Enough has been said to reveal the tendencies, tendencies which when curbed at all, requir-

*The Monks of the West Vol 2 p627

ed not only council edicts but physical suppression from both within and without.

We have tried to touch in general fashion the economic influence of the Benedictine order on the Continent, and the lesser economic but greater social pressure which it exercised in England. It is exceedingly doubtful if Benedict ever realized what would be the immense effect of his work. Mentalembert admirably sums up the probability and the fact when he declares: "I know not whether he entertained such grand plans (to regenerate Europe and stop the dissolution of society), but I can see no trace of them in either his rule or his life. If they ever penetrated into his soul it was only to be eclipsed and replaced by the thought of salvation,..... What is most to be admired in his social and historical influence is that he seems never to have dreamt of it THE MASTERS OF the spiritual life have always remarked that a man who begins a work blessed of God does it unawares. God loves to build upon nothing....."

"However it might be, the results of Benedict's work were immense. In his life-time, as after his death, the sons of the noblest races in Italy, and the

best of the converted barbarians, came in multitudes to Monte Cassino the situation of the most important of the Benedictine monasteries). They came out again and descended from it to spread themselves over all the West, missionaries and husbandmen who were soon to become the doctors and pontiff the artists and legislators, the historians and poets of the new world. They went forth to spread peace and faith, light and life, freedom and charity, knowledge and art, the Word of God and the genius of man, the Holy Scriptures and the greatest works of classical literature amid the despairing provinces of the destroyed empire, and even into the barbarous regions from which the destruction came forth. Less than a century after the death of Benedict all the barbarism had won from civilization was reconquered; and more still, his children took in hand to carry the Gospel beyond those limits which had confined the first disciples of Christ."

3

The monastic order following next in order of time from the Benedictines was that of Cluny, founded in 910. Except for the injunction regarding daily manual toil, the rule was strictly Benedictine. In place of toil

emphasis was placed upon churchly services. Indeed, so concerned did the adherents of this group become in this respect that the order very largely lost contact with the outer world. Its real economic and social effects amount to almost nothing. The same might be said of the Camaldulians and Vallombrosians in Italy, and the Grandmontines and Carthusians in France who exhibited the eremitical characteristics of the Oriental groups. Perhaps a very slight exception might be made for the latter in the Modern Era, for after the French Revolution, being compelled to find some way to pay the taxes imposed upon them, the monks of this order produced the famous Chartreuse wine, in the preparation of which the young buds of pine trees were used.

The first monastic order after the Benedictines to really claim our attention because of non-religious influences are the Cistercians, known as the Grey or White monks. This group was founded in 1098 to react against the tendencies, materialistic in their nature, of the times. It was the chief and direct offshoot of the Benedictine order and aimed at the full restoration of the Benedictine rule. As a consequence, the Cistercians gave a large place to manual labor. Indeed the

rule of the institute specified that the subsistence of the monasteries was to be derived exclusively from cattle-raising and agriculture. As the writer in the Encyclopedia says, "It was an agriculturalists and horse and cattle breeders that after the first blush of the success, and before a century had passed the Cistercians exercised their chief influence on the progress of civilization in the later Middle Ages; they were the great farmers of those days and many of the improvements in the various farming operations were introduced and propagated by them. It is from this point of view that the importance of their extension in Northern Europe (due very largely to the devoted efforts of Bernard of Clairveaux) is to be viewed." *

In the same vein Philip Schaff relates that "a novice at Clairveaux writes enthusiastically of the employment of the monks, whom he found with hoes in the gardens, forks and rakes in the meadows, sickles in the fields, and axes in the forest. In some parts they became large landowners and crowded out the owners of small plots."

The fact that the Cistercians from the very be-

** See Vol. on Med. Church Hist. p339.

*See Cistercians, Ency, Brit, Vol. 6, pp393ff

ginning of their career "renounced all sources of income arising from benefices, tithes, tolls, and rents, and depended wholly on land" is illustrated by their work in every country wherein they undertook to gain a livelihood. " In northeastern Germany and further to the east the Cistercians rendered great service to civilization by their colonizing activity. Marshes were drained and forests were cleared; orchards and vineyards were planted on a gigantic scale; and cattle and sheep were raised. The improvement of its property was the principal aim of each monastery." In a word, the story of the Benedictine achievements is here repeated.

"In England they (the Cistercians) were careful breeders of horses and were noted for their sheep and wool. Their wool was a popular article of royal taxation. John seized a year's product to meet the payment of Richard's ransom. Henry the second 1257, taxed it heavily, while Henry the third forbade them to sell it at all." **

The dependence of the Cistercians on the Benedictines, and the influence of both orders upon industry
** Philip Schaff, Vol. on Med. Church Hist. p337
* Schaff-Herzog, Article Cistercians, Vol. 2, p123

at Buckfastleigh undoubtedly had its origin in connection with the Abbey at Buckfast, founded by the Benedictines as far back as the day of Canute, and held by them until the 12th century, when it passed into the hands of the "White Monks" (Cistercians). In the reign of Edward the Confessor, they not only cultivated the land in the immediate vicinity of the Abbey, but established an extensive woolen trade throughout South Devon, Dom William Gifford in the 13th century obtaining the Royal privilege of a weekly market at Buckfastleigh, and a yearly Michaelman Fair at South Brent, while what is still known as "The Abbot's Way," is the track along which the mules proceeded laden with packs of wool from Buckfast to Tavistock. The Abbey continued until 1538, when Abbot Gabriel Donne handed it over with its possessions to Henry the Eighth. For 350 years after it remained in secular hands, and it was not until 1882 that it was sold to the Benedictines who were expelled from France."*

It is said that in the later years of their existence during the Mediaeval Period that the Cistercians

*See Buckfastleigh Western Guardian for Mar. 25, 1920
*See also History of Buckfastleigh, by Dom Adam Hamilton

gave themselves to copying manuscripts. In fact, it is claimed that they produced the first Swedish Bible. Doubtless these facts are true. But the order was never one of scholarly tastes or products. Beyond Bernard of Clairveaux they can claim no distinguished student. Nor can they set before us unusual examples of piety and saintliness, as can later institutes. Rather, in addition to the strictly economic bearing which their labors had, did they set before the peasants of their day a new social ideal. Workman has very well expressed our thought, applicable to Benedictines and Cistercians alike, when he says

"The sons of Benedict, freemen be it remembered, often men of high degree, as they labored in the field, clad in the dress familiar to the pagan world as the dress of slaves, or took their share in the work of the house, cooking the meals or cleaning the rooms, sanctified industry by consecrating it to the lowliest tasks. 'This is fine occupation for a count' sarcastically exclaimed Duke Geoffrey of Lorraine when he found his brother Frederick washing dishes in the kitchen of a monastery. 'You are right, duke,' was the reply. 'I ought indeed to think myself honored by the smallest

service for the Master." The scenes which Bernold described in his Chronicles regarding the Benedictines are equally true of the Cistercians, "counts cooking in the kitchen, and margraves leading the pigs out to feed. Such tales could be multiplied indefinitely. We may laugh at them, but their value is not less great in the witness they give to the existence of a new ideal in the world, Facts such as these raised labor into new esteem and aided in that development of industry which in centuries long after was to destroy feudalism itself and to shift the center of power to the producer and the toiler... The toil of the monk was socialistic in method and aim; tho its socialism, it is true, in practice did not look beyond the corporation."

"This socialism turned into a factor of immense importance in the history of civilization. For a thousand years Europe witnessed the spectacle of organized communities where the individual profited nothing, and the community gained all."* The immense influence of the propagation of such an ideal cannot be definitely computed, but its great benefits to civilization must be credited, along with many economic gains, to the

*Workman, Evolution of the Monastic Ideal.

work of the monks.

New monastic orders, so-called, began to appear in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The earliest of these was the "Rule of St. Augustine". This institute was really semi-monastic not confining itself to the strictures of real monastic life. Alongside the congregations of Augustinians there developed "the Premonstratensian order (1120) and the English double order of St. Gilbert of Sempringham (1148)". The religious wars called in to being military orders such as the Knights Hospitallers of St. John and the Knight Templars and the order of Ranscom such as the Trinitarians. So far as we are able to learn, these institutes possessed very few of those results such as we are trying to trace. It remains, then, for us to discover the influences which ensued from the work of the Mendicant Orders, particularly those of St. Benidict and St. Francis.

The mendicant orders themselves grew out of the strained economic and social conditions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The church had developed in accordance with feudalistic tendencies. "The Bishops and abbots were feudal barons," and the social centers existed not in the cities where the great

masses of the people lived, but on the feudal estates. Thus the clergy and the people were separated. The friars were needed as social no less than as spiritual ministers. In this exigency the Fransican performed a social service of very great importance. Indeed, this was their distinct contribution as opposed to the more economic influences of the Benedictines and Cistercians.

St. Francis was born of good parentage about the year 1182. His youth was an exceedingly merry one, often dissolute in nature. A hard illness turned the future churchman's mind to the serious things of life. As a result of his meditation he finally announced to his friends in the midst of a happy festival his determination to marry, the object of his affections being Lady Poverty. This decision was not a religious turning merely; it was a forecast of the whole temper and temperament of the future Fransican movement. Those who were to join the order, it is true, were to work, begging only when the latter was impossible. Self-renunciation and poverty were demanded, the cure of souls through the rendering of personal services being the principal objective.

The Fransicans turned their hands to anything.

They carried water, weaved willow baskets, cut and brot wood to the villages, buried the dead, gathered olives, and mended shoes. Indeed, the friars often went out from their monasteries to private homes, there to perform the menial tasks of domestic servants. All this was done in a spirit of true humility and of unremiting joy. As Montalembert admirably says, "to that unfortunate multitude condemned to labor and privation, which constitutes the immense majority of the human race, the monks have always been prodigal, not only of bread, but at the same time of a sympathy efficacious and indefatigable - a nourishment of the soul not less important than that of the body After having given an incessant and generous hospitality to the indigent crowd whom they never found too numerous, after having edified and rejoiced them by the sight of their own peaceful and gentle life, they offered to them, besides, in time of war, a shelter, an assylum almost always respected by Catholic conquerors. After having giving all that they could give on their own account, they inspired to marvels of generosity all those who loved and surrounded them. If they were richly endowed by rich Christians, they in their turn endowed the poor

with their purified wealth.....They were not satisfied simply to solace poverty; they honored it consecrated it adopted it, espoused it, as that which was greatest and most royal here below....Even to the poor who did not enter into their ranks, the monastic order presented a spectacle more adapted than any other to console them and elevate them."

So it appears that in the days following the first breaking up of the feudal system, when social anarchy might easily have become a wide-spread phenomenon, the Franciscans exercised a dedative and soothing influence. They won the love of the humblest, for "the monasteries were asylums for the hungry during famines, and the sick during plagues. They served as hotels where the traveler found a cordial welcome, comfortable shelter, and plain food. If he needed medical aid his wants were supplied." During the black plague, while many monks fled with the multitude others stayed at their posts and were to be found daily in the homes of the stricken, ministering to their bodily and spiritual needs. Many of them perished in their heroic and self-sacrificing labors."**

* Montalembert, "The Monks of the West" Vol. 1, p29
**Wishart, "Short Hist. of Monks and Monasticism", p410ff

Like Benedictine Hildegard, the Franciscans played well the role of Physicians. This was particularly true in England where they settled in such centers as Cambridge, Norwich, Northampton, and Yarmouth. The towns and villages of those days were in wretched sanitary condition. Skin diseases, including leprosy were very prevalent, while epidemics spread rapidly. Partly from necessity and partly from choice the Franciscans settled in the worst and most unhealthful districts, and by sanitation and simple medical precautions brot untold blessings to the miserable people around them. Their work in England is typical of their entire activity, that of a labor of love.

The other important branch of the friar monks, the Dominicans, achieved no such lasting results as have been ennumerated of the Franciscans. Indeed, the former were particularly trained for scholarly pursuits, for teaching and preaching, and for the extremely unhappy work of ferreting out the heretics. Deterred from manual labor and devoid of social contacts it is evident that their contributions must be entirely different from those of the Franciscans.

The thirteenth century stands as the high water

mark of monasticism, both the mendicant orders and the abbeys being at the height of their prosperity, religiously and secularly. Lesser orders sprung from the most prosperous, such as the Celestines, the Olivetans, and the Silvestrines from the Benedictines. But during the fourteenth century the secularity which we have already noted in regard to the Benedictines in England, swept over all the abbeys and orders, not excepting even the Franciscan. Wealth was the subtle infection of disruption and downfall. The greatest evil was that of commendation, altho it must be admitted that England was largely free from this evil. The efforts for betterment made during the early part of the fifteenth century were only partially successful, so that the Reformation found many abuses to strengthen its etre raison, and to serve as objects of attack.

We have tried briefly to trace the socio-economic effects of the various monastic movements during the Middle Ages. It now remains for us to summarize these results and attempt some general estimate. This it is not altogether easy to do. Wishart, in preparing to summarize the movement says, "The system presents one

long series of perplexities and contradictions.....
It was the inspiration of virtue and the encouragement
of vice. It was the patron of industry and the promoter
of idleness. It was a pioneer in education and the
teacher of superstition. It was the disbursar of alms
and a many handed robber. It was the friend of human
liberty and the abetter of tyranny....It was....every
thing that man was and is, so varied were its operations,
so complex was its influence, so comprehensive was its
life."*

We believe, however, that on the whole monasticism
was a great power for good and for human betterment. If
the foreboding mind dwells on the later economic disord-
ers in the abbeys, let it also recall the strategic help-
fulness of the monks in those early Middle centuries
when Europe was confronted with utter ruin. If it be
affirmed that monasticism drew many men into a cloister
ed life who would otherwise have been acceptable members
of society in an age when laborers were needed, and if
it be asserted that men so withdrawn became so intro-
spective as to loose their reason and so be made unfit
for political and secular duties, let the verdict of his-
tory be read again which declares that "the friar.....
"Monks and Monasteries" p387ff

became an indispensable counselor in political complications..... His influence is thus described by the historian Green: 'The theory of government wrought out in the cell and lecture room was carried over the length and breadth of the land by the Mendicant brother begging his way from town to town, shatting with the farmer or housewife at the cottage door; and setting up his portable pulpit in village green or market place.* And if it be averred that the monastic career developed spiritual pride, bigotry, an inhuman spirit, and contracted sympathy, let the imagination recall the scenes of suffering at which the monks ministered, the social legislation which they instigated, and the occasions, many in number, when the abbots stood between the violence of nobles and the legal rights of otherwise unprotected vassals.

The supreme contribution of the monks, it seems to us, aside from spiritual benefits, lies in their murture of individualism. As Allen explains in his chapter on Monasticism, individualism comes only when the demands for social solidarity indicative of a primitive people have passed away. Persons living under the meagre regulations of barbarism and savagery are forced to unite

for preservation. Exactly such was the condition during the Middle Ages. Altho the "immortal part of a man is not that which he shares with the rest of his race, but that which he possesses of his own", nevertheless the Catholic church confirmed and strengthened the social emphasis of Feudalism. By its philosophy of religion and its method of procedure and government it made impossible the development of personality in the subordination of the individual to the dictates of ecclesiastical authority. But it was just this realization of a person's best self that monasticism fostered. The monks and friars were continually helping others to overcome the circumstances of their own lives - the peasant's apathy and degradation, the artisan's lack of skill, the merchant's provincialism, and the thotful individual's lack of vision. In ancient days the man was trained for the state, and in the Middle Ages primarily for the church. The Benedictines and Cistercians trained men for themselves.

The depth of the genius of the monastic movement is found we believe, in the Franciscan movement, But the Papacy never heartily approved of St. Francis' work. There was an indiscoverable something about the humble

friar and his achievements which Rome did not like. We venture to say that this element was the absolute but hidden lack of submission to overhead restraint, the conscious or unconscious refusal to allow one's immortality to be mechanically directed or guided. These monks lived in strange opposition to Papal ideals. They sought for and established new truth. "In taking the vows of poverty and celibacy, the monk flung defiance in the face of existing civilization; flouting the relationships of state and family as ties incompatible with the highest freedom and development. But he took a vow of obedience, seeking therein a further freedom, for the obedience was to be rendered to one like-himself, in sympathy with his purpose and method," and not to an autocratic and unyielding force. To the monks, then we ascribe the beginning of that movement which finally culminated in the Renaissance of literature, art, thought, and feeling - everything royal in the nature of man. This initiation was small, to be sure, only a seed thrown out, as it were, on the broken and furrowed fields of human experience and history, but flowering at last in a verdant and prolific growth. The development of individ-

ualism must be credited to monastic influences, along with that long series of industrial, commercial, and social impulses to which they gave birth. Despite the many abuses, therefore, to which the orders gave rise, and the many infamies committed in their name, the social and economic benefits of the movement outweigh all evils, and the thoughtful mind will render grateful tribute to the monk, the friar, and the abbot, of the Middle Ages.