

any case, as M. Maritain has suggested<sup>11</sup>, that we have not yet seen the worst that the forces of materialism can do, that they have not yet completed their course. The necessity then is urgent of establishing now, firm and stable, the foundations of whatever edifice is to rise and, for those who have the courage and generosity to respond, the way is clear.

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## ‘WITH NATIVE HONOUR CLAD’

BY

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**P**OPE PIUS XII, in his Encyclical Letter *Fulgens Radiatur*<sup>1</sup> written to honour the fourteenth centenary of the death of St Benedict, invites ‘all classes of society’ to turn again to the Holy Rule that there they may find ‘the sacred principles of religion and the standards of life which are the most secure and most stable foundations of human society’.

It is clear that the Pope had a special reason for stressing the civilising and unifying effects of St Benedict’s work. All men are now searching for a solid foundation on which to rebuild the unity of Europe. It is an appropriate moment, then, to remind us of the way in which Europe was first united in the spirit of Christ. ‘Not only England, Gaul, the Low Countries, Friesland, Denmark, Germany and Scandinavia, but also many Slavonic lands boast of their conversion by those monks, whom they consider their glory and reverence as founders of their civilisation.’ It is true that now there are many other workers in the service of our Lord who have not St Benedict for their father and who follow other Rules. But the Pope asks all Christians, ‘beset and perturbed amid so much grave material and moral destruction, dangers and disasters, to turn to him for necessary and timely remedies’.

It is particularly fitting that the Catholics of England should recognise the great debt that we owe to the Benedictines. Not only was the Faith brought here by St Augustine and his companions, monks trained according to the Rule of St Benedict, but, since that first coming, the Black Monks have been at the heart of English Catholic life, and their history is the most ancient of English histories, beside which the oldest of our great families are but parvenus. The names of Bede and Cuthbert were revered before the reign of Alfred, and it is now a thousand years since St Dunstan of Canter-

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<sup>11</sup> *True Humanism* (Geoffrey Bles).

<sup>1</sup> The translation that is used is that printed in *Pax* for Summer and Autumn, 1947.

bury, once the Abbot of Glastonbury, made possible the flowering of the Benedictine influence in the following three centuries so that it was then 'perhaps more than at any other time in English history that the monastic life met and satisfied the deepest spiritual needs of the age, and discharged a function most essential to the higher life of society and to the well-being and development of the nation' (David Knowles, *Monastic Order in England*, p. 17). Since that time there have been the ebb and flow that is inevitable in the history of any vital society, but even in the darkest time the Benedictine life never died.

At the time of the destruction of the monasteries by Henry VIII it seemed that the life of the English Benedictine Congregation—the most venerable of the congregations that go to make up the Benedictine Order, for the English monasteries had been grouped together in the fourteenth century—must be finally extinguished. When the eighty-year-old Abbot of Glastonbury was bound to a hurdle and dragged past his deserted monastery and desecrated church to the top of Glastonbury Tor, and was there hung, drawn and quartered because he would not accept the king's will, and when his severed head was stuck over the gateway of his almost legendary monastery, the manner of his death must have appeared as the grim symbol of the inevitable destruction of the Benedictine Order in England.

But during the following years there were always Englishmen who wished to follow the Holy Rule, the purpose of which, wrote Bishop Ullathorne, is 'to form saints and to civilise mankind'. These men, in their Italian and Spanish monasteries, led the regular monastic life, and though they may have been tempted to impatience when they saw the great need for missionaries in their own country, they remained faithful to their hidden life, preparing the way for the great missionary future.

On March 20th, 1602, a papal decree was issued by Clement VIII granting permission to the Benedictines to return to England. Almost at once negotiations were begun to found a monastery whose members should be English, and in the next few years the two houses of St Gregory and St Lawrence were founded, the first at Douay and the second in Lorraine.

On coming to England it happened that two of the monks found the last survivor of the restored Marian community of Westminster, the one remaining link with the great congregation of the past. On November 21st, 1607, a day still celebrated in the English monasteries as the 'Dies Memorabilis', two Benedictine novices were professed in the old man's presence, and were then formally admitted by him as members of the Abbey of Westminster. So was the English

Congregation kept alive. 'For some five years after its renewal in 1607 the English Congregation was without a monastery of its own; but in or about the year 1612 it was admitted to an equal share in the monastery of St Lawrence, at Dieulouard in Lorraine (now at Ampleforth), which had been acquired by English monks of the Spanish congregation, and in 1614 it obtained full possession of this house. Dieulouard thus became the conventual house of the Westminster monks' (Dom Justin McCann, *The Confessions of Father Baker*, pp. 29-30).

When permission was granted by the Holy See and as soon as arrangements could be made, the monks started to return. Very soon they numbered martyrs among their company, and 'behind them were the lives of the Benedictine missionaries in England, unspectacular and unrecorded in detail, built on the unswerving round of monastic duty in the English Houses abroad' (Dom Adrian Morey, *Catholicism in England*, Appendix II, p. 272). It is instructive to see how hidden was the work of these men. It is true that the Faith was kept alive in many parts of England by reason of their devotion, but of their history we know little apart from its fruit, which 'is written', said Bishop Ullathorne, 'in the Church preserved to us, in the centuries of toil and suffering through which they worked to this result, and in the blood of the Benedictine martyrs' (Dom C. Butler, *Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne*, vol. ii, p. 220). Even the names of the beatified martyrs, George Gervase, John Roberts, Maurus Scott, Ambrose Barlow, Alban Roe, Philip Powel, and, characteristically, the lay brother, Thomas Pickering, are strange to Catholic ears. Indeed, there is only one name during the next two centuries that is familiar to us, that of Fr Augustine Baker, a monk of St Lawrence's, the author of *Sancta Sophia*. In teaching the importance of mortification and prayer as the necessary foundations for a Christian life, he has prepared our minds for the quietness of the succeeding years, when the monks in the monasteries lived the conventual life, based on the 'daily duty' of the choir, and taught in their schools, and those who came on the mission lived so that their lives have become obscured for the average man; but their piety and patience were laying the foundation for the ultimate revival.

When the English monks returned from the Continent at the time of the French Revolution, their future again seemed doubtful, but three small communities managed to survive, and gradually, in spite of difficulties, they grew. Two figures stand out in the last century, Bishop Ullathorne of St Gregory's and Bishop Hedley of St Lawrence's. Dr Mathew has written of Ullathorne that he was 'in all ways representative of the old Catholicism, its common sense, strength, and toughness, the spirit of the English Congregation'

religious and missionary' (*Catholicism in England*, p. 196). Hedley too had these qualities, but he added to them a remarkable self-effacement—a typical Benedictine quality—so that what Wilfred Ward has called his genius did not at first appear. 'This disguise of his greatest gifts arose largely from a deep reality of mind, which made him hate all unnecessary display. He had the true Benedictine sense that character was all in all—that what you do and are matters much; what men think of you matters very little indeed' (*Dublin Review*, January, 1916). His writings today are normally left on the shelves, and yet they received the highest praise that Wilfred Ward could give them—'There are pages which in their power are worthy of Newman himself'. There are others that come to mind as typical. Irresistibly there rises in the imagination the thick-set strong figure of Abbot Matthews of Ampleforth, a great man, courageous both in the things of God and as an administrator and worthy of the highest honours, but unassuming, in the tradition of his line. 'One would think that being an Abbot was something to be ashamed of', a friend said to him, as the Abbot removed his ring before going in to a meeting at which he was not known, and where he gave his name as Father Matthews.

The Benedictines are once more powerful in the Catholic life of England, and from them we can learn 'to rise above earthly and perishable things, whether the inventions or discoveries of keen minds or the products of some laborious craft, to those which are heavenly and lasting; only by attaining these last can we enjoy real peace, untroubled calm and eternal happiness' (*Fulgens Radiatur*).