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SOME CHAPTERS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

NUNNERIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

(c. 1250 - 1535)

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PREFACE.

The history of English monastic houses in the later middle ages has suffered from being regarded almost exclusively in connection of the Dissolution. On the one hand the apologists of the system have described monastic life from the monastic rule and have argued that and none of the sixteenth century writers or since the Reformation have believed in the myth of the Black Book. Of late there has been a reaction against monastic houses, which lay so long hidden in ecclesiastical and lay hands of the question whether the monastic houses were fulfilling their original functions, or had degenerated in discipline and morals, must be decided not by reference to the Benedictine rule, nor to the reports of Henry VIII's commissioners, but by a study of their history as preserved in these episcopal records, stretching over nearly three centuries.

Apart altogether from this question the English man-
The history of English monastic houses in the later middle ages has suffered from being regarded almost exclusively in the light of the Dissolution. On the one hand the apologists of the system have described monastic life from the monastic rule and have argued that the monks and nuns of the sixteenth century still preserved the strictness and purity of the original ideal. On the other hand ultra-Protestant writers ever since the Reformation have believed in the myth of the Black Book and have accepted unquestioningly the comperta of Layton and ap Legh. Of late there has been a reaction against both these extreme views, and as the visitations of monastic houses, which lay so long hidden in ecclesiastical registries, have by degrees been found and published, the realisation has grown that the question whether the monasteries in 1535 were fulfilling their original functions, or had degenerated in discipline and in morals, must be decided not by reference to the Benedictine rule, nor to the reports of Henry VIII's commissioners, but by a study of their history as revealed in these episcopal records, stretching over nearly three centuries.

Apart altogether from this question the English mon-
asteries deserve to be studied for the intrinsic interest of their records. The monasteries played a great part in the life of the middle ages and a study of the lives of the men and women who entered them has a social interest greater by far than its merely polemical value. Of all the records of the middle ages, with the exception of literary records such as Chaucer’s poems, those of the visitations of monastic houses are the most human.

The justification or condemnation of Henry VIII’s arbitrary action is a small matter compared with the historical interest of tracing the growth of the monasteries throughout the critical fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The history of the nunneries is only a small part of this work, but since there was little difference in the rule for men and for women, and since visitation records show the nuns to have fallen substantially into the same faults as the monks, it may be considered as typical.

To illustrate this subject I have selected four aspects of the history of English Nunneries. I have described the social class from which the nuns were drawn and the different motives for which a woman might enter religion. I have also described the increasing financial difficulties of the houses and the increasing freedom, with which nuns associated with the world outside their gates; for to these two factors, more
than to any other, was due the decline in discipline which took place in monastic houses during the period. Finally I have given some account of the women who ruled over the nunneries.

The evidence for this paper is drawn in all cases from Pre-Reformation sources.
CHAPTER I.

The Novice

'Mars, sum assent at adiuat sit ... viri potentes divitiaeque filia, nie ab incuncta estate servabit meli conversione, ut matris frequentor discret. Natus, fac me maniolus.'

-Cassiodorus of Neisterbach, Dialogus Miius I, p. 114.

Non paro, ausque et hunc
Omnem per seur fac
Qu' a me ventrice.
Tout

CHAPTER I.

-Wucherlin, L'Angiqtue plusieurs populaires we des Alpes (1870).

The Novice.

It has been insufficiently recognized that the medieval nunneries were recruited almost entirely from among the upper classes. They were essentially aristocratic institutions, the refuge of the gently born. At Ramsey Abbey a list of ninety-one sisters at the election of Abbess Johanna Ithan in 1546 is full of well-known county names. The names of Nesson, Haseville, Covent, Mussy, Tawke, and Yarnfield occur at Basseborne; Leckmor, St. John, Okhurst, Mitchelgrove, and Sidney at Sussex. The return of the subsidy in 1577 enumerates the sisters of Minchin Barre and, as their historian points out, among the

1. These are discussed in Living, Records of Ramsey Abbey, pp. 118, 119.
CHAPTER I.

The Novice.

'Haec, cum esset et adhuc sit ... viri potenti
divitisque filla, sic ab ineunte aetate fervebat
zelo conversionis, ut matri frequenter diceret:
Mater, fac me moniasem.'


"Mon pere, aussi ma mere
Ont jure par leur foy
Qu'ils me rendront nonnette,
Tout en despit de moy."


It has been insufficiently recognised that the medieval nunneries were recruited almost entirely from among the upper classes. They were essentially aristocratic institutions, the refuge of the gently born. At Romsey Abbey a list of ninety-one sisters at the election of Abbess Johanna Icthe in 1333 is full of well known county names. The names of Bassett, Sackville, Covert, Hussey, Tawke and Farnfold occur at Eaebourne; Lewknor, St. John, Okehurst, Michelgrove and Sidney at Rusper, the two nunneries in Sussex. The return of the subsidy in 1377 enumerates the sisters of Minchin Barrow and, as their historian points out, 'among the

1 These are discussed in Liveing. Records of Romsey Abbey. pp. 113. ff.
2 V.C.H. Sussex. II. p. 84.
3 Ib. II. p. 63.
Family names of these ladies are some of the best that the Western counties could produce.\(^1\) The other Somerset houses were equally aristocratic and an examination of the roll of Prioresses for almost any medieval convent in any part of England will give the same result, even in the smallest and poorest nunneries, the inmates of which were reduced to begging alms.\(^2\) These ladies appear sometimes to have had the spirit of their race, as they often had its manners and its tastes. For twenty-one years Isabella de Stanley, Prioress of King's Mead, Derby, refused to pay a rent due from her house to the Abbot of Burton; at last the Abbot sent his bailiff to distrain for it and she, who should have been a humble nun, spoke her mind with very worldly arrogance. "Wenes these churles to overlede me" cried this worthy daughter of a border family, "or sue the lawe agayne me? They shall not be so hardy but they shall avye upon their bodies and be nailed with arrows; for I am a gentlewoman, comen of the greatest of Lancashire and Cheshire, and that they shall know right well."\(^3\)

A tacit recognition of the aristocratic character of the convents is to be found in the fact that bishops were often at

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1 Hugo. Medieval Nunneries of the County of Somerset, Minchin Barrow. p.108.
3 Lysons. Magna Britannia V. p.113. Compare the remark of a nun of Wennigsen, near Hanover, who considered herself insulted when the great reformer Busch addressed her not as 'Klosterfrau' but as 'Sister'. "You are not my brother, wherefore then call me sister? My brother is clad in steel & you in a linen frock." (1455) quoted in Coulton. Medieval Garner. p 653
pains to mention the good birth of the girls whom, in accordance with a general right, they nominated to certain houses on certain occasions. Thus Wykeham wrote to the Abbess of St. Mary's Winchester, bidding her admit Johane Bleden 'quest de bone et honeste condition come nous sumes enformes'.

More frequently still the candidates were described as 'domicella' or 'damoysele'. At least one instance is extant of a Bishop ordering that all the nuns of a house were to be of noble condition.

The fact that the greater portion of the female population was unaffected by the existence of the outlet provided by conventual life for women's energies is a significant one. The reason for it - paradoxical as this may sound - lies in the very narrowness of the sphere to which women of gentle birth were confined. The disadvantage of rank is that so many honest occupations are not, in its eyes, honourable occupations.

In the lowest rank of society the poor labourer upon the land had no need to get rid of his daughter, if he could not find her a husband, nor would it have been to his interest to do so, for, working in the fields among his sons, or spinning and brewing with his wife at home, she could earn a supplementary if not a living wage. The tradesman or artisan in the town

2 e.g. Reg... of Rigaud de Amseria (Hants Rec. Soc.) p. 394; Reg... Stephani Gravesend (Cant. & York Soc.) p.200; Wykeham's Register. loc. cit.
was in a similar position. He recognised that the ideal course was to find a husband for his growing girl, but the alternative was in no sense that she should eat out her heart and his income during long years at home; and if he were too poor to provide her with a sufficient dower, he could and often did apprentice her to a trade. The number of industries which were carried on by women in the middle ages shows that for the burgess and lower classes there were other outlets besides marriage; and then, as now, domestic service provided for many. But the case of the well-born lady was different. The knight or the county gentleman could not apprentice his superfluous daughters to a pursemaker or a weaver in the town; not from them were drawn the regrateresses in the market place and the harvest gatherers in the field; nor was it their's to make the parti-coloured bed and shake the coverlet, worked with grapes and unicorns, in some rich vintner's house. There remained for him, if he did not wish or could not afford to keep them at home and for them, if they desired some scope for their young energies, only marriage or else a convent, where they might go with a smaller dower than a husband of their own rank would demand.

To say that the convents were the refuge of the gently born is not to say that there was no admixture of classes within them. The term gentleman was becoming more comprehensive in
the later middle ages. It included the upper class proper, the families of noble birth; and it included also the country gentry. The convents were probably at first recruited almost entirely from these two ranks of society and a study of any collection of medieval wills shows how large a proportion of such families took advantage of this opening for women. A phrase will sometimes occur which shows that it was regarded as the natural and obvious alternative to marriage. Sir John Daubriggecourt in 1415 left his daughter Margery forty marks "if she be wedded to a worldly husband and if she be caused to receive the sacred veil in an order of holy nuns" ten pounds and twenty shillings rent, and Sir John le Blunt in 1312 bequeathed an annuity to his daughter Ann "till she marry or enter a religious house." The anxiety of the upper classes to secure a place for their children in nunneries sometimes even led to overcrowding. At Carrow the Prioress was forced to complain that 'certain lords of England whom she was unable to resist because of their power' forced their daughters upon the priory as nuns and in 1273 a papal bull forbade the reception of more inmates than the revenues would support. Archbishop William Wickwane addressed a similar mandate to two Yorkshire houses, Wilberfoss and Nunkeeling, which public rumour had

1 Gibbons. Early Lincoln Wills. p. 117.
3 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 71.
informed him to be overburdened with nuns and with secular boarders 'at the instance of nobles'; 1 and in 1327 Bishop Stratford wrote to Romsey Abbey that the house was notoriously burdened with ladies beyond the established number, and that he had heard that the nuns were being forced to receive more 'damoyseles' as novices, which he forbade without special licence. 2 A very strong personal connection must in time have been established between a nunnery and certain families from which, in each generation, it received a daughter or a niece and her dower. Such was the connection between Shouldham and the Beauchamps 3 and between Nunmunkton and the Fairfaxes. 4 A close link bound each nunnery to the family of its patron. Thus we find a Clinton at Wroxall and a Darcy at Heynings; nor is it unlikely that these noble ladies sometimes expected privileges and homage more than the strict equality of convent life would allow, if it be permissible to generalise from the behaviour of Isabel de Clinton 5 and from the fact that Margaret

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1 Reg. of Archbishop William Wickwane. (Surtees Soc.) p. 113.
2 Liveing, Records of Romsey Abbey. p. 98
3 William de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, mentions two daughters, nuns at Shouldham, in his will (1296). Sir Guy de Beauchamp mentions his little daughter Katherine, a nun there (1359) and his father Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, mentions the same Katherine and his own daughter Margaret, nuns there (1369). Katherine was still alive in 1400, when she is mentioned in the next Earl’s will. Testamenta Vetusta. I. pp. 52, 63, 79, 125.
4 see below pp. 14.
5 see below pp. 58-9 & V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 123.
Darcy received a rather severe penance from Bishop Gynwell in 1351 and a special warning against going beyond the cloistral precincts or speaking to strangers,\(^1\) while in 1393 there occurs the significant injunction by Bishop Buckingham that no sister was to have a room to herself except Dame Margaret Darcy (doubtless the same woman now grown elderly and ailing) 'on account of the nobility of her race'; an old lady of firm will and (despite his careful mention of extra pittances and of tolerating for a while) a somewhat sycophantic prelate.\(^2\)

It is worthy of notice that Chaucer has drawn an unmistakable 'lady' in his typical prioress. There is her delicate behaviour at meals:

At mete wel ytaught was she with alle
She leet no morsel from her lippes falle
Ne wette hir fingres in hir sauce depe.
Wel coude she carie a morsel and wel kepe,
That no drope ne fille upon hir brest.

\(^{1}\) 'Et pur certayn cause nous auens enioynt a dame Margaret Darcy, vostre soer, qel ne passe les lieus de cloistre, cest assauoir de qu(er), de cloistre, de ffraitour, dormitorie ou fermerie, tantque nous en aueroms autre ordeigne, et qele ne parle od nul estrange gentz, et soit darreyrn enstalle, et en chescun lieu qele ne porte aucl(cle), et qele die chescun iour un sautier et June la quarte et la sexe ferre a payn et eu. Ensement voilloms qe la dit dame Margaret, se puisse confesser au confesseur de vostre couent quant ele auera measter.' Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Gynwell. f. 34d. It looks like the penance for immorality.

\(^{2}\) 'Item quod nulla monialis ibidem cameram tenent priuatam, sed quod omnes moniales sane in dormitorio et infirmerie iacent atque cubant, preter dominam Margaretam Darcy, monialem prioratus antedicti, cui ob nobilitatem sui generis de camera sua quam tenet in prefatu, absque tamen alia liberatu panis et ceruisii, extra casum infirmitatis manifeste, volumus ad tempus tollerare'. Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Buckingham. f. 397d.
In curteisye was set ful muche hir lest,
Hir over lippe wyped she so clene,
That in hir coppe was no ferthing sene
Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte -
Ful semely after hir mete she raughte.' 1

This was the ne plus ultra of feudal table manners; Chaucer
might have been writing one of those books of deportment for
the guidance of aristocratic young women, which were so numer-
ous in France. 2 So the Clef d'Amors counsels ladies who would
win them lovers:

'Si petis morceaux met en bouche
Que tes levres nul n'en atouche
Tes levres ne soient pas ointes
Ne te dois moilliez si qu'as jointes...
Ainz que verre ou henap mennies
Voil je que tes levres essies
A la fin que dedens ne metes
Ne parisis ne maailletes.' 3

Even so Robert de Blois depicts the perfect diner:

'Toutes les fois que vous bevez

1 Canterbury Tales (ed. Skeat). Prologue. U.127.ff. It is
interesting to notice that the Roman de la Rose, of which
Chaucer translated a fragment, contains some remarks upon
this subject which are almost paraphrased in his description
of Madame Eglentyne.

Et gart que ja hanap ne touche,
Tant cum ele ait morsel en bouche;
Si doit si bien sa bouche terdre
Qu'el n'i lest nule grese aerdre;
Au mains en la levre desseure;
Car quant grese en cel demeure,
Ou vin en perest les maiilletes
Qui ne sunt ne beles ne netes.'

Rom. de la Rose. v. 14366. ff.

2 See A.A. Hentsch. De la litterature didactique du moyen âge
s'adressant spécialement aux femmes. ( ) And on the subject
of table manners see

3 La Clef d'Amors ... ed. Doutrepont. (1890). v. 3227. ff.
Robert de Blois' ideal, the chivalrous, frivolous, sensuous ideal of 'courtesy', which underlay the whole aristocratic conception of life and the attainment of which was the criterion of polite society, is the ideal of the Prioress also:

'Gardez vous, Dames, bien acertes,' says he,
'Qu'au mengier sciez bien apertes;
C'est une chose c'on moult prise
Que la soit dame bien aprise.
Tel chose torne à vilonie
Que toutes genz ne sevent mie;
Se peut cil tost avoir mespris
Qui n'est cortoisement apris.'

Later he warns against the greedy selection of the finest and largest titbit for oneself, on the ground that 'n'est pas cortoïsie'. The same consideration preoccupies Madame Eglentyne at her supper; 'in curteisye was set ful muche hir lest.' Good manners, elegant deportment, the polish of the court, all that we mean by nurture, these are her aim:

'And sikerly she was of grete disport
And ful plessaunt and amiable of port,
And peyned her to countrefete chere
Of court and been estatlich of manere,
And to be holden digne of reverence.'

Her pets are the pets of ladies in metrical romances and in illuminated borders; 'smale houndes', delicately fed with 'rosted flesh or milk and wastel breed.' Her very beauty

1 Le Chastiment des Dames. (Barbazon & Meón. Fabliaux et Contes. t. II. p. 200.)
2 She had no business to have them. But Chaucer drew the portrait from life - see below p.
(‘Hir nose tretys; hir eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouthe ful smal, and ther to soft and reed,
But sikerly she had a fair forheed,
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe,
For hardly she was not undergrowne’)

conforms to the courtly standard. Only the mention of her
chanting of divine service (through the tretys nose) differentiates her from any other well-born lady of the day; and if Chaucer had not told us whom he was describing, we might never have known that she was a nun. It was in these ideals and traditions that most of the inmates of English convents were born and bred.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, another class rose into prominence and gradually amalgamated, drawn to a great extent from the younger sons of the country gentry, found amalgamation easy with the country gentry. The development of trade and the new openings for the employment of capital had brought about the rise of the English merchant class. Hitherto foreigners had financed the English crown, but during the first four years of the Hundred Years War it became clear that English merchants were now rich and powerful enough to take their place; and the triumph of the native was complete when, in 1345, Edward III repudiated his debts to the Italian merchants and the Bardi and Peruzzi failed. Henceforth the English merchants were supreme; on the one hand their trading ventures enriched them; on the other they made vast sums out of farming the customs and the war subsidies in return for loans of ready money, and out of all sorts of government contracts. The successful campaigns of Crécy and
Poitiers were entirely financed by these English capitalists. Evidences of their wealth and importance are to be found on all sides. The taxation of moveables, which from 1334 became an important and in time the main source of national revenue, indicates a realisation on the part of the government that the wealth of the nation no longer lay in land, but in trade. The frequent sumptuary acts, the luxury of daily life, bear witness to the wealth of the nouveaux-riches; and so also do their philanthropic enterprises, the beautiful perpendicular churches which they built, the bridges which they repaired, the gifts which they gave to religious and to civic corporations. And it was in the fourteenth century that there began that steady fusion between the country gentry and the rich burgesses, which was accomplished before the end of the middle ages and which resulted in the formation of a solid and powerful middle class. The political amalgamation of the two classes in the Lower House of Parliament corresponded to a social amalgamation in the world outside. The country knights and squires saw in business a career for their younger sons; they saw in marriage with the daughters of the mercantile class a way to mend their fortunes; the city merchants, on the other hand, saw in such alliances a road to the attainment of that social prestige which went with land and blood, and were not loath to pay the price. 'Merchants or new gentlemen I deem will proffer large,' wrote Edmund Paston,
concerning the marriage of one of his family. "Well I wot if ye depart to London ye shall have proffers large."¹

This social amalgamation between the country gentry and the 'new gentlemen', who had made their money in trade, was naturally reflected in the nunneries. The wills of London burgesses, which were enrolled in the Court of Hustling, show that the daughters of these well-to-do citizens were in the habit of taking the veil. There is even more than one trace of the aristocratic view of religion as the sole alternative to marriage. Langland, enumerating the good deeds which will win pardon for the merchant, bids him 'marie maydens or maken hem nonnes."² At Ludlow the gild of Palmers provided that "If any good girl of the gild of marriageable age, cannot have the means found by her father, either to go into a religious house or to marry, whichever she wishes to do, friendly and right help shall be given her out of our common chest, towards enabling her to do whichever of the two she wishes."³ Similarly at Berwick-on-Tweed the gild 'ordained by the pleasure of the burgesses' had a provision entitled 'Of the bringing up of daughters of the gild', which ran: "If any brother die leaving a daughter true and worthy and of good repute, but undowered, the gild shall find her a dower,

¹ See Mrs. Green. Town Life in the Fifteenth Century II. pp. 77-80. John Paston married a London draper's daughter, Margery Brews, and a charming person she was if she was anything like her letters (e.g. Paston Letters ed Gairdner Vol. III p. 214).
either on marriage or on going into a religious house." 1 So also John Syward, 'stockfishmongere' of London, whose will was proved at the Court of Husting in 1349, left, 'To Dionisia his daughter forty pounds for her advancement, so that she either marry therewith or become a religious at her election, within one year after his decease;' 2 and William Wyght, of the same trade, bequeathed "to each of his daughters Agnes, Margaret Beatrix and Alice fifty pounds sterling for their marriage or for entering a religious house (1393); 3 while William Marowe in 1504 bequeathed to 'Elizabeth and Katherine his daughters forty pounds each, to be paid at their marriage or profession'. 4 Sometimes, however, the sound burgess sense prevailed, as when Walter Constantyn endowed his wife with 'the residue of his goods, so that she assist Amicia, his niece, ... towards her marriage or to some trade befitting her position.' 5

The mixture of classes must have been more frequent in convents which were situate in or near a large town, while the country gentry had those lying in rural districts more or less to themselves. The nunnery of Carrow, for instance, was a favourite resort for girls of noble and of gentle birth, but

3 Sharpe. Op.Cit.II. p.299. The Fishmongers, who up to 1536 were divided into the two companies of salt-fishmongers and stock-fishmongers, were a powerful and important body, as the annals of the city of London in the fourteenth century show, 'these fishmongers' in the words of Stow 'having been jolly citizens and six mayors of their company in the space of twenty-four years.' Stow's Survey of London. (Everyman's Lib.) p. 192.
it was also recruited from the daughters of prosperous Norwich citizens; among nuns with well-known county names there were also ladies such as Isabell Barbour, daughter of Thomas Welan, barber, and Joan his wife, Margery Folcard, daughter of John Folcard, Alderman of Norwich, and Catherine Segryme, daughter of Ralph Segryme, another alderman; the latter even attained the position of prioress at the end of the fifteenth century. The citizens, wealthy and powerful men, who as aldermen and merchants figured honourably in days when Norwich was one of the most important towns in England, probably met on equal terms with the country gentlemen of Norfolk and both sent their daughters with handsome dowries to Carrow. The nunneries of London and of the surrounding district contained a similar mixture of classes, ranging from some of the noblest ladies in the land to the daughters of city magnates, men enriched by honourable trade or by the less honourable capitalistic ventures of the Kings' Merchants. The famous house of Minories outside Aldgate illustrates the situation very clearly. It was always a special favourite of royalty and the storm bird, Isabella, mother of Edward III, is by some supposed to have died in the order. She was certainly its constant benefactress as were Thomas of Woodstock, Earl of Gloucester and his wife, whose daughter Isabel was placed in the nunnery while only a child and eventually became its abbess. Katherine, widow of John de Ingham and Eleanor Lady Scrope were other aristocratic

1 Rye, Carrow Abbey. App.IX. pp.XVI, XVII, XVIII.
women who took the veil at the Minories. 1 But this noble connection did not prevent the house from containing Alice, sister of Richard Hale, fishmonger, 2 Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Padyngton, fishmonger, 3 Marion, daughter of John Charteseye, baker, 4 and Frideswida, daughter of John Reynewell, Alderman of the City of London, 5 girls drawn from the elite of the burgess class. An investigation of the wills enrolled in the Court of Hustings shows the relative popularity of different convents among the citizens of London. Between the years 1258 and the Dissolution, fifty two wills contain references to one or more nuns related to the testators. 6 From these it appears that the most popular house was Clerkenwell in Middlesex, which is mentioned in nine wills, 7 Barking in Essex comes next with eight references, 8 and St. Helen's Bishopsgate with seven; 9 the house of Minories without Aldgate is five times mentioned, Haliwell 11 in London and Stratford-atte-Bowe 12 outside, having

Two years previously (1386) John de Nevill had left legacies to his sister Eleanor and to his daughter Elizabeth, mino-
577. 6 Not counting legacies left to various nunneries, without specific reference to a relative professed there.
7 Ib.I.pp.222,303,569,638,688. II. pp.20,76,115.
9 Ib. II.pp.119,267,331,577,589. 11 Ib. I.pp.26,126,238,349,
628. Ralph le Blund's three daughters and his sister in law were all nuns here in 1295 (I.p.126) and Thomas Romayn, Alder-
man & Pepperer, left bequests to two daughters and to their aunt in 1313 (Ib.I.p.288) 12 Ib. I.pp. 34,11,611. II.
p. 119.
five and four references respectively, Kilburn in Middlesex three, Sopwell in Hertfordshire two, Malling and Sheppey in Kent two each. Other convents are mentioned once only and in some cases a testator leaves legacies to nuns by name, without mentioning where they are professed. All these houses were in the diocese of London and either in or near the capital itself; they lay in the counties of Middlesex, Kent, Essex, Hertford and Beds. It was but rarely that city girls went as far afield as Denney in Cambridgeshire, where the famous fishmonger and mayor of London, John Philipott, had a daughter Thomasina.

Thus the nobles, the gentry and the superior rank of burgesses - the upper and the upper-middle classes - sent their daughters to nunneries. But nuns were drawn from no lower class.

1 Sharpe, Op. Cit.II. pp. 157, 271, 274. 2 Ib. II. p. 474, 564. 3 Ib. I. pp. 510, 532. 4 Ib. I. p. 119. II. p. 306. 5 There are two exceptions, Greenfield (Lincoln.) (Ib. II. p. 327), and Amesbury (Wilts) (Ib. II. p. 326) but the testators in these cases are not burgesses, but a knight and a clerk. Stowe has the following synopsis of the career of this great and patriotic merchant, who was knighted by Richard II for his services to the Crown. "In the year 1378 John Filpot, sometime mayor, hired with his own money one thousand soldiers and defended the realm from incursions of the enemy, so that in small time his hired men took John Mercer, a sea-rover with all his ships, which he had before taken from Scarborough and fifteen Spanish ships, laden with great riches. In the year 1380 Thomas of Woodstocke, Thomas Percie, Hugh Calverley, Robert Knoles, and others, being sent with a great power to aid the duke of Brytaine, the said John Filpot hired ships for them of his own charges, and released the armour, which the soldiers had pawned for their battles, more than a thousand in number. 'This most noble citizen'saiith Thomas Walsingham, That had travailed for the commodity of the whole realm, more than all other of his time, had often relieved the King by lending him great sums of money and otherwise, deceased in A.D. 1384, after that he had assured lands to the city for the relief of thirteen poor people for ever." Stowe, Op. Cit. p. 98.
Poor girls of the lowest rank - whether the daughters of artisans or of country labourers - seem never to have taken the veil. A certain degree of education was demanded in a nun before her admission and the poor man's daughter would have neither the money, the opportunity nor the leisure to acquire it. The manifold fine paid by a villein when he wished to put his son to school and make a religious of him, had no counterpart in the case of girls; the taking of the veil by a villein's daughter was apparently not contemplated. The chief barrier which shut out the poor from the nunneries was doubtless the dower which, in spite of the strict prohibition of the rule, was certainly required from a novice in almost every convent. The lay sisters of those nunneries, which had lay sisters attached, were probably drawn to a certain extent from the lower class, but it must have been in the highest degree exceptional for a poor or low born girl to become a nun.

Medieval wills (our most trustworthy source of information for the personnel of the nunneries) make it possible to gauge the extent to which the upper and middle classes used the nunneries as receptacles for superfluous daughters. In these wills, in

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1 The corresponding fines for his daughters were merchant if they married and laywite if they dispensed with that ceremony. The medieval lord, concerned above all with keeping up the supply of labour upon his manor, naturally held the narrow view of the functions of women, which has been expressed in our day by Kipling: "Now the reserve of a boy is tenfold deeper than the reserve of a maid, she having been made for one end only by blind Nature, but man for several." (Stalky & Co.)

which the medieval paterfamilias laboriously catalogues his offspring and divides his wealth between them, it is easy to guess at the embarrassments of a father too well-blessed with female progeny. What was poor Simon the Chamberlain of the diocese of Worcester to do, with six strapping girls upon his hands and sons Robert and Henry to provide for too? Fortunately he had a generous patron in Sir Nicholas de Mitton and it was perhaps Sir Nicholas who provided the dowers, when two of them were packed off to Nuneaton; let us hope that Christiana, Cecilia, Matilda and Joan married themselves out of the legacies which he left them in his will, when he died in 1290.¹ William de Percehay, lord of Ryton, who made his will in 1344, had to provide for five sons and one is therefore not surprised to find that two of his three daughters were nuns.² It is the same with the rich citizens of London and elsewhere; Sir Richard de la Pole, of a great Hull merchant house soon to be ennobled, mentions in his will two sons and two daughters, one of whom was a nun at Barking while the other received a legacy towards her marriage;³ Hugh de Waltham, town clerk, mentions three daughters, one at St. Helen's;⁴ John de Croydon, fishmonger, leaves bequests to one son and four daughters, one at Clerkenwell;⁵ William de Chayham kept Lucy, Agnes and Johanna with him, but made Juliana a nun. The will of Lady Joan Clinton

illustrates the proportion in which a large family of girls
might be divided between the convent and the world; in 1457
she left certain sums of money to Margaret, Isabel and Cecily
Francys, on condition that they should pay four pounds annually
to their sisters Joan and Elizabeth, nuns. It was not infre-
quent for several members of a family to enter the same con-
vent, as the lists of inmates given in visitation records, or
in the reports of Henry VIII's commissioners, as well as the
evidence of the wills, bear witness. The case of Shouldham,
already quoted, shows that different generations of a family
might be represented at the same time in a convent, but it
was perhaps not usual for so many sisters to become nuns as in
the Fairfax family; in 1393 their mother's will introduces us
to Mary and Alice, nuns of Sempringham, and Margaret and
Eleanor, respectively Prioress and nun of Nunmonkton; Margaret
(of whom more anon) took convent life easily; it is to be fear-
ed that she had all too little vocation for it. Sometimes these
family parties in a nunnery led to quarrels; the sisters fore-
gathered in cliques, or else they continued in the cloister the

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1 Testamenta Vetusta I p. 286.
2 See above p. Notes 7 and 11. There were two Welbys, two
Alnwick f.76) and other references might be multiplied.
3 Op. also Sharpe Op. Cit. I p. 238; and Reg. of Bishop
4 Testamenta Eboracensia (Surtees Soc.) I. pp. 187 ff. (will
of Sir John Fayrfax, rector of Prestcote 1393). Compare,
however, the will of Sir Thomas Cumberworth in 1451: "Also
I will thar be gyfyn to the V nones, John of Cumberworth
doghtyr ... to Ilkon of yam a pare of bedys of gete and of
mony trebull of almus that schall be gyfyn to odyr nones."
domestic arguments of the hearth; at Giffard's visitation of Swine (1267-8) it was found that "three carnal and spiritual sisters, to wit Sibil, Belle and Amy, frequently rebel against the corrections of the prioress and having drawn into their party several other sisters, they conspire against their sisters, to the great harm of the regular discipline; and Alice de Scrutevil, Beatrice de Saint Quentin and Matilda Constable adhere to them"; and some years later (in 1318) another Archbishop of York had to forbid the admission of more than two or three nuns of one family to Nunappleton, without special licence, for fear of discord.

Probably the real factor in determining the social class from which the convents were recruited, was not one of rank, but one of money. The practice of demanding dowries from those who wished to become nuns was strictly forbidden by the monastic rule and by Canon Law. To spiritual minds any taint of commerce was repugnant; Christ asked no dowry with his bride. The didactic and mystical writers of the period often draw a contrast between the earthly and the heavenly groom in this matter. The author of 'Hali Meidenhad' in the thirteenth century, urging the convent life upon his spiritual daughter, sets against his picture of Christ's virgin-brides that of the well-born girl, married with disparagement through lack of dower: "What thinkest thou of the poor, that are indifferently dowered and ill-provided for, as almost all gentlewomen now are

1 Reg. of Walter Giffard (Surtees Soc.) p.147.
in the world, that have not wherewith to buy themselves a
bridegroom of their own rank and give themselves into servitude
to a man of low esteem, with all that they have? Wellaway!
Jesu! what unworthy chaff'er."¹ Thomas of Hales' mystical poem
'A Lume Ron', in the same century, also lays stress upon this
point, half in ecstatic praise of the celibate ideal, half as a
material inducement:

Ne byt he (Christ) with the lond ne leode
Vouh, ne gray, ne rency an.
Naueth he ther-to none neode.
he is riche and wel (i man).²

And the same idea is repeated at the end of the next century
in 'Clene Maydenhod':

He asketh with the nouther lond ne leode,
Gold ne selver ne precious stone.
To such thinges hath he no neode,
Al that is good is with hym one,
Gif thou with him thi lyf wolt lede
And graunte to ben his owne lemon. ³

In ecclesiastical language the same sentiment is expressed by
the injunction of Archbishop Greenfield of York, who forbade
the nuns of Arden to receive any one as a nun by compact, since
that involved guilt of simony, but only to receive her 'from
promptings of love.'⁴

This sentiment was however, set aside in practice from early
times; and a glance at any conventual register, such as the fa-
mous Register of Godstow Abbey, shows something like a regular

¹ Hali Meidenhad ed Cockayne (M.E.T.S.) p. 8.
² Old English Miscellany ed Morris (M.E.T.S. 1872) p. 96.
³ Clene Maydenhod ed Furnivall (M.E.T.S.) pp. 5-6.
⁴ V.C.H. Yorks III p. 113.
system of dowries, dating certainly from the twelfth century. The Godstow Register contains nineteen deeds, ranging between 1139 and 1278, by which grants are made to the nunnery on the entrance of a relative of the grantor, the usual phrase being that such and such a man gave such and such rent-charges, pasture-rights, lands or messuages, "with" his mother or sister or daughter "to be a nun". One very curious deed dated 1259, shows that the reception of a girl at Godstow was definitely a pecuniary matter. Ralph and Agnes Chendut sold to the nunnery a piece of land called Anfric, "for thys quite claime and relcs, the seyd abbas and holy mynchons of Godstowe gafe to the seyde raph and Agnes hys wyfe liii marke, and made Katherine the sustur of the seyd Agnes (wyfe of the seyd raph) Mynchon in the monasteri of Godstowe, with the costys of the hows, ... and the seyd holy mynchons of Godstowe shold pay to the seyd raph and Agnes hys wyfe xxv marke of the forseyd liii marke in that day in whyche the foreseyd Katerine should be deluyerd to hem to be norysshed and to be mad mynchon in the same place and in the whyche the seyd penyes shold be payd," and a second instalment at a place to be agreed upon when confirmation of the grant is obtained. That is to say the price of the land was £35:6:8. together with the cost of receiving Katherine, which was equivalent to a further sum of money, unfortunately not specified.

Any collection of wills provides ample evidence of this dowry system. Not only do they frequently contain legacies for the support of some particular nun during the term of her life, but bequests also occur for the specific purpose of paying for the admission of a girl to a nunnery, in exactly the same way as other girls are provided with dowries for their marriage. The Countess of Warwick, in 1439, left a will directing "that Iane Newmarch have 100 mark in gold, And I to bere all Costes as for her brynynge yn-ton seynt Katrens, or where-ever she woll be elles."¹ Even the clergy, who should have been the last to recognise a system so flagrantly contrary to canon law, followed the general custom; William Peke, rector of Scryvalby, left one Isabella ten marks to make her a nun at 'Catteley' (Catesby?) and Robert de Playce, rector of the church of Brompton, made the following bequest: "Item I bequeath to the daughter of John de Playce my brother 100 s. in silver, for an aid towards making her a nun in one of the houses of Wickham, Yedingham or Munciton; if her friends are willing to give her sufficient aid to accomplish this, but if, through lack of assistance from friends, she be not made a nun," she is to have none of this bequest (1345).² Sometimes, as has already been noted, the money is left alternately to marry the girl or to make her a nun.

¹ Nicholas. Testamenta Vetusta. I. p.118.
³ Testamenta Eboracensia. I. p.11.

nun, which brings our very clearly the dower-like nature of such bequests.¹ The accounts of great folk often tell the same tale. When Elizabeth Chaucy — probably a relative of the poet Chaucer — became a nun at Barking Abbey in 1361, John of Gaunt paid £51:8:2 in expenses and gifts on the occasion of her admission,² and the privy purse expenses of Elizabeth of York contain the item, "Delivered to the abbess of Elnestowe by hands of John Duffyn for the costes and charges of little Anne Loveday at the making of her nonne there £6:13:4."³

It is possible to determine the exact nature of these costs and charges from an account of the expenses of the executors of Elizabeth Sewardby, who died in 1468. This lady, the widow of William Sewardby of Sewardby, had left a legacy of £6:13:4 to her namesake, little Elizabeth Sewardby, to be given her if she should become a nun. The executors record certain payments made to the Prioress of Nunmonkton during the period when Elizabeth was a boarder there, before taking the vows, and then follows a list of "expenses made for and concerning Elizabeth Sewardby when she was made a nun at Monkton": "They

¹ See above pp.5-14. See also the interesting deed (1429-30) in which Richard Fairfax "scwyer", made arrangements for the entrance of his daughter "Elan", to Nunmonkton,always patronised by the Fairfaxes. He left an annual rent of five marks in trust for her "yat my dohtir Elan be made nun in ye house of Nun Monkton, and yat my saydes seffis graunt a nanuel rent of fourty schilyngs .. terms of ye lyffe of ye sayd Elan to ye tym be at sche be amun." His feoffees were to pay nineteen marks 'for ye makyng ye sayd Elan nun'. And 'if sche will be no nun' his wife & feoffees were to marry her at their discretion. V.C.H. Yorke. p. 123.

² V.C.H. Essex. II. p. 117.
³ Quoted in V.C.H. Beds. I. p. 254.
say that they paid and gave to the Prioress and Convent of Monkton, for a certain fee which the said Prioress and Convent claim by custom to have and are wont to have from each nun at her entrance £3. And in money paid for the habit of the said Elizabeth Sewardby and for other attire of her body and for a fitting bed, £3:13:6½. And in expenditure made in connection with the aforesaid Prioress and Convent and with the friends of the aforesaid Elizabeth coming together on the Sunday next after the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary A.D. 1460, £3:11:4. In a gratuity given to brother John Hamilton, preaching a sermon at the aforesaid Monkton on the aforesaid Sunday, 2/-. And in a certain remuneration given to Thomas Clerk of York for his wise counsel concerning the recovery of the debts due to the said lady Elizabeth Sewardby, deceased, 12d. Total £10:7:11½.\(^1\) It will be noticed that Elizabeth took with her not only a lump sum of money, but also clothes and a bed, the cost of which more than doubled the dowry. Canon law specifically allowed the provision of a habit by friends, when the poverty of a house rendered this necessary; and it is clear from other sources that it was not unusual for a novice to be provided also with furniture. The inventory of the goods belonging to the Priory of Minster in Shepey, at the Dissolution, contains, under the heading of 'the greate Chamber in the Dorter',

\(^1\) Testamenta Eboracensis. III. p. 168. The sum left for entrance of Ellen Fairfax to Nunmonkton was about the same, £10:13:4. (19 Marks) Above p. 24. Note 1.
a note of 'Stuff in the same chamber belonging to Dame Agnes Davye, which she broughte with her: a square sparver of payntyd clothes and iiiij peces hangyang of the same, iiiij payre of sheats, a counterpoynt of corse verder and i square cofer of ashe, a cobord of waynescott carved, iij awndyrone, a payre of tongues and a fyer panne.' And under 'Dame Agnes Browne's Chamber' is the entry: "Stuff given her by her frendes: - A fetherbed, a bol Skinner, iij pyllowys, a payre of blankatts, iij corse coverleds, iiiij pare of sheets good and badde, an olde tester and selar of paynted clothes and iij peces of hangyang to the same: a square cofer carvyd, with iij bad clothes upon the cofer, and in the wyndow a lytill cobord of waynescott carvyd and iij lytill chestes; a small goblet with a cover of sylver parcel gylt, a lytill maser with a bryme of sylver and gylt, a lytill pese of sylver and a spone of sylver, iij lyttill latyn candellstyks, a fire panne and a pare of tongues, iij small awndyrone, iiiij pewter dysashes, a porrenger, a pewter bason, iij skyllots, a lytill bresse pot, a cawdyron and a drymkyng pot of pewter". She had apparently been sent into the house with a complete equipment in furniture and implements.¹

¹ Walcott, Mackenzie E.C. Inventories of ... the Benedictine Priory of St. Mary and Sextergh in the Island of Shepèy for Nuns. (1669) (Reprinted from Archaeologia Cantiana) Compare the letter to Cromwell from Sir Thomas Willoughby, who asks that Elizabeth Reid his sister-in-law, who had resigned the office of Abbess of Malling, may have suitable lodging within the monastery, "not only that but such plate as my father-in-law did deliver her to occupy in her chamber, that she may have it again." Wood, Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies, II. p. 155.
Throughout the middle ages a struggle went on between the Church, which forbade the exaction of dowries, and the convents which persisted in demanding them, sometimes in so flagrant a manner as to incur the charge of simony. The earliest prohibition of dowries in English canon law occurred at the Council of Westminster in 11751 and was repeated at the Council of London in 12002 and at the Council of Oxford in 12223; it had been anticipated by a decree of the fourth Lateran Council. The history of the struggle to apply it is to be gathered from visitational records. Archbishop Walter Giffard, visiting Swine in 1268, finds that Alicia Brun and Alicia de Adeburn were simonically veiled4; Bishop Norbury has to rebuke the Prioress of Chester for the simonical receipt of bribes to admit nuns5; Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury has heard that the Prioress of Canyngton received four women as sisters of that house for £20 each, falling into the pravity of simony6; William of Wickham

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1 'Nullus praelatus in recipiendo monacho, vel canonico, vel sancti monialia pretium sumere vel exigere ab hiis, qui ad conversionem veniunt, aliqua pacti occasione praesumat. Si quis autem hoc fecerit anathema sit.' Wikins Concilia I.p.477

2 'Monachi etiam sub pretio non recipiantur in monasterio ... Si quis autem exactus pro sua receptione aliquid dederit, ad canonicos ordines non accedat.' Ib. p. 508.

3 'Praeterea statuimus, prassenti concilio approbante, ut nullus de cetero pro receptione alicujus in religionis domum pecuniam vel quicquam aliud extorquere praesumat; adeo ut si pro paupertate domus ingeniens debeat vestire seipsum praetextu vestimentorum ultra justum pretium eorum ab eo nihil penitus recipiatur.' Ib. p. 591.

4 Reg. of Walter Giffard. (Surtees Soc.) p. 147.


6 Reg. of Ralph of Shrewsbury (Somerset Rec. Soc.) p. 684.
writes to the nuns of Romsey in 1387 that "in our said visitations it was discovered and declared that, on account of the reception of certain persons as nuns of your said monastery, several sums of money were received by the Abbess and Convent by way of covenant, reward and compact, not without stain of the pravity of simony and, if it were so, to the peril of your souls", and he proceeds to forbid the exaction of a dowry "on pretext of any custom (consuetudinis) whatsoever, which is rather to be esteemed a corruption (corruptela)", a significant phrase, which shows that the practice was well-established. 1 Bishop Buckingham of Lincoln warns the nuns of Heynings against "the reception or extortion of money or of anything else by compact for the reception of anyone into religion" (1392)2; and Bishop Fleming enjoins at Elstow in 1422 "That hereafter fit persons be received as nuns; for whose reception or entrance let no money or aught else be demanded; but without any simon- aical bargain and covenant of any sum of money or other thing whatsoever, which were accustomed to be made by the crime of simony, let them henceforth be admitted to your religion purely, simply and for nothing."3 But the most detailed information as to the prevalence of the dowry-system is contained in the records of Bishop Alnwick's visitations of religious houses in the diocese of Lincoln in 1440. When the Bishop came to Heynings

1 MS. Register at New College. f. 87d.  
3 Visitation of Relig. Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln l.p.49.
(which had already been in trouble under Buckingham) one of the nuns, dame Agnes Sutton, gave evidence to the effect that "Her friends came to the Prioress and covenanted that she should be received as a nun for twelve marks and the said money was paid down before she was admitted, and she says that no one is admitted before the sum agreed upon for her reception is paid." She added that nothing was exacted save what was a free offering, but from her previous words it is obvious that no nuns were received at Haynings without a dowry. Similarly at Langley Dame Cecilia Folgeham said that her friends gave ten marks to the house 'when she was tonsured, but not by covenant'. 1 The most interesting case of all was that of Buncoton. The Subprioress, Dame Elena Frost, said "that it was the custom in time past to take twenty pounds or less for the admission of nuns, otherwise they would not be received." The Bishop proceeded to examine other members of the house; Dame Matilda Saltmershe confirmed what the Subprioress had said about the price for the reception of nuns; two other ladies, who had been in religion for fifteen and eight years respectively, depose to having paid twenty pounds on their entrance and Dame Alice Skottie said that she did not know how much she had paid, but that she thought it was twenty pounds. 2 Clearly there was a fixed entrance fee to this nunnery and it was impossible to become a nun without it; all pretence at free will offerings had been dropped. When it is considered that this entrance fee was twenty pounds (i.e. about

2 Ib. ff. 71d. (69d) - 72 (70).
£200 of modern money) it is easy to see why poor girls belonging to the lower orders never found their way into convents; such a luxury was far beyond their means.

In each of these cases and at two other houses (St. Michael's, Stamford, and Legbourne) Alnwick entered a stern prohibition, on pain of excommunication, against the reception of anything except free gifts from the friends of a novice. His injunction to Heynings may be quoted as typical of those made by medieval bishops on such occasions: "For as mykelle as we founde that many has been receyved here afore into nunne and sustre in your sayde pryory by covenant and purchas made before their receyvying of certeyn moneys to be payed to the house, the which is damned by alle lawe, we charge yowes under the payn wrytene that fro hense forthe ye receyve none persons in to nunne ne sustre in your sayde pryore by no suche coevenaunt, ne pactes or bargaines made before. When you are receyved and professed, if youre frendes of thaire almesse wylle any gyfe to the place, we commende and conferme and suffre wele hit be receyved." But the efforts at reform made by Alnwick and other visitors were never very successful; Muncoton evidently continued to demand its entrance fee, for in 1531 the practice was once more forbidden by Bishop Longland. Moreover it is easy to see that the distinction between the reception of what was willingly offered by friends (which was specifically

2 Ib. f. 23.
3 Archaeologia XLVI. p. 57.
permitted by the rule of St. Benedict and by synods and visitors throughout the middle ages), and what was given by agreement as payment for the entry of a novice (which was always forbidden) might become a distinction without a difference, as it clearly was in the case of Heynings quoted above. The Prioress of Gokewell, who declared to Alnwick that "they take nothing for the creation of nuns, save what the friends of she who is to be so created offer voluntarily and not by compact", may have acted in reality not very differently from her erring sisters of Heynings, Nuncoton and Langley. The temptation was in fact too great. The clause of the Oxford decree, which permitted poor houses if necessary to receive a sum sufficient for the vesture of a new member and no more, broadened the way already opened by the permission of free will offerings. The concluding words of Bishop Fleming's prohibition of dowries at Elstow in 1422 show that this permission had been abused; "if they must be clothed at their own or their friends' expense, let nothing at all be in any sort exacted or required, beyond their garments or the just price of their garments". Throughout the later middle ages an increase in the cost of living went side by side with a decrease in the monastic ideal of poverty, showing itself on the one hand in the constant breach of the rule against private property, on the other in the exaction of money with novices, until the dowry system, (although never during the

2 Visitations of Relig. Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln I, p.49.
middle ages recognised by law) became in practice a matter of course.

Lest it should seem that everyone who had enough money could become a nun, it must, however, be added that the bishops took some pains that the persons who were received as novices should be suitable and pleasing to their sisters. They seldom exercised their right of nomination without some assurance that their nominee was of honest life and station, 'Mulierem honestam, ut credimus', \(^1\) 'bonae indolis, ut credimus, juvenculam', \(^2\) 'jeovene damoisele et de bone condition, come nous aumez enfermez', \(^3\) 'at hujusmodi officii debittm litterate'. \(^4\) They were always ready to hear complaints, if unsuitable persons had been admitted by the Prioress and they sometimes made special injunctions upon the matter. Buckingham at Heyninge in 1392 ordered "that they receive no one to the habit, nor even to profession, unless they be first found by diligent inquisition and approbation to be useful, teachable, capable, of legitimate age, discreet and honest", \(^5\) Bishop Fleming ordered at Elstow in 1422 "that hereafter fit persons be received as nuns", \(^6\) and his successor Gray made an even more comprehensive injunction: "Furthermore we enjoin and charge you the Abbess ... that henceforward you admit no one to be a nun of the said monastery,

\(^1\) Reg. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Series) I p.189.
\(^2\) Ibid. I. pp. 40-1, 356.
\(^6\) Visitation of Relig. Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln. loc. cit.
unless with the express consent of the greater and sounder part of the same convent; and no one in that case, unless she be taught in song and reading and the other things requisite herein, or probably may be easily instructed within short time, and be such that she shall be able to bear the burdens of the quire (with) the rest that pertain to religion". Nevertheless, for all their precautions, some strange inmates found their way into the medieval nunneries.

The novice who entered a nunnery, to live there as a nun for the rest of her natural life, might do so for very various reasons. For those who entered young and of their own will, religion was either a profession or a vocation. They might take the veil because it offered an honourable career for superfluous girls, who were unwilling or unable to marry; or they might take it in a real spirit of devotion, with a real call to the religious life. For other girls the nunnery might be a prison, into which they were thrust, unwilling but often afraid to resist, by elders who wished to be rid of them; and many nunneries contained also another class of inmates, older women, often widows, who had retired thither to end their days in peace. A career, a vocation, a prison, a refuge; to its different inmates the medieval nunnery was all these things.

The nunnery as a career and as a vocation does not need separate treatment. It has already been shown that in large families it was a very usual custom to make one or more of the

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daughters nuns. Indeed the youth of many of the girls who took
the veil is in itself proof that anything like a vocation, or
even a free choice, was seldom possible and was hardly antici-
pated, even in theory. The age of profession was sixteen, but
much younger children were received as novices and prepared for
the veil; they could withdraw if they found the life distaste-
ful, but as a rule, being brought up from early childhood for
this career, they entered upon it as a matter of course. Sir
Guy de Beauchamp in his will (dated 1359) describes his daughter
Katherine as a nun of Shouldham and Dugdale notes that Katherine
aged seven years, and Elizabeth, aged about one year, were
found to be daughters and heirs of the said Guy, who died in
the following year.\(^1\) It might be supposed that this child of
six was being brought up as a lay boarder in the convent, but
legacies left to Katherine 'a nun at Shouldham' by her grand-
father and by her uncle, in 1369 and in 1400 respectively, show
that she had been thus vowed in infancy to a religious life.\(^2\)
One of the daughters of Thomas of Woodstock Earl of Gloucester
was 'in infancy placed in the monastery (of the Nuns
without Aldgate) and clad in the monastic habit' and in 1401
the Pope gave her permission to leave it if she wished, but she
remained and became its abbess.\(^3\) Bishops' registers constantly
give evidence of the presence of mere children in nunneries.
When Alnwick visited Ankerwick in 1441, three of the younger

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1. *Testamenta Vetusta I* pp. 63-4
2. See above pp. 6 note 3.
nuns complained that they lacked a teacher (informatrix) to teach them 'reading, singing and religion'; and at the end of the visitation the Bishop noted that he had examined all the nuns save three, whom he had omitted "on account of the heedlessness of their age and the simplicity of their discretion, since the eldest of them is not older than thirteen years".

At Studley in 1445 he found a girl who had been in religion for two years and was then thirteen; she complained that one of the maid-servants had slapped her in church! At Littlemore there was a certain Agnes Marcham, who had entered at the age of thirteen, and had remained there unprofessed for thirteen years; she now refused to take the full vows. 1 Some of the nuns at Romsey in 1534 were very young, two being fourteen and one fifteen. 2 Indeed the reception of girls at a tender age was rather encouraged than otherwise by the church. Archbishop Greenfield gave a licence to the Prioress of Hampole to receive Elena, daughter of the late Reynar Sperri, citizen of York, who was eight years old, and (he added solemnly) 'of good conversation and life', 3 and Archbishop John de Romeyn described Margaret de la Batayle, whom he sent to Sinningthwaite, as "juvenricula". 4 The great Peckham went out of his way to make a specific defence of the practice in 1282, when the Prioress...

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3 V.C.H. Yorks III, p. 163. In 1312 the Prioress of Hampole was rebuked for receiving a little girl (pulnilulam), not on account of her youth, but because she had omitted to obtain the Archbishop's licence. ib.
4 Reg. of Archbishop John le Romeyn (Surtees Soc.) p. 66.
and Convent of Stratford sought to excuse themselves from veiling a little girl called Isabel Bret, by reason of her youth, 'since on account of this minority she is the more able and capable to learn and receive those things which concern the discipline of your order'.

It is impossible to make the generalisation that even children professed at such an early age could have had no consciousness of a vocation for the religious life; the history of some of the women saints of the middle ages would be enough to disprove this. The German monk Caesarius of Heisterbach, who is only to be equalled as a gossip by the less pious Salimbene, has some delightful stories of youthful enthusiasts in the Dialogue Miraculorum, which he wrote between 1220 and 1235 for the instruction of the novices in his own Cistercian house. One child, destined for a worldly match, protests daily that she will wed

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1 Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Series) I p.356. Compare Caesarius of Heisterbach: "In the diocese of Treves is a certain convent of nuns named Lutzerath, wherein by ancient custom no girl is received but at the age of seven years or less; which constitution hath grown up for the preservation of that simplicity of mind which maketh the whole body to shine'. (Dial. Mirac.l p.369, quoted in Coulton, Medieval Garner, p.255)

The thirteenth century visitations of the Diocese of Rouen by Endes Rigard make it clear that novices there were often very young e.g. at St. Saens in 1266 'una earum erat novicia et minima' (Reg. Visit. Archiepiscopi Rothomagensis ed Bonnin p.566)

The Archbishop ordered novices to be professed at the age of fourteen and not before. (Op. Cit. p51, 121, 207)

2 For example the bégune Christina von Stommeln, who said of herself "So far back as my memory can reach, from the earliest dawn of my childhood, whenever I heard the lives and manners, the passion and the death of saints and especially of our Lord Christ and His glorious Mother, then in such hearing I was delighted to the very marrow". (Quoted in Coulton, Op. Cit. p 403)

At the age of ten she contracted a mystic marriage with Christ and at the age of thirteen she joined the Béguines at Cologne.

Christ only, and when forced to wear rich garments, asserts 'even if you turn me to gold you cannot make me change my mind', until her parents, worn out by her prayers, allow her to enter a nunnery where, although very young, *licet adolescentula*, she is soon made magistra or instructor of the novices. Her sister, given to an earthly husband while yet a child, is widowed and, *ipsa adhuc adolescentula* enters the same house. Another girl, fired by their example, escapes to a nunnery in man's clothes; her sister, trying to follow, is caught by her parents and married, 'but I hope' says the appreciative Caesarius 'that God may not leave unrewarded so fervent a desire to enter religion'. But the most charming tale of all is that of the conversion of Helswindis- Abbess of Burtscheid. She, although the daughter of a powerful and wealthy man ... burned so from her earliest childhood with zeal to be converted (i.e. to become a nun), that she used often to say to her mother: "Mother, make me a nun." Now she was accustomed with her mother to ascend Mount St. Saviour, whereon stood at that time the convent of the sisters of Burscheid. One day she climbed secretly in through the kitchen window, went up to the dormitory and putting on the habit of

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1 Caesarius of Heisterbach. *Dialogus Miraculorum* ed Joseph Strange. T pp53-4. 2 This abbess was Helswindis von Grimmenich. See Quix. Gesch. der ehemaligen Reichs-Artei Burtscheid. [Aachen 1835]
one of the maidens, entered the choir with the others. When the Abbess told this to her mother, who wanted to go, she, thinking that it was a joke, replied "Call the child; we must go." Then the child came from within to the window, saying: "I am a nun; I will not go with thee." But the mother, fearing her husband, replied: "Only come with me now, and I will beg thy father to make thee a nun." And so she went forth. It happened that the mother (who had held her peace) once more went up the mountain, leaving her daughter asleep. And when the latter rose and sought her mother in vain in the church, she suspected her to be at the convent, followed her alone, and, getting in by the same window, once more put on the habit. When her mother besought her to come away she replied: "Thou shalt not deceive me again", repeating the promise that had been made to her. Then indeed her mother went home in great fear, and her father came up full of rage, together with her brothers, broke open the doors and carried off his screaming daughter, whom he committed to the care of relatives, that they might dissuade her. But she, being (as I believe) not yet nine years of age, answered them so wisely that they marvelled. What more? The Bishop of Liège having excommunicated her father and those by whom she had been taken away, she was restored to
the place and after a few years was elected Abbess there'.

After these examples of infant zeal it is impossible (as I said) to assert that even the extreme youth of many novices made a real vocation for religious life impossible. But there is no doubt that such a vocation was less probable, than in cases when a girl of more mature years entered a convent. And it is also certain that the tendency to regard monasticism as the natural career for superfluous girls and as the natural alternative to marriage, was capable of grave

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1 Op. Cit. Pp. 54-5. For another case of children in this convent see the charming story of Gertrude's purgatory (Ib. pp. 344-5) A little girl of nine years old had died, and after death appeared in broad daylight in her own place in the choir, next to a child of her own age. The latter was so terrified that she was noticed and on being questioned told the vision to the Abbess (from whom Caesarius professes to have had the story). The Abbess says to the child 'Sister Margaret, ... if Sister Gertrude cometh to thee again, say to her: Benedictite, and if she reply to thee, Dominus, ask her whence she comes and what she seeks.' On the following day (continues Caesarius) 'she came again and since she replied Dominus when she was saluted, the maiden added: Good Sister Gertrude, why come you at such a time and what seek you with us? Then she replied: I come here to make satisfaction. Because I willingly whispered with thee in the choir, speaking in half tones, therefore am I ordered to make satisfaction in that place where it befel me to sin. And unless thou beware of the same vice, dying thou shalt suffer the same penance.' And when she had four times made satisfaction in the same way (by prostrating herself) she said to her sister 'Now have I completed my satisfaction; henceforth thou shalt see me no more.' And thus it was done. For in the sight of her friend she proceeded towards the cemetary, passing over the wall by a miracle. Behold such was the purgatory of this virgin.' It is a tender little tale, and kinder to childish sins than medieval moralists sometimes were; Saint Douceline beat a little girl of seven (one of her Béguines) 'so shrewdly that the blood ran down her ribs, saying meanwhile that she would sacrifice her to God', simply because she had looked at some men who were at work in the house. (See Coulton, Op. Cit. p.321)
abuse. When medieval convents are compared unfavourably with those of the present day, and when the increasing laxity with which the rule was kept in the later middle ages is condemned, it has always to be remembered that the majority of girls in those days (unlike those of today) entered the nunneries as a career, without any particular spiritual qualification, because there was nothing else for them to do. Even in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries monasticism produced saintly women and great mystics (especially in Germany); but it is remarkable that in England, although there must have been many good abbesses like Euphemia of Waverwell, there are no outstanding names. Monasticism was pre-eminently a respectable career.

It has been said that this tendency to regard monasticism as a career was capable of abuse and there were not wanting men to abuse it and to use the nunnery as a 'dumping ground' for unwanted and often unwilling girls, whom it was desirable to put out of the world, by a means as sure as death itself and without the risk attaching to murder. Kings themselves were wont thus to immure the wives and daughters of defeated rebels. Wenciliana daughter of Llewellyn was sent to Sempringham as a child, after her father's death in 1283, and died a nun there in 1337, and the two daughters of Hugh Despenser the Elder were forced to take the veil at the
same convent after their father's fall. The nunnery must often have served the purpose of lesser men, desirous of shaking off an encumbrance. The guilty wife of Sir Thomas Tuddenham, unhappily married for eight years and ruined by an intrigue with her father's servant, was sent to Crabhouse, where she lived for some forty years, and none thought kindly of her save — strangely enough — her husband's sister.\(^1\) Sir Peter de Montfort, dying in 1367, left ten shillings to the lady Lora Astley, a nun at Pinley, called by Dugdale 'his old concubine'.\(^2\) Illegitimate children were still more frequently sent to convents. Sir William Manney left 300 and 100 francs respectively to the euphoniously named Malosel and Malplesant 'my two bastard daughters, nuns'.\(^3\) One remembers Langland's convent, where

\begin{quote}
'Dame Iohane was a bastarde  
And dame Clarics a knyghtes douhter - a cokewold was hure syre.'
\end{quote}

\(^1\) V.C.H. Lincol. II. 184. But the usual custom was to place such women as lay boarders in the custody of a nunnery. See below pp. 22 ff.

\(^2\) 'Processus et sententia divortii inter Thomam Tudanham militem et Aliciam filiam quondam Johannis Woodhous armigeri, racione quia est monialis professa in prioratu de Crabhous et nunquam carnaliter cognita per maritum suum predictum durante matrimonio predicto, licet matrimonium predictum duravit et ut vir et uxor cohabitaverunt per spacion viij annorum. Durante matrimonio unicus filius ab eadem suscitatus, non tamen per dictum Thomam maritum suum, sed per Ricardum Stapleton servientem patris ipsius Alicie (1437) Her husband's sister Margaret Bedingfield left her a legacy of 10 marks in 1474. Norfolk Archaeology. (Norf. & Norwich Arch. Soc.) XIII pp. 351-2.

\(^3\) Testamenta Vetusta. I. p. 74.

\(^4\) Ib. I. p. 85.
Nor were the clergy loath to embrace this opportunity of removing the fruit of a lapse from grace. Hugh de Tunstede, rector of Catton, left ten shillings and a bed to his daughter Johanna, a nun of Wilberfoss, and at the time of the Dissolution there was a child of Wolsey himself at Shaftesbury.

It is significant that it was sometimes necessary to procure the papal dispensation of an abbess- or prioress-elect for illegitimacy, before she could hold office. The dispensation in 1472 of Joan Ward, a nun of Esholt, who afterwards became prioress, is interesting, for the Wards were patrons of the house and her presence illustrates one of the uses to which such patronage could be put. The diocese of York affords

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1 Testamenta Eboracensia. I. p. 18
2 See the letter from John Clusey to Cromwell in her favour: "Rygthe honorable, after most humyll comandacyons, I lyke-wyce besuche you that the Contents of this my symple Letter may be secret; and that for as myche as I have grete cause to goo home. I besuche your good Mastershipe to comand Mr. Herytag to give attendans opon your Mastershipe for the knowlefe off youre pleasure in the seyd secrete mater, whiche ys this, My Lord Cardinall causyd me to put a yong gentyll hom an to the Monastery and Runry off Shafftysbyry, and there to be provessyd, and wold hur to be namyd my doyhter; and the troythe ys shew was his dowythter; and now by your Visitacyon she haythe commawyment to departe, and knowythe not whether Wherefore I humely besuche youre Mastershipe to dysrect your Letter to the Abbas there, that she may there contynu at hur full age to be professed. Withoute dowyte she ys other xxiiiij yere full, or shalbe at shuche tyme of the here as she was boren, which was abowyte Mydelmas. In this your dyng your Mastershipe shall do a very charitable ded, and also bynd hur and me to do you such servyce as lyzthe in owre lytell powers; as knowythe owre Lord God, whome I humely besuche prosperously and longe to preserve you. Your orator John Clusey." Ellis. Original Letters. Series I. Vol.II. pp.92-3. An injunction had been made that profession made under twenty-four years was invalid, and that novices or girls professed at an earlier age were to be dismissed.

other instances (they were common enough in the case of priests) of dispensation 'super defectu natalium'; in 1474 one was granted to Cecily Conyers, a nun at Ellerton, 'born of a married man and a single woman' and in 1482 Alice Etton received one four days before her confirmation as Prioress of Sinningthwaite. At St. Mary Neasham in 1437, the Bishop of Durham appointed Agnes Tudowe prioress and issued a mandate for her dispensation for illegitimacy and her installation on the same day.

Less defensible from the point of view of the house was the practice, which certainly existed, of placing in nunneries girls in some way deformed, or suffering from an incurable defect.

Now earth to earth in convent walls,
To earth in churchyard sod.
I was not good enough for man,
And so am given to God.

Occasionally the nuns seem to have resented or resisted these attempts. One of the reasons urged by the obstinate inmates of Stratford against receiving little Isabel Bret was that she was deformed in her person. It was complained against

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1 Test. Ebor. III. p.289. Note. She was one of the Conyers of Hornby (Richmondshire) and is mentioned in the will of her brother Christopher Conyers, rector of Rudley in 1483. V.C.H. Yorks. III. p.177.
the Prioress of Ankerwick at Alnwick's visitation in 1441 that she made idiots and other unfit persons nuns;¹ and in 1514 the Prioress of Thetford was similarly charged with intending shortly to receive illiterate and deformed persons as nuns and especially one Dorothea Sturges, a deaf and deformed gentlewoman; her designs were frustrated, but the nuns of Blackborough were less particular and in 1532 Dorothea answered among her sisters that nothing was in need of reform in that little house.² At the time of the Dissolution the Commissioners found that one of the nuns of Langley was "in regard a fool";³ and a certain Jane Gowring (the name of whose convent has not been preserved) sent a petition to Cromwell, demanding whether two girls of twelve and thirteen, the one deaf and dumb and the other an idiot, should depart or not.⁴ Complaints of the presence of idiots were fairly frequent, It is easy to understand the exasperation of Thetford over the case of Dorothy Sturges, when one finds Dame Katherine Mitford complaining at the same visitation that Elizabeth Haukeforth is "aliyando lunatica";⁵ but a few years later


² Visitation of the Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc) pp 51,53.


⁴ Gairdner.Letters & Papers etc. (Rolls Series) IX. No.1073.

⁵ Visitation of the Diocese of Norwich. p. 31.
Agnes Hosey, described as 'ideota', gave testimony with her sisters and excited no adverse comment. In an age when faith and superstition went hand in hand a mad nun might even bring glory to her house; the tale of Catherine, nun of Bungay, illustrates this. In 1319 an enquiry was held into the miracles said to have been performed at the tomb of the saintly Robert of Winchelsea, Archbishop of Canterbury, whose canonisation was ardently desired by the English; among these miracles was the following: "Sir Walter Botere, chaplain, having been sworn, says that the miracle happened thus, to wit that he saw a certain Catherine, who had been (so they say) a nun of Bungay, in the diocese of Norwich, mad (furiosam) and led to the tomb of the said father; and there she was cured of the said madness and so departed sane; and he says that there is public talk and report of this." Three other witnesses also swore to the tale. Even cases of violent and dangerous madness seem at times to have occurred, judging from a note of Alnwick’s visitation of Stainfield in 1440, in which it is said that all the nuns appeared separately before the Bishop, 'with the exception of Alicia Benyntone, who is out of her mind and confined in chains'. The presence of persons of weak intellect must sometimes have given rise

2 Wilkins, Concilia II p. 437.
to trouble; it is not at all improbable that some cases of immorality may have been due to this cause and one is tempted to see something of the kind in the strange history of Agnes Fliethorp, apostate nun of St. Michael's Stamford, who after a profession of twenty years left her house and was discovered wearing a man's gilt-embroidered gown! She made the tardy excuse that she was never professed, having been married before entering religion to a man whose name she refused to give; but her many flights (she four times left her order) and the severity of the discipline imposed upon her, lead rather to the conclusion that her brain was turned. For nine years the church implacably pursued her and the last news we have of her in 1618, is contained in Bishop Dalderby's mandate to the Prioress to find Agnes, who had once more escaped and lived for two years in secular clothes, and bring her back to the convent, keeping her in solitary confinement, preventing her from receiving any message or letter from the outside world, and subjecting her to discipline.  

Lay and ecclesiastical opinion alike condemned another practice, which seems to have been fairly wide-spread in medieval England, that of forcing into convents children too young to realise their fate, or even girls old enough to resist, of whom unscrupulous relatives desired to be rid,  

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1 She was to be kept in solitary confinement in a chamber with stone walls and each leg was to be fettered, until she should consent to resume her habit.  
2 V.C.H. Northants. II. pp 99-100.
generally in order to gain possession of their inheritance; for a nun, dead in the eyes of the law which governed the world, could claim no share in her father's estate. To the credit of the church it must be said that whenever it could be proved that a nun was unwillingly professed, her petition for release was granted; but many little heiresses and

1 Hence the certificates sometimes required from Bishops to testify whether or not a girl had actually been professed. Such a certificate occurs in Wykeham's Register (II, p. 198), announcing that Joan, daughter of Stephen Asshewy, deceased, was not yet professed at St. Mary's Winchester or at any other house. The case of Isabel, daughter of Sir Philip de Coverle, is also interesting; she left the wretchedly poor house of Sewardesly to claim her share of her mother's inheritance, therewith to provide fit maintenance for herself among the nuns; but she was excluded from inheriting with her sisters on account of her religious profession. (V.O.H. Northants II. pp. 125-6). Compare also the case of Johanna, wife of Nicholas de Grene (1357-b); on a question of inheritance the King's court issued a writ of enquiry as to whether she had been professed at Nuneaton. (Reg. of Bishop Roger de Forbury (William Salt Archaeol. Soc. Collections I. pp. 285-7)).

2 See e.g. the commission for the release of a novice preserved in the register of Ralph Ballock, Bishop of London (1310). "We have lately received the supplication of our beloved daughter in Christ, Cristina de Burgh, daughter of the noble Sir Robert Fitzwalter, to the effect that whereas she was delivered by her parents, while not yet of a marriageable age, into the order of St. Augustine in the monastery of Haliwell of our diocese, and for some time wore the habit of a novice therein and still wears it, nevertheless there is no canonical reason why she should not freely return to the world at her own freewill; and whereas we do condescend to licence her to return to the world, having diligently made inquiries in the aforesaid monastery for our information as to the truth of the aforesaid matters, etc. etc;" the Bishop having no time to finish the enquiry himself commissions his official to carry it on and to release Cristina if the result is satisfactory. (Reg. Radulphi Ballock (Cant. and York Soc.) p. 129.)
unwanted children must have remained forever, without hope of escape, in the convents to which they had been hurried, for it is evident that the religious houses themselves did all they could to discourage the presentation of such petitions or the escape of unwilling members. A situation which no doubt often arose is eloquently set forth in a number of documents, which have fortunately been preserved. As early as 1197 there is a case at Ankerwick, where a nun who had been fifteen years professed returned to the world and claimed a share of her father's property, on the ground that she had been forced into the monastery by a guardian, who wished to secure the whole inheritance. Her relatives energetically resisted a claim by which they would have been the losers and appealed to the Pope. The runaway nun was excommunicated and her case came into the Curia Regis, but the result has not survived and it is impossible to say whether her story was true. The case of Agnes, nun of Haverholm, illustrates at once the reason for which an unwilling girl might be immured in a nunnery and the obstacles which her order would place in the way of escape. She enters history in a papal mandate of 1304, by which three ecclesiastics are ordered to take proceedings in the case of Agnes, whose father and stepmother (how familiar and like a fairy tale it sounds) in order to deprive her of her heritage, shut her up in the monastery of Haverholm. "The canons and nuns of Sempringham (to which

order Haverholm belonged) declare, "That she took the habit out of devotion, but refuse to con-
firm their assertion by an oath." 1 The inference is irre-
sistible. There seems to have been a less clear motive for
the incarceration of Margery of Hedeon, who left Burnham and
forsook her habit in 1311 and was excommunicated. In 1317,
while still under the ban of excommunication, she represented
that she had been compelled by her father to enter the monas-
tery when under age and that she had previously been con-
tracted in marriage to Roger Blacket of Rickmansworth. The
result of this enquiry is not known, but the Bishop gave
orders that the sentence of excommunication should be removed,
if her story were found to be true. 2

But the most vivid of all these little tragedies of the
cloister are those concerned with Margaret de Prestewych and
Clarice Stil. The case of Margaret de Prestewych has been
preserved in the register of Robert de Stretton Bishop of
Coventry and Lichfield; and it is satisfactory to know that
one energetic girl at least succeeded in making good her pro-
tests and in escaping from her prison. In her eighth year or
thereabouts, according to her own petition to the Pope, 'her
friends compelled her against her will to enter the priory of
the nuns of Seton, of the Order of St. Augustine and take on
her the habit of a novice. She remained there, as in a prison

1 Cal. of Papal Letters I. p.17.
for several years, always protesting that she had never made
nor ever would willingly make any profession. And then, see-
ing that she must by profession be excluded from her inheri-
tance, she feigned herself sick and took to her bed. But this
did not prevent her being carried to the church at the in-
stance of her rivals and blessed by a monk, in spite of her
cries and protests that she would not remain in that priory
or in any other order. On the first opportunity she went
forth from the priory without leave and returned to the world,
which in heart she had never left and married Robert de
Holand, publicly after banns and had issue. "The bishop, to
whom the case had been referred by the Pope, found upon enqui-
ry that these things were true, and in 1383 released her from
the observance of her order. Within a few years of this
high spirited lady's escape the case of little Clarice Stil
engaged the attention of the King's court. The dry as dust
pages of the medieval law books hide many jewels for whoever
has patience to seek them, but none brighter than this story.

1 Reg. of Bishop Robert de Stretton. (Will. Salt Archaeol. Soc.
Collections. N.S. VIII pp. 149-150.) With her case compare
that of Jane Wadham, which came up after the Dissolution in
1541. She "after arriving at years of discretion was forced
by the threats and machinations of malevolent persons to
become a regular nun in the house of nuns at Romsey, but hav-
ing both in public and in private always protested against
this seclusion, she conceived herself free from regular
observance and in that persuasion joined herself in matrimony
with one John Foster, per verba de presenti, intending to
have the marriage solemnized as soon as she was free from
her religion." For the further vicissitudes of her married
life, see Lives of Records of Romsey Abbey, p. 255.
It all arose out of a writ of wardship sued by one David Carmayngton or Servyngton against Walter Reynold, whom he declared to have unjustly deforced him of the wardship of the land and heir of Robert Stil, the heir being Clarice. Walter, however, said that no action lay against him, because Clarice had entered into the order of St. John of Jerusalem, of which the Prioress of Buckland was Prioress, and had been professed in that order on the very day of the purchase of the writ. In answer David unfolded a strange story. He alleged that William Stil, the father of Robert, had married twice; by his first wife Constantia he had one daughter Margaret, who was now the wife of Walter Reynold; by his second wife Johanna he had two children, Robert and Clarice. William died seized of certain tenements which were inherited by Robert, who died without an heir of his body; whereupon (David alleged) Walter, by connivance with the Prioress of Buckland and in order to disinherit Clarice (in which case his own wife Margaret would be the next of kin), took Clarice after her brother's death and conveyed her to Buckland Priory, she being then eight years of age and kept her there under guard. David's counsel gave a dramatic account of the proceeding. "Sir, we say that the same Walter by covinage to compel the said Clarice to be professed, took the said Clarice when she was between the ages of seven and eight years, to the house of nuns at Buckland and in that place were two ladies, nuns, who were of
his assent to cause the infant to be professed and they told
the child that if she passed the door the devil would carry
her away." It was furthermore pleaded that on the day of
purchase of the writ, Clarice was within the age of twelve
years and that she was still within that age, and that there-
fore she could not be considered professed by the law of the
land. By this time one's sympathies are all on the side of
David, and of terrified little Clarice, with whom the devil
was to run away. Unfortunately the judges referred the mat-
ter to an ecclesiastical court and ordered a writ to be sent
to the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The Bishop made his return
"that the said Clarice on August 1st. 1383, of her own free
will, was taken to the said Prioress of Buckland by Stephen
Joseph, rector of the church of Northelsey, without any con-
nivance on the part of the said Walter and the said Prioress
and she remained at the said Priory for two years to see if
the life would please her. Afterwards, on October 15th 1385,
she assumed the religious habit and made profession according
to the manners and customs of the said house. And on the
day when Clarice entered the house she was more than eight
years old and on the day of purchase of the writ more than
twelve years old, and at the present time is more than four-
teen years old, and is well contented with the religious
life." The Bishop also found that no guards had been placed
over Clarice by Walter, or by the Prioress. So David lost his
suit and was in mercy for a false claim; and he also lost, upon a technical point, another suit which he had brought against the Prioress of Buckland. Nevertheless one’s sympathies remain obstinately on his side. That touch about the Devil assuredly never sprang even from the fertile brain of a lawyer.  

The figure of the nun unwillingly professed has always been a favourite one in literature. On the continent a whole class of popular songs sprang up, Nonnenklagen or Chansons de

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1 Year Book of 12. Richard II ed. G.F. Deiser (Ames Foundation 1914) pp. 71-77. Cp. pp. 150-153. It may be noticed that Marvell, in his poem "Upon Appleton House" (dedicated to the great Lord Fairfax) preserves the tradition of another of these cases. In the time of Anna Langton, the last Abbess of Nunappleton, a certain Isabella Thwaite, who had been placed in her charge, fell in love with William Fairfax. The abbess, who wished her to become a nun, shut her up, but eventually Fairfax, having got the law upon his side, broke his way into the nunnery and released her and she married him in 1518. It was her son who obtained the house on its dissolution. (see Markham, Life of the great Lord Fairfax pp. 225-227.) Marvell has an amusing description of the attempts of the nuns to repel the lover's invasion:

Some to the breach, against their foes,  
Their wooden Saints in vain oppose;  
Another, bolder, stands at push,  
With their old holy-water brush;  
While the disjointed Abbess threads  
The jingling chain-shot of her beads;  
But their loudest cannon were their lungs,  
And sharpest weapons were their tongues.  
But waving these aside like flies,  
Young Fairfax through the wall doth rise.

Marvell, Poems, ed. G.A. Aitken. (Muses’ Lib.)
Nonnes, the complaint of the cloistered lovebirds:

Una jeune fillette de noble coeur 
... contre son gré l'on et rendu nonette point ne le vouloit estre, par quoy vit en langueur.

The popular mind had little sympathy for that career, in which the daughters of the people had no share. The cloister was a prison, a grave;

Mariez-vous, les filles, 
Avecque ces bons drilles, 
Et n'allez pas, les filles, 
Pourir derrière les grillies;

that was how the people and the nightingale envisaged it.

The moral is always the same. In France they sang -

Kni monne me fist Jesus lou maldie
Je di trop envi vespres ne complies:
J'amaisse trop mueles nonair bone vie
Ke fust deduissans et amooustete,
Je sent les doules mals leis ma senturete 
malois soit de deu ki me fist nonnete.

In Germany 'in this year (1359)' says the clerk of Limburg 'men sang and piped this song:

Got gebe ime ein vurdrehen jar, 
Der mich machte zu einer nonnen,
Und mir den swarzen mantel gap
Den wiszen rock darunden.
Sol ich ein nunn geworden
Sunder minen willen
So wel ich eine knaben jung
Sinen komer stillen.
Und stillet he mir den minen mit
Darauf mach he vurlisen.'

Jeanvay A. Les Origines de la Poesie Lyrique en France au Moyen Age. pp. 189-192 and the references to collections of songs there given. See also article by P.S. Allen in Modern Philology. v. (1908) pp. 432-5.

Quoted Ib. p. 190.


Quoted in Souton, Medieval Garner p. 476, with translation

God give him a year of light
Who made me to a nun,
Who bade me put this tunic white
And coal-black mantle on!
And must I be a nun in truth,
All against my will ....

For another translation, with references to other German Nonnenklagen see J. Bithall. The Minnesingers. I. p. 200.

For original see Uhland. Volkslieder. Nos. 312, 317.
The end of the story is nearly always the same too. The lover takes the nun away, or else, like the heroine of Mustache Deschamps' little masterpiece, the novice who wanted to have a husband 'si comme a Sibilette', she runs away herself:

Adieu le moniage
Jamaiz n'y enterreay.
Adieu tout le mainage,
Et adieu, Avenay!
Bien voy l'amoue ne est fait:
Trop tant me suy retraitee
Certes, ce poise my. 2
Plus me seray nonnette.

That these light-hearted little songs had a real basis in fact is shown by the more sober documents already quoted. If cases of immorality in convents seem all too frequent, it should be remembered how young and often how unwilling were those who took the vows.

Je sent les douls mals
leis ma senturete
maois soit de deu
ki me fist nonnete.

The blame is justly placed - and the wonder is not how many, but how few nuns went astray.

The illegitimate, the deformed, the feeble-minded and the unwilling represent a not very pleasant side of the conventual system. The nunneries contained other and less tragic

2 Œuvres complètes d'Éustache Deschamps. (Soc. des Anc. Textes Fr.) IV. pp. 235-6 (Virelay DCCLII. Sur une novice d'Avenay)
inmates, who may be distinguished from the majority; for to them went in voluntary retirement a large number of widows, who enjoyed no less respect because their marriage to Christ was a second wedding. If the nun unwillingly professed has always been a favourite theme in popular literature, so also has the broken hearted wife or lover, hiding her sorrows in the silent cloister; from the twelfth to the nineteenth century she remains unchanging; from Bèle Doette: 1

Bèle Doette a pris son duel a faire:
Tant muri fustes, cuena Do, frans, de ben aire!
Por vostre amor vestirai je la hare,
Ne sor mon cors n'avra pelice vaire.
E or en ai dol.
Por vos devenrai nonne en l'eagle Saint Pol.

Por vos ferai une abbaie tele
Quant ier li jors que la feste ier nomée
Se mus i vient qui ait s'amor fausse,
Ja del mostier ne savera l'entre.
E or en ai dol.
Por vos devenrai nonne en l'eagle Saint Pol.

Bèle Doette prist s'abaissée a faire,
Qui mout est grande et adès sera maire:
Toz cels et cels vorra dedanz atravié
Qui por amor sévent peine et mal traitre.
E or en ai dol.
Por vos devenrai nonne à l'eagle Saint Pol. 2

1 It was probably more common for widows to take a simple vow of chastity and to remain in the world. But the will of Thomas de Kent, fishmonger, seems to show that it would be considered quite natural for a widow to take the veil, even in the burges class, which possibly remarried more frequently than the nobles. He left his wife a tenement for life, adding that should she wish to enter any religious house the same was to be sold and half the proceeds given for her maintenance. (Sharpe, Op. Cit. I. p.124)

2 The woman who remarried an earthly husband was not smiled upon by the Church. See Lecky, Hist. of European Morals II. pp.156-7. (R.D.A. ed.)

to the Lady Kirkpatrick:

To sweet Lincluden's holy cells
Fu' dowie I'll repair;
There peace wi' gentle patience dwells
Nae deadly feuds are there.
In tears I'll wither ilka charm,
Like drops o' balefu' dew,
And wail a beauty that could harm,
A knight sae brave and true.

Many of the widows who took the veil were, however, less romantic figures. Although their presence as secular boarders was discouraged, because it brought too much of the world within cloister walls, those who desired to make regular profession were willingly received, the more so as they often brought a substantial dower with them. Thus when Margaret, Countess of Ulster, assumed the habit at Campsey in 1347, she took with her by licence of the crown, the issues of all her lands and rents in England for a year after her admission, and after that date 200 marks yearly were to be paid for her sustenance. Such widows often enjoyed a respect consonant with their former position in society and not infrequently became heads of their houses. Katherine de Ingham and Eleanor Lady Scrope both entered the Minories after widowhood and eventually became abbesses. But it does not need much imagination, nor an unduly cynical temperament, to guess that this element

of convent life must occasionally have been a disturbing one. The conventual atmosphere did not always succeed in killing the profane passions of the soul; and the advent of an opinionated widow, ripe in the experience of all those things which her sisters had never known, with the aplomb of one who had long enjoyed an honoured position as wife and mother and lady of the manor, must at times have caused a flutter among the doves; such a situation, for instance, as Bishop Cobham found at Wroxall when he visited it in 1323. Lady Isabel Clinton of Maxstoke, widow of the patron of the house, had retired thither and had evidently taken with her a not too modest opinion of her own importance. She found it impossible to forget that she was a Clinton and to realise that she, who had in time gone by given her easy patronage to the nuns and lodged with them when she would, was now a simple sister among them. Was she to submit to the rule of prioress Agnes of Aylesbury, she without whose goodwill Prioress Agnes had never been appointed? Was she to listen meekly to chiding in the dorter, and in the frater to bear with sulks? Impossible. How she comported herself we know not, but the bishop "found grave discord existing between the Prioress and Lady Isabel Clinton, some of the sisters adhering to one and some to the other". Evidently a battle royal. The bishop, poor man, did his best. He enjoined peace and concord among the inmates; the sisters were to treat the prioress with reverence and

1 V. C. H. Warwickshire II. p. 71.
obedience; those who had rebelled against her were to desist and the prioress was to behave amicably to all in frater, dorter, and elsewhere. And so my lord went his way. He may have known the pertinacity of the late patroness; and it was perhaps with resignation and without surprise that he confirmed her election as prioress on the death of the harassed Agnes.

The occasional cases in which wives left their husbands to enter a convent were less likely to provoke discord. Such women as left husband and children to take the veil must have been moved by a very strong vocation for religion, or else by excessive weariness. Some may perhaps have found married life even such an odious tale, 'a licking of honey off thorns', as the misguided realist who wrote 'Hali Meidenhad' sought to depict it: "Little knoweth a maiden of all this same trouble of wives' woe ........ nor of a nurse's watches, nor of her sad trials in the breeding and fostering (of a child); how much she must at once put into its mouth, neither too much nor too little; though this be to speak of things not of any importance, though they display still further in what slavery wives must be, that must endure the like and in what freedom maidens be that are free from them all. And what if I ask besides, that it may seem odious, how the wife stands, that heareth when she cometh in her child scream, sees the cat at the flitch and the hound at the hide; her cake is burning on the
stone hearth and her calf is sucking all the milk up, the earthen pot is running into the fire and the churn is scolding. Though it is an odious tale, it ought, maiden, to deter thee the more strongly from marriage, for it seems not easy to her that trieth it."

These were the domestic calamities of a poor man's wife; but the great lady in her castle was sometimes little happier, as we may gather from the rare occasions when these silent women became articulate and speak their own minds. One such occasion is preserved in a vivid little dialogue recorded by the great fifteenth century reformer Johann Busch, between himself and the dying Duchess of Brunswick. "When her confession, with absolution and penance, was performed, I said to her. 'Think you, lady, that you will pass to the kingdom of heaven after death?' She replied 'This believe I firmly.' Said I, 'That would be a marvel. You were born in a fortress and bred in castles, and for many years now you have lived with your husband, the lord duke, in manifold delights, with wine and ale, with meat and venison both roast and boiled; and then you expect to fly straight to heaven when you die!' She replied: 'Beloved father. Why should I not now go straight to heaven? I have lived here in my castle like an anchoress in her cell. What delights or pleasures have I enjoyed here, save that I have sometimes made shift to show a happy face to my servants and to my

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1 Mali Maidenlad ed Cockayne. (M.E.T.S.) 56-38. It is interesting that the author here seems to contemplate a girl of the lower orders becoming a nun.
maidens? I have a hard husband, as you know, who has scarce any care and inclination for women. Have I not been in my castle as in a cell? And I said to her: 'You think, therefore, that as soon as you are dead God will send his angels hither to your bed to bear your soul to paradise and to the celestial realm of God?' She replied: 'That do I firmly believe.' Then said I, 'May God confirm you in your faith and give you that which you believe.' Truly there were many reasons for which a wife might seek to escape the world, to fly from a noisy cell to a quiet one. In any case, whether the mystical faith of a St. Bridget drew her thither, or whether matrimony had not seemed easy to her that had tried it, the presence of a wedded wife was unlikely to provoke discord in the convent; the devout and the depressed are quiet bedeswomen. It was necessary for a wife to obtain her husband's permission before she could take the veil, since her action entailed celibacy on his part also, during her lifetime. Sometimes a husband would endow his wife liberally,

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1 Busch. Liber de reformatione monasteriorum ed Karl Grube. (Halie 1886) p. 779. The monk still found it difficult to believe that anyone could find salvation outside the cloister, for meeting the duke outside the door he remarked, "It is an astonishing thing that my lady your wife, who was born and bred and has always lived in a castle, hopes that she is soon going hence to heaven."

2 'After Seint Birget induced hir husbande to lyfe in contynens many yeres. And also they both went on pylgremage .... and by comen assent entendyd bothe to have entred into Relygyon and in that purpose the sayd Ulpho hir husbande dyed.' Life of St. Bridget in Myroure of Our Ladye, (E.E.T.S. ) p. 11.
on her entry into the house which she had selected. There
are two such dowers in the Register of Godstow Nunnery; about
1165 William de Seckworth gave the tithes of two mills and a
grant of five acres of meadow to the convent, 'for the helth
of hys sowle and of hys chyldryn and of hys aunceters, with
hys wyfe also, the whiche he toke to kepe to the forseyd holy
mynchons to serve god;'¹ and a quarter of a century later
Geoffrey Durant and Molde his wife, "when he same Moole
yielded herself to be a mynychon to the same chirch," granted
one mark of rent to be paid annually by their son Peter, out
of certain lands held by him, "which were of the mariage of
the said Moolde."² Nor did Walter Hauteyn, citizen of
London, in his solicitude for his son and three daughters,
forget the mother who had left her husband and children for
the service of God; to Alice his wife, a nun of St.Sepulchre's
Canterbury, he bequeathed in 1292 his dwelling place and
rents upon Cornhill for life, with remainder to his heirs.³

¹ English Register of Godstow Nunnery (E.E.T.S.) p.43.
² Ibid. p. 365. Confirmation of this deed of grant by Peter
³ Durant, about 1200. Ibid. p. 364.
CHAPTER II

Financial Difficulties.

In the history of the medieval monasteries of England there is nothing more striking than the constant financial straits to which they were reduced. Professor Savies' analysis of the

Savies, English Monasteries as the Rise of the Dissolution.

CHAPTER II

Financial Difficulties.

"Et siel plesoit a vostre deboneire Hautesce de savoir de nostre simple estat, nous sunes si poveres, Diu le siet et tot le pois, qe quant qe nous avoms ne suffist mie a petite sustenaunce de nous, qe devoms faire, de jour et de nut, le service Dieu, si par eide de amys noun."

The Nuns of Polslo to Queen Philippa in 1329.

In the history of the medieval nunneries of England there is nothing more striking than the constant financial straits to which they were reduced. Professor Savine's analysis of the Valor Ecclesiasticus has shown that in 1535 the nunneries were on an average only half as rich as the men's houses, while the average number of religious persons in them was larger; 1 and yet it is clear from the evidence of visitation documents that even the men's houses were continually in debt. It is therefore not to be wondered at that there was hardly a nunnery in England, which did not at one time or another complain of poverty. These financial difficulties had already begun before the end of the thirteenth century and they grew steadily worse until the moment of the Dissolution. The worst sufferers of all were the nunneries of Yorkshire and the North, a prey to the inroads of the Scots, who time after time pillaged their

lands and sometimes dispersed their inmates; Yorkshire was full of nunneries and almost all of them were miserably poor. But in other parts of the country, without any such special cause, the position was little better. When Bishop Alnwick visited the diocese of Lincoln in the first half of the fifteenth century, fourteen out of the twenty-five houses which he examined were in financial difficulties. Moreover not only is this true of small houses, insufficiently endowed from their foundation and less likely to weather bad times, but the largest and richest houses frequently complained of insufficient means. It is easy to understand the distress of the poor nuns of Rothwell; their founder Richard, Earl of Gloucester, had died before properly endowing the house and the Prioress and Convent could expend for their food and clothing only four marks and the produce of four fields of land, in one of which the house was situated. But it is less easy to account for the constant straits of the great Abbey of Shaftesbury, which had such vast endowments that a popular saying had arisen: "If the Abbot of Glastonbury could marry the Abbess of Shaftesbury, their heir would hold more land than the King of England." It is

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1 Cal. of Papal Letters IV. p. 436. In 1442 its numbers (which should have been fourteen) had sunk to seven and it was six marks in debt. (Linc. Evis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick p. 38) The clear annual value of the house in the Valor Ecclesiasticus was only £5.19.8s. Compare the case of Heynings, whose founder Sir John Darcy, had also died without completing its endowment. Cal. of Papal Letters V. p. 347.

2 Fuller. Church History III p. 332. Its net income at the Dissolution was £1329.1.3.
comprehensible that the small houses of Lincolnshire and the dangerously situated houses of Yorkshire should be in difficulties; but their complaints are not more piteous than those of Romsey, Godstow and Barking, richly endowed nunneries, to which the greatest ladies of the land did not disdain to retire.

The poverty of the nunneries was manifested in many ways. One of these was the extreme prevalence of debt. On the occasion of Bishop Alnwick's visitations, to which reference has been made above, no less than eleven houses were found to be in debt. At Ankerwyke the debts amounted to £40, at Langley to £5, at Stixwould to 80 marks, at Harrold to 20 marks, at Rothwell to 6 marks. Markyate was "indebted to divers creditors for a great sum." Heynings was in debt owing to costly repairs and to several bad harvests, and about the same time a petition from the nuns stated that they had "mortgaged for no short time their possessions and rents and thus remain irrecoverably pledged, have incurred various very heavy debts and are much depressed and brought to great and manifest poverty." In some cases the Prioresses claimed to have reduced an initial debt; the Prioress of St. Michael Stamford said that on her installation twelve years previously the debts stood at £20 and that they were now only 20 marks; the Prioress of Gracedieu said that she had reduced debts from £48 to £38; the Prioress of

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Legbourne said that the debts were now only £14 instead of £63. But from the miserable poverty of some of these houses (for instance Gokewell, where the income in rents was said to be £10 yearly and Langley, where it was £20, less than half the amount of the debts) it may be inferred that the struggle to repay creditors out of an already insufficient income was a hopeless one; and the effort to do so out of capital was often more disastrous still. Nothing is more striking than the lists of debts which figure in the account rolls of medieval nunneries. In thirteen out of seventeen account rolls belonging to St. Michael Stamford and ranging between 1304 and 1410, the nuns end the year with a deficit; and in fourteen cases there is a schedule of debts added to the account. Sometimes the amount owed is small, but occasionally it is very large. In the first roll which has survived (1304-5) the deficit on the account is some £5 odd; the debts are entered as £23.1.11. on the present year (which were apparently afterwards paid, because the items were marked "vacat pour ceo ke le deners sount paye") and fifteen items amounting to £52.3.8. and described as "nos sunciene dettes estre cest aan;" in fact the debts amount to considerably more than the income entered in the roll. Similarly in 1346-7 the debts amount to £61 add and in

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1 The Prioress of Ankerwyke also claimed to have reduced the debt from 300 marks to £40, but one of the nuns said that it had been only £30 on her installation and that that had not been paid by the Prioress. *Ib.* f. 57d.

2 P. R. O. Ministers Accounts 1260, passim.

3 P. R. O. Ministers Accounts 1260/1. It should however be noted that some of the items which go to make up the total of the debts are sums of money owing to members of the convent (e.g. the Prioress and Subprioress) by the treasurers, though the sums owing to outsiders are larger.
1376-7 to £53 odd, and in other years to smaller sums. In some cases a list of debts due to the convent is also entered in the account, but in only four of these does the money owed to the house exceed the amount owing by it; and 'argent aprompté' or 'money borrowed' is a regular item in the credit account. Similarly the treasurers' accounts of Gracedieu end with long schedules of debts due by the house. Nor was it only the small houses which got into debt. Tarrant Keynes was quite well off, but as early as 1292 the nuns asked the royal leave to sell forty oaks to pay their debts. Godstow was rich, but in 1316 the King had to take it under his protection and appoint keepers to discharge its debts, 'on account of its poverty and miserable state', and in 1335 the profits during vacancy were remitted to the convent by the King 'because of its poverty and misfortunes.' St. Mary Winchester was a famous house, but it also was in debt early in the fourteenth century. It should be noticed that the last cases (and that of St. Michael Stamford in 1304-5) are anterior to the Black Death, to whose account it has been customary to lay all the financial misfortunes of the religious houses. It is undeniable that the Black

1 P.R.O. Ministers Accounts 1257/10 ff. 34 and 34d. 39d. Similarly the Prioress' account of Delapraye for 4 Henry VII. contains a long list of debts. St. Pauls Ecclesiastical Soc. Vol. VII (1912) p.52. An analysis of Archbishop Eudes Rigaud's visitations of nunneries in the Diocese of Rouen gives even more startling information on this point; all but four of the fourteen houses show a list of debts growing heavier year by year and this was in the thirteenth century (1248-69). See Reg. Visit. Archip. Rothomag. ed. Bonnin passim.
2 V.C.H. Dorset II. p.68.
3 V.C.H. Oxon. II. p.73.
Death completed the ruin of many of the smaller houses and that matters grew steadily worse during the last half of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century; but there is ample evidence that the finances of many religious houses, both of men and of women, had been in an unsatisfactory condition at an earlier date; and even the golden thirteenth century can show cases of heavy debt.

In the smaller houses the constant struggle with poverty must have entailed no little degree of discomfort and discouragement. Sometimes the nuns seem actually to have lacked food and clothes and it seems clear that in many cases the revenues of these convents were insufficient for their support and that they were dependent upon the charity of friends. A typical case is that of Legbourne, where one of the nuns informed Bishop Alnwick (1440) that since the revenues of the house did not exceed £40 and since there were thirteen nuns and one novice, it was impossible for so many of them to have sufficient food and clothing from such inadequate rents, unless they received assistance from secular friends. Fosse in 1341 was said to be so slenderly endowed that the nuns had not enough to live on without external aid and in 1440 Alnwick noted "all

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the nuns complain ever of the poverty of the house and they receive nothing from it save only food and drink."

Of Buckland it was stated that 'its possessions cannot suffice for the sustenance of the said sisters with their household, for the emendation of their buildings, for their clothes and for their other necessities without the help of friends and the offering of alms'. Cookhill in 1336 was excused a tax because it was so inadequately endowed that the nuns had not enough to live upon without outside aid.

Davington in 1344 was in the same position; although the nuns were reduced to half their former number, they could not live upon their revenues without the charity of friends. Alnwick's visitations, indeed, show quite clearly that in poor houses the nuns were often expected to provide either clothes or (on certain days) food for themselves, out of the gift of their friends. At Fosse the nuns had food and drink only from the house; at Langley they had that only upon three days of the week, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. The Bishop discouraged this dependence upon the outside world for clothes, and at Stixwold and Nuncotan, where the dress-allocation of the nuns was several years in arrears, he ordered it to be paid regularly "so that they have no cause to please outward for their necessitee."

2 The Knights Hospitallers in England (Camden Soc.) p.20.
4 Dugdale Mon. IV. p.288.
7 Ib. ff. 76, 78. Compare the complaint of the sub-prioress of Markyte: "They receive from the house only bread, ale and two marks for their clothes and other necessary food, which is insufficient for the necessities of each." Ib. f.6.
At Sinningthwaite, in the diocese of York, the position appears even more clearly; in 1319 it was declared that the nuns who had no elders, relatives or friends, lacked the necessary clothes and were therefore afflicted with cold, whereupon the Archbishop ordered them to have clothes provided out of the means of the house. The clause of the Council of Oxford, which permitted poor houses to receive a sum sufficient for the vesture of a new member was evidently stretched to include the perpetual provision of clothing by external friends, and this is sometimes indicated in the wording of legacies. Thus Roger de Moreton, citizen and mercer of York, left the following bequest in 1390: "I bequeath to Isabel, my daughter, a nun of St. Clement's York, to replenish her black flannels (pro flannolis suis nigris emendis), according to the arrangement of my wife Agnes and of my other executors, at fitting times, according to her needs, four marks of silver." Sir Thomas Cumberworth, dying in 1451, specifically directed that "ye blak Curteyns of lawne be cut in vailes and gyfyn to pore nones."

The nuns were not always able to obtain adequate help from external friends in the matter of food and clothes; and evidence given at episcopal visitations show that they sometimes went cold and hungry. Complaints are common that the allowance paid to the nuns (in defiance of canon law) for the provision

1 V.C.H. Yorks III p.177.
3 Lincoln Diocesan Documents (E.E.T.S.) p.57.
of food and of garments had been reduced or withdrawn; and so also are complaints that the quality of beer provided by the convent was poor, though here the propensity of all communities to grumble at their food has to be taken into account. But more specific information is often given and though it is clear that financial mismanagement was often as much to blame as poverty, the sufferings of the nuns were not for that reason any less real. The Yorkshire nunnery of Swine is a case in point. It was never rich, but at Archbishop Giffard’s visitation in 1268 the nuns complained that the maladministration of their fellow canons had made their position intolerable. Although the means of the house, if discreetly managed, sufficed to maintain them, they nevertheless had nothing but bread and cheese and ale for meals and were even served with water instead of ale twice a week, while the canons and their friends were provided for "abundantly and sumptuously enough"; the nuns were moreover insufficiently provided with shoes and clothes; they had only one pair of shoes each year and barely a tunic in every three and a pall in every six years, unless they managed to beg more from relatives and secular friends. Fifty years later there was still scarcity at Swine, for the Prioress was

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1 It is amusing to notice the indignation of the nuns when their beer was not strong enough. See e.g. Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick f. 171d, 72; Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) p.209; Yorks Archaeol. Journal XVI. p.443.
2 When little Elizabeth Sewardby was boarding in Nunmonkton she had ten pairs in eighteen months. Test. Ebor. III p.168.
3 Reg. of Walter Giffard (Surtees Soc.) pp.147-8.
ordered to see that the house was reasonably served with bread, ale and other necessities. 1 At Ankerwyke (1441) the frivolous and incompetent prioress, Clemence Medeford, reduced her nuns to similar discomfort. Margery Kirkby, whose tongue nothing could stop, announced that 'she furnishes not nor for three years' space has furnished fitting habits to the nuns, insomuch that the nuns go about in patched clothes. The threadbareness of the nuns' added the bishop's clerk 'was apparent to my lord. (Patent domino nuditas monialium). Three of the younger nuns also made complaints; Thomasina Talbot had no bedclothes 'insomuch that she lies in the straw', Agnes Dychere 'asks that sufficient provision be made to her in clothing for her bed and body, that she may be covered from the cold, and also in eatables, that she may have strength to undergo the burden of religious observance and divine service, for these hitherto had not been supplied to her'; and Margaret Smith also complained of insufficient bedclothes. Poor little sister Thomasina also remarked sadly that she had no kirtle provided for her use. The history of Romsey shows that even the rich houses suffered from similar inconveniences. In 1284 Peckham speaks of a scarcity

1 V.C.H. Yorks III p.181.
2Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick ff.58 (56) 58d (56d). This lack of bedclothes for the younger nuns was partly due to the fact that the Prioress did not want them to sleep in the dorter, for Thomasina adds "and when my lord had commanded this deponent to lie in the dorter and this deponent asked bedclothes of the prioress, she said chidingly to her "Let him who gave you leave to lie in the dorter supply you with raiment." Mr. Hamilton Thompson thinks that 'probably sister Thomasina had previously been lodged separately with the other younger nuns and the prioress and elders objected to the crowding of the dorter.'
of food in the house and forbids the Abbess to fare sumptuously in her chamber, while the convent went short; in 1311 it was ordered that the bread should be brought back to the weight, quantity and quality hitherto used; and in 1387 William of Wykeham rather severely commanded the Abbess and officiaries to provide for the nuns bread, beer and other fit and proper vi- tuals, according to ancient custom and to the means of the house. Campsay was another flourishing house, but in 1532 a chorus of complaint greeted the ears of the vicar, and (as in so many cases) the ills were all put down to the mismanagement of the Prioress; here, however, she was not too luxurious, but too stingy. Katherine Symon said that noble guests, coming to the priory, complained of the very great parsimony of the Prioress; Margaret Harmer said that the sisters were sometimes served with very unwholesome food; Isabel Norwich said that the friends of the nuns, coming to the house, were not properly provided for; Margaret Bacton said that dinner was late through the fault of the cook and that the meat was burnt to a cinder; Katherine Grome said that the beef and mutton with which the nuns were served was sometimes bad and unwholesome and that within the past month a sick ox, which would otherwise have died, had been killed for food, and that the Prioress was very sparing, both in her own meals and in those with which she provided the

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1The same injunction was sent to Wherwell. Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Ser.) II. pp.651, 659-60.
2Livyng. Records of Romsey Abbey. P.103.
nuns; and four other sisters gave evidence to the same effect. One has the impression that the nuns were elderly and fussy, but there was evidently a basis for their unanimous complaint, and it is easy to imagine that food may sometimes have been very bad in convents which (unlike Campsey) were burdened with real poverty.

Another sign of the financial distress of the nunneries was the ruinous condition of their buildings. The remark written by a shivering monk in a set of nonsense verses may well stand as the plaint of half the nunneries of England:

Hœc abbathia ruit, hoc notum sit tibi, Christe,
Intus et extra pluit, terribilis est locus iste.

("This abbey falleth in ruins, Christ mark this well! It raineth within and without; this is a fearful place!"

Time after time visitations revealed houses badly in need of repair and roofs letting in rain or even tumbling about the ears of the nuns; time after time indulgences were granted to Christians who would help the poor nuns to rebuild church or frater or fermy. The thatched roofs especially were continually needing

1. Visit of the Diocese of Norwich. (Camden Soc.) pp.290-292. Cp. the complaint of the nuns of Studley in 1530: "They be oftentimes served with beffe and no moton upon Thursday at nyght and Sundays at nyght and be served oftentimes with new ale and not hulsome." V.C.H. Oxon. II. p.78.

2. Other houses in the diocese of Norwich which complained of bad food were Flixton (1520) and Carrow (1492,1514,1526). Carrow was one of the most famous nunneries in England, but in 1492 one of the Bishop's comperta ran: "That the present sisters are restricted to eight loaves and this is very little for ten sisters, for the whole day. Item there is often a lack of bread in the house, contrary to the good repute of the place." See Op. Cit. pp. 16-17,145. 185-6. 209.

repairs. It will be remembered how the Abbess Euphemia of Wherwell rebuilt the bell tower above the dorter, "which fell down through decay one night, about the hour of mattins, when by an obvious miracle from heaven, though the nuns were in the dorter, some in bed and some in prayer before their beds, all escaped not only death but any bodily injury." At Crabhouse in the time of Joan Wiggenhall "the dortour that then was, as fer forthe as we knowe, the furste that was set up on the place, was at so grete mischeef and at the gatedoun, the Prioresse dreedying perissachyng of her sistres whiche lay thereinne took it doun for drede of more hermys", and next year "sche began the grounde of the same dortoure that now standith and wrought thereupon fulli vij yere betymes as God wolde sende hir good."

The Prioress of Swine was ordered in 1318 to have the dorter covered without delay, so that the nuns might quietly and in silence enter it, without annoyance from storms and to have the roofs of the other buildings repaired as soon as might be. At St. Radegund's Cambridge, in 1373, the Prioress was charged with suffering the frater to remain unroofed, so that in rainy weather the sisters were unable to take their meals there, to which she replied that the nunnery was so burdened with debts, subsidies and contributions, that she had so far been unable to carry out repairs, but would do so as quickly as possible. At Littlemore in 1445 the nuns did not sleep in the

1 V.C.H. Hants II 135. The bell tower of St. Radegund's Cambridge fell down and injured the church in 1277 (Gray, Hist. of the Priory of St. Radegund Cambridge pp. 37-8. op. p. 79) and that of Esholt in 1445. (V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 161)
2 Reg. of Crabhouse Nunnery (Norfolk Archaeology XI. 1892) p. 61.
dorter for fear it should fall. At Romsey in 1502 the wicked Abbess Elizabeth Broke had allowed the roofs of the chancel and dorter to become defective, 'so that if it happened to rain the nuns were unable to remain either in the quire in time of divine service or in their beds and the funds that the abbess ought to have expended on these matters were being squandered on Master Bryce'; the fabric of the monastery in stone walls was also going to decay through her neglect and so were various tenements belonging to the house in the town of Romsey. Over a hundred and twenty years before, William of Wykeham had found Romsey hardly less delapidated, with its church, fermery and nuns' rooms "full of many enormous and notable defects", and the buildings of the monastery itself and of its different manors in need of repair. Of the unfortunate houses on the Scottish border, Arden, Thicket, Keldholme, Rosedale, Swine, Wykeham, Arthington and Moxby were all ruinous at the beginning of the fourteenth century; the monotonous list includes the church, frater and chapter house of Arden, the cloister of Rosedale, the bakehouse and brewhouse of Moxby, the dorter and frater of

1 V.C.H. Oxon II. p.76
2 V.C.H. Hants II. pp.129-31 passim. For another complaint that tenements and leasehold houses belonging to a priory were ruinous and like to fall down, through the negligence of the prioress and bailiff, see the case of Legbourne in 1440. Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick. f.86.
3 New Coll. MS. Reg. ff.87d-88. He ordered the Abbess to repair defects at once out of the common goods of the house. Better still, he would seem to have assisted them from his own pocket to carry out the injunction, for by his will (1402) he remitted to them a debt of £40, for the repair of their church and cloister. Nicholas, Testamenta Vetusta II. p.708.
Arthington. In the sixteenth century the distress was, as usual, at its worst. At the visitation of the Chichester diocese by Bishop Sherburn in 1521 the cloister of Easebourne needed roofing and Rusper was 'in magna decasu'; six years later Rusper was still 'aliqualiter ruinose'. At the Norwich visitations of Bishop Nixie the church of Blackborough was in ruins, and the roofs of cloister and frater at Flixton were defective; while at Crabhouse buildings were in need of repair and the roof of the Lady chapel was ruinous; Joan Wiggenhall must have turned in her grave. Bishop Longland's visitations of the diocese of Lincoln show a similar state of affairs. In 1531 he commanded the Abbess of Elstow "that suche reparacoons as be necessarye in and upon the buildinges within the said monasterye and other houses, tenements and fearmes thereto belonging, be suffycyently doon and made within the space of oon yere", and the Prioress of Nuncoton, "that ye cause your firmary, your churche and all other your houses that be in ruyne and dekaye within your monastery to be suffycently re-payred within this yere if itt possible may"; and reminded the nuns of Studley that they "muste bestowe lardge money upon suche reparacoons as are to be doon upon your churche, quere, dortor and other places which are in grete decaye. At Goring, also, the nuns all complained that the buildings were utterly

2 Sussex Arch. Coll. IX. pp.23; V. pp.256, 258.
3 Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) pp.107-8, 109, 261,311.
4 Archaeologia XLVII pp.52,54,59.
out of repair, especially the choir, cloister and dorter. 1

The frequency of fires in the middle ages was probably often to blame for the ruin of buildings. There were then no contrivances for extinguishing flames, and the thatched and wooden houses must have burned like stubble. Thus it was that 'thorow the negligens of women, 2 with fyre brent up a good malt house with a soler and alle her malt there' at Crabhouse, and Joan Wiggenhall had to repair it at a cost of five pounds. 3 There is a piteous appeal to Edward I from the nuns of Cheshunt, who had been impoverished by a fire and sought "help from the King of


2 Perhaps in the same way that a fire broke out at Sempringham in the lifetime of St. Gilbert. "A nun, bearing a light through the kitchen by night, fixed a part of a burnt candle to another she was going to burn, so that both were alight at once. But when the part fixed on to the other was almost consumed, it fell on the floor, on which much straw was collected, ready for a fire. The nun did not heed it, and believing that the fire would go out by itself, she went away and shut the door. But the flame, finding food, first devoured the straw lying close by, then the whole house with the adjacent offices and their contents, whence a great loss happened to the church." Quoted from MS.Cott.Cleop.B.I.f.77 by R. Graham. St. Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines p.135. It will be remembered that the author of the thirteenth century treatise, called 'Senechaucie', is most careful to declare that ploughmen, waggoners and cowherds must not carry fire into the byres, stables and cowhouse, either for light or to warm themselves, "unless the candle be in a lantern and this for great need and then it must be carried and watched by another than himself." Walter of Henley's Husbandry ed. E. Lamond (1890) p.113.

3 Reg. of Crabhouse Nunnery (Norfolk Archaeology XI.1892)p.61.
his special grace and for God's sake"; but 'Nihil fiat hac vice', replied red tape; an undated petition in the Record Office says that the house, church and goods of the nuns had twice been burned and their charters destroyed. In 1299 the Abbess of Wilton received permission to fell fifty oaks in the forest of Savernake 'in order to rebuild therewith certain houses in the abbey lately burnt by mischance'. At Wykeham, in Edward III's reign, the priory church, cloisters and twenty-four other buildings were accidentally burned down and all the books, vestments and chalices of the nuns were destroyed. Similarly the nuns of St. Radegund, Cambridge, lost their house and all their substance by fire at the beginning of the fourteenth century and in 1376 their buildings were again said to have been burned; either they had never recovered from their first disaster or a second fire had broken out. The nuns of St. Leonard, Grimsby, apparently lost their granaries in 1311, for they sought licence to beg on the ground that their houses and corn had been consumed by fire, and in 1459 they asked for a similar licence, because their buildings had been burnt, and their land inundated. The convent of St. Bartholomew, Newcastle, gave misfortune by fire as one reason for wishing to appropriate the chapel of St. Edmund in Gateshead.

1 Dugdale Mon. IV. p.326. See also V.C.H. Herts IV. p.426.
2 V.C.H. Herts loc. cit.
3 Cal. of Close Rolls (1296-1302) p.238.
4 V.C.H. Yorks III. p.183.
6 V.C.H. Lincs. II. p.179.
7 Dugdale, Mon. IV. p.485.
Sometimes poverty, misfortune and mismanagement reduced the nuns to begging alms. About 1253 the convent of St. Mary of Chester wrote to Queen Eleanor, begging her to confirm the election of a prioress "to our miserable convent amidst its multiplied desolations; for so greatly are we reduced that we are compelled every day to beg abroad our food, slight as it is." Similarly the starving nuns of Whitehall, Ilchester, were reduced to "begging miserably", after the régime of a wicked prioress at the beginning of the fourteenth century. In 1308 the sub-prioress and convent of Whiston mentioned, in asking for permission to elect Alice de la Flagge, that the smallness of their possessions had compelled the nuns formerly to beg, 'to the scandal of womanhood and the discredit of religion.' In 1351 Bishop Edymton of Winchester 'counted it a merciful thing', to come to the assistance of Romsey and of Nunnaminster, 'when overwhelmed with poverty, and when in these days of increasing ill-doing and social deterioration they were brought to the necessity of secret begging.' At Cheshunt in 1367 the nuns declared that they often had to beg in the highways. At Rothwell in 1392 the extreme poverty of the nuns compelled some of them "to incur the opprobrium of mendicity and beg alms after the fashion of the mendicant friars.' In all these cases it is evident

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1 Wood. Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies. I. p.35.
3 But seven years before they had been begging, according to the Bishop, by the compulsion of this expelled prioress, whose case was sub judice. Reg. p. 115 and Hugo. loc.cit.
5 Liveing. Records of Romsey Abbey p.145.
7 V.C.H. Northants II. p.137.
that objection was taken to personal begging by the nuns, and
it is clear that such a practice, which took the nuns out into
the streets and into private houses, was likely to be subversive
of discipline. The custom of begging through a proctor was open
to no such objection; and it was common for bishops to give to
the poorer houses licences, allowing them to collect alms in
this manner. Early in the fifteenth century the nuns of Rowney
in Hertfordshire petitioned the Chancellor for a patent for a
proctor to go about the country and collect alms for them and
their request was granted. Many such licences to beg occur in
episcopal registers; Bishop Dalderby of Lincoln granted them to
Little Marlow (1300 and 1311), St. Leonard Grimsby (1311) and
Rothwell (1318); and St. Michael's Stamford (1359) and
Sewardsley (1366) received similar licences from his successors.
The distinction between begging by the nuns and begging by a
proctor is clearly drawn in the licence granted by Bishop
Dalderby to Rothwell. Addressing the clergy in the Archdeacon-
ates of Northampton and Buckingham he writes, "Pitying, with

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1 V.C.H. Herts IV. pp.434-5. The text of their petition is as
follows: "A tres reverend pier en dieu, mon tres honure seigneur le chaumeellardengleteur, suppliant voz powers cratrices la prioresse et les noynes de Rowney en le countee de .........., qe come leur esglise et autres mesons sont en poynt de cheyer a terre pur de faute de reparacion et ils nount dont lez re-
parailler, si noun dalmoigne de bones gens, qe plese a vostre treshonure seignurie de vostre grace eux grantar vn patent pur vn leur procuratour, de aler en la paiss a collier almoigne de bones gentz pur la sustenance et releuacion du dit pouere mesou et en noun de charite." P.R.O. Ancient Petitions
2 502/15063.
4 V.C.H. Linos II. p.179. Another licence in 1459.
5 V.C.H. Northants II. p.137.
6 Ib. pp.100, 128.
paternal affection, the want of the poor nuns of Rothwell in our diocese, who are oppressed by such scarcity that they are obliged to beg the necessities of life, we command and straitly enjoin you, that when there shall come to you suitable and honest secular proctors or messengers of the same nuns, (not the nuns themselves, that they may have no occasion for wandering thereby), to seek and receive the alms of the faithful for their necessities, ye shall receive them kindly and expound the cause of the said nuns to the people in your churches, on Sundays, and feast days during the solemnization of mass, and promote the same by precept and by example once every year for the next three years, delivering the whole of whatever shall be collected to these proctors and messengers.¹

The Bishops sought to relieve necessitous convents by offering particular inducements to the faithful to give alms, when they were thus requested. Along with mending roads and bridges, ransoming captives, dowering poor maidens, building churches and endowing hospitals, the assistance of impecunious nunneries was generally recognised as a work of christian charity, and indulgences were often offered to those who would aid

¹ Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Dalderby f.374. (Pro monialibus de Rowell). It is surprising, however, that Peckham, in his constitution forbidding nuns to be absent from their convents for longer than three, or at the most six, days, adds: "We do not extend this ordinance to those nuns who are forced to beg their necessities outside, while they are begging." Wilkins. Concilia II, p.59. It is certain that the nuns did beg in their own persons. When Archbishop Endes Rigaud visited St. Aubin in 1261 he ordered that the younger nuns should not be sent out to beg (pro questu); and in 1263 two of them were absent in France, seeking alms. Reg.Visit.Archiepiscopi Rothomagensis ed Bonnin pp.412,471.
a particular house. The same Bishop Dalderby, for instance, granted indulgences for the assistance of Cheshunt, Flamstead, Sewardley, Catesby, Delapre, Ivinghoe, Fosse, St. James outside Huntingdon and St. Radegund, Cambridge. Archbishop Kemp of York granted an indulgence of a hundred days valid for two years to all who should assist towards the repair of Arden (1440) and of Esholt (1445) and Archbishop Booth granted an indulgence of forty days to penitents contributing to the repair of Yedingham; indeed it is probable that the money for the much needed work of roofing a building could only be collected by means of such special appeals. The Popes also sometimes granted indulgences; Boniface IX did so to penitents who on the feasts of dedication visited and gave alms towards the conservation of the churches and priories of Wilberfoss, Clement, York, and Handale. The history of St. Radegund Cambridge will serve to illustrate the method by which the Church thus organised the work of poor relief in the middle ages; and it will be noticed that this nunnery was an object of care to Bishops of other dioceses beside that of Ely. In 1254 Walter de Suffield, 

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1On this subject see an interesting article by C. Wordsworth "On some Pardons or Indulgences preserved in Yorkshire 1412-1527" (York. Archaeol. Journ. XVI. pp.369 ff.)
2V.C.H. Herts IV. pp.426,432.
4V.C.H. Bucks I. P.353.
8Cal. of Papal Letters IV, p.393. V.p.373.
9Except where otherwise stated the following references all occur in Gray. Op.Cit. p.79 and are printed in full in R. Willis, Architectural Hist. of the Univ. of Cambridge ed. J. Willis Clark (1886) II pp.183-186.
Bishop of Norwich, granted a relaxation of penance for twenty-five days to persons contributing to the aid of the nuns; in 1268 Richard de Gravesend, Bishop of Lincoln, ordered collections to be made in the churches of the Archdeaconates of Northampton and Huntingdon on their behalf; in 1277 Roger de Skerning, Bishop of Norwich, ordered collections to be made in his diocese for the repair of the church; in 1313 the Official of the Archdeacon of Ely wrote to the parochial clergy of the diocese recommending the nuns to them as objects of charity, having lost their house and goods by fire, and in the same year Bishop Dalderby granted an indulgence on their behalf for this reason, while in 1314 John de Ketene, Bishop of Ely confirmed the grants of indulgence made by his brother bishops to persons contributing to their relief and to the rebuilding of the house; the next indulgence mentioned is one of forty days granted by Thomas Arundel, Bishop of Ely, in 1376, also on the occasion of a fire; in 1389 Bishop Fordham of Ely granted another forty days indulgence for the repair of the church and cloister and for the relief of the nuns, and in 1390 William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury made a similar grant, mentioning that the buildings had been ruined by violent storms; finally in 1457 Bishop Gray of Ely granted a forty days indulgence for the repair of the bell tower and for the maintenance of books, vestments and other church ornaments. There is no need to suppose that St.

Radegund was in any way a particularly favoured house and such a list of grants shows that the Church fulfilled conscientiously the duty of organising poor relief and that the objects for which indulgences were granted were not always as unworthy as has sometimes been supposed.

The financial straits to which the smaller convents were continually and the greater convents sometimes reduced grew out of a number of causes; and it is interesting to enquire what brought the nuns to debt or to begging and why they were so often in difficulties. A study of monastic documents makes it clear that a great deal of this poverty was in no sense the fault of the nuns. Apart from obvious cases of insufficient endowment, the medieval monasteries suffered from natural disasters, which were the lot of all men, and from certain exactions at the hands of men, which fell exclusively upon themselves. Of natural disasters the frequency of fires has already been mentioned. Another danger, from which houses situated in low lying land near a river or the sea were never free, was that of floods. The inundation of their lands was declared one of the reasons for appropriating the church of Bradford to Shaftesbury in 1343 and in 1380 the nuns were allowed to appropriate another church, in consideration of damage done to their lands by encroachments of the sea and losses of sheep and cattle. In 1377 Barking suffered the devastation by flood of a large part of its possessions along the Thames and never recovered its

1 A few other references may be given: Bishop Fordham of Ely for Rowney (1408) and Bishop Alcock of Ely for the Minories (1490). [Gibbons, Ely Eps. Records pp.406,414]; Bishop Sutton of Lincoln to Wotherpes (1232) [V.C.H.Northants II.p.114]

2 V.C.H. Wilts II p.77.
former prosperity; and in 1394 Bishop Fordham of Ely granted
an indulgence for the nuns of Ankerwyke, whose goods had been
destroyed by floods. In the North the lands of St. Leonard
Grimsby were flooded in 1459; in 1445 the nuns of Esholt suffered
heavy losses from the flooding of their lands near the
river Ayre, which had been cultivated at great cost and from
which they derived their maintenance; and in 1484 Archbishop
Rotheram appealed for help for the nuns of Thicket, whose
fields and pasturages had been inundated and who had suffered
much loss by the death of their cattle. Heavy storms are
mentioned as contributing to the distress of Shaftesbury in
1365 and of St. Radegund, Cambridge in 1390. Moreover some
houses suffered by their situation in barren and unproductive
lands; Easebourne in 1411 complained of 'the sterility of the
lands, meadows and other property of the priory, which is situ-
at ed in a solitary, waste and thorny place'; Heynings put
forward the same plea in 1401; and Flamstead in 1380.

But far more terrible than fire and flood were those two

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1 V.C.H. Essex II. p.119. References to this occur in 1380, 1362,
1364, 1392, 1402 and 1409.
5 "Ib. p.124.
6 V.C.H. Wilts. II. p.77. The reference is perhaps to the famous
storm of St. Maur's Day 1362, which, together with the Black
Death is commemorated in a griffito in the church of Ashwell
(Herts) and in a distich quoted by Adam Murimuth:
C ter erant mille. decies sex unus et ille.
Luce tua Maure, vehemens fuit impetus auroe.
Ecce fili hoc anno. Maurus in orbe tonans.
8 Bishop Rede's Reg. (Sussex Rec.Soc.) p.137.
9 Cal. of Papal Letters V. p.347.
10 Dugdale, Mon. IV. p.301.
other scourges, with which nature afflicted the men of the middle ages, famine and pestilence. The Black Death of 1348 was only one among the pestilences of the fourteenth century; it had the result of 'domesticating the bubonic plague upon the soil of England'; for more than three centuries afterwards it continued to break out at short intervals, first in one part of the country and then in another.¹ The epidemics of the fourteenth century were so violent that in forty years the chronicles count up five great plagues, beginning with the Black Death; and Langland, in a metaphor of terrible vividness, describes the pestilence as 'the rain that raineth where we rest should'. The Black Death was preceded by a famine pestilence in 1317-18, when there was 'a grievous mortality of people so that the sick might vnneath burie the dead'. It was followed in 1361 by the Second Plague, which was especially fatal among the upper classes and among the young. The Third Plague in 1368-9 was probably primarily a famine sickness, mixed with plague. The Fourth Plague broke out in 1375; and the Fifth, in 1390-1 was so prolonged and so severe as to be considered comparable with the Black Death itself. Moreover these are only the great landmarks, and scattered between them were smaller outbreaks of sickness, due to scarcity or to spoiled grain and fruit. The pestilences continued in the fifteenth century, (more than twenty one are recorded in the chronicles), but, except perhaps for

¹The following account of medieval plagues and famines is taken mainly from Creighton. Hist. of Epidemics in Britain.I.pp. 202-7,215-228. See also Denton. England in the Fifteenth Century pp.91-106.
the great plague of 1439, they were seldom universal and came by degrees to be confined to the towns, so that all who could used to flee to the country when the summer heat brought out
the disease in crowded and insanitary streets. But if country
convents escaped the worst disease, those situated in borough
towns ran a heavy risk.

Often enough these plagues were preceded and accompanied
by famines, sometimes local and sometimes general. The English
famines had long been notorious and were enshrined in a popular
proverb, "Tres plagae tribus regionibus appropriari solent,
Anglorum fames, Gallorum ignis, Normannorum lepra." The three
greatest outbreaks took place in 1194-6, in 1257-9 and in 1315-6
(before the plague of 1318-9). The dearth which culminated in
the last of these famines had begun as early as 1289; and the
misery in 1315 was acute; "The beastes and cattell also" says
Stow, translating from Trokelowe, "By the corrupt grane whereof
they fed, dyed, whereby it came to passe that the eating of
flesh was suspected of all men, for flesh of beasts not corru-
ted was hard to finde. Horse-flesh was counted great delicates:
the poore stole fatte dogges to eate; some (as it was sayde)
compelled through famine, in hidden places did eate the flesh of
their owne children, and some stole others, which they devoured.
Theeves that were in prisons did plucke in peeces those that
were newly brought among them and greedily devoured them halfe
alive." There was another severe famine in 1322 and in 1325 a
great drought so that the cattle died for lack of water. Famine

accompanied the pestilences of 1361, 1368, 1391 and 1439; and these are only the more outstanding instances. Here again, however, the fourteenth century was on the whole worse off than the fifteenth; almost every year was a year of scarcity and the average price of wheat during the period 1261 to 1400 was nearly six shillings (i.e. nearly six pounds of modern money.)\(^1\) Moreover the ravages of murrain among cattle and sheep were hardly intermittent from the end of the thirteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century.\(^2\) The fatal years 1315-9 included not only a famine and a plague but also (1318-19) a murrain among the cattle, which was so bad that dogs and ravens, eating the dead bodies, were poisoned and died, and no man dared eat any beef. In the year of the Black Death also there was 'a great plague of sheep in the realm, so that in one place there died in pasturage more than five thousand sheep and so rotted that neither beast nor bird would touch them'; and murrains accompanied the four other great plagues of the century. Indeed dearth, murrain and pestilence went hand in hand, in that unhappy time we call the 'good old days'.

These natural disasters could not but have an adverse effect upon the fortunes of the monastic houses; and many charters and petitions contain clauses which specifically attribute the distress of this or that nunnery to one of the three causes described above. During the famine years of 1314-15 Walter Reynolds, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to the Bishop of

Winchester, urging him to take some steps for the relief of the nuns of Wintney, who were dispersing themselves in the world, because no proper provision was made for their food, and about the same time the convent of Clerkenwell addressed a petition to Queen Isabel, stating that they were "moet en-pouerees par les durs annez" and begging her to procure for them the King's leave to accept certain lands and rents to the value of twenty pounds. In 1326 (after the great drought) the nuns of Kings Mead, Derby, begged the King to take them under his special protection, granting the custody of the house to two custodes, on the ground that, owing to the badness of past years and the unusually heavy mortality among cattle their revenues were reduced and they were unable to meet the claims made by guests upon their hospitality. The ravages of the Black Death were most severe of all and many houses never recovered from it. In the diocese of Lincoln the nunnery of Wothorpe lost all its members save one, whom the Bishop made Prioress; and in 1354 it was annexed to St. Michael Stamford. Greenfield Priory, when he visited it in 1350 "per tres mensas stetit et stat priorissse solacio destituta"; and other houses in this large diocese which lost their heads were Fosse.

1 V.C.H. Hants II. p.150. He attributed their condition to negligence and bad administration.
2 P.R.O. Anc. Correspondence XXXVI No. 201.
4 Monasticon IV. p.288.
nun of Bawsey petitioned for leave to enjoy certain lands and

Markyate, Hinchinbrooke, Gracedieu, Rothwell, Delapré, Catesby,

1 In the diocese of York the prioresses of Arthington, Kirklees, Wallingwells and St.

Stephen's Foukholme died; the latter house, like Wootherpe,

2 failed to recover and is never heard of again. Other parts of the country suffered in the same way. At Malling Abbey in Kent the Bishop made two abbesses in succession, but both died and only four professed nuns and four novices remained, to one of whom the Bishop committed the custody of the temporalities and to another that of the spiritualities, because there was no fit person to be made Abbess; and the next year, on visiting this and another house, he found them so decayed "that it seemed impossible that they should be set up again while the world lasted even to the Day of Judgment." 3 At Henwood, in August 1349, there was no Prioress "and of the fifteen nuns who were lately there, three only remain." 4 The death of the nuns themselves was, moreover, the least disastrous effect of the pestilence; it left a legacy of neglected lands, poverty and labour troubles which lasted for long after a new generation of sisters had forgotten the fate of their predecessors. The value of Flixton dwindled after the Black Death to half its former income, and the house was never prosperous again. In 1351 the

1 Ib. pp.359-60.
4 W.C.H. Warwick. II. p.65.
nuns of Romsey petitioned for leave to annex certain lands and advousons and gave as one of the reasons for their impoverishment "the diminution or loss of due and appointed rents, because of the death of tenants, carried off by the unheard of and unwonted pestilence", and in 1352 the house of St. Mary's Winchester or Nunnaminster made special mention, in petitioning for the appropriation of a church, of the reduction of its rents and of the cattle plague. The other great plagues of the century aggravated the distress. Four of the sixteen nuns of Carrow died in the year of the third pestilence (1369), and in 1378, three years after the fourth pestilence, the licence allowing Sewardsey to appropriate the church of Easton Neston, recites that the value of its lands had been so diminished by the pestilence that they no longer sufficed to maintain the statutory number of sisters. In 1381 (mentioned as a plague and famine year in some of the chronicles) a bull of Urban IV appropriating a church to Flamstead, after recapitulating the slender endowments of the house, repeats the complaint of the nuns that "the servants of the said priory are for the most part dead, and its house and tenants and beasts are so destroyed that its lands and possessions remain as it were sterile, waste and uncultivated, wherefore, unless the said Prior and Convent be by some remedy succoured, they will be obliged to beg for the necessities of life from door

3 Rvs. Carrow Abbey, p.37.
4 V.C.H. Northants ii. p.126.
to door." In 1395, four years after the 'Fifth' pestilence and itself a year of bad plague and famine, the nuns of Lebourne complained that the lands and tenements of the priory were uncultivated, 'on account of the dearth of cultivators and rarity of men, arising out of unwonted pestilences and epidemics'. The outbreak of 1405-7 was followed by a petition from Easebourne for licence to appropriate two churches, on the ground of 'epidemics, death of men and of servants' and because 'the lands and tenements of the Prioress and Convent notoriously suffer so great ruin that few tenants can be found willing to occupy the lands in these days and the said lands, ever falling into a worse state, are so poor that they cannot supply the religious women with sufficient support for themselves or for the repair of their ruinous buildings.'

The worst of these natural disasters was not the actual damage done by each outbreak, but the fact that famine, murrain and pestilence followed upon pestilence, murrain and famine with such rapidity, that the poorer houses had no chance of recovery from the initial blow dealt them by the Black Death. The nuns of Thetford, for instance, were excused from the taxation of religious houses under Henry VI, on the ground that their revenues in Norfolk and in Suffolk were much decreased by the recent mortality and had so continued since 1349. Even the well-endowed houses found recovery difficult, and the

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1 Dugdale Mon.IV. p.301. Their petition had been presented in 1380. V.C.H. Herts IV. p.433.
2 Cal. of Papal Letters IV. p.521.
3 Bishop Rede's Reg. p.137.
4 V.C.E. Norfolk II. p.335.
The history of the great abbey of Shaftesbury illustrates the situation very clearly. In 1365, shortly after the *pestis secunda*, the nuns received a grant of the custody of their temporalities on the next voidance, and losses by pestilence were mentioned as one reason for the decline in their fortunes. In 1380 their lands were flooded and they suffered heavy losses in sheep and cattle. In 1382 (the year of the fifth plague) they were obliged to petition once again for help, representing that although their house was well-endowed, "toutes voies voz dites oratrices sont einsi arreriz a jour de huy, quoy per les pestilences en queles lors tenants sont trez toutz a poy mortz, et per murrayne de lour bestaille a grant nombre et value, nemye tant seulement a une place et a une foitz, einz a diverses foitz en toutes leurs places, quoy per autres grandes charges quelles lour convient a fine force de jour en autre porter et sustenir, q'elles ne purront, sinoun a moelt grant peine, sanz lour endangerer al diverses bones gentz lour Creditours, mesner l'an a bon fyn." Again at the beginning of the fifteenth century Bishop Aiscough sanctioned the appropriation of a church to the abbey, which had pleaded its great impoverishment through pestilence, failure of crops, want of labourers and through the excessive demands of such labourers as could be obtained. If Shaftesbury found recovery so difficult, it may easily be imagined what was the effect of the natural disasters of the fourteenth century upon smaller and less wealthy houses.

2 V.C.H. Dorset II p.77.
The revenues of the nunneries, often scant to begin with and liable to constant diminution from the ravages of nature, were still more heavily burdened by a variety of exactions on the part of the authorities of church and state. The procurations payable to the Bishop on his visitation fell heavily upon the smaller houses; hence such a notice as that which occurs in Bishop Nicke's Register under the year 1520: "Item the reverend father with his colleagues came down to the house of nuns that afternoon, and having seen the priory he dissolved his visitation there, on account of the poverty of the house." 1 St. Mary Magdalen Bristol was on account of its poverty exempt from the payment of such procurations and the Bishops doubtless often exercised their charity upon such occasions. Papal exactions were even more oppressive; John of Pontoise, Bishop of Winchester, pleaded with the papal nuncio in 1285 that he would forbear to exact procurations from the poor nuns of Wintney, whom the Bishop himself excused from all charges in view of their deep poverty; and in 1300 Bishop Swinfield of Hereford made a similar appeal to the commissary of the nuncio, and secured the remission of procurations due from the nuns of Lingbrook and the relaxation of the sentence of excommunication, which they

1 Visit. of Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) p.155.
2 V.C.H., Glouc. II. p.93.
3 On other occasions, however, they were careful to take all their due. V. the great Bishop Grandisson's letter to the abbess and convent of Canonleigh, announcing his forthcoming visitation and "mandantes quod in illum eventum de procuracione ea occasione nobis debita providam in pecunia numerata." Reg. of Bishop Grandisson ed. Hingeston-Randolph Pt.II. p.767. At Day.
4 Reg. Johannis de Pontissara (Cant. & York Soc.) p.299. Ingpon in
had incurred through non-payment. The obligation to pay tithes also fell heavily upon the poorer houses; it was for this reason that Archbishop John le Romeyn appealed to the Prior of Newburgh in 1236 not to exact tithes from the food of animals in Nether Sutton, belonging to the poor nuns of Arden; and in 1301 the prior of Worcester desired his commissary to spare the poverty of the nuns of Westwood and not to exact tithes or any other things due to him for them or for their churches. Added to ecclesiastical exactions were the taxes due to the Crown. In 1344 the nuns of Davington addressed a petition to Edward III, representing that, owing to their great poverty, they were unable to satisfy the King's public aids without depriving themselves of their necessary subsistence, a plea which was found to be true. The frequency with which such petitions for exemption from the payment of taxes were made and granted, is in itself a proof that the burden of taxation was a real one, for the Crown would not have excused its dues, unless the need for such an act of charity had been great;

1 Reg. Ric. de Swinfield (Cant. & York Soc.) p.366. Other cases of excommunication are sometimes to be found in Bishops' Registers, e.g. in 1335 the Prioresses of Cockhill and Bawdrip were excommunicated for failure to pay the tenth; one owed 9½d. and the other 1/6d. paltry sums for which to damn a poor nun's soul! Reg. Thomas de Charleton (Cant. & York Soc.) p.57.

2 Reg. John le Romeyn (Surtees Soc.) p.159.


4 Dugdale Mon. IV. p.286.

5 For a few out of many instances of remission of payment on account of poverty see Ivinghoe, Little Marlow, Burnham (V.C.H. Bucks I. pp. 353, 358, 382); Cheshunt (V.C.H. Herts IV pp. 426-7); Stixwould, Heynnings, Greenfield, Fosse, St. Leonard Grimsby (V.C.H. Lincs. II pp. 122, 147, 149, 155, 157, 179); Catesby (V.C.H. Northants III. p.123); Ickleton, Swaffham, Chatteris, St. Radegund Cambridge (Dugdale Mon. IV. p.439); Malling (Ib. III. p.382); St. Mary Magdalen, Bristol (V.C.H. Gloce. II. p.93); Minchin Barrow (Hugo. Op. Cit. p.108); Blackborough (V.C.H. Norfolk II. p.351); Arden (V.C.H. Yorks III. p.113); Nunkeeling and Nunappleton (Reg. John le Romeyn pp.140, 234); Whitney (V.C.H. Hants II. p.150).
and it is obvious that the sheer impossibility of collecting the money from a penurious house must often have left little alternative. The houses that did contribute were not slow to complain. 'The unwonted exactions and tallages with which their house and the whole of the English Church has been burdened' were pleaded by the nuns of Heynings as in part responsible for their poverty in 1401; similarly 'the necessary and very costly exactions of tenths and other taxes and unsupportable burdens' occurs in a complaint by Romsey in 1351; and the Abbess and Convent of St. Mary's, Winchester stated in 1468, that they were so burdened with the repair of their buildings and with the payment of imposts, that they could not fulfil the obligations of their order as to hospitality.

Nor was taxation for public purposes the only demand made upon the religious houses. Abbeys holding of the King in chief had to perform many services appertaining to tenants in chief, which seem oddly incongruous in the case of nunneries. The Abbesses of Shaftesbury, St. Mary Winchester, Wilton and Barking were baronesses in their own right; the privilege of being summoned to Parliament was omitted on account of their sex; but the duty of sending a quota of knights and soldiers to serve the King in his wars was regularly exacted. In 1257 Agnes Ferrar,


Cal. of Pat. Rolls. (1467-77) pp.136. 587.

Abbess of Shaftesbury was summoned to Chester to attend the expedition against Lewellin ap Griffith, and her successor Juliana Bauceyn was also summoned in 1277 to attack that intrepid prince. The Abbess of Romsey had to find a certain number of men at arms with their armour for the custody of the maritime land in the county of Southampton; she resisted when an attempt was made to exact an archer as well and successfully showed the King "that she has only two marks' rent in Pudele Bardolveston in that county." Less lawful exactions were even more burdensome, and the nunneries suffered with the rest of the nation under the demand for loans and the burden of purveyance. In December 1307 the Abbess of Barking, in common with the heads of ten other religious houses was requested to lend the King "two carts and horses to be at Westminster early on the day of St. Stephen to carry vessels and equipment of the King's household to Dover, the King having sent a great part of his carts and sumpter horses to sea, so that he may find them ready when he arrives;" it is true that he engaged to pay out of his wardrobe the costs of the men leading the carts and of the horses going and returning, but meanwhile the Abbey lost their services and carts and horses were very necessary on a manor; moreover it was common complaint that the tallies given

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by the King's servants for what they took were sometimes of no more value than the wood whereof they were made:

I had catell, now have I none;
They take my beasts and done them slo'n,
And payen but a stick of tree.

Similarly in June 1310 the King sent out a number of letters to the heads of religious houses, requesting the 'loan' of various amounts of victuals for his Scottish expedition, and among the houses upon whom this call was made were the nunneries of Gatesby, Elstow, St. Mary Winchester, Romsey, Wherwell, Barking, Nuneaton (Warwickshire), Shaftesbury and Wilton.\(^1\)

The nunneries also suffered considerable pecuniary loss by the right possessed in certain cases by the patron of a house, to take the profits of its temporalities during voidance through the death or resignation of its superior, sometimes enjoying them himself and sometimes granting the custody of the house to someone else.\(^2\) It is obvious that serious loss might be entailed upon the community, if the patron refrained for some time from granting his congé d'élire. It was for this reason that the Convent of Whiston wrote in 1308 to the Bishop-elect of Worcester, their patron, praying that 'considering the smallness of the possessions of the nuns of Whiston, in his patronage, which compelled the nuns formerly to beg, and for the honour of religion and the frailness of the female sex' he would grant them licence to elect a new prioress and would confirm the same election; and the Prior of Worcester also addressed

\(^1\)It. pr. 262-6 passim.
\(^2\)For instance in 1275 the King granted the custody of Barking Abbey, void and in his hands, to his mother, Queen Eleanor. (Cal. of Close Rolls (1272-9) p. 210)
a letter to the commissary-general on their behalf. The King exercised with great regularity his rights of patronage and the direct pecuniary loss, sustained by a house in being deprived of the profits of its temporalities, seems to have been the least of the evils which resulted, if the state of affairs described in the petition addressed to the crown by the Abbess and Convent of Shaftesbury in 1382 was at all common. After a moving description of the straits to which they were reduced, they begged that the King would, on future occasions of voidance, allow the community to retain the administration of the abbey and of its temporalities, rendering the value thereof to the King while the voidance lasted, so that no escheator, sheriff or other officer should have power to meddle with them;

"Entendant, tres redoute seigneur, qe parmy votre grace en celle partie a faire, grant reliefment, si Dieu ples, et amendement avendra a mesme votre maison, et nul damage ent purra avenir a vous ne a voz heirs; ne a nul autre; fors qe seulement a voz ministres, leaqueux en tems de tieles voidances qe sont accustumez de faire grande detruccions et wastes, et y prendre grauntz et diverses profitz a leur propre oeps, dont rien ne vient a votre oeps, combine qe mesme la voidance ne dure si per petit temps noun." St. Mary Winchester also pleaded the

2 See above p. 394.
Dugdale, Mon. II. p. 435 and Rot. Parl. III. p. 129. The petition was granted, but the nuns seem to have shown themselves unworthy of the royal clemency, for after the death of Abbess Joan Furnace in 1394, the King was forced to abrogate the grant, because by fraudulent means an election had been obtained of an unfit person, who, with the object of securing confirmation, had repaired with an excessive number of men to places remote, to the waste and desolation of the convent. Cal. of Pat. Rolls (1391-6) p. 511.
royal administration of its temporalities as one reason for its impoverishment, when petitioning the Pope for leave to appropriate the church of Froyllie in 1343 and 1346. Sometimes the abbeys found it cheaper to compound with the King for a certain sum of money and thus to purchase the right of administering their own temporalities, saving to the King, as a rule, knights' fees, advowsons, escheats and sometimes wards and marriages. Romsey Abbey secured this privilege, after the escheator had already entered in 1315, for a fine of forty marks; but in 1333, when there was another voidance, the convent had to agree to pay £40 for the first two months and pro rata for such time as the voidance continued, saving to the king knights' fees, advowsons and escheats. In 1340 the royal escheator was ordered to let the prioress and convent of Wherwell have the custody of their temporalities, in accordance with a grant made some years previously, by which the house was to render £250 for a year and pro rata. In 1344 a similar order was made in the case of Wilton whose late abbess (prudent woman) had seized the opportunity to purchase the right for £60 from the king, when he lay at Orwell before crossing the sea. Similarly, the next year, Shaftesbury received the custody of its temporalities in consideration of a fine of £100, made with the king by its Abbess, in the second year of his reign. With four great

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3 Ib. (1339-41) p. 377.
5 Ib. (1343-6) p. 599. The profits during vacancy were similarly remitted to Godstow in 1385 "because of its poverty and misfortunes." (Y.C.H. Oxford, 111, p. 72)
abbey's falling vacant in little over ten years, the royal ex-
chequer reaped a good harvest; and though the payment of a
lump sum was better than falling into the hands of the eschea-
tor, and though the nuns would make haste to elect a new ab-
bes at soon as possible, a voidance was always a costly mat-
ter.

But perhaps the most serious tax upon the resources of
the nunneries was the right, possessed by some dignitaries
(notably the King and the Bishop of the diocese), to nominate
to houses in their patronage persons whom the nuns were oblig-
ed to receive as members of their community or to support as
corrodians, pensioners or boarders. The right of nominating
a nun might be exercised upon a variety of occasions. The
Archbishop might do so to certain houses in his diocese on
the occasion of his consecration and this right was energeti-
cally enforced by Peckham, who nominated girls to Wherwell,
Hedingham Castle, Burnham, Stratford, Easebourne and Catesby.
The Bishop possessed, in some cases, a similar right on the
occasion of his coronation. Rigaud de Asserio, Bishop of
Winchester, sent nuns to Romsey, Nunnaminter and Wherwell;
Ralph of Shrewsbury, Bishop of Bath and Wells, nominated to
Minchin Barrow and to Canyngton; 3 Stephen Gravesend, Bishop

1 Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Ser.) I. pp.40-1, 56-7,
769-90, 356-7, 365-7, 577.
2 Reg. of ..... Rigaud de Asserio (Hants. Rec. Soc.) pp.387,
Johannis de Pontissara (C. & Y. Soc.) pp.240, 241, 252 and of
pp. 69, 61.
3 Reg. of Ralph of Shrewsbury (Somerset Rec. Soc.) pp.26, 39, 146.
of London sent a girl to Barking; and the successive bishops of Salisbury exercised the prerogative of placing an inmate in Shaftesbury Abbey and of appointing one of the nuns to act as her instructor. The existence of this right seems to have varied with different dioceses and its exaction with different bishops, if it is possible to judge from the absence of commenda
datory letters in some registers and their presence in others. The Bishop of a diocese also sometimes had the right of pre-
senting a nun to a house when a new superior was created there. This was the case at Romsey, where nuns were thus nominated in 1307, 1333 and 1397, and at Romsey also there occurs one in-
stance (the only one of the kind which search has yet yielded) of the nomination of a nun by the bishop, because of "a pro-
fession of ladies of that house which he had lately made;" Bishop Stratford thus appointed Jouette de Stretford (perhaps a poor relative) 'en regard de charite' in 1333, a month after having appointed Alice de Hampton by reason of the Abbess' creation.

The king possessed in houses under his patronage rights of nomination corresponding to those of the Bishop. That of pre-
senting a nun on the occasion of his coronation was frequently exercised. Edward II sent ladies to Barking, Wherwell and St. Mary Winchester; Barking received nuns from Richard II, Henry IV and Henry VI and Shaftesbury from Richard II, Henry V. and

1 Reg. ... Stephani de Gravesend (C. & Y. Soc.) p.200.
2 Dugdale, Mon. II. p.473 and V.C.H. Dorset II. p.75.
5 Cal. of Close Rolls (1307-8) pp.46, 53, 134.
6 V.C.H. Essex II. p.117.
Henry VI. He also possessed the right in certain abbeys of presenting a nun on the occasion of a voidance and there are many such letters of presentation enrolled upon the Close Rolls; for instance Joan de la Roche was sent to Wilton in 1322, 2 Katherine de Arderne to Romsey in 1333, and Agnes turbervell to Shaftesbury in 1345. 3

Sometimes similar rights to these were exercised by private persons, who held the patronage of a house or to whom it was connected by special ties; the family of le Rous of Inmere, for example, had the right (resigned in 1313) of presenting two nuns, with a valet, to Romsey Abbey. But the royal rights were always the most burdensome and, though such privileges as those described above, and the even more burdensome right to demand corrodies and pensions, normally affected only great abbeys such as Barking, Romsey, St. Mary's Winchester and Shaftesbury, the smaller houses (not under royal patronage) were not always exempt from sudden demands - witness the case of Polsal below - and a wide range of nunneries was affected by archiepiscopal and episcopal rights. Moreover even the great houses, in spite of their large endowments, were crippled by the system, as may be gathered from their constant complaints of poverty and of overcrowding. The obligation to receive fresh inmates by nomination was especially burdensome when it

1 V.C.H. Dorset II. pp.76-7.
2 Cal. of Close Rolls (1318-23) p.517. She was still unadmitted in 1327, when the order was repeated. Ib. (1327-30) p.204.
3 Ib. (1333-7) p.175.
5 Deving. Op.Cit. p.99. And in the Register of Bishop Northury of Lichfield. There is a certificate (dated 1358) of 'having admitted, twenty years ago, thirty nuns at Nuneaton at the desire of the patron, the Earl of tanaro.
was incurred on more than one occasion by the same house and coincided with other exactions. The case of Shaftesbury is noticeable in this connection; the King claimed the right to administer its temporalities during voidance, to nominate a nun on his own coronation and on the election of an Abbess, to demand a pension for one of the royal clerks on the latter occasion, and to send boarders or corrodians for maintenance; and the Bishop of Salisbury could nominate a nun on his own promotion to the see and could demand a benefice for one of his clerks on the election of an abbess. It is, of course, possible that all these prerogatives were not invariably exercised and that a new inmate was not sent to Shaftesbury every time a King was crowned, a Bishop consecrated or an Abbess elected; but it was exercised sufficiently often to be a strain upon the house.

Even when the right of nomination was confined to one occasion, it seems to have been generally resented and frequently resisted. The reason for resistance lay in the fact that the house was forced to support another inmate without the hope of receiving the donation of land or rents, which medieval fathers gave to the convents, in which their daughters took the veil; and as the dowry system became more and more common, the hardship of having to receive a nun for nothing would soon appear intolerable. In some cases a sturdy resistance against this 'dumping' of nuns finds an echo in the bishops' registers. Four houses out of the six to which Peckham nominated new
inmates attempted a refusal, and the excuses which they offered are interesting. Two years after his consecration the nuns of Burnham were still refusing to receive his protégée, Matilda de Weston; they had begun by trying to question his right to nominate and he seems to have taken legal action against them, after which they pleaded poverty (resulting from an unsuccessful lawsuit) and also an obligation to receive no novice without the consent of Edmund Earl of Cornwall, son of their founder. The Archbishop directed a stern letter to them, rejecting both their excuses and announcing his intention of pursuing his right, but the end of the matter is not known. 1 An equally determined resistance was offered by the Prioress of Stratford, who had been ordered to receive Isabel Bret. In 1282 Peckham wrote to her for the third time, declaring that her excuses were frivolous; she had apparently objected that the girl was too young and that her house was too heavily burdened with nuns, lay sisters and debts for another inmate to be received, for the Archbishop declared the youth of the candidate to be rather a merit than a defect and pointed out that, so far from being a burden to their house, she would bring it honour, for by receiving her they would multiply distinguished friends and benefactors and would be able to rely on his own special protection in their affairs. 2

A further letter to the Bishop of London is interesting, because it mentions a third objection made by the recalcitrant nunnery.

2 ib. I. pp.356-7. The reference to 'distinguished friends and benefactors' is interesting, because she was the daughter of Robert Bret, 'civis London'.
"We have received your letter," writes Peckham, "in favour of the Prioress and Convent of Stratford, urgently begging us to moderate our purpose concerning a certain burden which is alleged to be threatening them from us, on account of the insupportable weight and the poverty of the house and the deformity of the person, whom we have presented to them for admission. Concerning which we would have you know that already in the lifetime of your predecessor of good memory, we had ordered them to receive that same person and for two years we continued to believe that they would yield to our wishes in the matter, yet without burden to themselves, by the provision of the parents of the said little maid; especially seeing that never yet have we been burdensome to any monastery making a truthful plea of indigence. We believe that what they allege about deformity would be an argument in favour of our proposal; would that not only these women of Stratford, concerning whom so many scandals abound, but also all who so immodestly expose themselves to human conversation and company, were or at least appeared notable for such deformity that they should tempt no one to crime. We have moreover heard that the greater part of the convent would willingly consent to the reception of the girl, were they not hindered by the malice of the prioress; nevertheless, lest we should seem deaf to your entreaties, we suspend the whole business until we come to London, to ascertain how our purpose may be carried out without notable damage to them."

The archbishop had his

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1Ib. I.pp. 366-367. The assertion that the convent was required to receive Isabel 'without burden to themselves by the provision of the parents of the said little maid' is interesting, partly because it suggests that the royal and episcopal nominees were not always received at a loss, partly because it looks suspiciously like a condonation of the dowry system by an otherwise strict disciplinarian.
way however; for eleven years later the will of Robert le Bret was enrolled in the Court of Husting and contained a legacy of rents on Cornhill 'to Isabella his daughter, a nun of Stratford'.

Peckham also wrote in a tone of strained patience to the nuns of Hedingham Castle, who had refused to receive Agnes de Beauchamp, warning them that besides incurring severe punishment at his own hands, further obstinacy would offend the Queen of England, at whose instance he had undertaken the promotion of the said Agnes. The Prioress of Catesby was equally troublesome and as late as 1284 the Archbishop wrote reprimanding her for her inconstancy and feigned excuses, because, after promising to receive the daughter of Sir Robert de Caynes and after repeated requests on his part that they should admit the girl, she and her nuns had written asking to be allowed to admit another person in her stead.

Real poverty often nerved the nuns to such bold resistance. In the Register of Bishop Grandisson of Exeter there is a letter from Polsalo Priory, written in 1329 and addressed to Queen Phillippa, on the subject of a certain Johanete de Tourbevyle, whom she had requested the nuns to receive as a lay sister. Written in the French of their daily speech, with no attempt at formal phraseology, their naif plea still rings with the agitation of the "poor and humble maids", torn between anxiety not to burden their impecunious house, and fear of being held in contempt, as quoted below.

\[1\] Sharpe. Cal. of Wills. I. p.111.
\[3\] Ib. II. p.704.
\[4\] An Agnes Turbevile was sent by the King to Shaftesbury in 1345. Cal. of Close Rolls (1343-6) p.604.
of offending the new-made Queen of England. "A leur treshold
able et trespuissante et redoute Dame, ma dame, Dame Phelipe,
par la grace de Dieu Royne Dengleterre etc, ses poveres et
humbles Auncles, Noumayns de Poleslaw, quant quelles pount de
reverences et honorons; emprisnantes vostre douce pitee que mercy
eyt de nostre graund povertee. Nostre tresnoble Dame nous avoms
reciu vos lettres, par les quelles nous entendons que vostre vol-
entee seroit que nous reciuyssons Johanete de Tourbevyle entre
nous comme Soere de la Meson, a prendre le certeme (coastome?)
dune Noumayn en seculer habite. De quel chose, tresdebeneire
Dame, pur lamour de Dieu et sa Mere, prensez pitee de nous si
vous plesst. Gar certeynment unges nule Royne tiel chose ne de-
maunda de nostre petit Meson avant hore, coment que par aventure
faire le soleyent des autres Mesons que furent foundees par les
Rois et tients en chiefe deux; mes ceo ne fesoms nous mie;
dount il nous poise. Et, sil plescit a vostre deboneire Hautes-
ce de savoir de nostre simple estat, nous sumes si poveres,
Diu le siet et tot le pois, que quant que nous avoms ne suffist
mie a petite sustanaunce de nous, que devoms faire, de jour et
de nut, le service Dieu, si par eide des amys noun, ne ni puis-
soms estre chargees de Seculieres saundz abregier le nombre
des nous Religiose, en emenusement du Serve Dieu et preju-
dice perpetuel de nostre powere Mesoun. E nous esperoms ferme-
ment en Dieu et en vostre graund bonte que ja a mal ne prenrez
si tiel chose ne se face en peril de noz almes; gar de entreir
et a comenceir tiel novele charge en si petit lui, que dureyt
et seroit apres demande tous jours, mes seroit trop grant peril de vostre alme, ma dame, vers Dieu, deyt Dieu vous defend pur Sa grace! Nostre tres benette Dame, Dieu vous doynt bone vie et longe a pleasance de ly et aide et alegement de nous et autres poures serijantes de Dieu en terre; et mout avereyoms grand joie de faire voz commaundemenz, si Dieu nous otreast le poer."

The nuns evidently asked the support of the Bishop (which accounts for the presence of their letter in his Register) for about the same time Grandiason also wrote an informal letter in French to the King, begging him to give up his design to place his cousin Johanete de Tourbeyle at Polso, on the ground that the nuns held all that they possessed in frank almoign and were so poor that it would be unpardonable to entail upon them a charge, which would become a precedent for ever.

'E pur ceo, cher Sire' he continued 'Si vous pleste, nous eiez excuse de ceste chose et otez vous meymes de cele pensee. Et pur l'amour de vous, a qi nous sumes mout avaunt tenuz, et pur monstreir qi vous ne nous femyons mie, ordinez, si vous plest, par ailours de son estat, et nous ymettrons mout volontiers privenment du nostre bien resonablement; qar ceo poums nous sauvement faire.'

It is not impossible that the disinclination of the nunneries to receive royal and episcopal nominees was in part due

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2Ib. I. pp.222-3. Does the Bishop mean that he will help to provide a dowry for Johanete out of his private purse, in another religious house?
to dislike of taking an entirely unknown person into the close life of the community, in which so much depended upon the character and disposition of the individual. The right seems nearly always to have been exercised in favour of well-born girls, but though the bishops endeavoured to send only suitable novices, their knowledge of the character of their protégés would sometimes appear to have rested upon hearsay rather than upon personal acquaintance - 'ut credimus', 'come nous suumz enforme'. On at least one occasion the nuns who resisted a bishop's nominee were to our knowledge justified by later events. In 1329 Ralph of Shrewsbury, the new Bishop of Bath and Wells, wrote to the Prioress and Convent of Canyngeton, desiring them to receive Alice, daughter of John de Northlode, to whom he had granted the right 'par rescun de nostre premiere creacion', on the request of Sir John Mautravers; four years later he was obliged to repeat the order, because the convent 'had not yet been willing to receive the said Alice.' The end of the story is to be found in the visitation report of 1361, when 'it was discovered that a certain Matilda Pulham and Alice Northlode, nuns of the said monastery, discoursed with suspected persons and admitted them and on dark nights the said nuns held long and suspicious conversation with Richard Sopmnour and Hugh Willynge, chaplains, in the nave of the church of the said monastery and, as many suspect, thence fell into worse sins; ..... we ordain that the said Matilda shall take the last place and the said Alice last but one in the choir, whenever the
daily office is celebrated there, and in the frater during meals and that they shall not go outside the cloister precincts for a year. There were other and worse scandals discovered at the visitation and it is impossible to say whether the convent corrupted Alice or Alice the convent; but it is unfortunate that the Bishop’s nominee should have been implicated.

The obligation to receive a nun on the nomination of the king or the bishop was not the only burden upon the finances of the nunneries. Abbeys in the patronage of the Crown were upon occasion obliged also to find maintenance for other persons, men as well as women, who never became members of their community. The right to demand a pension for one of the royal clerks was sometimes exercised on the occasion of a voidance, and the money had in most cases to be paid until such time as the young man was provided with a suitable benefice by the Abbey. The Abbess of Romsey was ordered to give a pension to William de Dersham in 1315 by reason of her new election; John de St. Paul was sent to the same house in 1333, Willain de Tydeswell in 1349. The right is also found in exercise at Wherwell, St. Mary Winchester, Shaftesbury, Wilton, Delapré (Northampton), Barking and Elstow. In certain cases the Bishop possessed
a similar right on the occasion of his own consecration; for instance John of Pontoise Bishop of Winchester wrote to the Abbess of St. Mary Winchester in 1268, complaining "that whereas his predecessors, by a laudable custom, presented their own clerks to the first benefice in the patronage of a religious house vacant after their establishment in the bishopric, they (the nuns) had recently presented a nominee of their own to a benefice then vacant." Two years later the Abbess and convent of Wherwell wrote to him, voluntarily offering him the next vacant benefice in their patronage for one of his clerks; and in 1293 he reminded the nuns of Romsey that they were bound by agreement to do likewise.¹ Similarly Simon of Ghent, Bishop of Salisbury directed the Abbess of Shaftesbury to provide for Humphrey Wace in 1297.² The demand to pension a clerk, like the demand to receive a nun, was sometimes resisted by the convents. In the early part of his reign Edward II ordered the sheriff of Bedford "to distrain the Abbess of Elstow by all her lands and chattels in his bailiwick and to answer to the King for the issues and to have her body before the King at the Octaves of Hilary next, to answer why, whereas she and her convent, by reason of the new creation of an Abbess, were bound to give a pension to a clerk, to be named by the King and he had transferred the option to his sister Elizabeth Countess of Hereford and had asked the Abbess to give it to her nominee.

they had neglected to do so."

The end of the story is contained in a petition printed in the Rolls of Parliament, where-in the Abbess and Convent of "Dunestowe" (Elstow) informed the King in 1320 "que come il les demaunde par son Brief devant Sire H. le Scrop et ses compagnons une expensione pur un de ses clercs par reson de la novelle Creacion la dite Abbesse et tiel expensione unqs devant ces temps ne fust demaunde ne donee de la dite meson, fors tant seulement que la dereyn predeces­sere dona a la requeste nostre Seigneur le Roy a la Dameye sele la Countesse de Hereford, un expension de c s. Par qi eles prient que nostre Seigneur le Roy voet, si lui plest, comander de soursere de execucion faire de la dite demandes, que la dite Abbay est foundee de Judit, jadis Countess de Huntingdon, et la dite expension unques autrement done." The reference to the Countess of Hereford's 'dameysel' shows that the pension was not invariably given to a clerk and it appears that the King tried to substitute corrodies, pensions and reception as a nun for each other according to the exigencies of the moment. In 1318 he sent Simon de Tyrelton to the Abbess and Convent of Barking, 'they being bound to grant a pension to one of the King's clerks, by reason of the new creation of an abbess, and the King having requested them to grant in lieu of such pension the allowance of one of their nuns to Ellen, daughter of Alice de Leygrave, to be received by her for life, to which they replied that they could not do so, for certain

2 Rot. Parl. I. p.381. John de Houton, clerk, had been sent to Elstow in 1318. (Cal. of Close Rolls (1318-23) p.119)
reasons."¹ In 1313, in pursuance of his right to nominate a nun on the new creation of an abbess, he had sent Juliana de Leygrave "niece of the King's foster mother, who suckled him in his youth", to St. Mary Winchester, in order that she might be given a nun's corrody for life (the value of which was to be given her wherever she might be) and a suitable chamber within the nunnery for her residence, whenever she might wish to stay there.²

The obligation to provide corrody for royal nominees pressed more heavily than the duty of pensioning royal clerks. A corrody was originally a livery of food and drink given to monks and nuns in addition to their usual daily portion; but the term was extended to denote a daily livery of food given to some person not of the community and frequently accompanied by suitable clothing and a room in which to live. Hence corrodiens were often completely kept in board and lodging, having the right to everything that a nun of the house would have (a nun's corrody') and sometimes allowed to keep a private servant, who had the right to the same provision as the regular domestics of the house (a 'servant's corrody'). The King, indeed, looked upon the monastic houses of his realm as a sort of vast Chelsea Hospital, in which his broken-down servants, yeomen and officials and men-at-arms, might end their days. Thus he obtained their grateful prayers without putting his hand into his purse. There must have been hundreds of such

¹Cal. of Close Rolls (1313-18) p.611.  
old pensioners scattered up and down the country, and judging from the number of cases in which one man is sent to receive the maintenance lately given to another, deceased, some houses had at least one of them permanently on the premises. Many a hoary veteran found his way into the quiet precincts of a nunnery.

His helmet now shall make a hive for bees;
   And, lovers' sonnets turn'd to holy psalms,
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
   And feed on prayers, which are Age his alms.

In the intervals between feeding on prayers he must have been vastly disturbing and enthralling to the minds of round-eyed novices, with his tales of court and camp, of life in London town or long campaigns in France, or of how John Copeland had the King of Scots prisoner and what profit he got thereby. He must have known songs, too, other than holy psalms, merry trolls of the alehouse -

Tapster, fille another ale.
   Anonne have I do.
God sende us good sale.
   Avale the stake, avale.
Here is good ale ifounde.
   Drinke to me
And I to thee,
   And lette the cuppe go rounde,

or lovers' sonnets remembered from his adventurous youth,

Above all other praise must I
   And love my pretty piggesne,
For none I find so womanly
   As my sweet sweeting.

In the last three months of 1316 Edward II sent seventeen old servants to various religious houses and among them Henry
de Oldyngton of the Avenary was sent to Barking, to receive such maintenance as William de Chygwell, deceased, had in that house. In 1328 Roger atte Bedde, the King's yeoman, who served the King and his father, was sent to St. Mary Winchester, instead of James le Porter, deceased; and in 1329 the Abbess and Convent of Shaftesbury were requested to admit to their house Richard Knight, spigurnel of the King's chancery, who had long served the King and his father in that office, and to administer to him for his life such maintenance in all things as Robert le Poleter, deceased, had in their house.

The unlucky convent of Wilton apparently had to support two pensioners, for in 1328 Roger Liseway was sent there in place of Roger Danne and the next year John de Odiham, yeoman of the chamber of Queen Philippa, took the place of John de Asshe.

It was doubtless even more common for the widows of the King's dependents to be sent to nunneries, and he must often have received such a petition as was addressed by Agney de Vylers to Edward III: "A nostre Seigneur le Roi et a son Conseil, prie vostre pourve Agney, qi fut la femme Fraunceys de Vylers, jaditz Bachiler vostre pierre, qe vous pleise de vostre grace avoir regard du graunt service qe le dit Fraunceys ad fait a vostre dit pierre et od vostre ayel, en la Terre Seinte, Gascoigne, Gales, Escocie, Flaundres et en Engleterre,"

1 Cal. of Close Rolls (1313-18) P.437. The avenere was an officer of the household who had the charge of supplying provisions for the horses. See Promptorium Parvulorum (Camden Soc.) I, p.19, n. 2.
2 Cal. of Close Rolls (1327-30) p.393.
3 Ib. p.523.
4 Cal. of Close Rolls (1327-30) pp.396,534.
et graunter au dit Agneys une garisoun en l'Abbeys de Berkyng,
c'est assaver une mesoun & la droite de une Nonyme pour la
sustiance de lui et de sa file a terme de leur vie, en alle-
gaunce de l'alme vostre dit pire, qi promist al dit Fraunceys
eide pour lui, sa femme et ses enfauz." "Il semble a conseil
q'il est almoigne de lui mander la ou aillours, s'il plest a
Roi," was the reply; so Agnes and her daughter might end their
days in peace, and Barking be the poorer for their appetites. 1
At Barking the king had the right to claim a corrody at each
new election of an abbess, as Agnes de Vylers doubtless knew;
as early as 1253 its Abbess was exempted from being charged with
converts and others, because she had granted food and vesture
for life to Philippa de Rading and her daughter. Other nun-
neries in the royal patronage were under a similar obligation.
In 1310 Juliana la Despenser was sent to Romsey, to be provided
with fitting maintenance for herself and for her maid during
her lifetime 3 and in 1319 Mary Ridell was sent to Stainfield to
be maintained for life. 4 There were the usual attempts to es-
cape from a costly and burdensome obligation; Romsey seems to
have been successful in repelling Juliana la Despenser, for in
the following month the King sent her to Shaftesbury, request-
ing the nuns to "find her for life the necessities of life ac-
cording to the requirements of her estate, for herself and for
the damsel serving her, and to assign her a chamber to dwell in,

1Rot.Parl. II. pp.381-2. Letters patent were duly sent to
Barking bidding them admit Agnes, on Nov. 6th. 1331. Cal. of
Pat. Rolls (1330-3) p.407.
2V.C.H. Essex II. p.117.
3Cal. of Close Rolls (1307-13) p.267.
making letters patent of the grant.\(^1\) Stainfield was less successful in the matter of Mary Ridel; the usual plea of poverty was considered insufficient and the convent was ordered to receive her, to supply her with food, clothing and other necessities and to make letters patent, specifying what was due to her.\(^2\)

Certain convents were in addition handicapped by the obligation to make certain grants or liveries, in kind or in money, to other monastic houses. The nunneries of St. Clement York and Moxby seem to have involved themselves - how is not apparent - in a curious obligation to the friars of their districts. At a visitation of the former house in 1317, Archbishop Melton found that the Friars Minor of York, every alternate week of the year, and the Friars Preachers of York in the same manner, had for a long time been receiving fourteen conventual loaves; the nuns were ordered to show the friars the Archbishop's order and to cease from supplying the loaves as long as their own house was burdened with debt; and in no case was the grant to be made without special leave from the Archbishop.\(^3\)

The next year, on visiting Moxby, Melton was obliged to make an injunction as to the bread and ale called "levedemets", which the Friars Minor were accustomed to receive from the house; if it were owed to them it was to be given as due, if not it was not to be given without the will of the head.\(^4\) At Alnwick's

\(^1\) Op. Cit. (1307-13) p.328. She was the niece of John de London, late the King's escheator this side Trent.
\(^2\) Loc. Cit.
\(^3\) V.C.H. Yorks III. p.129.
\(^4\) Ib. p.237.
first visitation in 1440 the Prioress of St. Michael Stamford declared that the house was burdened with the payment of an annual pension of 60s. to the monastery of St. Mary York "and that for tithes not worth more than forty pence annually; also it is in arrears for twenty years an more." 1 The nuns also had to pay various small sums to Peterborough Abbey, by which they had been founded and to which they always remained subordinated. 2

The support of resident corrodians and the payment of pensions and liveries were, however, less onerous than the duty of providing hospitality for visitors, which the nunneries performed as one of their religious obligations. Date and Dabitur did not always accompany each other. The great folk who held the Pope's indult to enter the houses of Minories were probably generous donors; but the unenclosed orders had to lodge and feed less wealthy guests and often enough they found the obligation a strain upon their finances. When the nuns of King's Mead Derby in 1327 petitioned the King to take the house into his special protection, they explained that great numbers of people came there to be entertained, but that

1 Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick. f.83. The taxation of Pope Nicholas mentions a pension due to the Abbot of York of £3 for the church of Corby, which was appropriated to the nuns, and for other tithes elsewhere. The sum of £3 is occasionally mentioned in the account rolls of St. Michael Stamford as having been paid to 'Our Lady of York', or as being still due. What the special payment of 6 s. to which the nuns objected was, does not seem clear.
2 Dugdale. Mon. IV. pp.256 ff. Payments to the abbot and to other officiaries of Peterborough also occur very frequently in the conventual accounts.
owing to the reduction in their revenue they were unable to exercise their wonted hospitality; and the number of guests was mentioned by the nuns of Heynings in 1401 as one reason for their impoverishment. At Nunappleton in 1315 the Archbishop of York had to forbid two sets of guests to be received at the same time, until the house should be relieved of debt; and at Moxby (which was also in debt) he ordained that relatives of the nuns were not to visit the house for a longer period than two days; Nunappleton was evidently a favourite resort, for in 1346 another archbishop speaks of guests flocking - hospites confluences - to the priory and orders them to be admitted to a hostelry constructed for the purpose. At Marrick in 1252 it was ordered that guests were not to stay for more than one night, because the means of the house barely sufficed for the maintenance of the nuns, sisters and brethren.

Another charge which fell heavily upon the nunneries, sometimes not entirely by their own fault, was that of litigation.

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1 See above page 90. Compare the case of St. Mary Winchester where the nuns complained in 1468 that they were so burdened, that they could not fulfill the obligations of their order as to hospitality. V.C.H. Hants II. pp.123-4. The difficulty of keeping up the accustomed hospitality was one of the reasons for annexing Wotherope to St. Michael's Stamford, after the Black Death. Dugdale. Mon. IV. p.268.


3 V.C.H. Yorks III. pp.117, 171, 172, 232. On the subject of abuse of monastic hospitality see Lusserand. English Wayfaring Life. p.121. Edward I forbade anyone to eat or lodge in a religious house, unless the superior had invited him or that he were its founder and even then his consumption was to be moderate.
This was only an occasional expense, but when it occurred it was heavy and a suit once begun might drag on for years. Moreover the incidental expenses in journeys and bribes, which all had to be paid out of the current income of a house already (perhaps) charged with the payment of tithes and taxes and badly in need of repair, were often almost as heavy as the costs of the litigation. For instance an account of Christian Basset, Prioress of St. Mary de Prè (near St. Albans), contains the following list of expenses incurred by her in the prosecution of a law suit in 1487, during the rule of her predecessor Alice Wafer: "Item when I ryde to London for the suyt that was taken ayenst dame Alice Wafer in the commen place, for myself and my preest and a woman and ij men, their hyre and hors hyre and mete and drynke, in the terme of Ester ye secunde yere of the regne of kyng Henry the viij th xx.s. Item paid aboute the same suyt at Mydsomer tyme, for iiiij men, a woman and iiij horses xvi s. Item paid for the costs of a man to London at Mighelmas terme to Master Lathell, to have knowledge whethir I shuld have nede to come to London or not xij d. Item for the same suyt of Dame Alice Wafer for herself and a suster wt.

\[1\]Pope Boniface VIII's edict for the stricter enclosure of nuns contained a clause warning secular lords against summoning nuns to attend in person at the law courts; they were to act through their proctors (see version promulgated by Simon of Ghent, Bishop of Hereford in 1299. Reg. Simonis de Gandavo. [C. & Y. Soc.] P. 11). The heads of the larger houses often did act through proctors, but less wealthy convents usually sent the head or one of the other nuns in person. See Eckenstein. Women under Monasticism. pp.362-3.
her, ij men, ij horses, in costs at the same time xiiij s.
Item for the same suyt when I cam from London to have counsell of Master More and men of lawe for the same ple x s. Item when I went to Master Fforster to the Welde to speke wt. him, to have counsell for the wele of the place, for a kercher geven to hym, ij s. Item on other tyme for a couple of capons geven to Master Fforster ij s. Item for a man rydyng to London at Candilmas to speke wt. Master Lathell and Master More and for iiiij hennys geven to them and for the costs of the same man and his hors iiij s. iiiij d. Item when I went to London to speke wt. Master Lathell for to renewe our chartor of the place and other maters of our place xij s. Item in expenses made upon Master Pfortescue atte dyvers tymes, when I wente to hym to have his counsell for the same suyt in the common place xiiij s. iiiij d. Item paid to a man to ryde to Hertford to speke wt. Norys, that he shuld speke to Master Pfortescue for the same ple viij d. Item in costs for a man to go to Barkhamsted to Thomas Cace viij d. Item when I went to Master Pfortescue to his place, for mens hire and hors hire for the same mater iiij s. Item when I went to London at an other tyme for the same ple, for iiij men and iiij hors hire xvij s." After this one does not wonder that in 1517 the convent of Goring pleaded that owing to lawsuits, it was too poor to repair its buildings. 

1 Dugdale. Mon. III. p.360.
2 V.C.H. Oxon. II. p.104.
Priory of St. Michael's Stamford are full of references to expenses incurred in legal business. On one occasion the nuns bought a "bill" in the Marshalsea "to have a day of accord" and the roll for 1375-6 contains items such as, "Paid for a purse to the wife of the Seneschal of the marshalsea xx d. Paid for beer bought for the Marshalsea by the Prioress ij s. ijd. Paid for capons and chickens for the seneschal of the Marshalsea xxij d. ob." Poor Dames Margaret Redynges and Joan Fychemere 'del office del tresorie', ending the year £16.8.6½ in debt; they must often have sighed with Longland Lawe is so lordeliche, and loth to make ende, Withoute presentz or pens. she pleseth wel fewe. Nor was it only the expenses of great lawsuits which bore heavily upon the nunneries; a great deal of lesser legal business had to be transacted from year to year. The treasurers' accounts of St. Michael Stamford contain many notices of such business; the expenses of Raulyn at the sessions, expenses of the clerks at the Bishop's court or at the last session at Stamford, a suit against a neighbouring

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parson over tithes, four shillings to Henry Oundyl for suing out writ; and innumerable entries concerning the inevitable 'presentz and pens', a duceur to the Bishop's clerk, a courtesy to the king's escheator, a present to the clerks at the sessions, a gift 'to divers men of law for their help on divers occasions.' All nunneries had constantly to meet such petty expenses as these; and if we add an occasional suit on a larger scale the total amount of money devoured by the Law is considerable.

So far mention has been made only of such reasons for their poverty as cannot be considered the fault of the nuns. The inclemency of nature, the rapacity of lay and ecclesiastical authorities and the law's delays could not be escaped, however wisely a prioress husbanded her resources. Nevertheless it cannot be doubted that the nuns themselves by bad management, contributed largely to their own misfortunes. Bad administration, sometimes wilful, but far more often due to sheer incompetence, was constantly given as a reason for undue poverty. It was 'negligence and bad administration' which nearly caused the dispersion of the nuns of Wintney during the famine year of 1316; and

\[1\] V. C. H. Hants. II. p.150.
those of Hampole in 1353. At Daventry in 1511 one of the nuns deposed that 'the rents and revenues of the house decrease owing to the guilt of the officers. The fault was often with the head of the house, who loved to keep in her own hands the disposal of the convent's income, omitted to consult the chapter in her negotiations, retained the common seal and did not render accounts. An illustration of the straits to which a house might be reduced by the bad management of its superior is provided by the history of Malling Abbey in the early part of the fourteenth century, as told by William de Dene in his 'Historia Roffensis'. In 1321 an abbess had been deposed, ostensibly on the complaint of her nuns and because the place had been ruined by her; but too much importance must not be assigned to the charge, for she was a sister of Bartholomew de Badlesmere, at that time a leader of the baronial party against Edward II, and it was by the king's command that Hamo of Hythe, Bishop of Rochester, visited Malling and deprived her; her deposition was obviously a political move. The same cannot however be said of Lora de Retlyng, who became abbess in 1324. "The Bishop" says William de Dene, "although unwilling, knowing her to be insufficient and ignorant, set Lora de Retlyng in command as abbess, a woman who lacked all the capacity and wisdom of a leader and ruler, the nuns enthusiastically applauding; and the next day he blessed her, which benediction was rather a

1 Y.C.R. Yorks III. p.164.
2 E.H.R. VI p.28.
malediction for the convent. Then the Bishop forbade the Abbess to give a corroyd to her maid servant, as it had been the ill custom to do and he sequestrated the common seal, forbidding it to be used, save when his licence had been asked and obtained." Twenty five years passed and in 1349 the chronicler writes: "The Bishop of Rochester visited the abbeys of Lesnes and Malling, and he found them so ruined by longstanding mismanagement, that it is thought they never can recover so long as this world lasts, even to the day of judgment." Malling had suffered severely from the Black Death in the previous year, but our knowledge of the character of Lora de Retlyng and the plain statement of William de Dene (destructa per malam diutinam custodiam), make it clear that bad management and not the pestilence was to blame for its poverty.

Financial mismanagement was, indeed, the most frequent of all charges brought against superiors at the episcopal visitations. When Alnwick visited his diocese of Lincoln several cases of such incompetence came to light. At St. Michael Stamford (1440) it was found that the Prioress had never rendered an account during the whole of her term of office and one of the nuns declared that she did not rule and supervise temporal affairs to the benefit of the house; two years later the Bishop visited the convent again and the Prioress herself pleaded bodily weakness, adding 'that since

1Ib. I. p. 364.
3Gasquet, however, mistakenly attributes its state entirely to the plague. The Great Pestilence. p. 106.
she was impotent to rule the temporalities, nor had they any industrious man to supervise these and to raise and receive the produce of the house and since the rents of the house remained unpaid in the hands of the tenants, she begged that two nuns might be deputed to rule the temporalities, and to be responsible for receipts and payments.' In 1445, however, one of the appointed treasurers, Alice de Wyteryng admitted that she neither wrote down nor accounted for anything concerning her administration and another nun complained that if Wyteryng were to die, it would be impossible for any of them to say in what state their finances stood. ¹ At the poor and heavily indebted house of Lergborne (1440) the Prioress, unknown to the Bishop, but with the consent of the convent, had sold a corrodye to the bailiff of the house, Robert Warde, who was nevertheless not considered useful to the house in this post; the tenements and leasehold houses belonging to the house were ruinous and like to fall through the carelessness of the Prioress and bailiff, and one aggrieved nun stated that 'the prioress is not circumspect in ruling the temporalities and cares not whether they prosper, but applies all the common goods of the house to her own uses, as though they were her own.' At Godstow also it was complained that the Seneschal had an annual fee of ten marks from the house and was useless. ² At Heynings (1440) the Prioress was charged with never rendering accounts and with cutting down timber unnecessarily, but she

¹Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Alnwick ff. 39d. 93. 96. ²Oxf. Ctd. ff. 69(66) and 68a (66d.). ³Th. f. 28d.
denied the last charge and said she had only done so for necessary reasons and with the express consent of the convent. At Nuncotton corrodies had been sold and bondmen alienated without the knowledge of the nuns. At Harrold it was found that no accounts were rendered, that a corody had been sold for twenty marks, and that when the Prioress bought anything for the convent, no tallies or indentures were made between the contracting parties, so that after a time the sellers came and demanded double the price agreed upon; one nun also asked that the Bishop should prevent the selling or alienation of woods. At Langley (which was miserably poor) there was a similar complaint of the sale of timber. These are the less serious cases of financial mismanagement; the cases of Gracedieu, Ankerwyke and Catesby have already been considered. Sometimes the extravagance or incompetence of a Prioress became so notorious as to necessitate her suspension or removal; as at Basedale in 1307, Rosedale in 1310, Hampole in 1353, Basebourne in 1441 and St. Mary de Pré at the end of the fifteenth century. But more frequently the bishops endeavoured to stem in expenditure by elaborate safeguards, which will be described below.

1 V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 159.
2 Ib. p. 22.
3 Ib. p. 72 (70)
5 Ib. p. 163.
6 V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 159.
7 Ib. p. 174.
9 Sussex Archæol. Coll. IX. p. 7.
Besides cases of incompetence and cases of misappropriation of revenues by an unscrupulous prioress, the mismanagement of the nuns may usually be traced to a desperate desire to obtain ready money. One means by which they sought to augment their income was by the sale of corrodiodes in return for a lump sum.¹

¹ It must be understood that the judicious sale of corrodiodes was not necessarily harmful to a house. Sometimes it might lead to the acquisition of land or rents at comparatively little expense to the convent, as a glance at some of the charters in the English Register of Godstow Abbey will show. (see Eng. Reg. of Godstow Abbey (E.E.T.S.) pp.xxvii-xxviii) The convent probably drove a good bargain when in 1230 the harassed Stephen, son of Waryn, the miller of Oxford, conveyed all his Oxford property to Godstow "and for this graunte, & cetera, the for-said mynchons yaf to them to ther gret rede, that is to sey, to aquyte hym of the lewry and otherwise where he was endited, X markes of silver in warison. And furthermore they graunted to hym and to hys wyf molde, with ther servaunt to serve them while they lived, two corrodiodes of ij mynchons and a corrodye of one servaunt to ther susteynynge." (Op. Cit. p.362.) Nor was there much harm in grants for a term of years, such as the grant of board and lodging made by the convent of Nunappleton in 1301 to Richard de Fauconberg, in return for certain lands bringing in an annual rent of two marks of silver, both the corrody and the tenure of these lands being for a term of twelve years. (Dugdale, Mon. V. p.652.) Sometimes, again, corrodiodes were granted in return for specified services; in 1270 Richard Grene of Cassington surrendered 5½ acres of arable and 2 roods of meadow land to Godstow in return for "the servyce under the porter for ever at the yate of Godesstowe and j half mark in name of his wegis yerely." (Op. Cit. p.305) At Yedingham in 1352 an interesting grant of a corrodiode moniale was made to one Emma Hert, who in return for a sum of money was given the position of deye or dairy woman; she was to have the same food-alloance as a nun and a share in all their small pittances, and a building called 'le cheeshouse' with a solar and cellar to inhabit and was allowed to keep ten sheep and ten ewes at the convent's charge. In return she was to do the dairywork and when too old to work any longer the convent engaged to grant her a place in 'le sisterhouse'. V.C.H. Yorks III p.128. Sometimes also corrodiodes were granted by way of pensioning off old servants, as when in 1529 the nuns of Arden granted one to their chaplain 'for the gud and diligent service yt oure wellbe loued sir Thomas parkynson, prest, hav done to vs in tyme paste.' (V.C.H. Yorks III p.118) To corrodiodes such as these there was little objection (though the last might lead to financial loss). The danger came from life-grants in return for an inadequate sum of ready money.
A man (or woman) would pay down a certain sum of money, and in return the convent would engage to keep him in board and lodging for the rest of his natural life; at Arden for instance, in 1524, Alice Widow of William Berre paid twelve pounds and was granted "mett and drynke as their convent hath" at their common table, or when sick in her own room, and "on honest chamber with sufficient fyer att all tyme, with sufficient apparell as shalbe nedful." Obviously, however, such an arrangement could only be profitable to the nuns, if the grantee died before the original sum had been expended in boarding her. The convent, in fact, acted as a kind of insurance agency and the whole arrangement was simply a gamble in the life of the corrodian. The temptation to extricate themselves from present difficulties by means of such gambles, was one which the nuns could never resist. They would lightly make their grant of board and lodging for life and take the badly needed money; but it would be swallowed up only too soon by their creditors and often vanish like fairy gold in a year. Not so the corrodian. Long-lived as Methusaleh and lusty of appetite she appeared year after year at their common table, year after year consumed their food, wore their apparel, warmed herself with their firewood. Alice Berre was still hale and hearty after twelve years, when the commissioners came to Arden and would doubtless have lasted for several more to come if his Majesty's quarrel with Rome had not swept her and her harrassed hostesses alike.


\(^1\) V.C.H. Yorks III. p.115.
out of their ancient home; but she must long before have eaten through her original twelve pounds. 1 There is an amusing complaint in the register of Crabhouse; early in the fourteenth century Aleyn Brid and his wife persuaded the nuns to buy their lands for a sum down and a corrodye for their joint and separate lands. But the lands turned out barren and the corrodians went on living and doubtless chuckling over their bargain, and "sicher terre de cy petit value unkes ne fut achate" wrote the exasperated chronicler of the house. 2 Bishop Alnwick found two striking instances of a bad gamble during his visitations in 1440-1; at Langley the late prioress had sold a corrodye to a certain John Fraunceys and his wife for the paltry sum of twenty marks, and they had already held it for six years; 3 worse still, at Nuncotton there were two corrodians, each of whom had originally paid twenty marks, and they had been there for twelve and for twenty years respectively. 4 In the face of cases like these it is difficult not to suspect that unscrupulous persons took advantage of the temporary difficulties of the nuns and of their lack of business acumen. There is comedy, though not for the unhappy convent, in the history of a corrodye which, in 1526, was said to have been granted by Thetford to 'a certain Foster'. Six years later there was a great to-do at the visitation. The nuns declared that John Bixley of Thetford, "bocher", had sold his corrodye in the house to Thomas Foster, gentleman, who was nourishing a

1 She received 6s.4d. in part payment for the commutation of the corrodye.
2 Jessopp, Frivola, pp.55-6.
4 ib. f.71d (52d)
large household on that pretext, to wit six persons, himself, his wife, three children and a maid; but Bixley said that he had never sold his corrodry and there in public displayed his indenture. What happened we do not know; Thomas Foster, gentleman, must be the same man who had a corrodry in 1526 and how John Bixley came into it is not clear. It looks as though the convent (which was so poor that the Bishop had dissolved his visitation there some years previously) was trying by fair means or foul to get rid of Thomas Foster and his family; doubtless they had not bargained for a wife, three children and a maid when they rashly granted him one poor corrodry. It is easy to understand why medieval bishops, at nearly every visitation, forbade the granting of fees, corrodies or pensions for life or without episcopal consent; "for asmoche as the granting of corrodyes and lyveryes hath bene chargious, bardynouse and greucuse unto your monastery" wrote Longland to Studley in 1531, "As it apperithe by the graunte made to Mosse, Janet bynbrok, Elizabeth todde and other whiche has right score hyndrede your place, In consideracon therof I charge you lady priores upon payne of conteempe and of the lawe, that ye give noo moo like graunts, and that ye joutt (? putt) away Elizabeth Todde her servant .... and that Elizabeth Todde haue noo kowe going nor other bestes within eny of your grounds;" and Dean Kentwood, visiting St. Helen Bishopsgate in 1432 found that "diverce fees perpetuelle, corrodies and

2Archaeologia XLVII p.58.
lyuers have been grauntyd befor this tyme to divorce officers of your house and other persones, which have hurt the house and be cause of delapidacyone of the godys of youre seyde house.

Even the nuns themselves sometimes realised that the sale of corrodies had brought them no good; they often complained at visitations that the prioress had made such grants without consulting them; and the convent of Heynings gave "the multiplication of divers men who have acquired corrodies in their house" as one reason for their extreme poverty, when they petitioned for the appropriation of the church of Wilmersleye. ²

The nuns were wont to have recourse to other equally improvident expedients for obtaining money without regard to future embarrassment. They farmed their churches and alienated their lands and granges or let them out on long leases and these practices were constantly forbidden in episcopal injunctions; ³ at the visitation of Easebourne in 1524 the Prioress Dame Margaret Sackfelde, being questioned, as to what grants they had made under their convent seal, said that they had made four, to wit, one to William Salter to farm the rectory there, another of the proceeds of the chapel of Farnherst, another of the proceeds of the chapel of Mydherst and another to William

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¹ Dugdale, Mon. IV. p. 554. He had once before ordered the holders of corrodies there to display their grants, that it might be known whether they had fulfilled the services due from them. V.C.H. London I. p. 452.
³ See below pp. 165 ff.
Toty for his corrod; this was corroborated by the Sub-prioress, who also mentioned a grant of the proceeds of the church of Basbourne to a rather disreputable person called Ralph Pratt; and this is only a typical case. 1 The nunnery of Wix was reduced to such penury in 1285 on account of various alienations that Pope Martin IV granted the nuns a bull declaring all such grants void: "It has come to our ears that our beloved daughters in Christ, the Prioress and convent of the monastery of Wix (who are under the rule of a prioress), of the order of St. Benedict, in the diocese of London, as well as their predecessors, have conceded tithes, rents, lands, houses, vineyards, meadows, pastures, woods, mills, rights, jurisdictions and certain other goods belonging to the said monastery to several clerks and laymen, to some of them for life, to some for no short time, to others in perpetuity, at farm or under an annual payment, and have to this effect given letters, taken oaths, made renunciations, and drawn up public instruments, to the grave harm of the said monastery; and some of the grantees are said to have sought confirmatory letters in common form, concerning these grants, from the apostolic see." 2 This comprehensive catalogue gives some indication of the losses which a house would suffer from reckless grants. The sale of timber and the alienation or pawning of plate were other expedients to which the nuns constantly resorted and which were as constantly prohibited by the bishops. 3 The Prioress of Nunmonkton in 1397

1 Sussex Archaeol. Coll. IX p.25.
2 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p.516.
3 See below pp165ff.
"alienated timber in large quantities to the value of a hundred marks"; the cutting down of woods was charged against the Prioresses of Heynings, Harrold, Langley, Gracedieu, Catesby and Ankerwyke at Alnwick's visitations; at Langley it was moreover found that the wood was not properly covered in after it was felled and so perished in storms; the necessity for raising the money was sometimes specifically pleaded, as at Markyate, where a small wood had been sold "to satisfy the creditors of the house." These sales of timber were a favourite means of obtaining ready money; but too often the loss to the house by the destruction of its woods far outweighed the temporary gain and the Abbeys of St. Mary Winchester and Romsey made special mention of this cause of impoverishment in the middle of the fourteenth century. The alienation or pawning of plate and jewels was often resorted to in an extremity. At Gracedieu in 1441 the jewels of the house had been pawned without the knowledge of the convent, so that the nuns (as one of them complained) had not one bowl from which to drink; the next year it was asserted that the Prioress of Catesby "pawned the jewels of the house for ten years, to wit one cup for the sacrament, which still remained in pawn, and also other pieces of silver." When Bishop Longland visited Nuncotton in 1531 he found that the Prioress had in times past

sold various goods belonging to her house, "viz. a bolle ungiltte playn with a couer, oon nutt gilte with a couer, ij bolles white without couers, oon Agnus of gold, oon bocle of gold, oon chalice, oon maser and many other things;" and in 1436 it was ordered that the chalices, jewels and ornaments of St. Mary Neasham, which were then in the hands of sundry creditors were to be redeemed. In the case of Sinningthwaite in 1534 the convent was in such a reduced state that Archbishop Lee was actually obliged to give the nuns licence to pledge jewels to the value of £15. The charge of pawning or selling jewels for their own purposes was often made against prioresses whose conduct in other ways was bad; for instance against Eleanor of Arden in 1396, Juliana of Bromhale in 1404, Agnes Tauke of Easebourne in 1478 and Katherine Wells of Littlemore in 1517.

To financial incompetence and to the employment of improvident methods of raising money, the nuns occasionally added extravagance. The Bishops forbade them to wear gay clothes for reasons unconnected with finance; nevertheless their silks and furs must have cost money which could ill be spared, and it is amusing to notice that even at Studley, Rothwell and Langley, which were among the smallest and poorest houses in

1 Archaeologia XLVII pp. 58-9.
3 V.C.H. Yorks III p. 177.
5 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 506. note b
7 V.C.H. Oxon II. p. 76.
the diocese of Lincoln and in debt, the nuns had to confess
to silken veils. 1 The maintenance of a greater number of ser-
vants than the revenues of the house could support was an-
other not uncommon form of extravagance. At Nuncoton in 1440
the Prioress said that the house employed more women-servants
than was necessary 2 and a century later Bishop Longland found
the same fault and admonished the nuns, "that ye streight upon
sight herof dymynishe the nombre of your servaunts, as well men
as women, whiche excessive nombre that ye kepe of them bothe
is one of the grette causes of your miserable pouertye, and
that ye are not hable to mayntene your household nouter re-
paracons of the same, by reason whereof all falleth to ruyne
and extreme decaye. And therefore to kepe noo moo thenne shalbe
urged necessarye for your said house." 3 Similarly Longland
wrote to the nuns of Studley: "To bring your said house azen
into prosperous estate, wee do counsell and advertisise you all
to be contented to lyue vnder a scarcer manour for a time then
ye haue done in tymes past, that soo ye may the rather be
brought azen to wealthynes, and farther avertyze you not to
overchardge you selues with so many servaunts." 4 In 1306 every
useless servant, who was a burden to the impoverished house of
Arden, was ordered to be removed within a week; 5 and in 1326

hand the gay clothes were no doubt sometimes legacies left to
them by will, or the gift of injudicious friends.
2 Ib. f. 71d. (69d.) The Bishop forbade them to keep more than
the necessary servants and made the same injunction at Leg-
bourne. Ib. f. 68d. (66d.)
3 Archaeologia XLVII pp.57-8.
4 Archaeologia XLVII pp.54-5.
5 V.C.H. Yorks III. p.113.
the custos of Minchin Barrow was told to remove the 'onerosa familia'. Sometimes it was the head of the house who kept too many servants, as at Romsey and Wherwell in 1284 and at Baseborne in 1441. Instances of

Reg. of John of Drorensford. (Somerset Rec. Soc.) p.242. Sometimes, on the other hand, the nuns were too poor to keep enough servants and complained that they had to do the work themselves, to the detriment of their religious duties in the choir and elsewhere. At Ankerwyke one of the nuns deposed 'that they had not serving-folk in the brewhouse, bakehouse or kitchen from the last festival of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist last year to the Michaelmas next following, inasmuch that this deponent, with the aid of other her sisters, prepared the beer and victuals and served the nuns with them in her own person' and Alnwick enjoined 'that ye have an honest woman servaund in your kyche, brewhouse and bakehouse, dehoue and selere wythe an honest damyselle wythe hire to saruf ywoe and your sustres in thise saide offices, so that your saide sustres for occupacyone in ony of the saide offices be ne letted fro divine service'. Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick, ff.58d, 59. At Gracedieu there was no servant for the fermery and the subcellar had to sleep there and look after the sick, so that she could not come to matins. Ib. f.110. At Markeyte and at Harrold the nuns had no washerwoman; at the former it was said 'that the nuns have no woman to wash their clothes and to prepare their food, wherefore they are either obliged to be absent from divine service or else to think the whole time about getting these things ready.' Ib. f.6; at the latter a nun said 'that they have no common washerwoman to wash the clothes of the nuns, save four times in the year, and at other times the nuns are obliged to go to the bank of the public stream to wash their clothes.' Ib. f.114. The provision of a laundress was ordered at Nunapleton in 1554. (Yorks. Arch. Journ. XVI p.444) At Sheppey in 1511 there were many complaints that the nuns had no covent servante (hired at the cost of the house) to serve them with food and drink, to wash their clothes and to look after them when they were ill; so that their stipends were diminished, because they had to pay for a washerwoman and for a servant when they were ill out of their own pockets. E.H.R. VI. pp.33-4. It was probably on account of the poverty of Sinningthwaite that Archbishop Lee ordered 'the susters and the nonys there they kepe no seculer women to serve them or to doe any busynes for them, but yf sekenes or oder necessitie doe require.' Yorks. Arch. Journ. XVI. p.443. See below p.366. At Wherwell the order was 'superflua autem et inutilis ac suspeeta familia per ... officialem, cui hoc committimus vices nostre, penitus expellatur.' At Romsey the Abbess was limited to two servants in her chamber and the expulsion of useless servants was also ordered at the Holy Sepulchre Canterbury and at Godstow. Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Ser.) II. pp.663, 664, 663, 707, III. p.849. The injunction was repeated by John of Pontoise at Romsey in 1302. "Item familiam inutilem, superfluum, uxorom et incontinentem et dominaibus convivialentem infra mensem ... precipimus amoveri.' Reg. Johannis de Pontissara (Cant. & York. Soc.) p.127.
luxurious living on the part of the heads of various houses will have been given elsewhere; it need only be remarked that a self-indulgent prioress might cripple the resources of a house for many years to come, whether by spending its revenues too lavishly, or by raising money by the alienation of its goods.

One other cause of the poverty of nunneries must be noticed, before turning to the attempts of bishops and other visitors to find a remedy. Overcrowding was, throughout the earlier period under consideration, a common cause of financial distress and the admission of a greater number of nuns than the revenues of the convent were able to support was constantly forbidden in episcopal injunctions. Certainly this was not invariably the fault of the nuns. They suffered (as we have seen) from the formal right of bishop or of patron to place a nun in their house on special occasions, and they suffered still more from the constant pressure to which they were subjected by private persons, anxious to obtain comfortable provision for daughters and nieces. It was sometimes impossible and always difficult to resist the importunity of influential gentlemen in the neighbourhood, whose ill-will might be a serious thing, whether it showed itself in open violence or in closed purses. The authorities of the church had sometimes to step in and rescue houses which had thus been persuaded to burden themselves beyond their means. In 1273 Gregory X issued a bull to the Priory of Carrow, with the intention of putting a

1 See Chap. IV
stop to the practice. "Your petition having been expounded to us, containing a complaint that you have, at the instant requests of certain lords of England, whom you are unable to resist on account of their power, received so many nuns already into your monastery, that you may scarce be fitly sustained by its rents, we therefore, by the authority of these present letters forbid you henceforth to receive any nun or sister to the burden of your house."¹ Some nine years later Archbishop Wickwane wrote in the same strain to the nuns of Nunkeeling and Wilberfoss: "Because we have learned from public rumour that your monastery is sometimes burdened by the reception of nuns and by the visits of secular women and girls, at the instance of great persons, to whom you foolishly and unlawfully grant easy permission, we order you ...... henceforward, to receive no one as nun or sister of your house, nor to lodge for a time in your monastery, without our special licence."² Bishop Stratford, in his visitation of Romsey in 1311, forbade additions to the nuns, the proper number having been exceeded, and again in 1327 he wrote, "It is notorious that your house is burdened with ladies beyond the established number which used to be kept and I have heard that you are being pressed to receive more young ladies (damoyseles) as nuns, wherefore I order you strictly that no young lady received by you be veiled, nor any other received, until the Bishop's visitation, or until they

¹ Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 71.
² Reg. of Archbishop William Wickwane. (Surtees Soc.) p. 113.
have special orders from him." The situation at the great
abbey of Shaftesbury was the same. As early as 1218 the Pope
had forbidden the community to admit nuns beyond the number of
a hundred because they were unable to support more or to give
alms to the poor; in 1322 Bishop Mortival wrote remonstrating
with them for their neglect of the Pope's order and repeating
the prohibition to admit more nuns until the state of the
abbey was relieved, on the ground that the inmates of the house
were far too many for its goods to support; and in 1326 (in
response to a petition from the abbess asking him to fix the
statutory number) the Bishop issued an order stating that the
house was capable of maintaining a hundred and twenty nuns and
no more and that no novices were to be received until the com-
munity was reduced to that number. 2

Episcopal prohibitions to receive new inmates without
special licence were very common, especially in the late thir-
teenth and early fourteenth centuries. Bishops realised that
overcrowding only increased the growing poverty of the nunneries

1 Liveing. Records of Romsey Abbey. p.98. Similarly Bishop
Edyndon wrote in 1346 and again in 1363 to St. Mary Winchester,
Wherwell and Romsey forbidding them to take a greater number
of nuns than was anciently accustomed or than can be sustained
by them without penury. Ib. p.165.
2 V.C.H. Dorset II. p.77. Nevertheless at Romsey and at Shaftes-
bury the King and the Bishop himself continued to "dump" nuns,
in accordance with their prerogative right, throughout the
career of both houses. In the six years following this prohi-
bition of 1327 Bishop Stratford not only gave permission for
a novice to be received at the nuns' own request, but deposited
no less than three there himself. The words and the actions
of bishops sometimes tallied ill.
In the poor diocese of York, between 1250 and 1320, the nuns were over and over again forbidden to receive nuns, lay sisters or lay-brothers without the licence of the Archbishop. Injunctions to this effect were issued to Marrick (1252), Swine (1266), Wilberfoss (1282), Nunappleton (1282, 1290, 1346), Hampole (1267, 1308, 1312), Arden (1306), Thicket (1309, 1314), Nunkeeling (1282, 1314), Nunburnholme (1318), Esholt (1318), Arthington (1318) and Sinningthwaite (1319). At Swine, after the visitation of Archbishop Walter Giffard in 1267-8, it was noted among the comperta "that the house of Swine cannot sustain more nuns or sisters than now are there, inasmuch as those at present there are ill provided with food, as is said above, and that the house nevertheless remains at least a hundred and forty marks in debt; wherefore the lord Archbishop decreed that no nun or sister should thenceforward be received there, save with his consent." A very severe punishment was decreed at Marrick, where the Archbishop announced that any man or woman admitted without his licence would be expelled without hope of mercy, the Prioress would be deposed and any other nuns who agreed condemned to fast on bread and water for two months (except on Sundays and festivals). In other dioceses the bishops pursued a similar policy. But it was not easy to enforce...

3 V.C.H. Yorks III p.117.
these prohibitions. Four years after Archbishop Greenfield's injunction to Hampole (1308) he was obliged to address another letter to the convent, having heard that the Prioress had received "a little girl (puellulam), by name Maud de Dreffield, niece of the Abbot of Roche, and another named Jonetta, her own niece, at the instance of Dominus Hugh de Cressy, her brother, that after a time they might be admitted to the habit and profession of nuns." The predicament of the Prioress is easily understood; how was she to refuse her noble brother and the Abbot of Roche? They could bring to bear far more pressure than a distant archbishop, who came upon his visitations at long intervals. Moreover the ever present need of ready money made the resistance of nuns less determined than it might otherwise have been; for a dowry in hand they were, as usual, willing to encumber themselves with a new mouth to feed throughout long years to come. The double inducement of fear to offend a powerful neighbour and anxiety to obtain money is shown very clearly in an incident which occurred at the Norman house of St. Aubin during the episcopate of Éudes Rigaud, Archbishop of Rouen. In 1259 he found that in spite of his former prohibition to receive anyone without his mandate, they had admitted and veiled a certain lady (domicella), daughter of Sir Robert 'dicti Mali Vicini' knight, and when he demanded why they had done this, they said that urgent poverty had forced

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1Ib. III. p.163. The house was heavily in debt at the time and though the Bishop had forbidden the granting of corrodies and liveryes without leave, the Prioress was also charged with having 'sold or granted corrodies very burdensome to the house.'
them to it, since the father of the girl had offered them 10 s.
of annual rent.  

Prohibitions to decrease the number of nuns became more rare in the second half of the fourteenth and in the fifteenth centuries. Even when the population recovered from the havoc wrought by the Black Death, the numbers in the nunneries continued steadily to decline. Perhaps fashion had veered, conscious that the golden days of monasticism were over; more likely the growing poverty of the houses rendered them less tempting a retreat. A need for restricting the number of nuns still continued, because the decline in the revenues of the nunneries was swifter than the decline in the number of the nuns. Thus in 1440-1 Alnwick included in his injunctions to seven houses a prohibition to receive more nuns than could competently be sustained by their revenues, and the evidence given at his visitations shows the necessity for such a restriction. The injunction to Heynongs is particularly interesting:

"For as mykelle as we fonde that agayn the entente and the forbedyng of the commune lawe there are in your saide pryorye meo nunnes and susters professed then may be competently susteyned of the revenews of your sayde pryorye, the exiltee of

1 Reg. Visit. Archiepiscopi Rothomagensis ed Bonnin (1852) p.361. The transaction, though certainly simonical, was not such a bad bargain as some, since the nuns received an annual rent to support the girl and not simply a round sum of ready money. Rigaud expelled the girl; it was his consistent policy to forbid the reception of novices without licence.

the saide revenews and charitees duly considered, we commaunde, ordeyn, charge and enioyne yowe vnder payne etc. etc. that fro this day forthe ye receyve no mo in to nunnes ne sustres in your saide prory wyth owte the advyse and assent of hus (and) of our successowers byshoph of Lincolne, so that we or thai, wele informed of the yerely valve of your saide revenews may ordeyn for the nombre competente of nunnes and susters. ¹ Nevertheless even at Nuncoton, one of the houses to which a similar injunction was sent, one of the nun gave evidence "that in her own time there were in the habit eighteen or twenty nuns and now there are only fourteen" and the Bishop himself remarked that "ther be but fewe in counet in regarde of tymes here to fore." ² Everywhere this decline in the number of nuns went steadily on during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. And from the beginning of the fifteenth century there begin to appear, here and there among visitational injunctions, commands of a very different nature; here and there a Bishop is found trying, not to keep down, but to keep up the number of nuns. Instead of the repeated prohibitions addressed to Romsey at the beginning of the fourteenth century, there is an injunction

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¹ Ib. f. 22.
² Ib. ff. 71d (63d), 77d (73d).
³ It would be interesting to collect statistics as to the relative size of different nunneries at different periods. It is here possible to give only a few examples of the decline in the number of inmates. The numbers at Nuneaton varied as follows: 93 (1234), 89 (1238), 47 (1370), 40 (1459), 23 (1539). (V.C.H. Warwick. II. pp. 56-9). At Romsey (where the statutory number was supposed to be 100) as follows: 91 (1333) and 26 (from 1478 to the Dissolution). (V.C.H. Dorset II. p. 55). At Shaftesbury as follows: Forbidden to receive more than 100 in 1218 and in 1322; number fixed at 120 in 1326; between 50-57 (from 1441 to the Dissolution). V.C.H. Dorset II. p. 77.
from William of Wykeham in 1387, ordering the Abbess to augment the number of nuns, which had fallen far below the statutory number. Similarly in 1432 Bishop Gray wrote to Elstow, 'since the accustomed number of nuns of the said monastery has so lessened, that those who are now received scarcely suffice for the chanting of divine service by night and day according to the requirement of the rule, we will and enjoin upon you the abbess, in virtue of obedience and under the penalties written above and beneath, that, with what speed you can, you cause the number of nuns in the said monastery to be increased in proportion to its resources.' At Studley in 1531, although the house was badly in debt, the nuns were ordered to live less luxuriously and 'to augment your nombre of ladyes within the yere.' In this connection Archbishop Warham's visitation of Shepey in 1511 is significant. The Prioress, when questioned as to the number of nuns in the house, said that 'she had heard there were seventeen; she knew of fourteen; she herself wished to increase the number to fourteen if she could find any who wished to enter into religion.' It is an interesting reflection that Henry VIII may simply have accelerated by his violent measure, a gradual dissolution of the nunneries through poverty and through change of fashion.

1 New. Coll. MS. f. 666. 
3 Archaeologia XLVII p. 55. 
4 E.H.R. VI. pp. 33-4. From the fact that the Prioress was ordered to make up the number to fourteen, as soon as she conveniently could, it appears that the ten nuns who gave evidence before the Archbishop represented the full strength of the house.
This account of the attempts of medieval bishops to prevent the nunneries from burdening themselves with inmates, beyond the number which could be supported by their revenues, leads to a consideration of the other methods employed by them to remedy the financial distress in which the nuns so often found themselves. These methods may be divided into three classes: arrangements to safeguard expenditure by the head of the house and to impose a check upon autocracy, arrangements to prevent rash expenditure or improvident means of raising money, by requiring episcopal consent before certain steps could be taken, and thirdly, if the incompetence of the nuns was such that even these restrictions were insufficient, the appointment of a male custos, master or guardian to manage the finances of the house.

Arrangements for safeguarding expenditure by the head of the house were of four kinds (1) provision for the consultation of the whole convent in important negotiations, (2) provision for the safe custody of the common seal, (3) provision for the regular presentation of accounts and (4) the appointment of coadjutresses to the Prioress, or of two or three treasurers, to be jointly responsible for receipts and expenditure. It was a common injunction that the whole convent, or at least 'the greater and wiser part of it', should be consulted in all important negotiations, such as the alienation of property, the leasing of land and farms, the cutting down of woods, the incurring of debts and the
reception of novices. It has already been shown that Prioresses acted autocratically in performing such business on their own initiative and the injunction sent by Peckham to the Abbess of Romsey shows the lengths to which this independence might lead them. Flemyng's injunction to Elstow in 1421-2 is typical: 'That the Abbess deliver not nor demise to farm appropriated churches, pensions, portions, manors or granges belonging to the monastery, nor do any other such weighty business, without the express consent of the greater and sounder part of the convent.' At Arthington in 1318 the Prioress was specially ordered to consult the convent in sales of wool and other business matters; the Prioress of Sinningthwaite the next year was told to take counsel with the older nuns and in all writings under the common seal to employ a faithful clerk and to have the deed read, discussed and sealed in the presence of the whole convent, those who spoke against it on reasonable grounds being heard and the deed if necessary corrected. Provision for the safe custody of the common seal, and for the assent of the whole convent to all writings which received its imprint, was a necessary corollary to the demand that the Prioress should consult her nuns in matters of business. Medieval superiors were

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2 See above pp.100-102.


4 V.C.H. Yorks III. p.188

5 Ib. III. p.177.
constantly charged with keeping the common seal in their own custody and nuns and bishops alike objected to a custom which rendered the convent responsible for any rash agreement into which the Prioress might enter. Elaborate arrangements for the custody of the seal are therefore common in visitational injunctions. In 1302 Bishop John of Pontoise wrote to Romsey that 'whereas from the bad keeping of the common seal many evils to the house have hitherto happened (as the Bishop has now learned from the experience of fact), and also may happen unless wholesome remedy be applied, three at least of the discreeter ladies shall be appointed by the Abbess and by the larger and wiser part of the convent to keep the seal; and when any letter shall be sealed with the common seal in the chapter before the whole convent, it shall be read and explained in an intelligible tongue to all the ladies, publicly, distinctly and openly and afterwards sealed in the same chapter, (not in corners or secretly, as has hitherto been the custom,) and signed as it is read, so that what concerns all may be approved by all. Which done the seal shall be replaced in the same place under the said custody.' These injunctions were repeated by Bishop Woodlock nine years later, but in 1387 William of Wykeham laid down much more stringent rules. The seal was to be kept securely under seven, or at least five locks and keys, of which one key was to be in the custody of the abbess and the

1 e.g. Clemence Medforde at Ankerwyke in 1441 and Eleanor of Arden in 1396. See above pp. 127, 134.
others to remain with some of the more prudent and mature nuns, nominated by the convent; no letter was to be sealed without first being read before the whole convent in the vulgar tongue and approved by all or by the greater and wiser part of the nuns. Seven locks was an unusually large number; usually three, or even two, were ordered. At Malling, where, as we have seen, Bishop Hamo of Hythe unwillingly confirmed an 'insufficient and ignorant' woman as Abbess, he took the extreme step of sequestrating the common seal and forbidding it to be used without his permission.

Another method of keeping some control over the expenditure not only of the head or treasurer of the house, but also of the other obedientaries, was by ordering the regular presentation of accounts before the whole convent; and in spite of the injunctions of councils and of bishops no regulation was more often broken. Bishop Stapeldon's rules, drawn up for the guidance of Polslo and Canonsleigh afford a good example of these injunctions, and deal with the presentation of accounts by the bailiffs and officers of the house, as well as by the Prioress. "Item, let the accounts of all your bailiffs, provosts and receivers, both foreign and denizen, be overlooked every year, between Easter and Whitsuntide, and between the Feast of St. Michael and Christmas, after final account rendered in the Priory before the Prioress, or before

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1 See above p. 127.  
2 See above pp. 338-40.
those whom she is pleased to put in her place, and before two
or three of the most ancient and wise ladies of the said re-
ligion and house, assigned by the Convent for this purpose:
and let the rolls of the accounts thus rendered remain in the
common treasury, so that they may be consulted, if need shall
arise by reason of the death of a Prioress, or of the death
or removal of bailiffs, receivers or provosts. Item, let the
Prioress each year, between Christmas and Easter, before the
whole convent, or six ladies assigned by the convent for this
purpose, show forth the state of the house, and its receipts
and expenses, not in detail but in gross (ne mie par menue
parceles mes par grosses sommes), and the debts and the names
of the debtors and creditors for any sum above forty shil-
lings. And all these things are to be put into writing and
placed in the common treasury, to the extent that it may be
seen each year how your goods increase or decrease.¹ Bishop
Pontoise ordered that at Romsey an account should be rendered
twice a year and at the end thereof the state of the house
should be declared by the auditors of the convent, or at least
by the seniors of the convent, but finding the practice in
abeyance in 1302 he ordered the account to be rendered once a
year:² his ordinance was repeated by Bishop Woodlock in 1311³
and by William of Wykeham in 1387,⁴ both of whom specially
refer to the rendering of accounts by officials and

³ Ib. pp. 102-3.
⁴ New Coll. MS. Reg. s. 87. In 1492, at the visitation by Archbishop
Morkes commissioners a nume `pray that injunctions be made to
the sisters and abbess that they choose no one as auditor with-
obedientaries as well as by the abbess. Bishop Flemyng in his injunctions to Elstow says: "Also let the treasurers aforesaid, the cellareess, the sacrist and the other nuns of the monastery, who bear offices in the same and minister in things temporal, render a full reckoning of their ministries at least once in the year, in the presence of the whole convent and of the other persons deputed for this purpose; and she who shall be found neglectful or faulty in this part, let her be severely punished as a proprietress and be altogether expelled from the same office." (1421-2)

More frequently, especially in the smaller houses, the Bishops confined their efforts to extracting the main account from the Prioress, with the double object, so ungraciously expressed by Archbishop Lee, "that it may appere in whate state the housse standith in, and also that it may be known, whether she be profitable to the house or not." How far it was a common practice that the accounts should be audited by some external person, it is impossible to say. Our only evidence lies in occasional injunctions such as those sent by Bishops Pontoise and Woodlock to Romsey, or by Bishop Buckingham to Heynings; or an occasional remark, such as the Prioress of Blackborough's excuse that she did not render account in order 'to save the expenses of an auditor'; or an occasional order addressed by a Bishop to some person.

1 For other mentions of the rendering of accounts by bailiffs, officiaries etc. see Arden 1306 and Arthington 1315 (V.C.H. Yorks III pp.113, 188), Farewell 1367 (Reg. of Robert de Stretton p.119.)
4 Visit. of the Dioc. of Norwich (Camden Soc.) p.108.
bidding him go and examine the accounts of a house. In 1314
William, rector of Lodersborough, was made custos of Nunburn-
holme on peculiar terms, being ordered to go there three times
a year and hear the accounts of the ministers and prepositi of
the house; his duties were thus, in effect, those of an unpaid
auditor and no more. It is probable that the accounts of ba-
liffs and other servants were audited by the custos, in those
houses to which such an official was attached; whether his own
accounts were scrutinised is another matter. In 1309 Archbish-
op Greenfield wrote to his own receiver, William de Jafford, to
audit the accounts of Nunappleton, and after the revelations
of Margaret Watere's maladministration at Catesby in 1445, a
commission for the inspection of the accounts was granted to
the Abbot of St. James, Northampton. In some cases the annual
statement of accounts was ordered to be made before the Bishop
of the diocese, as well as the nuns of the house, and in such
cases he would act as auditor himself.

1V.C.H. Yorks III. p.119.
2 Sometimes specific mention is made of this duty, e.g. in 1318
Thomas de Mydelsburg, rector of Loftus, was ordered to adminis-
ter the temporal goods of the Cistercian house of Handale, to
receive the accounts of the servants and to substitute more
capable ones for those who were useless. Ib. III. p.166. Cp.
the commission to the rector of Aberford to be custos of Kirk-
3V.C.H. Yorks III. p.171.
4V.C.H. Northants II. p.124.
5 In 1442, for instance, the Prioress of Rusper, was ordered to
render accounts yearly before the Bishop of Chichester and the
nuns of the house (Sussex Arch. Coll. V.p.256) and at Sheppey
in 1511, two nuns having complained that the Prioress did not
account, she was ordered to render accounts, with an inventory,
to the convent and to Archbishop Warham. (E.H.R. VI. p.34.)
It was also a common practice for the Visitor to demand that the current balance sheet (the *status domus*) of a monastic house should be produced, together with its foundation charter and various other documents, before he took the evidence of the inmates at a visitation. The register of Bishop Alnwick's visitations shows the procedure very clearly; usually there is simply a note to the effect that the Prioress handed in the *status domus*, but at some houses the Bishop encountered difficulties. At St. Michael Stamford in 1440 the old Prioress (who, it will be remembered, had rendered no account at all during her twelve years of office) was unable to produce a balance sheet, or one of the required certificates and Alnwick was obliged to proceed with her examination *'hiis extubendis non exhibitis'*. He made shift however to extract some verbal information from her; she said that the house was in debt £20 at her installation and now only 20 marks, that it could expend £40, besides 10 marks belonging to her in the office of pittancer and besides the *'commoda iconomice'*. she said also "that they plough with two ploughs and have eight bullocks, seven horses, one bailiff, four servants, one ploughman and one who is baker and brewer and whose wife makes the malt." At Legbourne also the Prioress "showed the state of the house, as it now stands, as they say, but not annual charges etc. ... She says that the house owed £43 at the time of her confirmation and installation

and now only £14; nevertheless because the state of
the house is not fully shewn, let her have the next day
at Louth to show it more fully." At Ankerwyke also
Clemence Medforde gave in an incomplete balance sheet:
"she shewed a roll containing the rents of the house,
which, after deducting rent-charges, reach the total of
£22. 6. 7. Touching the stewardship of the temporalities
and touching the other receipts, as from alms and other
like sources, she shews nothing, and says that at the
time of her preferment the house was 300 marks in debt,
and now is in debt only £40, and she declares some of
the names of the creditors of this sum." A special
demand for a complete statement of accounts was sometimes
made in cases where gross maladministration was charged
against a prioress. Thus in 1310 Archbishop Greenfield
ordered an investigation of certain charges (unspecificed,
but clearly of this nature) made against the Prioress of
Rosedale; her accounts, "as well as those of all bailiffs
and other officials and servants who were bound to render
accounts, were to be examined and the prioress was order-
ed to render to the commissioners full and complete
accounts from the time of her promotion, as well as a

1 Ib. f. 68 (66).
2 Ib. f. 57d (55).
statement of the then position of the house", and a further letter from the Archbishop to the subprioress and nuns ordered them to display the status domus to the commissioners, as it was when the Prioress took office and as it was at the time he wrote. She resigned shortly afterwards, sentens se impotens; but in 1315 her successor was enjoined to draw up a certified statement showing the credit and debt accounts of the house and to send it to the Archbishop before a certain date. Sometimes the Bishop demanded not only the account roll of a house, but also an inventory, doubtless in order that he might see whether anything had been alienated. In 1318 the Prioress of Arthington and three or four of the more discreet nuns were ordered to have an account of all goods, showing also debts and credit, corrodies, pensions and other obligations in full, drawn up under the convent seal for the Archbishop; and similar inventories were demanded from Rosedale in 1310, from Rusper in 1478 and from Sheppey in 1511. Sometimes these inventories still remain attached to the account of the visitation.

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2 V.C.H. Yorks III. p.188.
3 Ib. III. p.174.
4 Sussex Arch. Coll. V. p.255.
5 E.H.R. VI. p.34.
preserved in the episcopal register. 1

If a Prioress was found to be hopelessly incompetent or unscrupulous, but not bad enough to be deprived of her position, Bishops sometimes took the extreme measure of appointing one or more coadjutresses, to govern the house in conjunction with her; and often (even when there was no complaint against the prioress) the nuns were ordered to elect treasurers, to receive and disburse the income of the house from all sources. In order to understand these regulations it is necessary to know something of the financial organisation of a medieval

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1An inventory of the goods of Easebourne Priory, drawn up for the Bishop of Chichester on May 27th 1450, has survived. It is very complete and comprises all departments of the house, together with a list of land, chapels and appropriated churches and a note that the house can expend in all £22.3. on repairs and other expenses and that the debts 'for repairs and other necessary expenses this year' amount to £66.6.8. Sussex. Arch. Coll. IX, pp. 10-13. It may be of interest to quote the briefer inventory of the poor house of Ankerwyke, as presented to Bishop Atwater at his visitation in 1519 and copied by his clerk into the register. There were at the time five nuns in the house and one in apostacy. "Reditus ibidem extendunt prima facie ad xxxiiij li. x s. Inde resolutum pro liberis reditibus v li. x s. Et sic habent clare ad reparacionem & alia onera sustinenda ultima xlii marcas.

Jocallia in Ecclesia: Habet ibidem vestimenta sacerdotalia ad minus serica xiiij. Habet eclair vniam capam de serica & auoro. j calicem de argento deaurato. j par Turribulorum. j pixidem de argento pro sacramento. ij libros missales impressos. j magnum par candelabrorum ante summum altare. j paruum par candelabrorum super summum altare. ij urciolos argenteos. j paxbread de argento, una parua campana argentea.

Cattelle: Habet vaccas duas, ij equas, boues senes iij, unus bouiculus (sic), j vacam anne (sic) (blank), ij equas pro aratro. Wtensilia vj plumalia, x paria linthiaminum, iij superpellectilia, iij paria de le blanket, iij le white Testers. Habet Reditus Annualis preter terras ipsarum dominicalium (sic) in earundem manibus occupatas xlviij li. xj s. x d." Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Atwater f. 42. A fair number of inventories of convent property made for this or for other purposes is extant; notably those drawn up, for purposes of spoliation instead of preservation, at the Dissolution. See Bibliography.
monastery. Normally the different obedientaries had certain rents assigned to them for the expenses of their departments and were supposed to render an account of their receipts and expenditure each year. The head of the house would also expend a certain amount upon hospitality to guests at her own table, journeys on convent business and other affairs. But the bulk of the income from different sources would, in the larger houses, be received by two or more Treasuresses (of whom one might or might not be the head of the house) and doled out as it was required to such obedientaries as had no special rents assigned to their offices, to the Prioress and to the priests, bailiffs, servants and hired workmen for all the manifold expenses of the estate and for their wages. But it is evident from visitation detecta that in many cases, and especially in small houses, the Prioress took the place of Treasuress ("priorissa est bursaria", as the nuns of Nunmonkton complained) and kept the whole receipts and expenditure in her own hands. To understand how this came about one has only to remember how small were the majority of English nunneries in the

1 The system is best illustrated in Compotus Rolls of the Obedientaries of St. Swithun's Priory Winchester ed. Kitchin (Hants Rec. Soc.)
2 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 194.
3 The account of the Prioress of Catesby for 1414-15 (Baker. Hist. & Antiq. of Northampton. 1822. I. pp. 278-83) is a full statement of receipts and expenditure, corresponding to the account of the Treasuresses at Gracedieu, where the account of the Prioress is on a separate 'parcel', and deals with certain special receipts and expenses by herself (e.g. receipts from boarders; it is entered less fully on the Treasuresses' account for the year (5 Hen. V)(P.R.O. Mins. Accts. 1257/10, loose sheet).
later middle ages and how speedily their numbers decreased. Multiplication of obedientaries would be impossible in a very small community and the post of treasurers would naturally fall to the head of the house. The objection of medieval visitors to the practice was doubtless directed less against such an inevitable situation in a small house, than against the arrogation to herself of a Treasurers' duties by the head of a large community, and above all against the abuse of the system in both large and small houses by a Prioress, who refused either to consult her sisters or to give any account of her administration. One of the comperta at the visitation of Swine in 1268 was to the effect that 'the sums of money which are bestowed in charity upon the convent, for pittances and garments and other necessary uses, are received by the Prioress; which ought the rather to be in the custody of two honest nuns and distributed to those in need of them, and in no wise converted to other uses.' At Nunkeeling in 1314 it was ordained that all money due to the house should be received by two bursars, elected by the convent, and in 1323 Bishop Cobham of Worcester made a similar injunction at Wroxall, that two sisters were to be chosen by the chapter, to do the business of the convent in receiving rents etc. Elaborate arrangements for the appointment of treasurers were made by Bishop Buckingham at Elstow and at Heynings, in 1388 and 1392

1 Reg. of Walter Giffard (Surtees Soc.) p.147.
2 V.C.H. Yorks III. p.120.
3 V.C.H. Warwick. II. p.71.
respectively, and by Bishop Flemyng at Elstow in 1421-2. It will suffice here to quote the much earlier arrangement made by Archbishop Peckham at Usk in 1284: 'Since' he wrote 'late-ly visiting you by our metropolitan right, we found you in a most desolate state (multipliciter desolatae), desiring to avoid such desolation in future, we order, by the counsel of discreet men, that henceforth two provident and discreet nuns be elected by the consent of the prioress and community; into whose hands all the money of the house shall be brought, whether from granges, or from appropriated churches, or coming from any other offerings, to be carefully looked after by their consent. And as well the Prioress as the other nuns shall receive (money for) all necessary expenses from their hands and in no manner otherwise. And we will that these nuns be called Treasurers, which Treasurers thrice in the year, to wit in Lent, Whit-suntide and on the Feast of St. Michael, shall render account before the Prioress for the time being and before five or six elders of the chapter.' In addition they were to have a priest as custos or administrator of their temporal and spiritual possessions.

The appointment of a coadjutress to the head of a house in the administration of its affairs is of the same nature. The appointment of coadjutresses was a favourite device with Archbishop Peckham, to check an extravagant or incapable head, and

1 See below p. 168 ff.
his injunctions to the Abbess of Romsey in this matter have already been quoted. In the case of this great and important abbey, three coadjutresses were appointed, without whose testimony and advice the Abbess was to undertake no important business. At Wherwell one coadjutress only, a certain J. de Ver, was appointed in 1284, and the same year the Archbishop wrote to his commissary on the subject of the Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Canterbury: "Since by the carelessness and neglect of the Prioress the goods of the house are said to be much wasted, we wish you to assign to her two coadjutresses, to wit Dame Sara and another of the more honest and wise ladies; but let neither be Benedicta, who is said to have greatly offended the whole community by her discords." Here, as at Usk, Peckham appointed in addition a master to look after their affairs. At the disorderly house of Arthington Isabella Couvel was in 1312 associated with the Prioress Isabella de Berghby, but the Prioress seems to have resented the appointment and promptly ran away. In the Exeter diocese Bishop Stapeldon made Joan de Radyngton coadjutress to Petronilla, Abbess of Canonsleigh in 1320; and in the diocese of Bath and Wells Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury in 1335 appointed two coadjutresses to Cecilia de Draycote, Prioress of White Hall, Ilchester, and in 1351, when his visitation had revealed many scandals at Cannington, including the simoniacal admission of nuns and unauthorised sale of
Isabella shall write all the parcellis of recent and corrodies by the Prioress, the Bishop, instead of depriving her "tempered the rigour of the law with clemency" and appointed two coadjutresses without whose consent she was to do nothing. 

Bishop Alnwick made use of this method of controlling a superior in several cases where serious mismanagement had come to light at his visitation. The unlucky Clemence Medeforde of Ankerwyke was enjoined "that fro hence forthe the commune seale and all the munimentes of your place be surely keppede in a chyaste vnder two lokkes of diuerse forme and makyng, the keyes where of oon shalle remeyne in your kepyng and an other in the kepyng of dame Margery Kyrkeby, chosen ther to by the coutent." 

Margaret Wavere, the disreputable head of Catesby, received a severer injunction: "also we ordeyn that at the same fest of Myghelmesse ye ordeyn that the two nunnes receyve alle the revenues and profites of your saide pryorye, whilk we ordeyne to be dame Isabelle etc and dame Agnes etc, the whilk

Reg.of Ralph of Shrewsbury (Somerset Rec.Soc.)pp.240-1. 684.


These names are interesting. There was one nun called Isabella in the house (Isabella Benet) and there were two called Agnes, of whom Agnes Allesley is probably meant, since Agnes Halewey was "iuinus (sic) et vellet addiscere religionem". But a loose slip of parchment bound into the register contains the note "Domine Isabella Benet et Agnes Halesley, moniales de Catesby, nolunt obedire ... (illegible) inunjuciones domini episcopi, et presertim de dimentendo cameris, asserendo se non esse subditas eisdem." And these were the coadjutresses he appointed to the Prioress. Evidently his principle was that applied by Henry VII to Kildare: "All Ireland cannot rule this man. Then this man shall rule all Ireland." Nevertheless Isabel Benet was the lady who spent two nights dancing with the Northampton friars and had had a child (see above p....) and was a most unsuitable person for a position of authority. Alnwick was unlucky in his coadjutresses. At St.Michael Stamford one of them (Margaret Mortymere) had a child before his next visitation and the other annoyed the whole convent by her autocratic rule.
Isabelle shall wryte alle the parcelles of receyten and expenses, so that the money be putte in a chiste vnder thre lokkes of diverse maken, where of ye pryoresse shalle have oon key, dame Isable an othere and dame Agnes etc the thrydde key, and that alle receytes and delyueres be done or there be talyes or indentures, so that these two receyvours gyfe yerely betwix the festes of seynt Mighelle and seynt Martyne a fulle account of their receytes and expenses be fore yow prioresse ad couent (sic).

1 At St. Michael Stamford the old and impotent Prioresse herself asked for coadjutresses to rule the temporalities and "the lord, with the consent and by the petition of all the nuns deputed Margaret Mortymere and Alice Wyteryng as administrators of all goods spiritual and temporal of the said priory and committed this administration to them, having first suspended the said Prioresse from all administration:" 2 at Gracedieu also (where the Prioresse was old and impotent) two bursars were to be elected to receive the revenues and to make payments. 3 Other instances of this method of controlling the administration of a superior might be multiplied from the episcopal registers.

The appointment of treasurers and of coadjutresses and the provision for due consultation of the chapter, custody of the common seal and presentment of accounts had the purpose of


2 Ib. f. 39d.

3 Ib. f. 107d.
safeguarding the nuns against reckless expenditure or maladministra-
tion by the head of the house and, where the injunctions of the Visitor were carried out, such precautions doubtless proved of use. Some further check was, however, necessary, to safeguard the nuns against themselves, and to prevent the whole convent from rash sales of land, alienation of goods and from all those other improvident devices for obtaining ready money, to which they were so much addicted. The Bishops attempted to impose such a check by forbidding certain steps to be taken without their own consent. The business for which an episcopal licence was necessary usually comprised the alienation of land or its lease for life or for a long term of years, the sale of any corrodies or payment of any fees or pensions, and (as has already been pointed out) the reception of new inmates, who might overcrowd the house and thus impose a strain upon its revenues.\(^1\) Other business, such as the sale of woods, was sometimes included.\(^2\) The prohibition of corrodies, fees and pensions was doubtless intended to protect the nuns against the exactions of patrons and other persons, who claimed the right to pension off relatives or old servants by this means, as well as against their own improvidence in selling such doles for inadequate sums of ready money. Three instances of such prohibitions may be quoted as typical. The

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\(^1\) To this the reception of boarders was sometimes added, but with a different purpose, viz. to protect the nuns from contact with the world.

\(^2\) At Moxby in 1318 no fresh debts, especially large ones, were to be incurred without the convent's consent and the Archbishop's special licence. V.C.H.Yorks III.p.239. At Nuncoton in 1440 'ne that ye aleyse or selle any bondman' was added to the usual prohibition. Linc. Epis.Reg.Visit.Alnwick.f.78.
first is Alnwick's injunction (given in two parts) to Harrold in 1442/3: 'Also we enioyne yow, prioresse, and your succes-
sours vndere payne of pryacyone and perpetuelle amoracyone fro
your and thaire astate and dygnyte that fro hense forthe ye
ne thai selle, graunte ne gyfe to ony persone what euery thai
be any corrody, lyverye, pensyone or anuyte to terme of lyve,
that certeyn tyme or perpetuellly, but if ye or thai fyreste declare
long the cause to vs or our successours bysshoppes of Lincolne, and
in that case have our specyalle licence or of our saide suc-
cessours and also the fulle assent of the more hole parte of
dering
your couent. Also we enioyne yow prioresse and your succes-
sours vndere the payne of priuacyone afore saide that ye ne
by any thai selle, gyfe, aleyne, ne felle no grete wode or tymbere,
which saue to necessary reparacyone of your place and your tenaun-
dyes, but if ye and thai hafe specyalle licence ther to, of vs
or our successours bysshoppes of Lincolne and the cause declar-
ed to vs or our successours.' The second is his injunction
(also in two parts) to Sinningthwaite in 1534: "Item we in-
ioyne and commaunde by thies presentes the prioresse and covent
that she nor they graunt any corrodies, pensions, or lyveres,
nor lett to ferme any of their granges or demeanes, without
expresse consent obtayned of vs or our successors, vnder our or
their seall .. Item we commaunde and inioyne that the said
prioresse nor her couent shall admitt any parson to the

1Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick.f.114d. At the visitation one nun had complained of the presence of two corrodians and the Bishop had made a special note, "Fiat prouisio de nemoribus non vendendis vel alienandis."
professid habite of a nune, or a suster, or a conuershe, nor shall re-
ceve any seculer or spirituality persons to suggiarne or dwell within 
the precinct of that monasterie without speciall licence hadd and 
obtayned of vs or ovr successors, vnder ovr or their seall."¹ The 
third is a special mandate addressed by John le Romeyn to the nuns 
of Arthington in 1286: "Lately exercing at your monastery our of-
fice of visitation, by our clerks, to whom we specially committed 
that office, we found your condition, as concerning possessions be-
longing to you, somewhat straitened and depressed, so that these pos-
sessions scarce suffice to you for food, and are diminished only at 
the cost of your necessities. We therefore strictly command you, or-
dering in virtue of obedience that you transfer no estate (agrum), 
or any part of the estates in your possession, to anyone whatsoever, 
by means of any kind of alienation, without our special licence; for 
which purpose we intend not to give you licence, unless it be called 
for by the rise of something entirely advantageous, which shall add 
threefold at least to your annual profits. Fare you well."²

Reg. of John le Romeyn (Surtees Soc.) p.55. A few other instances of 
these injunctions may be given: Arden (1306), Marrick (1282), Nun-
burnholme (1316), Nunkeeling (1314), Taicket (1309), Yedingham 
(1314), Esholt (1318), Hampole (1308,1312), Nunappleton (1489), Ro.
sdale (1315), Sinningthwaite (1316), Arthington (1314, 1316, 1318), Moxby (1314, 
1316 and 1328). V.C.H. Yorks III. p.113,117,119,124,128,161,163,172, 
174,177,188,239-40. (There are probably more instances in Yorkshire 
but the dismissal of injunctions as 'common form' and the scantness 
of some of the summaries make it impossible to give exact refer-
ences to these.) Stixwouold (1440), Legbourne (1440), Nuncoton (1440), 
Heynings (1440), Langley (1440-1), Gracedieu (1440-1), St. Michael 
Stamford (1440), Ankerwyke (1444), Markyate (1442), Godstow (1445). 
Elstow (1421-2), Burrenham (1434) (Visit. of Relig. Houses in Dioc. 
(1351) (Arch.XLVII pp.54,58), Poiolo and Canonsleigh (1319) (Reg.of 
Bishop Stapledon ed. Hingeston-Randolph p.317), Romsey (1302) (Reg. 
An exceptionally conscientious Bishop would sometimes send even more full and elaborate instructions to a nunnery on the management of its property, and examples of such minute regulations are to be found in the injunctions sent to Elstow Abbey at different times by Bishop Buckingham (1387), Archbishop Courtenay (1389) and Bishop Flegyng (1421-2). Bishop Buckingham also sent very full injunctions to Heynings in 1392 and these may be quoted to illustrate the care which the Visitors sometimes took to set a house upon a firm financial footing, so far as it was possible to do so by the mere giving of good advice. "The Prioress, indeed, shall attempt to do nothing without the counsel of two nuns, elected by the convent to assist her in the government of the aforesaid priory, both within and without; and when any important business has to be done concerning the state of the priory, the same Prioress shall expound it to the convent in common, and shall settle and accomplish it according to their counsel, to the advantage of the aforesaid house. And each year the receiver shall display fully in chapter to the convent in common the state of the house and an account of the administration of its goods, clearly and openly written ... Item we command and ordain that the common seal and muniments of the house be faithfully kept under three locks, of which one key shall be in the custody of the prioress, another of the sub-prioress and the third of a nun elected for this purpose by the

2 Lambeth Reg. Courtenay I f. 336.
convent ... Item we enjoin and command that two receivers be
each year elected by the chapter, who shall receive all money
whatsoever, forthcoming from the churches, manors or rents of
the said priory, the which two elected (receivers), together
with the Prioress and with an auditor deputed in the name of
the convent, shall hear and receive in writing the computation,
account and reckoning of all bailiffs without the precincts of
the house, who receive any moneys, or any other goods whatso-
ever in the name of the said convent, from churches, manors or
rents. And afterwards the same two elected receivers, before
the Prioress and two other of the greater, elder and more
prudent nuns, elected to this end by the convent, shall faith-
fully render at least twice every year the account and com-
putation of all the receipts and expenses of the same (recei-
vers) within the precincts of the aforesaid house, to the said
Prioress and two sisters elected and deputed in the name of the
convent. And when this has been done, we will and enjoin that
twice in every year the Prioress of the aforesaid house show
the whole state of the aforesaid house in chapter, the whole
convent being assembled on a certain day for this purpose. And
we will that the roll of the aforesaid balance sheet, or paper
of account or reckoning, remain altogether in the archives of
the aforesaid house, that the prioress and the elder and more
prudent (nuns) of the aforesaid house may be able easily to
learn the state of the same in future years and whenever any
difficulty may arise. And let bailiffs be constituted of
sufficient faculties and of commendable discretion and fidelity, the best that can be found, and let them similarly render due account every year before the same prioress and convent...

Furthermore we will that the Prioress and convent of the aforesaid house do not sell or concede in perpetuity or grant for a term corrodies, stipends, liveries or pensions to clerics or to laymen, save with our licence first sought and obtained.¹ At Elstow Buckingham gave a more detailed injunction about the appointment of bailiffs and other officers.

"Let the Abbess for the government of the aforesaid monastery have faithful servants, in especial for the government and supervision without waste of the husbandry and the manors and stock and woods of the aforesaid house; the which the Abbess herself is bound, if she can, to supervise each year in person, or else let her cause them to be industriously supervised by others; and to look after the external and internal business of the house and to prosecute it outside let her appoint also some man of proven experience and of mature age."² And in 1421-2 Flemynge (modelling his injunctions upon those of Archbishop Courtenay in 1389) ordered "that the collectors and receivers of the rents and profits appertaining to the said monastery, and the other servants deputed and to be deputed for this purpose, take a corporeal oath that they will faithfully levy and collect the money forthcoming from such rents.

¹Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Bokyngham. ff.397-397d. These injunctions are scattered among the others, but have been placed together here for the sake of reference.

²Ib. f.343.
and profits and will at the same time pay it in its entirety when levied to the abbess and treasurers aforesaid by means of indentures or tallies agreed between them."

The purpose of those regulations and restrictions which have hitherto been described, was to assist the nuns in managing their own finances. But the nuns were never very good business women, and they were moreover in theory confined to the precincts of the cloister, so that it was difficult for them to manage their own business, unless they imperilled their souls by excursions into the world. During the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, therefore, a common method of extricating them from their difficulties was by appointing a male guardian, known in different places as Custos, Prior, Warden or Master, to supervise the temporal affairs of a house and to look after its finances. In the early history of Cistercian nunneries each house was governed jointly by a Prior and Prioress and in some cases a few canons are found holding the temporalities jointly with the nuns. Of these Cistercian houses Mr. Hamilton Thompson says: "As in the case of the Gilbertine priories, such nunneries are rarely found outside Lincolnshire and Yorkshire: they were under the bishop's supervision and their connexion with the order of Citeaux was nominal. Their geographical distribution, as well as the fact that St. Gilbert attempted to affiliate his nunneries to the Cistercian order and modelled them upon its rule, provoke
the suspicion that such houses were a result of the growth of
the Gilbertine order, and, if not intended to become double
houses, were at any rate imitations of the corporations of
nuns at Sempringham and elsewhere." References to canons
occur in connection with the houses of Stixwould, Heynings and
Legbourne in Lincolnshire, Catesby in Northamptonshire3 and
Swine in Yorkshire.4 The comperta of Archbishop Giffard's
visitaton of Swine in 1267-8 show that the house at that
time closely resembled the double houses belonging to the
Gilbertine order. "Item Compertum est, that the two windows,
by which the food and drink of the canons and laybrothers are
conveyed (to them), are not at all well guarded by the two
nuns who are called janitresses, inasmuch as suspicious con-
versations are frequently held there between the canons and
lay brothers on the one hand and the nuns and sisters on the
other. Item, compertum est that the door which leads to the
church is not at all carefully kept by a certain secular boy,
who permits the canons and laybrothers to enter indescrimi-
ately in the twilight, that they may talk with the nuns and
sisters, the which door was wont to be guarded diligently by
a trusty and energetic laybrother." It has already been

2V.C.H. Lincs. II pp.148, 150, 154 (note 1.),
3V.C.H. Northants II. p.121.
4V.C.H. Yorks. III. pp.178-9, and Reg. of Archbishop Giffard
(Burtees Soc.) pp.147-8. The canons at these houses must be
distinguished from the canons who held prebendal stalls in
the Abbeys of Romsey, St.Mary Winchester, Wherwell, Wilton
and Shaftesbury; these were often bad plurists and could
have been of little use to the abbeys, as chaplains or as
described how the ill management of the canons and lay brothers ('who dissipate and consume, under colour of guardianship, the goods outside, which were wont to be committed to the guardianship of one of the nuns') caused the nuns to go short in clothes and food and even to be reduced to drinking water instead of beer twice a week, though the canons and their friends "did for themselves well" (satis habundanter et laute procurantur).

In most cases this double constitution of nuns and canons was in abeyance in Cistercian houses before the fourteenth century, though a prior and canons are mentioned at Stixwould in 1308 and Richard de Staunton, 'canon of Catesby', was made Master of that house as late as 1316.

In other houses where no trace of canons has survived there are often references to the resident Prior, especially in the dioceses of York and Lincoln and the official is sometimes

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1 Loc. Cit. Compare the complaint of the nuns of Broadholme in 1321-2. "A nostre Seyngnur le Roy e a son Cousennill monsrent le Prioressel e Covente de Brodholme, qe lour Gardayns de la cit meson par lour defaute scunt lour Rentes abatez, e lour meson a poy ennente e le dit Gardayns ne vollen nulle entent mettre ne despender pur les ayder kaunt eles scunt employdie, mes come eles meymes defendent a graunt mechef. Pur qei eles prient pur l'amour de Dieu, trescher Seygnour, pur l'alme nostre Pier, e ouir de charite, qe Vous volchez graunter vostre Charter qe l'avantdit Prioressel e covent pouissent avoir lour rentes e lour emprumens, de ordiner a lour voluntes, e al profist de la dit meson, si pleiser Vous soit, Kare autrement ne poivent eles viver." The reply was 'Injusta est Peticio, ideo non potest fieri.' Rot. Parl. I. pp.393-4. Broadholme was one of the only two convents of Premonstratensian nuns in England; the guardians were probably the canons of the Premonstratensian Abbey of Newhouse; for an ordinance (1354, confirmed 1409) regulating the relations between the two houses, see Cal. of Papal. Letters VI. pp.159-160.

found in Benedictine houses (e.g. Godstow, St. Michael Stamford and King's Mead, Derby.) He seems to have acted as senior chaplain and confessor to the nuns as well as supervising their financial business. In cases where a nunnery was in some sort of dependence upon an abbey or priory of monks, it is usual to find a religious of that house acting as custos of the nuns. At St. Michael Stamford, for instance, the abbots of Peterborough had the right of nominating a resident prior, subject to the approval of the Bishop of Lincoln, and the office was often held by a monk of Peterborough.

Similarly, a monk of St. Albans acted as custos of Sopwell and a canon of Newhouse dwelt at Broadholme 'to say daily mass for the sisters and to overlook their temporalities.'

The joint rule of Cistercian houses by a Prior and Prioress seems to have died out in most cases by the end of the thirteenth century, but it was customary for some secular and regular cleric to be appointed in most of the small and poor houses of York and Lincoln to look

2 V.C.H. Northants II. p. 98.
3 V.C.H. Derby II. p. 43.
5 Walsingham. Gesta Abbatum (Rolls Series) II. p. 519. * V.C.H.
6 See Cal. of Papal Letters VI. pp. 159-160.
after their business. 1 Usually the custos appointed was the
vicar or rector of some neighbouring parish. Archbishop Romeyn,
for instance, placed Sinningthwaite, Wilberfoss and Arthington
under the guardianship of the rectors of Kirk Deighton, Sutton-
on-Derwent and Kippax respectively and he made the vicars of
Thirkleby and Bossall successively masters of Mexby. 2 Bishop
Dalderby of Lincoln appointed neighbouring rectors and vicars
to be masters of Legbourne, Godstow, Rowney, Sewardsley, Posse,
Delapre, St. Leonard Grimsby and Nuncoton. 3 Sometimes, on the
other hand, canons or monks of religious houses in the vicinity
were charged with looking after the affairs of nunneries.

Swine was managed by Robert de Spalding, a canon of the

1 Mention of custodes occurs at the following houses, in addi-
tion to those mentioned in the text: Studley (1290), Goring
(1309) V.C.H. Oxon II. pp. 73, 104. Markyate (1325) Harrolld
(late XIII century) V.C.H. Beds. I. pp. 359, 388. Arden (1302,
1324) Harrick (1252) Nunburnholme (1314) Yedingham (1280),
Basedale (1304) Hampole (1268, 1280, 1308) Handale (1318) Nun-
113, 117, 119, 127, 159, 163, 166, 171, 180; Kirkles, see below 2...
For mention of custodes in other dioceses see Cookhill (1285)
Sepulchre Canterbury, Davington, Usk, Whitehall Ilchester,
Minchin Barrow, Easebourne, St. Bartholomew Newcastle, King's
Mead, Derby, below pp. 177 180. passim. The frequency
with which custodes occur in houses in the dioceses of Lin-
coln and York and their rarity in other dioceses would seem
to support the theory of Gilbertine influence. Of the cases
quoted from other dioceses all are either custodes appointed
as a deliberate policy by Archbishop Peckham, or custodes ap-
pointed to meet some special moral or financial crisis, not
regular officials. King's Mead Derby seems to be the only
nunery outside the two dioceses of York and Lincoln (with the
exception of those in direct dependence on a house of monks)
which started its career under the joint government of a cus-
tos and a Priorress. V.C.H. Derby II. p. 43.

Reg. of John le Romeyn (Surtees Soc.) pp. xii, xiii, 66, 125, 137, 140
Linc. Epis. Reg. Mem. Dalderby ff. 23d, 37, 44, 60d, 79d, 113d, 328d, 366,
373, 378, 382, 388. (These comprise two appointments to Rowney,
Godstow and Nuncoton; the dates are between 1301 and 1318).

4 Flamstead (1337), Rowney (1302, 1328) V.C.H. West. IV pp. 43, 434.
Premonstratensian house of Croxton, and in 1289-90 Archbishop Romeyn wrote remonstrating with the Abbot of Croxton for recalling him, and begging that he might be allowed to continue at Swine, 'cum idem vester canonicus proficus labores ibidem impenderit ad relevacionem probabilem depressionis notoriam dicte domus'; but the capable Robert was not allowed to return and in 1290 John Bustard, canon of St. Robert's Knaresborough, was appointed in his place; John was not a success and the next year the Abbot removed him; in 1295 Robert of Spalding became master again and in 1296 the rector of Londesborough was appointed. 1 At Catesby in 1293 the office of Master was held by a certain Robert de Wardon, a canon of Canons Ashby, who had apparently left the nuns and gone back to his own house, to the great detriment of the nunnery, for Bishop Sutton wrote in 1293 to the Prior of Canons Ashby, bidding him send back the truant. 2 Similarly a canon of Wellow is found as warden of St. Leonard Grimsby in 1232 and in 1303, 3 a monk of Whitney as guardian of Handale and Basesdale in 1263, 4 a canon of Newburgh at Arden in 1302 5 and a canon of Lincoln at Heynings in 1291; concerning the latter Bishop Sutton wrote to the nuns that since, 'because of private business and various other impediments he is prevented from looking after your business as much

1Reg. of John le Romeyn pp.203-4, 209, 211, 217.
3V.C.H. Lines II. p.179. But in 1313 Dalderby appointed the Vicar of Parva Cotes. Loc. Cit. f.373. Originally St. Leonard Grimsby had been placed under the protection of the canons of Wellow.
4Reg. of Archbishop Giffard (Surtees Soc.) p.54.
5V.C.H. Yorks III p.113.
as it requires, the Vicar of Lipton your neighbour is to look
after your affairs in his absence', and in 1294 he was defi-
nitely replaced by the rector of Blankney. It is clear from
this letter that the masters of nunneries could be non resi-
dent and this was no doubt usually the case when the office was
held by the rector of a neighbouring parish. Indeed sometimes
the same man would be master of more than one nunnery; as in
the case of the monk of Whitney mentioned above. It was pro-
bably rare after the beginning of the fourteenth century for
a custos to reside at a nunnery, as the early Cistercian
priors had done.

The appointment of custodes to manage the finances of
nunneries was a favourite policy with Archbishop Peckham,
doubtless because it facilitated the enforcement of strict
enclosure upon the nuns. At Godstow there was already at the
time a master, but Peckham also gave the custody of Davington
to the Vicar of Faversham in 1279, and that of Holy Sepulchre,
Canterbury, to the Vicar of Wickham in 1284, while at Usk in
1284 he ordered the nuns to have 'some senior priest circum-
spect in temporal and in spiritual affairs to be, with the
consent of the diocesan, master of all your goods, internal


Sometimes the chaplain of the house must have acted as an un-
oficial custos and sometimes he held the position by special
mandate e.g. in 1285 Bishop Giffard ordered the nuns of Cok-
hill that 'for the better conduct of temporal business and for
the increase of divine praise,' Thomas their chaplain was to
have full charge of their temporal affairs. Reg. of. Godfrey
and external, temporal and spiritual.¹ At other times a
custos would be appointed to meet a particular difficulty when
the financial state of a house had become specially weak. About
1303, for instance, a monk of Peterborough was made special
warden of St. Michael Stamford for a season 'with full powers
over the temporalities and of adjudicating and ordering all
temporal matters both within and without the convent as he
should think profitable'; the appointment is specially inter-
esting because there was at the time a resident prior at St.
Michael's and the 'spiritual disposition of all things concern-
ing the house' is reserved to this prior and to the prioress.²

A more serious crisis occurred at the Priory of White Hall
Ilchester, which was evidently in a disorderly condition at the
beginning of the fourteenth century. In 1323 Bishop John of
Drakensford wrote to Henry to Birlaunde, rector of Stoke and
to John de Herminal, announcing that the Prioress, Alice de
Chilterne, was defamed of incontinence with a chaplain and had
so mismanaged and turned to her own nefarious uses the reven-
ues of the house that her sisters were compelled to beg their
bread; she had however submitted herself to the Bishop, but as
public affairs called him to London and as he did not wish to
leave the nunnery unprovided for, he committed the custody to
these two men, ordering them to administer the necessities
of life to the Prioress and sisters, according to the means of

¹ Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Ser.) I pp. 72-3, II pp. 708-9,
III p. 806.
the house, until his return. 1 Some ten years later Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury similarly gave the custody of White Hall, 2 Ilchester, to the rectors of Lymington and St. John's, Ilchester. The neighbouring nunnery of Barrow was also in a disorderly condition; in 1315 John of Drokensford wrote to the Prioress ordering her to leave the management of secular matters to a Custos appointed by him, and the same day appointed William de Sutton; and in 1324-5 when he had been obliged to remove the Prioress Joanna Curney, he committed the custody of the house to William, rector of Blackwell, ordering him to do the best he could with the advice of the sub-prioress and one of the nuns. More often sheer financial distress, rather than moral disorders, was the reason for which a Custos was appointed to a house. At St. Sepulchre Canterbury the rector of Whitestaple was made Custos, "by reason of the miserable want and extreme poverty of the said house" (1359) and for the same reason another secular cleric received the 'supervision, custody or administration' of the same house in 1365. In 1366 Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, 'pitying the miserable state of St. Bartholomew at Newcastle on Tyne, both as to spirituals and temporals and dreading the immediate ruin thereof, unless some speedy remedy should be applied, committed it to the care

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3 Dugdale, Mon. IV. p.413.
of Hugh de Arnecliffe, priest in the church of St. Nicholas in Newcastle upon Tyne, strictly enjoining the prioress and nuns to be obedient to him in every particular and trusting to his prudence to find relief for the poor servants of Christ here, in their poverty and distress.

Sometimes the nuns themselves begged for a custos to assist them, in terms which show that they found the management of their own finances too much for them. At Godstow in 1316 the King was obliged, at the request of the abbess and nuns, to take the abbey into his special protection 'on account of its miserable state', and he appointed the Abbot of Fynsham and the Prior of Bicester as keepers, ordering them to pay the nuns a certain allowance and to apply the residue to the discharging of their debts. Similarly in 1327 the Prioress and nuns of King's Mead, Derby, represented themselves as much reduced, and begged the king to take the house into his special protection, granting the custody of it to Robert of Alsop and Simon of Little Chester, until it should be relieved. Three months later Edward III granted it protection for three years and appointed Robert of Alsop and Simon of Little Chester custodians, who, after due provision for the sustenance of the prioress and nuns, were to apply the issues and rents to the discharge of the liabilities of the house and to the improvement of its condition. Some interesting evidence in this

1 Ib. IV. p. 465.
2 V.C.H. Oxon II. p. 73.
connection was given during Alnwick's visitations of the diocese of Lincoln. When Clemence Medeforede, the Prioress of Ankerwyke was asked whether she had observed the Bishop's injunctions, she answered "that such injunctions were, and are, well observed as regards both her and her sisters in effect and according to their power, except the injunction whereby she is bound to supply to her sisters sufficient raiment for their habit, and as touching the non-observance of that injunction she answers that she cannot observe it, because of the poverty and insufficiency of the resources of the house, which have been much lessened by reason of the want of a surveyor or steward (yconomus). Therefore she besought my lord's good-will and assistance that he would deign with charitable consideration to make provision of such steward or director ... And when these nuns, all and several, had been so examined and were gathered together again in the chapter house, the said Depyng (the Visitor) gave consideration to two grievances, wherein the priory and nuns alike suffer no small damage, the which, as he affirmed, were worthy of reform above the rest of those that stood most in need of reform, to wit the lack of raiment for the habit, of bedclothes and of a steward or seneschal, but in these matters, as he averred, he could not apply a remedy for the nonce without riper deliberation and consultation with my lord."  

Similarly the old Prioress of St. Michael Stamford, when asking for the appointment of two nuns as treasureresses,

complained "that she herself is impotent to rule temporalities, nor have they an industrious man to supervise these and to raise and receive (external payments);" another nun said that "they have not a discreet layman to rule their temporalities," and a third also complained of the lack of a "receiver". At Gokewell, on the other hand, the Prioress said 'that the rector of Flixburgh is their steward (yeonomus) and he looks after the temporalities and not she;' he was evidently a true friend to the nuns, for she said "that the house does not exceed £10 in rents and is greatly in debt to the rector of Flixburgh." The terms of appointment of custodes often specify the inexpertness of the nuns, or their need for someone to supervise the management of their estates. The nuns of Nunburnholme in 1314 were said to have "no expert person, who could look after the business of their poorly-endowed house." At Arden in 1306 they were ordered to provide a master of guardian of their goods, "especially to look after their husbandry." At Marrick in 1252 it was enjoined 'that the whole number of oxen, cows, horses and stock of every kind was to be entered in two rolls, one of which was to remain with the convent and the other with the custos of the house, who had been appointed to look after the outside business and guardianship of the granges, so that the property of the house might be apparent at any visitation. No letters were to be sealed with the common seal

1Ib. f.39d.
2Ib. f.86.
3V.C.H. Yorks III.p.119.
4Ib.III.p.113.
except by consent of the whole convent, or at least of the wiser part, and of the master. Sales of wood and stock were forbidden, except with the consent of the master. At Nunburnholme (1314) it will be remembered that the duty of the custos was simply to go there thrice a year and read over the accounts of the ministers and bailiffs. Perhaps however the fullest set of instructions to a custos which have survived are those given by Archbishop Melton to Roger de Saxton, rector of Aberford, in making him custos of Kirklees in 1317.

"Trusting in your industry, we by tenour of the present (letters) give you power during our pleasure to look after, guard and administer the temporal possessions of our beloved religious ladies, the Prioress and convent of Kirklees in our diocese, throughout their manors and estates (locæ) wherever these be, and to receive and hear the account of all servants and ministers serving in the same, and to make those payments (allocandum) which by reason ought to be made, as well as to remove all useless ministers and servants and to appoint in their place others of greater utility, and to do all other things which shall seem to you to be to the advantage of the place, firmly enjoining the said prioress and convent, as well as the sisters and lay brothers of the house, in virtue of holy obedience, that they permit you freely to administer in all and each of the aforesaid matters."

It must have been of great assistance to the worried and

1 Lib. III. p.117.
2 Above p.154.
incapable nuns to have a reliable guardian thus to look after their temporal affairs and it is difficult to understand why the practice of having a resident prior died out at the Cistercian houses and at Benedictine houses (e.g. St. Michael Stamford) which had such an official in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Even the appointment of neighbouring rectors as custodes of nunneries in the York and Lincoln dioceses ceased, apparently, to be common by the middle of the fourteenth century. It is a curious anomaly that this remedy should have been applied less and less often during the very centuries when the nunneries were becoming increasingly poor, and stood daily in greater need of external assistance in the management of their temporal affairs. For the financial decline of the nunneries,

It will be noticed that all the references to custodes given on p.175 note 1 belong to the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; appointments at a later date are generally made to meet some regular crisis. There are no references to the Prior of St. Michael Stamford in the later account rolls of that house, though one or two rolls belonging to the beginning of the century mention him. One of the few references to the regular appointment of a master in a Cistercian house after the first quarter of the fourteenth century is at Legbourne, where "later Lincoln regulations record the appointment of several masters from 1294-1343 and in 1366 the same official is apparently called an yconomus of Legbourne." (V.C.H. Lincs. II. p.154 note 1.) The will of Adam, vicar of Halington, "custos sive magister domus monialium de Legbourne," dated 1345, has been preserved. Gibbons, Early Lincoln Wills. The yconomus of Gokewell in 1440 is a very late instance. (Compare Buckingham's advice to the Abbess of Elstow in 1387. Above p.179...) Much the same function as that of the ekes was, however, probably performed by the seneschal, an official often mentioned during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The seneschal was an ordinary manorial official to be found on most large estates, looking after the bailiffs of the different manors and acting much as a modern agent. See the evidence as to Master Brye & Master Brian Cotterel who held the office at Romsey in 1502 & 1507 respectively, in the Vita Benedicta of those dates. V.C. Hants II p.127 ff. & Livingstone, Ross at Romsey Abbey p.278 ff. For the same office at Nall and Dartford see Wood, Letters of Royal & Illustrious Ladies II, pp.150-3.
CHAPTER III

The Cloister and the World

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The Cloister and the World

Dames religieuses, blankes, noires et toutes,
Vous donnez a parler a ches gens et des doubtes;
Car quand on voit de vous hors de vos lieus les routes
Li fol ont tantost dit "Or rewardes ches gloutes."

Gilles li Muisis (†1352)

When the gates of the cloister shut upon a new made nun,
they shut by no means for ever. The Poor Clares, indeed, were
under a vow of perpetual enclosure, but there were only three
Franciscan nunneries in England. The Benedictines and even
the stricter Cistercians, had a greater freedom of movement
under their rule; and where the rule gave them an inch they
habitually took an ell. It is clear from the Benedictine rule
that nuns were to be allowed to go out on errands, though

All if men unto mets Iam pray
For to ete sale Iay not assent
But if Iay asked leue or Iay went;

that they might on occasion be away from the church if "Iay
sal walk bi way or work"; that they might even make longer
journeys "to fadir or moder or o fer frend" and spend the
night outside their house; but no one might leave the cloister
bounds without permission. These regulations both monks and
nuns interpreted, as time went on, with increasing wideness,
and the freedom with which they wandered about in the world had
a very bad result, both on discipline and on morals. The least objectionable occasion for leaving cloistral precincts rose when convent business demanded it; and this happened frequently to the superior and to the obedientaries. The treasurer and cellareress might be obliged day by day to visit, in the course of their duties, offices and buildings which lay outside the walls; and if they were not sober-minded women, they might find occasion to linger and gossip with secular persons and with servants. The constitutions of the legate Othobon in 1268 attempted to minimise this danger by enacting that no nun was to go into the different officinas, except those whose offices rendered it necessary to do so and they were never to go unaccompanied. The complaints brought by the nuns of Gracedieu in 1440-1 against their self-confident cellareress Margaret Bélers show that some such regulation was necessary; it was said that she was accustomed to visit all the offices alone, even the granaries and other places where men were working and that she often went there (good zealous house-wife that she was) very early in the morning, before it was light; whereupon Bishop

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1 Wilkins. Concilia II p.18. Compare William of Wykeham's injunctions to Romsey in 1387: "Constituciones bone memorie domini Ottoboni quondam sedis apostolice in Anglia legati in hoc casu editas, vt conuenit imitantes, vobis sub penis infrascriptis districcius inhibemus, ne ad officinas aliquas aut alias cameras quascumque forinsecas extra septa claustri, vel ad alia loca in villam vel alibi extra vestrum monasterium, illis quibus hoc ex officio competit dumtaxat exceptis ... exeatis." New Coll. MS. f.84. Compare also the injunctions (also modelled on Othobon's constitution) sent by Thomas of Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford to Lymbrook about 1277. Reg. Thome de Cantilupo, p. 201.
Alnwick ordered the Prioress to 'suffre none of thaym, officiere ne other, to go to any hous of office wythe owte the cloystere, but if ther be an other nunne approve in religione assigned to go wythe hire, eyther to be wytnesse of others conversacyon.'

Convent business, however, frequently took the officiaries further afield than outlying barns, and they undertook journeys hardly less often than did the head of the house. Here, as usual, the evidence of account rolls is invaluable. The Chambress of Syon went to London three times in 1536, doubtless to buy the 'russettes', 'white clothe', 'kerseys', 'fryce', 'holand cloth', 'soope' and 'laine' which figure so largely in her account and to take the spectacles to be mended; but she was a thrifty lady and her expenses were only 6d., 2d. and 20d., respectively. Her sister the Cellaress also went to London that year and expended 6d. on the jaunt. The nuns of St. Michael Stamford sometimes took long journeys on convent business; in 1372-3 Dame Katherine FitzAleyn, went 'to London and other places about our tithes (dyneis)' at the heavy cost of 15/8. Another year the same business took her once more to the capital and the Prioress' account notes "Paid for the hire of three horses for six days going to London for our tithes ..., paid for the hire of a valet and for his expenses going with the said horses 2/3, item sent to Dame Katherine FitzAleyn at the same time 6/8'; the

3 Ib. 2.xxxi.
5 Ib.1260/4.
treasurer's account for the same year throws further light upon the movements of that much trusted lady: "Paid for the expenses of Dame Katherine Fitzaleyn and Dame Ida going to London and for the hire of their horses going and returning, for our tithes £2.11.0. Paid to Dame Katherine Fitzaleyn for the business of the convent 3/-.

In the expenses of the Sub-prioress and Dame Katherine Fitzaleyn and two men and three horses, going to Fleet for rent and for salt 3/8. In the expenses of Dame Katherine Fitzaleyn and Dame Joan Fishmere (treasurer) for hire of horses 8d."

Dame Katherine also went to the Bishop to get a certificate; and in 1377-8 she went with the treasurer Dame Margaret Redinges to Corby and to Sempringham and Dames Margaret Redinges and Joan Fishmere went with Robert Clerk to Clopton.

Sometimes again, nuns left their houses to take part in ecclesiastical ceremonies, such as processions. There does not seem much harm in the whole convent sallying forth on these solemn occasions and indeed bishops sometimes gave orders that they were to do so; in 1321 Rigaud de Asserio, Bishop of Winchester, sent a letter to the Prior of St. Swithun's monastery "ad orandum pro pace, cum processionibus sollemnibus"; he was to cause the Abbot and Convent of Hyde, the Abbess and Convent of St. Mary Winchester and all the other religious houses and parish priests of Winchester to come together in the

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1Ib. 1260/5.
2Ib. 1260/7.
cathedral and then to proceed in solemn procession through the town.\(^1\) The strictest disciplinarians, however, looked with suspicion even upon religious processions and sought to keep nuns within the precincts of their cloister; the constitutions of the legate Othobon (1268) contain a proviso that nuns are not to go out for public processions but are to hold their processions within the bounds of their own house\(^2\) and the prohibition was repeated by Thomas of Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford writing to Lymbrook (1277)\(^3\) and by William of Wykeham, (who specifically based his words upon Othobon), writing to Romsey (1387).\(^4\) Some explanation of this severity may perhaps be gleaned from an injunction sent by Bishop Longland to Elstow in 1531: 'Moreover forasmooche as the ladie abbesse and covent of that house be all oon religious bodye unite by the profession and rules of holy saint benedictes, and is nott convenient ne religious to be dissewerd or separate, we will and Inioyne that frome hensforth noon of the said abbesse seru-aunte nor no other seculer person or persones, whatsoever he or they be, goo in eny procession before the said abbesse betwene hir and hir said covent, undre payne of excommunycacon, and that the ladye abbesse ne noon of hir successours hereafter be ladde by the arme or otherwise in eny procession ther as in tymes paste hath been used, undre the same payne.'\(^5\)


\(^2\)Wilkins. Concilia, II. p.18.

\(^3\)Reg. Thome de Cantilupo (Cant. & York Soc. & Cantilupe Soc) p.201.

\(^4\)MS. in New Coll. Oxon. f.85d.

\(^5\)Archaeologia XLVII. pp.52-3.
religious ceremonies of a less definitely formal nature occasionally called nuns, in a body or individually, out of their convents. They sometimes went to the funerals of great folk; not only priors and prioresses but also canons and nuns were expected to be present at Sir Thomas Cumberworth's funeral and month's-mind, and in an account roll of St. Michael Stamford there is the entry 'paye a nos compaygnounes alaunt a Leycestre al enterment la Duchesse ij s.' Attendance at religious processions might be, and attendance at funerals undoubtedly was, regarded as a legitimate reason for going outside the precincts of the cloister; one other excuse of the same nature, however, sometimes took a nun away from her convent for a considerable length of time and was never looked upon with any favour by the authorities of the church. It is an excuse with which Chaucer has familiarised us; nuns sometimes went upon pilgrimages. It is unnecessary to go

1 See below p.350

This was probably Constance of Castile, second wife of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; she died on March 24, 1394 and was buried with great magnificence at St. Mary's, Leicester. (S. Armitage-Smith, John of Gaunt (1904) pp. 357-8.) The date on the account roll is illegible and I have conjecturally dated it 1393-4 from this internal evidence.

3 All pilgrimages, however, did not involve a long journey, or absence as prolonged as that of Madame Eglantine. The nuns of Nuncorton could make a pilgrimage to St. Hugh of Lincoln, without being away for more than a night and the nuns of Blackborough would not have to follow for a long distance the milky way to Walsingham. There were over seventy places of pilgrimage in Norfolk alone. (Cutts, Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages (3rd. ed. 1911) p. 162.)
further than Chaucer to realize why it was that medieval bishops offered a strenuous opposition to the practice; one has only to remember some of the folk in whose company the Prioress travelled and some of the tales they told. If one could be certain that she rode with her nun or at least between the Knight and the poor Parson ... but there were also the Miller and the Summoner and, worst of all, that cheerful and engaging sinner, the Wife of Bath. If one could be certain that she listened only to the tales of Griselda, or of Melibeus (though indeed she had not deserved such a dreary fate as the last) or of Palamon and Arcite, and fell discreetly to the rear when the company laughed over the 'nyce cas of Absalon and hende Nicholas'. If one could be certain that it was to the Wife of Bath alone that the Merchant made his apology

Ladies I prey yow that ye be nat wrooth;
I can nat glose, I am a rude man.

Certainly the Wife of Bath was a host in herself, but the plural is ominous and the two nuns were the only other ladies in the company. The sterner moralists of the middle ages bear out Chaucer's picture of a typical pilgrimage, with most unchaucerian denunciation. Jacques de Vitry does not mince his words, 'I have seen many pilgrims who, weary of wayfaring, used to drink themselves tipsy ... You will find many prostitutes and evil women in the inns, who lie in watch for the incautious and reward their guests with evil,
even as a mouse in a wallet, a serpent in the bosom.' Etienne de Bourbon has the same tale to tell: 'A pilgrimage should be sober, lest the pilgrims be despoiled and slain and turned to scorn, both materially and spiritually. For I have seen a person who had laboured greatly making a pilgrimage overseas, lose both his virtue and his money, when drunk and lying with a chambermaid in an inn.' Pilgrims indeed got drunk at times, as drunk as the Miller 'so that wnethe up-on his hors he sat' on the very first day of the journey, as drunk as the 'sory palled gost' of a cook, when the cavalcade reached that little town

Which that y-cleped is Bob-up-and-doun,
Under the Blee in Canterbury waye.

Again, there are pilgrims, says Etienne de Bourbon 'who when they visit holy places sing lecherous lays, whereby they inflame the hearts of such as hear them and kindle the fire of lechery'; and like an echo rise the well-known words

Ful loude he song 'Come hider, love, to me'.
This sonnour bar to him a stif burdoun
Was never trompe of half so greet a soun,

For these quotations see Anecdotes Historiques &c. d'Etienne de Bourbon ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche (Soc. de l'Hist. de France 1877) pp.167-6. Compare Gautier de Coincy's story of the rich young man Girart, who resolved to go on a pilgrimage to St. James of Compostella, but the night before his departure, drunk and tempted by the devil, 'il vint a une sole garce'. Afterwards the Devil in the form of St. James caused him to commit suicide, but he was saved and resuscitated by the intervention of the Virgin. Gautier de Coincy. Miracles de Notre Dame ed. Poquet (Paris 1857) pp.289 ff. Mine host's words to the drunken cook are significant in the light of these quotations from Jaques de Vitry and Etienne de Bourbon (Manciple's Prologue. li. 15-19) So also are the adventures of 'that loose fish the Pardoner' with Kit at the Chequer Inn. See Tale of Beryn ed. Furnivall & Stone (Chaucer Soc.1887) (The Prologue or the mery adventure of the Pardoner and Tapstere at the Inn at Canterbury.)
and shrill and clear sound the miller's bagpipes, bringing the pilgrims out of town.¹ No place for a cloistered nun was the inn, (though one feels that mine host's wife, 'big in armes', could have kept the Tabard decent, whatever might be said of the Cheker-of-the Hope), or the road to Canterbury, or yet Canterbury itself, where the monk with the holy-water sprinkler was so anxious for a peep at her face, and where she hob-nobbed over wine in the parlour, with the hostess and (horrors) the Wife of Bath,

(And aftir, with our hostis wyff, in hir parlour rowe, I woll gyve zewe the wyne, and yee shull me also; ffor tyll we go to soper wee have nauzt ellis to do.)²

Madame Eglantine, for all her simplicity, must have circumvented her Bishop before she got there. For the Bishops were quite clear in their minds that pilgrimages for nuns were to be discouraged. They were of Langland's way of thinking.

Right so, if thow be religious. renne thow neuere ferther
To Rome ne to Rochemadore, but as thi reule techeth,
And holde the vnder obedience. that heigh wey is to heuene.

As early as 1195 the Council of York decreed "Ut ergo eis a di-
matur opportunitas evagandi, prohibemus ne ... iter

¹ Compare the words of the Lollard William Thorpe in 1407: 'Such fond people waste blamefullie Gods goodes in their vaine pilgrimages, spending their goods upon vitiuous hostelars, which are oft uncleane women of their bodies ... Also, Sir, I knowe well that when divers men and women will goe thus after their owne wills and finding, out on pilgrimage, they will ordaine with them before to have with them both men and women that can well sing wanton songes; and some other pilgrimages will have them with bagge-pipes' etc. This and other information about pilgrimages may be found in Coulton, Chaucer and his England pp.138-143. See also The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry (E.E.T.S.) pp. 47ff.
² Tale of Beryn pp. 6,10.
peregrinationis arripiant."¹ In 1351 Bishop Gynwell wrote thus to Heynings: 'Item pur ceo que ascun de les dames de dit mesoun sount trop acustumez de faire auowes de pili_

grimage et dautres abstinences, saunz conge de lour souerayn, par quar ils ount souent occasion de les retirer de lour religion, si vous comandoms sur peyn des comengement que nul de vous face tiel maner auowe en destourbance de vostre religion, saunz es-

pecial conge de vostre souereyn. Et que nul tiel auowe sort fait par ascun de vous, pur faire paregrinage ou autre abstin-

ence, a quel il neat pas tenuz par sa religion, nous lui re-

lessoms tut maner de tel auowe issint qil se poet doner entiere-

ment a sa religion parfaire.'² The nuns of Nunappleton did not escape so easily; in 1318 Archbishop Melton strictly or-

dered them not to leave their house 'by reason of any vow of pilgrimage, which they might have taken; if any had taken such vows she was to say as many psalters as it would have taken days to perform the pilgrimage so rashly vowed.'³ One has a melancholy vision of Madame Eglantine saying psalters in-

terminably through her tretye nose, instead of jogging along so gayly with her motly companions and telling so prettily her tale of little St. Hugh. But the nuns of Nunappleton retained their taste for pilgrimages and nearly two centuries later (in 1489) we find Archbishop Zouch admonishing their successors 'yat ye prioresse lycence none of your sisters to goe pilgrémage

³V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 172.
or visit yer frendes w'oute a grete cause, and yen such a sister lycencyate by you to have w' her son of ye moste sadde and well disposed sistirs to she come home agayn. 1 At Wix, twenty years later, the nuns were forbidden to undertake pilgrimages without the consent of the diocesan, and in 1531 Bishop Longland wrote to the Prioress of Nuncoton: "Forasmoche as by your negligent sufferaunce dyeers of your susters hath wandred a brode in the world, some under the pretense of pylgrimage, some to see ther frends, and otherwise whereby hath grown many Inconuenyences insolent behaviours and moche slaun-der, aswell to your house as to those susters, as by the texte of my said visitation doth euydently appere, I chardge you lady priores that frome hensforthe ye neyther licence ne suffre eny your susters to goo out of your monastery," without good cause and company of a 'wise sobre and discrete suster' and an in-junction not to 'tary out of the monastery in the nighte tyme.' 2 But most significant of all is a case which occurred at the little Cistercian priory of Wykeham in Yorkshire in the fif-teenth century. In 1450 Archbishop Kemp wrote to the Prioress, bidding her readmit an apostate nun Katherine Thornyf, 'who, seduced by the Angel of Darkness, under the colour of a pil-grimage in the time of the Jubilee, without leave of the arch-bishop, or officials or even of the prioress, set out on a journey to the court of Rome, in the company of another nun of the house, who, as it was reported, had gone the way of all

1. Ib. and Dugdale, Mon. V. p.654.
flesh and on whose soul the Archbishop prayed for mercy. After the death of this nun, Katherine Thornyf had lived in sin with a married man in London. Then she had been moved to penitence, after who knows what agony of soul, and had gone to the Archbishop seeking absolution; and so the prodigal, weary of her husks, came back to the nunnery she had left. The melancholy tale is borne out by all we know about medieval pilgrimages. Years before - in 744 - an Archbishop of Milan had written to an Archbishop of Canterbury, advising that the synod should prohibit women and nuns from travelling to Rome, on account of the dangers and temptations of the journey, 'for very few are the cities in Lombardy ... France ... Gaul, where in there is not to be found a prostitute of English race;' and the trouvère Rutebuef, in the thirteenth century, spoke with less pity and a more biting satire of the pilgrimages of French nuns:

Les blanches et les grises et les noires nonains
Sont sovent pelerines aux saintes et aux sainz;
Le Diez lor en set gre, je n'en suis pas certains,
S'elles fussent bien sages elles alasser mains.

Quant ces nonains s'en vont par le pays esbatre
Les unes à Paris, les autres à Montmartre,
Tels foiz enmaine deus qu'en ramaine quatre,
Quar s'on en perdoit une il les ceverroit baire.

Excursions on convent business or for attendance at ecclesiastical ceremonies (other than pilgrimages) were legitimate,

1 V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 183.
2 Quoted in Gregorovius. Hist. of Rome in the Middle Ages. III. p. 78 note.
though strict disciplinarians sought to restrict them to occasions of real urgency. But for the most part we hear about journeys undertaken for pleasure and not for business, or at any rate the elastic term business is stretched to cover some very pleasant wandering in the world and much hobnobbing with friends. Nuns were allowed sometimes to go and stay with their relatives; and they occasionally made long journeys for this purpose. Bishop Stapeldon, for instance, ordained that when the nuns of Canonsleigh in Devon went to visit their friends 'in Somerset, Dorset, Devonshire or in Cornwall', they might not stay for longer than a month; but if they went outside these four counties the Abbess might allow them to stay longer still, having regard to the distance of their destination and to the time which would be spent in travelling. 1 A month was a very generous allowance, and other bishops do not seem to have countenanced so long a furlough; but, whatever the term allotted, the nuns sometimes outstayed it. In 1351 Bishop Gynwell was obliged to write to the nuns of Heynings rebuking such disobedience: 'encement si auoms entendez que les dames de dit mesoun souent acustumez demurrer od lour amys outre le terme par vous, Prioressse, assigne, nous commandons a vous, Prioressse auantdit, qe taunt eulemment une foiht en lan donez conge a les dames de visiter lour amys, et certeyn terme resounable pur reuerir, outre quelle terme sils facent demoer, saunz cause resounable par vous accepte, les chastes pur le trespasse

1Reg. of Bishop Stapeldon of Exeter ed Hingeston-Randolph p.95. cp. injunctions to Polsio, below pp135-139
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At Ivinghoe in 1530, it was discovered that one of the nuns had gone on a visit to her friends without permission, and had stayed away from the Feast of St. Michael to Passion Sunday in the following year (i.e. over six months), which came perilously near to apostasy. The authorities disliked and distrusted not only these long absences, but also short visits, and tried their best to restrict them. Once away from the cloister and staying in a private house there was nothing to keep a nun from joining in the secular revelries of friends; and though her behaviour was doubtless, in the majority of cases, exemplary, the convent rule aimed at keeping her unspotted even by temptation; and an anecdote related by Erasmus in his dialogue 'Ichthyophagia' shows that the danger of allowing nuns to visit their friends was a real one. Two nuns had gone to stay with their kinsfolk, and at supper "they began to grow merry with wine; they laughed and joked and kissed and not over-modestly neither, till you could hardly hear what was said for the noise they made ... After supper there was dancing, singing of lascivious songs and such doings I am ashamed to speak of, inasmuch as I am much afraid that night hardly passed very honestly."  

2 V.C.H. Bucks i. p. 366. In the Vitae Patrum X. c. 206, however, there is a tale of a nun who was lent by her abbess to a certain religious matron and lived with her for a year. See the version in Jacques de Vitry. Exempla ex sermonibus &c. ed. T. F. Crane pp. 26-7. 
3 The Whole Familiar Colloquies of Erasmus, translated by Nathan Bailey (1877) p. 280.