Moreover even if nuns visited their friends for a very short time, staying only one night, or even returning before nightfall to the convent, there was danger that they might join in the various revelries practiced among secular folk, and reprobated by the church as occasions for unseemly and licentious behaviour. Bishop Spofford of Hereford, indeed, found it necessary in 1437 to send a special warning against doing so to the nuns of Lymbrook; the Prioress was to "gife no lycence to noon of hire sustres her aftir, to go to no port townes no to noon othir townes to comyn wakes and festes, spectales and othir wordly vanytees, and specyally on holy-dayes, nor to be absent lyggyng oute by nyght out of thair monastery, but with fader and moder, except causes of necessytee."

The words which the Good Wife spoke to her daughter come to mind:

Go not to e wrastelinge ne schotynge at cok
As it were a strumpet or a giggelot.
Wone at hom, douzter, and love Fi werk myche. 2

Clemence Medforde, Prioress of Ankerwyke, went to a wedding at Bromhall; yet weddings were of all those 'comyn wakes and festes' most condemned by the church for the unseemly

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3. See below p.351....
revelries which followed them. 'The Cristen State of Matrimony', written in 1543, throws a flood of light upon the subject: "When they come home from the Church, then beginneth excess of eatyng and dryncking - and as much is waisted in one daye, as were sufficient for the two newe maried Folkes halfe a yere to lyve upon .......

After the Bancket and Feast, there beginnethe a vayne, madde and unmanerlye fashion, for the Bryde must be brought into an open dauncyng place. Then is there such a rennyng, leapyng, and flyngyng among them, then is there suche a lyf tyming up and discoveryng of the Damseiles clothes and other Womennes apparell, that a Man might thynke they were sworne to the Devels Daunce. Then muste the poore Bryde kepe foote with al Dauncers and refuse none, how scabbed, foule, droncken, rude and shameles soever he be. Then must she oft tymes heare and se much wyckednesse and many an uncomely word; and that noyse and romblyng endureth even tyll supper."¹ It may be urged that the Brides of Heaven need not necessarily have attended these merry makings after the ceremony; but the example of Isabel Benet nun of Catesby,² and the

¹ Quoted in Brand's Observations on Popular Antiquities (ed. 1877) pp. 382, 394.
² See below pp 213.......

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The text includes references and notes to other works and historical contexts, such as Brand's Observations on Popular Antiquities, and references to historical events and figures. The text is rich in detail, discussing the cultural and social aspects of marriage and festivities in the 16th century, with a focus on the experiences of newly married couples and their celebrations.
tenour of certain episcopal injunctions show that nuns did not always despise dancing. The strict disciplinarian's view of weddings is shown in the fact that members of the Tertiary Order of St. Francis were forbidden to attend them; and even the civic authorities of London found it necessary to regulate the disorders which were prevalent on such occasions.

1 See e.g. Dean Kentwood's injunction to St. Helen's, Bishopsgate in 1432: 'Also we enjoin you that all dauncysng and revelyng be utterly forborne among you, except Christmas and other tymys of recreacyone among youre selwe usyd, in absence of seculers in all wyse.' Dugdale, Mon. IV p. 554. Also Bishop Spofford's injunction to Lymbrock, forbidding "all maner of mynstrelsey, enterludes, daun-syng or reuelyng with in your sayde holy place." Hereford Epis. Reg. Spofford f. 774. Shortly before the dissolution Henry VIII is said to have come to Halywell Priory, dressed like a Turk and accompanied by some of his courtiers, and had a dance with the nuns. Wriothesley's Chron. (Camden Soc.) p. 50. Compare also references to the observances practised in nunneries on Innocents Day. Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham I., pp. 82-3. III., p. 846, and on Christmas Day. Visit. of Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) pp. 209-10. In 1531 Bishop Longland wrote to Nuncoton 'And likewise chardge you lady priores that ye suffre nomore hereafter any lorde of mys-rule to be within your house, nouthere to suffre hereafter any such disgyisinge as in tymes past have bene used in your monasterie in nunnes apparell ne otherwise.' Archaeologia XLVII p. 56. References to expenditure on gaities often occur in nunny accounts e.g. in the account of Christian Bassett, Prioress of St. Mary de Pré St. Albans (2-4 Hen. VII) 'Item paid for makyng of the dyner to the susters upon Childermasday iijs iiijd. Item paid for brede and ale for Seint Nicholas clerks iiijd. Item for harpers and players atte Christmas and ... tymes xiiijd.' Dugdale, Mon. III., p. 360. On other occasions the nuns paid for wassail at New Year and Twelfth Night, for May Games, for bread and ale on bonfire nights etc. V.C.H., Herts IV., p. 431 note 39.

2 Coulton, Chaucer and his England, pp. 108-9. It is the more surprising to find weddings occasionally being celebrated in convent churches e.g. on Jan. 3, 1465-6 the Bishop of Ely addressed a licence to Thomas Trumpton 'Sacrae Pag. Prof. Praesidenti religionis Minorissarum monasterii de Denny' authorising him to celebrate matrimony in the convent church between William Ketterich junior and Marion Hall, domestic servants in the monastery, the bans to be put up in the parish church of Waterbeach. Ely Episcopal Records ed. Gibbons p. 145. Compare case at Crabhouse in 1476 V.C.H., Norfolk II, p. 409. Henry VIII was said to have married one of his wives in the chapel of Sopwell. Dugdale Mon. III., p. 364. Such weddings would necessarily take place in convent churches where the nave was also used as a parish church, but this was not the case at Denney.
Again not only weddings, but also christenings, often involved unseemly revels, and this could not fail to affect nuns, who (despite canonical prohibition) were somewhat in demand as godmothers. Christening parties were gay affairs; the gossips would return to the house of the child's parents to eat and drink and make merry; "ad tunc et ibidem immediate venerunt in domam suam ad comedendum et bibendum et ad tunc sibi revelaverunt de baptismo;" if or viennent commeres de toutes pars; or convient que le pauvre homme face tant que elles soient bien aises. La dame et les commeres parlent et raudent, et dient de bonnes choses et se tiennent bien aises, quiconques dit la peine de le querir, quelques temps qu'il face ... Et tousjours boivent comme bottes ... Lors les commeres entrent, elles desjument, elles disnent, elles menjent a raassie, maintenant boivent au lit de la commere, maintenant à la cuve, et confondent les biens et du vin plus qu'il n'en entreroit en une bote; et à l'aventure il vient à barrilz où n'en y a que une pipe. Et le pauvre homme, qui a tout le soussy de la despense va souvent veuir comment le vin se porre, quant il voit terriblement boire ... Briefment tout se despend; les commeres s'en vont bien coiffées, parlant et janglant et ne se esmoient point dont il vient.  If Antoine de la Sale's witty account of 'the third joy of marriage' has any truth,

(and it is upheld by more sober documents) bishops did well to dislike christening parties for nuns. It was, in fact, forbidden for monks and nuns to become godfathers and godmothers, not only, as Mr. Coulton, has pointed out, 'because this involved them in a fresh spiritual relationship incompatible with their ideal, but also because it entangled them with worldly folk and worldly affairs.' Thus in 1367 William of Wykeham wrote to the nuns of Romsey, "We forbid you all and singly to presume to become godmothers to any child, without obtaining our licence to do so, since from such relationships expense is often entailed upon religious houses;" at Nuncoton in 1440 two nuns asked that their sisters might be forbidden the practice and Alnwick enjoined "that none of yowe have no children at the fount ne confirmyng;" and nearly a century later one of his successors wrote to the Prioress of Studley "that from henceforth ye give noo more licence ne suffre any of your sisters to be godmother to any child, neither at the christening nor at the confirmacon, and under like paine charge you not to be godmother to any child in christening nor".

2 MS. in New Coll. Oxon. f.87. On the other hand such connections with rich families might be a source of wealth to a house,"Cf. the letter of an Abbot at Bordeaux in Father Denifle's Désolation des Eglises, &c, Vol. I. p.583 (A.D.1419). The abbey had been so impoverished by war that the Abbot begged for a papal indulg permitting him to stand godfather to forty children of noble or wealthy families; the pope granted only four." Coulton. loc. cit.
There does indeed seem a certain incongruity in the presence of one who had renounced the world at a wedding or a christening, even had such ceremonies not been accompanied by very worldly revels. But they were less incongruous than was the attendance of Mary, daughter of Edward I, the nun-princess of Amesbury, upon her stepmother Queen Margaret, and later upon her niece Elizabeth de Burgh, during their confinements. A King's daughter, however, could not be subjected to ordinary restraints; Mary led a particularly free life, constantly visiting court and going on pilgrimages, and there is no reason to suppose that ordinary nuns shared her privileges.

Naturally the occasions when a nun was away from her convent for the night, whether on business or on pleasure, were comparatively rare. For the most part the bishops in their injunctions had to deal with casual absences during the day. There seems to have been a great deal of wandering about without any specific purpose, such as attending a funeral, a wedding or a christening. Short errands perhaps took the nuns out

1 Archaeologia XLVII. p. 54. Compare similar prohibitions by Ette des Rigaud, Archbishop of Rouen, addressed to the nuns of Montivilliers in 1257 and 1265, Reg. Visit. Archiepisc. Rothomag. ed Bonnin (1852) p. 293, 517. The prohibition was frequently broken by monks as well as by nuns. See e.g. the complaint of Guy Jouenneaux, Abbot of St. Sulpice de Bourges in his Defence of Monastic Reform (1503): "Sometimes they eat in the houses of their gossips, though the law forbids them such relationships, or again among citizens, at whose houses they are as frequent guests, or more frequent, than even worldly-minded folk." Coulton, loc. cit.
for a few hours, or they went simply for air and exercise. Their rule and their bishops would have had them hear the 'smale fowles maken melodye' and tread 'the smalle, softe, sweete grass' within the narrow cloister court, or at least in the privacy of their own gardens. But the nuns liked highways and hedges, and often in springtime it was farewell their book and their devotion. Certainly the convent often did come out to take the air in its own meadows; John Aubrey (in a much-quoted passage) tells of the nuns of Kington in Wiltshire, and how 'Old Jacques' could see them from his house "come forth into the nymph-hay with their rocks and wheels to spin: and with their sewing work. He would say that he had told three-score and ten, but of nuns there were not so many, but in all, with lay sisters and widows, old maids and young girls, there might be such a number." Sometimes, indeed, at the busy harvest-time, when every pair of hands was needed on the manor farm, the nuns even went hay-making in the meadows. The visitations of Bishop Alnwick

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1 Their gardens are often mentioned e.g. at Nuncoton in 1440 it was complained that the nuns had private gardens and that some of them did not come to compline, but wandered about in the gardens, gathering herbs. *Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick*. 172 (70). At Stainfield in 1519 a similar complaint was made that on feast days they did not stay in the church and occupy themselves in devotion, between the Hours of Our Lady and High Mass, but came out and walked about the garden and cloisters. *V.C.H. Lincs. II. p. 151*. The nuns of Sinningthwaite (1319) were ordered to provide themselves with a competent gardener for their curtillage, so that they might always have an abundance of vegetables. *V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 177*. The nuns of Gracedieu had a garden 'made in resemblance of that upon Mount Olivet, Gethseane.' *Nichols. Hist. & Antiq. of Leicester*. III. p. 652.

Quoted in *Gasquet. English Monastic Life* p. 177.
provide two instances of this and show also the abuses to which it might give rise, since the fields were full of secular workers. At Nuncoton in 1440 the subprioress deposed "that the nuns in time of harvest go out to do harvest work, wherefore the choir is not followed, and ... the nuns in seed time clear the corn from tares in the barns, into which there do enter seculars, between whom and the nuns unseemly words are passed, whence it is feared that evil may follow." At Gracedieu the sub-prioress mentioned that "the nuns helped the seculars to store the grain at harvest time," but the most amusing revelations were made by one Dame Constance London, and concerned the conduct of the haughty cellaress Margaret Belers, who whether on account of her autocratic government or because she was of better birth than they, was regarded by her sisters with the utmost jealousy. 'The nuns' said Dame Constance, 'assist seculars in making the sheaves of corn. And Belers goes to the harvest alone with Master Henry (the chaplain), he reaping the corn and she stacking it, and she rides behind him at sunset on the same horse; far too familiar with him she is.' Here was a pretty scandal; the Bishop (hiding, we will hope, a smile) made enquiries; Master Henry was charged with the heinous crime of going haymaking with Dame Belers. But Master Henry specifically denied wandering alone in the fields.

1 One of the charges against Eleanor Prioress of Arden in 1396 was that 'she compelled three young nuns to go out haymaking very early in the morning, and they did not come back before nightfall, and so divine service was not yet said.' Test. Ebor. (Surtees Soc.) p. 283.

with the Cellareress; he said "that he and Belers and others were in
the meadows making hay and assisting in stacking the sheaves in the
barns;" and Alnwick contented himself with enjoining the Prioress
"that ye suffre none of your susters to go to any felde werkes but
alle onely in your presence." At Bishop Atwater's visitation of
Legbourne in 1519 it was stated that the nuns often worked at hay-
making, but only in the presence of the Prioress. Such field work,
when it was undertaken, must have afforded not only wholesome exer-
cise, but a very pleasant relaxation from the cramping life of the
cloister. The more human bishops made allowance for a natural in-
stinct by giving the convent permission to go for walks. 'Let the
door be closed at the right time' wrote Archbishop Courtenay to
Elstow in 1390 'And let no nun go out without licence of the abbess
or other president, yet so that leave of walking for recreation in
the orchard or in any other seemly and close place, at suitable times
be not out of malice denied to the nuns, provided that the younger do
not go without the society of the elder,' and the injunction was re-
peled by Bishop Flemyng in 1421-2. Bishop Spofford of Hereford

went even further; after forbidding any revelries to be held in the nunnery of Lymbrock, he added 'and what dysport of walk-
yng found in dewe tyme and place, so that ye kepe the dewe
houres and tymes of dyuyne seruyce with inforth, and with
honeste compony, and with lycence specyally asked and obteyned
(from) the pryoresse or supporyresse in her absence, and at
yee be two to gyder at the leest, we holde vs content.'

(1437). So in 1367 Robert de Stretton Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry forbade any nun to go into Lichfield without the Prioresse' leave, ordering that she should be accompanied by
two sisters and should 'make no vain and wanton delays', but
added that 'this is not intended to interfere with the laudable
custom of the whole or greater part of the convent walking
out together on certain days to take the air.'

This forerunner of the schoolgirls' 'crocodile' was not, however, what
the nuns desired. It was wandering about the roads in twos
and in threes (sometimes, alas, in ones also) that they really
enjoyed and against this freedom the bishops continually ful-
minated. It must be remembered that walking in the public
streets in the middle ages was very different from what it is
today; it is impossible otherwise, as Mr. Coulton has pointed
out, to explain the extraordinary severity of all rules for
the deportment of girls.

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\[\text{Coulton. Chaucer and his England p.109. He quotes one such}
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\[\text{rule from the 'Menagier de Paris'.} \quad \text{"When thou goest into town}
\]
\[\text{or to church, walk with thine head high, thine eyelids lower-
\]
\[\text{ed and fixed on the ground at four fathoms distance straight}
\]
\[\text{in front of thee, without looking or glancing sideways at either}
\]
\[\text{man or woman to the right hand or the left, nor looking up-
\]
\[\text{ward."} \]
pastimes, hocking and hoodsnatching, football and the games of noisy prentices in the town; and in the country villages they resounded with the still more boorish sports of country folk and with the shrill quarrels of alewives and regrateresses and all the good natured but short tempered people, whom court rolls show as raising the hue and cry upon each other and drawing blood from each other's noses. There is perhaps solicitude for the nuns in the injunction which Bishop Fitzjames sent in 1509 to the convent of Wix in Essex, forbidding them to permit 'any public spectacles of seculars, javelin-play, dances or trading in streets or open places.'

Manners were free in that age and the nuns would see and hear much that were best hidden from their cloistered innocence. Moreover if once they began to stop and pass the time of day with their neighbours, religious and secular, or to go into houses for some more private gossip, there was no knowing where such perilous familiarity would end; and the outspokenness with which bishops condemned such conduct by references to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, leaves no doubt as to what they feared.

But nothing availed to keep the nuns within their cloisters; and hardly a set of episcopal injunctions but bears witness to the freedom with which they wandered about the streets and fields. The nuns of Moxby are not to go out of the precincts

1 V.C.H. Essex. II. p.124.  
of their monastery often, nor at any time to wander about the
woods. 1 Alas poor ladies,

In somer when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is full mery in feyre forsete
To here the foulys song.

The nuns of Cookhill are more urban; they are not to wander
about in the town (1285) and the nuns of Wroxall are not to go on foot to Coventry or to Warwick 'cum eles ount fet desor-
dement en ces heures' (1338). The nuns of White Hall,
Ilchester 'walk through the streets and places of the vill of
Ilchester and elsewhere, the modesty of their sex being alto-
gether cast off and they do not fear to enter the houses of
 secular men and suspected persons.' (1335). 4 The nuns of
Polslo are not to go without permission into Exeter and are to return at once when their errand is accomplished, instead of
"wascauntes de hostel en hostel, si come eles unt maynte foiz
fait, en deshonestete de lur estat et de la Religioun" (1319).
- an echo here of the Good Wife's advice 'and run thou not from
house to house, like a St. Anthony's pig', 6 or of the reminis-
cences of that other Wife of Bath,

For ever yet I lovede to be gay,
And for to walke, in March, Averille and May,
Fro hous to hous, to here sondry talis. 7

1 V.C.H. Yorks III p.239.
VIII) p.39.
7 Wife of Bath's Prologue ll.545-7.
The nuns of Romsey 'enter houses of laymen and even of clerics in the town, eating and drinking with them' (1284). The nuns of Godstow constantly go to Oxford to see their friends (1445). The nuns of Elstow are a great trial to their diocesan; Bishop Gynwell finds that 'there is excessive and frequent wandering of nuns to places outside the same monastery, whereby gossip and laxity are brought about' (1359); Bishop Bokyngham boldly particularises: "We order the nuns on pain of excommunication, to abstain from any dishonest and suspicious conversation with secular or religious men and especially the access and frequent confabulations and colloquies of the canons of the Priory of Caldwell or of mendicant friars, in the monastery or about the public highways and fields adjoining" (1387). But the sisters of Elstow remain on good terms with their neighbour; Bishop Flemyng forbids the nuns 'to have access to the town of Bedford or to the town of Elstow or to other towns or neighbouring places' and straitly enjoins the canons 'that no canon of the said priory, under what colour of excuse soever, have access to the monastery of the nuns of Elstow; nor shall the same nuns for any reason whatever be allowed to enter the said priory, save for a manifest cause, from which reproach or suspicion of evil could in no way arise; nor even shall the same canons and nuns meet in any wise one with

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another, in any separate or private places; nor shall they
talk together anywhere one with another, save in the presence
and hearing of more than one trustworthy, who shall bear
faithful witness of what they say or do" (1421-2). 1 The nuns
of Nuncoton were even more addicted to the society of canons
in the sixteenth century and Bishop Longland wrote to them in
stern language: "And that ye, lady prioresse, cause and com-
pell all your suster s (those oonly excepte that be seke) to
kepe the quere and nomore to be absent as in tymes past they
have been wont to use, being content yf vj haue been present,
the residue to goo att lybertie where they wold, some att
thornton (Augustinian house at Thornton-upon-Humber), some at
Newsom (or Newhouse, a Premonstratensian house near Thornton),
some at hull, some att other places att their pleasures, which
is in the sight of good men abhomynable, high displeasur to
God, rebuke shame and reproache to religion and due correction
to be doon according unto your religion frome tyme to tyme." 2
Indeed these colloquies with monks and canons in their own
monastery were nothing unusual. Bishops and Councils constantly
forbade nuns to frequent houses of monks, or to be received
there as guests, but the practice continued. Sometimes they
had an excuse; the nuns of St. Mary Winchester were in the
habit of going to St. Swithun's monastery to confess to one of
the brothers, who was their confessor and in ill-health, and

2 *Archaeologia* XLVII p.57.
Bishop Pontoise appointed another monk in his place, who should come to the nuns when summoned thus avoiding the risk of scandal. Similarly Peckham forbade the nuns of Holy Sepulchre, Canterbury, to enter 'any place of religious men or elsewhere, under colour of confessing', unless they had no other confessor, in which case they were to return directly their business was accomplished and not to stay eating and drinking there. But sometimes the nuns had less good reason. At Elstow, as we know, they gossipped in the fields and highways; and if nuns were sometimes frivolous, so were monks. What are we to think of that nun of Catesby (gone to rack and ruin under the evil rule of Margaret Watere), who 'on last Monday spent the night with the Austin friars of Northampton and there with them danced and played until midnight (saltateur et citharaet usque ad medium noctem) and the following night she spent with the Friars Preacher of Northampton, likewise playing and dancing.'

Alack, had she forgotten that 'even as the cow which goeth before the herd hath a bell at her neck, so likewise the

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3 Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick (slip of paper bound in between ff. 92 and 93, but evidently belonging to the visitation of Catesby in 1442). With this account of the entertainment provided by the Friars of Northampton for their visitors, compare the evidence given at Bishop Nicke's visitation of the Cathedral priory of Norwich in 1514. "Item, the Brethren are wont to dance in the guesten-house, by favour of the guest-master, by night (and) up to noon." Visit. of the Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) p. 75. One of the Bishop's comperta was that suspicious women had access to the house of the guest-master, which throws further light on the Catesby case. Incidentally the latter bears out Chaucer's description of the Friar, who was so fond of harping.
woman who leadeth the song and the dance hath, as it were,
the devil's bell bound to hers, and when the devil hears the
sound of it, he feels secure and says he 'I have not lost my
cow yet.'? 1 Had she forgotten the awful vision of that holy
man, to whom the devil appeared in the form of a tiny black-
moor, standing above a woman who was leading a dance, guiding
her about as he wished and jumping on her head'? Possibly
she would not have cared if she had remembered; she was a
loose woman, disobedient to her Prioress, disobedient to the
bishop and she had been defamed with the chaplain of the
house and borne a child. In her case we have an admirable
illustration of the motives which prompted the extreme sever-
ity of episcopal attempts to enforce enclosure.

Even if they did not often go to such extremes the nuns
foregathered sometimes in the most strange places. The com-
plaint that priests and monks and canons were tavern-haunters
occurs with wearisome iteration in medieval visitation docu-
ments; but surely a tavern was the last place where one would
expect to find a nun; surely 'Sit Deus propitius huic potatori'
were a strange invocation on lips that prayed to 'Our bliss-
ful lady, Cristes moder dere'. Yet nuns sometimes abused their
liberty to frequent such places. Archbishop Zouch wrote to the
Prioress of Nunappleton in 1489 'yat noon of your sistirs use

1 Exempla e sermonibus Vulgaribus Jacobi Vitriacensis ed. T.F.
Crane. p.131.
2 Anecdotes Historiques &c d'Etienne de Bourbon ed Lecoy de la
Marche. pp229. (cp. p.266) 'The Devil' says Etienne de Bour-
bon 'is the inventor and governor and disposer of dances and
dancers.' Almost all medieval moralists condemned dancing.
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ye alehouse nor ye watirside, wher concurse of straungers dayly
résortes'; and at Romsey in 1492 Abbess Elizabeth Broke depo-

sed that she suspected the nuns of slipping into the town by
the church door and prayed that they might not frequent taverns
and other suspected places; the Prioress also deposed that they
frequented taverns and continually went into the town without
leave. And imagine what lies behind such bald statements.

Imagine nuns at the tunning of Elynour Rummynge, edging in by
the back way 'over the hedge and pale', to drink her nappy
ale. Or again call up a vision of Beton the Brewster standing
in her doorway, beneath the ivy bush, hailing Dame Agnes and
Dame Matilda as they patter along upon their 'fete ful ten-
dre'. Hear her seductive cry 'I have good ale, gossip'; (no
nuns ever despised good ale - only when it was valde tenuis
did they object); 'I have peper and piones and a pounde of
garlike, A ferthyngworth of fenel-seed for fasting days';
imagine the nuns hugging that fennel seed to their consciences
and scuttling through the door. And then that interior,
the heat, the smell of ale and perspiring humanity, the babel
of voices as all the riff-raff of the village greets the
nuns and gives them 'With glad chere good ale to hansel.'

1Dugdale. Mon. V. p.654.
3Poetical Works of John Skelton ed. Dyce. I. p. 95. Quoted
Chaucer's Prioress sat on a bench in an alehouse, between Clarice of Cokkeslane and Peronelle of Flanders! And the scene that follows; 'the laughyng and lowryng and "let go pe cuppe"', the singing, the gambling, the drinking, the invincible good humour and the complete lack of all decency. We will hope Dame Agnes and Dame Matilda left before Glutton got drunk.¹

But perhaps the alehouses frequented by the nuns of Nunappleton and of Romsey were less low places, more like the tavern where the good gossips met and feasted, all unknown to their husbands, and cherished the heart with muscadell;² or liker still perhaps to that lordly tavern kept by Trick, where the city dames come tripping at dawn, as readily as to church or to market, and where he draws them ten sorts of wine, all out of a single cask, crying

O mestres chieres Mes dames, faitez bonnes cheres Bevetz tres tout a vo plaisir ³ Car nous avons asses loisir.

²Songs and Carols ed. Th. Wright (Percy Soc.) pp. 31-5.
But however select the house, whether they met there buxom city dames drinking away their husbands' credit, or merely Tim the tinker and twain of his prentices, whether they were quizzed by 'those idle gallants who haunt taverns, gay and handsome', or hobnobbed with 'travellers and tinkers, swankers and swinkers', the alehouse was assuredly no place for nuns.

Medieval moralists were generally agreed that intercourse with the world was at the root of all those evils which dimmed the fair fame of the conventual system, by affording a constant temptation to frivolity and to grosser misconduct. Moreover the tongue of scandal was always busy and the nuns' reputation was safe only if she could be placed beyond reproach. Hence those regulations which Mr. Coulton compares to 'the minutely ingenious and degrading precautions of an oriental harem.' Minute as were the restrictions imposed by

1 At Esholt in 1535 Archbishop Lee even enjoins 'that the prioresse suffer no ale house to be kept within the precinct of the gates of the saide monasterie.' Yorks. Arch. Journ. XVI p.462. An explanation of this may be found by comparing the evidence at Archbishop Warham's visitation of the Hospital of St.James outside Canterbury in 1511. 'The Prioress complains that Richard Welles stays and talks in the precincts of the house and his wife sells beer in the precincts. They are very quarrelsome people, brawlers and sowers of discord. There is always a crowd of people at the house of Richard.' E.H.R. VI. p.22. At both these houses the nuns probably employed a secular ale wife to make their beer and she sold also to other customers within their precincts. Compare Peckham's injunction to Wherwell in 1284: "Iterum ob Dei reverendiam et ecclesiae honestatem perpetuo inhibemus ne mercatores sedere in ecclesia cum suis mercibus permittantur." Reg.Epis.Johannis Peckham (Rolls Ser.) II.p.654, and Bishop Bokyngham's letter forbidding merchants to sell their wares in the conventual church or churchyard of Stainfield under pain of excommunication (1392). V.C.H.Lincoln II.p.131. Medieval churches were put to strange uses. They served sometimes as a market-place, sometimes as a granary, sometimes as a stage.

2 Coulton. Chaucer and his England p.111.
their rule upon the exit of nuns from their cloistral pre-
cincts, they were not minute enough to prevent abuse; and as
nuns became more careless and found more and more occasion to
wander in the world, so Popes, Councils, Chapters and Bish-
ops redoubled their efforts to force a strict enclosure upon
religious women. It would be tedious to trace at length the
various efforts made in the later middle ages to keep the nuns
in their cloisters, by means of an absolute enforcement of the
Benedictine rule.¹ But some of the more important of these at-
ttempts in England are worthy of notice: the constitutions of
the legate Othobon in 1268, the vigorous reforms of Archbishop
Peckham (1279-92), the attempts of English bishops to enforce
Pope Boniface VIII's Bull Periculoso (promulgated about 1300),
the general trend of visitatorial injunctions throughout the
fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and finally the renewal of
the movement for complete enclosure on the eve of the Dissolu-
tion. The Cardinal Legate Othobon had come to England in 1265,
on the restoration of Henry III after Evesham, with the pur-
pose of punishing bishops and clergy, who had supported the
party of de Montfort and the barons. When peace - largely by
his intervention - was finally signed in 1267, he was able to

¹Chap. LXVI. 'The monastery itself ought, if possible, to be
so constructed as to contain within it all necessaries, that
is water, mill, garden and places for the various crafts which
are exercised within a monastery, so that there be no occa-
sion for monks to wander abroad, since this is in no wise ex-
pedient for their souls.' Chap. LXVII gives directions for the
behaviour of brethren sent on a journey; so that the rule al-
lowed a certain latitude. Rule of St. Benedict ed Gasquet
(King's Classics) pp.117-118.
turn his attention to general abuses prevalent in the English church, and one of the reforms which he attempted to enforce was the stricter enclosure of nuns. Chapter III of his Constitutions (quod moniales a certis locis non exsant) is an amplification of the Benedictine rule of enclosure, made far more rigid and severe. 'Lest by repeated intercourse with secular folk the quiet and contemplation of the nuns should be troubled', minute regulations were laid down as to their movements. They were allowed to enter their chapel, chapter, dorter and frater at due and fixed times; otherwise they were to remain in the cloister; and none of these places were to be entered by seculars, save very seldom and for some sufficient reason. No nun was to converse with any man, except seriously and in a public place, and at least one other nun was always to be present at such conversations. No nun was to have a meal outside the house except with the permission of the superior and then only with a relative, or some person from whose company no suspicion could arise. All other places, beyond those specified, were entirely forbidden to nuns, with the exception (in certain cases) of the fermery. No nun was to go to the different offices, except the officiaries whose duties rendered it necessary and they were never to go without a companion. The Abbess or head of a house was never to leave it, except for the evident advantage of the monastery or for urgent necessity and she was always to have an honest companion, while the less-er nuns were never to be given licence to go out, except for
some fit cause and in company with another nun. Finally nuns were not to leave their convents for public processions, but were to hold their processions within the precincts of their own houses. The legate strictly enjoined 'that duly-appointed visitors of nunnery cause these statutes to be observed.'

It will be realised that these restrictions were exceedingly severe and that duly-appointed visitors were likely to have a difficult task. There is no evidence for determining how far any serious attempt was made to enforce the Legate's constitutions, but if we may judge from the language of Peckham some ten years later, any attempts which may have been made had not been strikingly successful. Of this energetic Archbishop it might be said, as was said of Robert Grosseteste, in religions terribiliter et in religiosas terribilius consuevit fulgurare; and one of his first actions on his elevation to the see of Canterbury was to carry out a visitation of the nunneries of Barking and Godstow and to send to both houses injunctions, in which great stress was laid on the strict clausstration of the nuns (1279). In 1281 he followed up these injunctions by two general decrees for the enclosure of nuns; and in 1284 he visited the three nunneries of Romsey, Holy Sepulchre Canterbury and Usk and sent injunctions enforcing the constitutions of 1281. To Barking and Godstow in

1 Wilkins. Concilia II. p.18.
2 See however the injunctions of Thomas de Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford to Lymbrook in 1277, which are in part a recital of Othobon's Constitutions. Reg. Thome de Cantilupo (Cant. & York Soc. and Cantilupe Soc.) p.201. (See p.189. above)
4 He visited Wherwell the same year, but his injunctions to that house dealt with the entrance of seculars into the nunneries and not with the exit of nuns. See below p.264.
1279 he stated that his injunctions were based respectively upon those issued by John de Chishull, Bishop of London, and by Robert de Kilwardby, his predecessor as Archbishop of Canterbury, both of which prelates had probably attempted to enforce Othobon's constitutions. In these injunctions he laid down with great exactness the conditions to be observed in granting nuns permission to leave their convents. The Godstow injunction runs thus: "For the purpose of obtaining a surer witness to chastity, we ordain that nuns shall not leave the precincts of the monastery, save for necessary business which cannot be performed by other persons. Hence we condemn for ever, by these present (letters), those sojourns which were wont to be made in the houses of friends, for the sake of pleasure and of escaping from discipline (ad solatum et subterfugium disciplinæ). And when it shall befall any (nuns) to go out for any necessity, we strictly order these four (conditions) to be observed. First, that they be permitted to go out only in safe and mature company, as well of nuns as of secular persons helping them. Secondly that having at once performed their business, so far as it can be by them performed, they return to their house; and if the performance of the business demands a delay of several days, after the first or second day it shall be left to proctors to finish it. Thirdly that they never lodge in the precincts of religious men (i.e. monks) or in the houses of clergy, or in other suspected habitations. Fourthly, that no one shall absent herself from the sight of her
companion or companions, in any place where human conversation might be held, nor listen to any secret whispering, except in the presence of the nuns, her companions, unless perchance father or mother, brother or sister have something private to say to her. ¹ The Barking injunctions are slightly different. "In sending out nuns to visit any of the dying, these four (conditions) are to be observed. First that they be sent forth only for a necessary and inevitable cause, that is chiefly the imminent death of a relative (parentum), beyond which cause we can hardly imagine any other which would be sufficient. Secondly that they be sent to a place at no great distance, but near and entirely free from all suspicion, being careful that they lodge never with monks or canons or in houses of religious men, for the reason that the malice of seculars easily slanders the fair fame of such places. Thirdly that no one go out save in safe company and beyond suspicion, both of nuns and of servants. Fourthly that a speedy return should be enjoined upon those who go out, and a short space of time allotted, and if anyone be found to have sinned in making a delay, she shall not be sent out at all for a long time afterwards."² These injunctions are very severe, for they limit the occasions upon which a nun might leave her convent to the performance of some negotiation connected with the business of the house and to attendance at the deathbeds of relatives and entirely forbid all visits

for pleasure to the houses of friends. In 1281 Peckham published a mandate directed against the seducers of nuns; after excommunicating all who committed or attempted to commit this crime and declaring that absolution for the sentence could be given only by a bishop or by the Pope (except on the point of death, when an ordinary priest might bestow it) he proceeded to deal with the question of the claustration of nuns, on the ground that their wandering in the world gave opportunity for such crimes. 'We totally forbid any of them, even with a companion and much less alone, to presume to sojourn even for the sake of recreation, or to stay for more than two days for any necessary reason, even with parentes, agnatos seu cognatos, vel affines, however closely related by blood or by marriage, still less with strangers, however great their repute, their eminence or their religion. And those who shall after the publication of this edict be found wandering without the licence of their superior in the aforesaid ways, are thereupon to incur the sentence of excommunication and the same sentence shall be incurred by their abbesses or other rulers, if these shall have given them indiscreet licence to do such things.'¹ The same year Peckham also dealt with the subject in the course of a set of Constitutions, dealing with a variety of abuses, which he considered to be in need of reform. The language of the chapter in which he treats of the claustration of nuns is in parts the same as that of the ordinance

just quoted, but it is less severe, for it forbids nuns to stay 'more than three natural days for the sake of recreation or more than six days for any necessary reason, save in the case of illness.' Moreover the Archbishop adds "we do not extend this ordinance to those who are obliged to beg necessi-
ties of life, while they are begging." It was this modified version of his ordinance that Peckham tried to impose in his visitations of 1284, for at Romsey he recognised that the nuns might be leaving the house for recreation and not merely upon the business of the convent; the abbess, for instance, is to take her three coadjutresses with her when she goes out on business, and two of them if she goes out *causa solatii*. At this house he forbade nuns to go out without a companion or to stay for more than three days with seculars and condemned their practice of eating and drinking in the town; no nun, either leaving or returning to the convent was to enter any house in the town of Romsey or to eat and drink there, and no cleric or secular man or woman was to give them any food out-
side the precincts of the monastery.  

At St. Sepulchre Canterbury Peckham regulated the visits of nuns to confessors outside the house; and at Usk he ordered that no nun was to go out without suitable companions or to stay more than three

3 Tb. II, p. 707.
or four days in the houses of secular persons. 1

The end of the thirteenth century saw yet another strenuous attempt to enforce a strict and absolute interpretation of the Benedictine rule, when Boniface VIII issued his bull Periculoso. "Desiring to provide for the perilous and detestable state of certain nuns, who, having slackened the reins of honesty and having imprudently cast aside the modesty of their order and of their sex, have wandered about (discurrent) outside their monasteries, sometimes in the habitations of secular persons, and frequently admit suspected persons within the same monasteries, to the grave offence of Him to Whom they have, of their own will, vowed their innocence, to the oppor-

trium of religion and to the scandal of very many persons; we by the present constitution, which shall be irrefragably valid, decree that all and sundry nuns, present and future, to whatever order they belong and in whatever part of the world, shall henceforth remain perpetually enclosed within their monasteries; so that no nun tacitly or expressly professed in religion shall henceforth have or be able to have the power of going out of those monasteries for whatever reason or cause, unless perchance any be found clearly suffering from a disease, so great and of such a nature that she cannot, without grave danger or scandal, live together with others; and to no dis-

honest or even honest person shall entry or access be given to

1Ib. II. p. 806.
them, unless for a reasonable and manifest cause and by a special licence from the person to whom (the granting of such a licence) pertains; that so, altogether withdrawn from public and mundane sights, they may serve God more freely, and, all opportunity for wantonness being removed, they may more diligently preserve for him in all holiness their souls and their bodies." The bull further (in order to remove any excuse for wandering abroad in search of alms) forbids the reception into any non-mendicant order of more sisters than can be supported without penury by the goods of the house; and (in order to prevent nuns being forced to attend the law courts in person) requires all secular and ecclesiastical authorities to allow them to plead by proctors in their courts; but if an Abbess or Prioress has to do personal homage to a secular lord for any fief and it cannot be done by a proctor, she may leave her house with honest and fit companions and do the homage, returning home immediately. Finally Archbishops and Bishops are given authority to visit all the nunneries in their diocese, expounding the decree to the nuns and enforcing it within a certain date.¹ Bishop's registers, about the year 1300, sometimes contain copies of this severe enactment. One of the earliest efforts to enforce it was made by Simon of Ghent, Bishop of Salisbury, who on November

¹Sext. decret. lib. III. tit. XVI. Quoted in Reg. Simonis de Gandavo (Cant. & York Soc.) pp.10 ff., from which I quote.
28, 1299, issued a long letter to the Abbess of Wilton, embodying the text of the bull and ordering her to put it into force; and shortly afterwards he sent a similar letter to Shaftesbury Abbey. The register of Godfrey Giffard, Bishop of Worcester, contains a note (1300): 'As to the shutting up of nuns. It is expedient that a letter of warning be sent according to the form of the constitution and directed to every house of nuns, that they do what is necessary for their inclusion and cause themselves to be enclosed this side the Gules of August.' The Bishop, however, seems from the beginning to have doubted his capacity to carry out the decree, for further on the register contains another note, "As to whether it is expedient to enclose the nuns of the diocese of Worcester."³

But the most detailed information as to the efforts of a conscientious bishop to enforce Boniface VIII's decree in England, is contained in the register of Bishop Dalderby of Lincoln. Dalderby was a new broom in the diocese of Lincoln and he determined to sweep clean. On June 17th 1300, he directed a mandate to the archdeacons of his diocese, ordering them each to associate with himself some other mature and honest man and to visit the religious houses in his archdeaconry, explaining the terms of the new bull intelligibly to the nuns and ordering them to remain within their nunneries and to

1 Loc. Cit.
2 V.C.H. Dorset II p.78.
permit no one to enter the precincts, contrary to the tenour of the decree, until the Bishop should be able to visit them in person; the heads of the houses were to be specially warned to carry out the decree and for better security a sealed copy of it was to be deposed in each house by the commissioners. In the course of the next two months Dalderby visited, either in person or by commissioners, Marlowe, Burnham, Flamstead, Markyate, Elstow, Goring, Studley, Godstow, Delapre (Northampton) and Sewardley. At each house the bull was carefully explained to the nuns in the vulgar tongue, they were ordered to obey it and a copy was left with them. But this campaign was not unattended with difficulties. The nuns were bitterly opposed to the restriction of a freedom, to which they were accustomed and which they heartily enjoyed.

The canonist John of Ayton, reciting the decrees of Othobon and of Boniface, (with their injunction that bishops and visitors shall 'cause them to be observed'), exclaims, "cause to be observed! But surely there is scarce any mortal man who could do this; we must therefore here understand 'so far as lieth in the prelate's power.' For the nuns answer roundly to these statutes or to any others promulgated against their wantonness, saying, 'In truth the men who made these laws sat well at their ease, while they laid such burdens upon us by these hard and intolerable restrictions!'" Wherefore we see in fact that

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2 Ib. ff. 9d, 10d, 11, 12d, 15d.
these statutes are a dead letter, or are ill-kept at the best. Why, then, did the holy fathers thus labour to beat the air? Yet indeed their toil is none the less to their own merit; for we look not to that which is, but to that which of justice should be. "1 John of Ayton's account of the attitude of the nuns receives interesting corroboration from the entry in Dalderby's register, which describes his visitation of Markyate: "On July 3rd, in the first year (of his consecration), the Bishop visited the house of nuns of Markyate, and on the follow¬ing day he caused to be recited before the nuns of the same (house) in chapter, the statute put forth by the lord Pope Boniface VIII concerning the enclosure of nuns, explained it in the vulgar tongue and giving them a copy of the same statute under his seal, ordered them, in virtue of obedience, hence¬forth to observe it in the matter of enclosure and of all things contained in it, and especially to close all doors by which entrance is had into the inner places of their house and to permit no person, whether dishonest or honest, to enter in to them, without reasonable and manifest cause and licence from the person to whom (the granting of such a licence) pertains. F ur¬thermore he specially enjoined the Prioress to observe the said statute in all its articles and to cause it to be observed by the others. But when the Bishop was going away, certain of the nuns, disobedient to these injunctions, hurled the said statute

1 Lyndwood. Provinciale (1679) Pt. II. p.155. Quoted in Coulton, Medieval Studies No. 10 (Monastic Schools in the Middle Ages) p.21.
at his back and over his head, and as well the Prioress as the convent appeared to consent to those who threw it, following the bishop to the outer gate of the house and declaring unanimously that they were not content in any way to observe such a statute. On account of which, the Bishop, who was then directing his steps to Dunstable returned the next day and having made inquisition as to the matters concerned in the said statute, imposed a penance on four nuns, whom he found guilty and on the whole convent for their consent, as is more fully contained in his letters of correction sent to the aforesaid house. Afterwards he sent letters to the recalcitrant convent warning them for the third time (they had already been warned once by the Official of the Archdeacon of Bedford and a second time at the visitation which has just been described) to keep the new decree, on pain of the major excommunication, from which only the Pope could absolve them.

There was opposition at other convents, too, though we hear of no more bruises sustained by the episcopal shoulders. On August 19th Dalderby wrote as follows to the rector of Brotherton. "It has come to our ears, by clamorous rumour, that some of the nuns of our diocese, spurning good obedience, slackening the reins of honesty and imprudently casting aside the modesty of their sex, despise the papal statute concerning enclosure directed to them, as well as our injunctions made to them upon the subject, and frequent cities and other
public places outside their monasteries, and mingle in the haunts of men;" he proceeded to order the rector to visit nunneries wherever he considered it expedient to do so, and to punish those who were guilty of breaking the statute, signifying to the Bishop, by a certain date, the names of all who had been accused of doing so, whether they had been found guilty or not. 1 This mandate is no doubt in part explained by two other letters which he dispatched on the same day; one of them was directed to the Archdeacon of Northampton and set forth (in language which often repeats verbatim the phrases of the papal bull) that at the Bishop's recent visitation of Delapré (Northampton) he had found three nuns in apostasy, having cast off their habits after being a long time professed, and left their house to live a secular life in the world; the Archdeacon was ordered to pronounce excommunication against them and to summon them to return within a week; all who received the nuns into their houses, or gave them help or counsel were to be warned to desist within three days and given a penance; the names of all who aided or received them were to be discovered and those guilty were to appear before the Bishop. 2 The other letter contains a sentence of the greater excommunication against a nun of Sewardley, for similar conduct. 3 These cases of apostasy were less rare than might be imagined;

1Ib. f. 35d.
2Ib. f. 16. (Translated in R.M. Serjeantson. Hist. of Delapré Abbey, Northampton (1909) pp.7-8. Their names were Isabella de Clouvill, Matilda de Thychemers and Ermentrude de Newark.
3Ib. Johanna de Fynnemere.
Dalderby had to deal with two others during his episcopate, one at St. Michael Stamford and the other at Goring; during the rule of his predecessor Sutton three nuns had escaped from Godstow and one from Wothorpe. They illustrate the undoubted truth that it was only the existence (already in the thirteenth century) of very grave disorders, which led reformers like Othobon, Peckham and Boniface VIII to 'beat the air' with such severe restrictions.

These three documents, the constitutions of Othobon and of Peckham and the bull Periculoso were the standard decrees on the subject of the claustration of nuns in England and were used as a model by Visitors in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. William of Wykeham, for example, in the exceptionally full and formal injunctions which he sent to Romsey and to Wherwell in 1387 continually refers by name to Othobon and to Peckham, and the wording of the bull Periculoso is followed verbatim in the mandate directed by Bishop Grandisson of Exeter to Canonsleigh in 1329 and in the commission sent by his successor Bishop Brantyngham to two canons of Exeter in 1376, concerning the wanderings of the nuns of Polslo. But a study of the visitation documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries makes it clear that the nuns never really made any attempt to obey the regulations which

1 ib. ff. 152, 152d, 161, 167d, 180d, 199, 296, 272c, 374. Agnes de Flixtorpe (see above p 45)
2 ib. f. 152. Matilda de Benham.
imposed a strict enclosure upon them; and that the bishops directed their efforts to regulating the conditions under which they left their convents, rather than to keeping them strictly immured within the precincts. An endeavour was made to prevent unlicensed visits; no nun was to leave her house without a licence from her superior, and such licences were not to be granted too easily or with any show of favouritism. It was attempted to prevent excuses being granted without a reasonable cause; normally a nun might go out if the business of the house demanded it, or to visit sick relatives or to attend their funerals,  

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1See e.g. Farwell 1367. Reg. Robert de Stretton p.114. The necessity for an injunction against favouritism is shown by the compertum of Archbishop Langham's visitation of St. Sepulchre, Canterbury in 1367-8: "Priorissa non permittit moniales wie in villam ad visitandum amicos suas nisi Margeriam Chilk et Julianam Aldelesse que illuc vadunt quociens eis placet." She was charged with allowing them to receive suspected visitors also. Lambeth Reg. Langham f.76d. Compare the compertum at a visitation of St. Radegund Cambridge in 1373. "Item the Prioress is too easily induced to give permission to the nuns to go outside the cloister." Gray. Priory of St. Radegund, Cambridge p.36.  


3The Council of Oxford (1222) said that they were not to go merely to visit relatives or for recreation except in such case as might arouse no suspicion. Wilkins. Concilia. I. p. 592. Compare Peckham, above p.222. At Harriick (1252) the Prioress was to give leave to none to go out unless 'the sickness of friends or some other worthy reason' demanded it. V.C.H. Yorks III. p.117. At Nunkeeling (1314) none was to go out 'except on the business of the house or to visit friends and relations.' Ib. p.120. One of the nuns of Legbourne complained in 1440 that the Prioress 'non vult patri istem deponentem visitare parentum infirmatum quando putabatur ipsum moriturum.' Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick. f.68d. (66a).
but occasional licence might be granted her to visit her friends for her health (if she were ailing) or for recreation. Such licences were not to be granted often (once a year is generally the specified rule) and the Bishops sometimes tried to confine the visits of the nuns to parents or to near relatives. An attempt was also made to regulate the length of the visits paid by a nun to her friends. A maximum number of days was fixed and the nun was punished if she outstayed her leave, except when she was detained by illness. This maximum differed from time to time and from place to place, according to the strictness of the diocesan. Bishop Stapeldon, it will be recalled, allowed the nuns in his diocese to remain away from their houses for a month and longer; Archbishop Greenfield, at the same date, permitted his Yorkshire nuns a maximum visit of fifteen days, and Bishop Gynwell of Lincoln wrote to Godstow in 1358, "Item nous ordinons pur honeste de vostre dite religioun, que nulle dame de vostre religioun ne eit counge de se absenter hors de vostre Abbaye plus longement.

1 e.g. in 1314 Archibishop Greenfield granted his licence to a nun of Yedingham, who was suffering from dropsy, that for the sake of improving her health she might with honest company visit friends and relatives. V.C.H. Yorke, III, p.127, note 12.
2 But Archbishop Melton said twice a year at Arthington in 1315. Ib. III, p.183.
3 See e.g. Bishop Spofford's regulation at Lymbrock in 1437 'nor to be absent lygyng cute by nyght out of thair monastery but with fader and moder, excepte causes of necessyte.' Hereford Epis. Reg. Spofford, I, p.77; and Archbishop Lee's injunction to Sinningthwaite in 1354 'that she from hensforth licence nor of her susters to go fourth of the house, unless it be for the profitt of the house, or visite their fathers and modres, or oure nere kynsfolkes, if the prioresse shall thinke it con- ent.' Yorke, Arch. Journ. XVI, p.442.
4 See above p.77.
5 V.C.H. Yorke, III, pp.120, 128, 175, 177, 188.
que par treys symayns a plus, et cec par necessarie et resoun-
able cause cuesque leur parentz, honestement au profit de vos-
tre mesoun, signifiaisent expressement al abbesse a leur counge
prendre la veray cause de leur aler. 1 When Alnwick visited
the diocese of Lincoln in 1440-5, he made careful inquiry into
the length of the visits paid by the nuns to their friends and
at Markyte, Goring, Nuncoton, St. Michael Stamford and Grace-
dieu he found that the superior usually gave the nuns licence
to remain away a week, 2 though the Prioress of Studley gave
exaets for three and four days only. At Godstow the Prioress
complained that the nuns went often to Godstow to visit their
friends; 4 and at Heynings the discontented Dame Alice Porter
said that two of her sisters went too often into Lincoln and
stayed there too long. 5 A week does not seem a very lengthy
stay, but Alnwick would have lifted horrified eyebrows at the
action of his predecessor Gynwell, for he ordered the super-
iores 'that ye gyffe no sustere of yours lefe to byde wythe
thaire frendes, when thai visite thyem, ouere thre days in
helthe, and if thai falle seke, that ye to feche thyem home
wythe yn sex dayes;' he shared the views of an even stricter

3Ib. f. 26d.
4Ib. f. 28.
5Ib. f.22. There seems to have been some truth in the accusa-
tion, though it was denied by the two nuns concerned, for a
note in the margin of the register runs as follows: "Moniales
habent nimium accessum ad domum thesaurii Lincolniensis, ali-
quando per septimanam ibidem expectando,' and he made an im-
junction on the subject.
6Ib. f.85d. Op. ff.28d, 77d. (79d), 95d.
reformer, Archbishop Peckham, who allowed three days for recreation and six if the nuns were delayed for any necessary reason. ¹ It was often stipulated that the nuns, when away on long or on short journeys, were to go only to the place which they had received permission to visit; and sometimes they were specially told that if they were obliged to spend the night away from their house, on convent business or on the journey to and from their friends, they were to do so, whenever possible, in a religious house. ² Archbishop Courtenay in 1389 sent an interesting injunction to Elstow Abbey, which had apparently been remiss in offering hospitality to travelling nuns. 'Inasmuch as it has happened that nuns coming to the monastery on their return from a visit to their friends, have been refused necessities for themselves and for their horses, inhumanly and against the honesty of religion, which we wish to remedy, we order that for each nun thus tarrying provision be made, according to the resources of the house, for four horses at least, if by day for the whole day, and if by night or after the hour of none for the rest of the day and for the following night.' ³ They were, however, strictly forbidden to

² See e.g. Brokenford's injunction to Minchin Barrow in 1316: "Quod tunc bene incedant et in habitu moniali et non ad alia loca quam se extendit licencia se divertant quoquo modo et ultra tempus licencie sue, se voluntarie non absenterent." Hugo. Med. Nunnaries of Somerset: Barrow. App. II P.81.  
³ e.g. the synodal constitutions of c.1237. Wilkins. Op.Cit. I.  
be received as guests in the houses of monks or canons. On short journeys, or on errands which could be speedily accomplished, they were forbidden to eat or drink out of their monasteries or to make unnecessary delay, but were to return at once and not to be out after night-fall. Finally it was insisted that no nun was to leave her house without another nun of mature age and good reputation, who would be a constant witness to her behaviour.

As a typical set of episcopal injunctions dealing with journeys by nuns outside their cloister it will suffice to quote those sent by Bishop Stapeldon of Exeter to the nunneries of Polso and Canonsleigh. They are interesting because they were drawn up in 1319, only twenty years after the publication of the bull Periculous, and yet they are far removed from the strict ideal of Boniface VIII. Already, it would seem, a practical-minded bishop realised that the enforcement of strict enclosure was impossible in a diocese where the nuns had evidently been used to considerable freedom and where all the counties of the West saw them upon their holidays. The

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2 At Wroxall in 1338 it was specially ordered 'que deux jeanes re issent poyn ensemble pur male suspectioyn que de cec purra legement scourdre, ke Dieuz defent.' Reg. Sede Vacante (Worc. Hist. Soc.) p.276. At Lymbrook in 1437 Bishop Spofford ordered that no nun was to go out without a companion 'in case they lygge owte be nyght, two sustres to lye togeder in on bed', a practice which (according to the usual custom) he forbids in the dorter. Hereford Epis. Reg. Spofford. f.77.
best he could do was to regulate very carefully the terms upon which they left their houses. The clauses dealing with the subject run as follows: "De visitacione amicorum. No lady of religion is to go and visit her friends outside the priory, but if it be once a year at the most, and then for reasonable cause and by permission; and then let her have a companion, professed in the same religion, not of her own choice, but whatever the Prioress will assign to her, and she who is once assigned to her for companion shall not be assigned the next time, so that each time a lady goes to visit her friends her companion is changed; and if she have permission to go to certain places to visit her friends, let her not go to other places, without new permission. De absencia Dominarum et regressu earum. Item, when any lady of religion eats at Exeter, or in another place near by, for reasonable cause and by permission, wherever she can she ought to return the same or the following day and each time let her have a companion and a chaplain, clerk or esquire of good repute, assigned by the Prioress, who shall go, remain and return with them, and otherwise they shall not go; and then let them return speedily to the house, as they be commanded, and let them not go again to Exeter, wandering from house to house, as they have oftentimes done, to the dishonour of their state and of religion. De Dominabus "Wakerauntsse". Item, a lady who goes a long distance to visit her friends, in the aforesaid form, should return to
the house within a month at the latest, or within a shorter space if it be assigned her by the Prioress, having regard to the distance or proximity of the place, where dwell the friends whom she is going to visit, but a longer term ought the Prioress never to give her, save in the case of death, or of the known illness of herself or of her near friends. Pena Dominarum Vaganoium. And if a lady remain without for a longer time or in any other manner than in the form aforesaid, let her never set foot outside the outer gate of the Priory for the next two years; and nevertheless let her be punished otherwise for disobedience, in such manner as is laid down by the rule and observances of the order of St. Benet for the fault; and leave procured by the prayer of her friends ought not to excuse her from this penance. No lady of your religion, professed or unprofessed, shall come to the external offices outside the door of the cloister to be bled or for any other feigned excuse, save it be by leave of the Prioress or of the Subprioress, and then for a fit reason and let her have with her another professed lady of your religion, to the end that each of them may see and hear that which the other shall say and do.  

1 Apparently friends and relatives in the world outside sometimes intervened, by threats or prayers, to save a nun from punishment. A compertum of Archbishop Giffard's visitation of Swine in 1267-8 runs: "Item compertum est that the Prioress is a suspicious woman and far too credulous, and easily breaks out into correction, and often punishes some unequally for equal faults, and follows with long dislike those whom she dislikes until occasion arises to punish them; hence it is that the nuns, when they suspect that they are going to be troubled with excessive correction, procure the mitigation of her severity by means of the threats of their kinsfolk." Reg. of Walter Giffard (Surtees Soc.) p.148.

When the London mob had miserably beheaded Bishop Stapeldon in Cheapside, his place was filled (after the short rule of Bishop Berkeley) by an even greater Bishop of Exeter, John Grandisson. Grandisson, like Dalderby, was a new broom, and in the year of his consecration he directed a mandate to the nuns of Canonsleigh, in which, scorning the compromise of his predecessor, he attempted to carry out more clearly (though still not exactly) the terms of the bull Periculoso. In language copied directly from the bull, he ordered the Abbess of Canonsleigh 'that you permit no nuns from your house under any pretext to go out of the precincts of your monastery before our visitation, unless with our special licence, that is to such a distance that it is not possible for them to return on the same day.' This was on June 23rd 1329; a month later he was obliged to retract his decision, for on July 18th he sent a licence to Canonsleigh, recapitulating his former mandate, but adding a special indulgence, permitting ('for certain legitimate reasons') the nuns to absent themselves from the monastery 'with honest and senior ladies [i.e. nuns] to visit near relatives and friends of themselves and of the house, who are free from all suspicion', but they were in no case to remain away longer than fifteen days.¹ Certainly this was a

¹Reg. of Bishop Grandisson ed Hingeston-Randolph I pp.508,511. Another licence bidding a piousress to allow a particular nun to leave her house is printed in Postroge, British Monachism (1917) p.361. note g. (see also Taunton, Engl. Black Monks of St.Benedict I.p.168 note 2). It is said to be granted on the prayer of 'Lady J. wife of Sir Wla Knight of our diocese', whom the nun is to be allowed to visit with a companion from the same priory, and to thither on horse back 'notwithstanding your customs to the contrary.'
shorter leave than that which had been allowed by Bishop Stapeldon, but it was very far removed from the spirit of Boniface VIII's bull. A similar compromise was forced upon all the bishops; but, in spite of the moderate limits which they imposed, the nuns (as has been shown) persisted in wandering about outside their convents, and by the eve of the Reformation the evil results of this freedom had become apparent to everyone. It was on the very eve of the Reformation that the last attempts were made to enforce a strict and literal enclosure. That ardent reformer of nunneries, Bishop Fox, pursued the policy firmly in his diocese of Winchester, and was apparently accused of undue severity, for in 1528 he wrote to Wolsey in defence of his action: "Truth it is, my lord, that the religious women of my diocese be restrained of their going out of their monasteries. And yet so much liberty appeareth some time too much, and if I had the authority and power that your grace hath, I would endeavour me to mure and enclose their monasteries according to the ordinance of the law, for otherwise can be no surety of observance of good religion. And in all other matters, concerning their living or observance of their religion, I assure your grace they be as liberally and favourably dealt with as be any religious women within this realm." ¹ Wolsey apparently came to the same conclusion as to the necessity of enclosure, and tried to

¹Wood. Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies II.p.35 note b.
enforce it at Wilton, after the scandals which came to light there before the election of Isabel Jordan as abbess. 1 His chaplain, Dr. Benet, who had been sent to reform the nunnery wrote to him on July 13th and described his difficulty in 'causing to be observed' the unpopular decree. 'Please it your grace to be advertised, that immediately after my return from your grace I repaired to the monastery of Wilton, where I have continually made mine abode hitherto and with all diligence endeavoured myself to the uttermost of my power to persuade and train the nuns there to the accomplishment of your grace's pleasure for enclosing of the same; whom I find so Untoward and refusal (sic) as I never saw persons, in somwhat that in nowise any of them, neither by gentle means nor by rigorous, - and I have put three or four of the captains of them in ward, - will agree and consent to the same, but only the new elect and her sisters that were with your grace; which notwithstanding, I have closed up certain doors and ways and taken such an order there that none access, course or recourse of any person shall be made there.' 2 About the same time the Abbess-Elect herself wrote to Wolsey, telling him that 'since my coming home I have ordered me in all things to the best of my power, according to your gracious advertisement by the advice of your chancellors and have oftentimes motioned my sisters to be reclused within our monastery; wherein they

1 See above pp. 81-2. Below pp. 81-7
2 See above pp. 81-2. Below pp. 81-7
3 See above pp. 81-2. Below pp. 81-7
4 See above pp. 81-2. Below pp. 81-7
do find many difficulties and show divers considerations to
the contrary; she besought him to have patience and promised
to 'order my sisters in such religious wise and our monastery
according to the rule of religion, without any such resort as
hath been of late accustomed.'\textsuperscript{1} Evidently nuns had not changed
since the day when the sisters of Markyate threw the bull
\textit{Periculoso} at Bishop Dalderby's retreating back. But their
struggles were in vain and a worse fate awaited them. The
Dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII was preceded by
an order to his commissioners, that they should enforce enclo-
sure upon the nuns. The injunction met with the usual resis-
tance at the time and later apologists of the monastic houses
have blamed the King for undue and unreasonable harshness. But
if Henry VIII was too strict, so also was Othobon, so Peckham,
so Boniface VIII, so almost every bishop and council of the
past three hundred years. In this at least, low as his mo-
tives may have been, the man who was to claim the headship of
the English Church was the lineal descendent of the greatest
medieval Pope. The instructions given to the commissioners
were the last of a long series of injunctions, in which it was
attempted to reform the nunneries by shutting them off from
the world. It is plain that even in the thirteenth century
some such reform was necessary, and the history of fourteenth,
fifteenth and sixteenth centuries only shows the necessity be-
coming more urgent. Whatever may have been Henry VIII's

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ib. pp. 36-37 (No. XV).}

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{See below pp. 349-50}
motives, however greedy, however licentious, however unspiritual, it would be impossible to contend that his decree of claustration was not in accordance with the best ecclesiastical tradition, and amply justified by the condition of the monastic houses.

Hitherto the question of enclosure has been considered only from one point of view, that of keeping the nuns within the precincts of their cloister. But, as Isabel Jordan's reference to 'such resort as hath been of late accustomed' shows, there was another side to the problem. In order to preserve them unspotted from the world it was necessary not only that the nuns should keep within their cloisters, but that secular persons should keep without. It was useless to pass regulations forbidding nuns to leave their houses, if visitors from the world had easy access to them and could move freely about within the precincts. Othobon, Peckham, Boniface VIII and all who legislated on the subject down to Henry VIII, combined a prohibition against the entrance of seculars, with their prohibition against the exit of nuns. Some intercourse with seculars was bound to occur, even in the most strictly regulated nunnery. The nuns were often served by lay folk, and if these were too numerous, or ill conducted, or if a proper decorum did not prevail in the relations between themselves and their mistresses, they might be very disturbing to convent life and discipline. Hence the frequent regulations that nuns were to keep no more servants than were absolutely
necessary and that dishonest and suspected servants were to be removed. It is plain from the warnings that servants of loose morals should be sent away and never recalled, as well as from actual revelations at episcopal visitations that the nuns sometimes employed very unsuitable persons. At Alnwick's visitation of Gracedieu two nuns complained of the dissolute life led by a certain foreign ale wife who dwelt in the priory. It was also said that the servants esteemed the nuns but little, and refused to obey the kitchener. The charge that the servants bore themselves disrespectfully towards their mistresses is fairly common; at Stuiley in 1445 one of them had slapped a nun in church; at Markyate Alnwick was forced to enjoin the Prioress 'that ye refreyne your seculere seruauntes that honestly and not sturdyly ne rebukyngly thai hafe thaym in thaire langage to the susters;' at Wherwell in 1284 Peckham ordered

1 The object of this prohibition was also to minimise expense. See e.g. the decree of Council of Oxford 1222. Wilkins. Concilia. I. p.592. See also above p.132

2 e.g. Chatteris 1345. "Inhibemus ... ne ancilla vel serviens ob obsequio abbatissae seu sanctimonialis cucuscumque hastenus amota ob causam impudicinae, de qua sit notoria fama, non reconcilietur nec serviat infra septa monasterii, ut domestica, mercenaria vel gratuita servitura." Dugdale. Mon. II.p.619.


4 lb. I. 26d.

5 lb. I. 17.
'that if any servant, male or female, be found who is in the
habit of vexing any nun or nuns with sharp replies, let him be
expelled, unless he correct himself sufficiently after the
aforesaid warning;" and at Romsey in 1302 Bishop Pontoise,
foundating his injunction upon that of Peckham, wrote "A useless,
superfluous, quarrelsome and incontinent servant and one using
insolent language to the ladies shall be removed within one
month from the reception of these presents and especially John
Chark, who has often spoken ill and contumaciously in speaking
to and answering the ladies, unless he correct himself so that
no more complaints be made to the ladies." Sometimes the
servants, not content with miscalling the nuns to their faces,
gossipped about them in the neighbourhood. At Godstow in 1432
the bailiff was ordered to hold no private conversations with
any nun 'since he says that there is no good woman in the monas-
tery'; and at Sheppey in 1611 a nun deposed 'that the men
servants of the prioress do not behave properly to the convent,
but speak of the convent contemptuously and dishonestly, thus
ruining the convent.' Sometimes there were actual complaints
that the nuns talked too often with their bailiffs and male
servants or went too often to their houses and were on suspi-
ciously friendly terms with them. At the visitation of Romsey

2 Reg. Johannis de Pontissara p.127, translated in Liveing. Re-
cords of Romsey Abbey p.101. Injunction repeated by Bishop
P.67.
4 E.H.R. VI, p.33.
in 1507, Bishop Fox's Vicar General enjoined the Prioress to
make search for one nun "who has frequent access, familiarity,
and suspiciously and beyond the proper time, to the house of
the bailiff or villici agricultori of the monastery, and all
others who went with her to the said house, and to correct and
reform her, but to admonish all the others that they go no more
henceforth to the said house:" at the same time the bailiff
Thomas Leycroft was ordered on pain of excommunication "that
in future he shall have no access to any chamber of the
Abbess or nun and shall not enter the cloister or conventual
church, nor have any communication with the Abbess or any nun,
nor direct or cause to be directed any letters or messages to
any of them", and "the said Vicar General in hall admonished
Thomas Langton, Christopher George, Thomas Leycroft, bailiffs
and Nicholas Newman villicum agricultorem, that they should
behave better in their offices."

Actual misconduct may not have been very common, but even
if it were not, a number of servants wandering about the clois-
tral precincts, sometimes sleeping among the nuns in the dorter,
sometimes witnessing and reporting their secret affairs, could

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1. Liveing, Records of Ramsey Abbey pp. 229-30, 232. The abbey was
in a very disorderly state at the time.

2. At Alnwick's visitation's complaint of this was made at Leg-
bourne, Heynings, and Nun斯顿 and he forbade the practice.

(1314) Y.C.H. Yorks III p. 164.

E.g., the injunction to Thicket in 1309 that "in future servants
and other seculars were in no wise to be allowed to go into
the kitchen and sit and take meals there as they chose, and so
witness the 'secreta' of the nuns." Ib. III, p. 124.
not fail to be disturbing to discipline. It will suffice as an example to quote William of Wykeham's injunctions to Romsey on the subject in 1387. "Because the secular woman serving the nuns come far too often into the frater, when the convent is feeding there, and into the cloister when the same convent is there in chapter, in contemplation, or reading or praying, and because they make a noise there and otherwise misbehave in a way ill beseeming the honesty of religion, and the same secular women by chattering, songs and other insolences, which they often keep up until midnight, disturb the aforesaid convent in the fulfilment of their regular services; therefore we command, strictly enjoining you all and singly in virtue of obedience and under penalty of the sentence of greater excommunication, that henceforth you on no account permit the aforesaid things, or any others which do not befit the observances of the rule, to be done by the said servants or by any other women whatsoever, or permit these servants to wait upon you in frater or cloister; and a servant or any other secular woman who disobeys is to be expelled from the house."¹

Another inevitable occasion of intercourse with seculars was the presence of guests. The exercise of hospitality was one of the chief functions of monastic houses in the Middle Ages, and was so far regarded as a right by their neighbours that remonstrances were actually made if the quality of the entertainment offered was not considered sufficiently good.

¹ New. Coll. MS. f.87d.
At Campsey in 1532 one of the nuns declared that 'well-born guests (hospites *generosae*) coming to the priory complained of the excessive parsimony of the Prioress.' Occasional complaints by the nuns of the spiritual disturbance caused by this influx of visitors, shows that the right was vigorously exercised. In 1364 the Pope granted permission to Margaret de Lancaster, an Augustinian canoness of the same nunnery of Campsey, to transfer herself to the order of St. Clare, she having already caused herself to be enclosed at Campsey in order to avoid the number of nobles coming to the house; and in 1375 he commanded the Bishop of St. Andrews to make order concerning the Prioress and nuns of the Benedictine convent of North Berwick, "who have petitioned for perpetual enclosure, they being much molested by the neighbourhood and visits of nobles and other secular persons." Even enclosure was not always a protection against visitors; for the Popes constantly granted indults to great persons, allowing them to enter, with a retinue, the houses of monks and nuns belonging to enclosed orders. A few instances may be taken at random. John of Gaunt in 1371 received an indulgent to enter any monasteries of religious men and women once a year, with thirty persons of good repute; Joan Princess of Wales in 1372 was given permission to enter monasteries of enclosed nuns with six honest and aged men and fourteen women and

1 Vis. of Dioc. of Norwich (Camden Soc.) p. 290.
3 Ibid. IV, p. 212.
4 Ibid. IV, p. 167.
to eat and drink, but not to pass the night therein; Thomas of Gloucester and his wife, the notorious Eleanor de Cobham, had an indulg to enter monasteries of enclosed monks and nuns six times a year, with twenty persons of either sex. Sometimes, it is true, the visitors were forbidden to eat, drink or spend the night in the house, but often they received special permission to do so; thus in 1408 Philippa, Duchess of York, was given an indulg allowing her to take five or six matrons and to stay in monasteries of enclosed nuns for three days and nights at a time and in 1422 Joan Countess of Westmoreland received one to enter any nunnery with eight honest women, and to stay there with the nuns, eating, drinking and talking with them and spending the night. An indulg granted in 1398 to Margery and Grace de Tylney 'noblewomen', to enter 'as often as they please with six honest matrons, the monastery of enclosed nuns of the order of St. Clare, Denney' and a faculty granted in 1371 to 'John, Cardinal of Sancti Quatuor Coronati', empowering him to give leave to a hundred women of high birth of France and England, to enter nunneries once a year, accompanied each by four matrons, give some idea of the extent to which it was usual for guests to visit even houses belonging to enclosed orders.

1 *Ib. IV. p.182.*
2 *Ib. IV. p.394.*
3 For example *Ib. I pp.522, 526, IV p.38, VII pp.70, 440, 617.* Sometimes, too, they were ordered to pay their own expenses. e.g. *Ib. VI p.293.*
4 *Ib. VI, p.132.*
5 *Ib. VII. p.220.*
6 *Ib. VII. p.91.*
7 *Ib. IV. p.170.*
Even more disturbing to monastic discipline were the casual visits of friends in the neighbourhood, coming to see and talk to the nuns for a few hours. Visitation documents show that there was a steady intercourse between the convent and the world. Letters and messages passed between the nuns and their friends outside, and a great many of the private affairs of the convent found their way to the ears of seculars. "From mill and from market, from smithy and from nunnery, men bring tidings" ran the proverb, and complaints were common that the secrets of the chapter were spread abroad the country side. At the ill conducted house of Catesby in 1442 the Prioress (herself the blackest sheep in all the flock) complained that "seculars have frequent access to the rooms of nuns within the cloister, and converse and amuse themselves there without her knowledge ... that the nuns send out letters and receive them without the knowledge of the prioress and that the secrets of the house are spread abroad in the neighbourhood by such secular visitors, and that the nuns send out the priory servants upon their own business and also receive persons for whom they have sent and with whom they have conversations and communications, concerning which the Prioress knows nothing." At Goring in 1530 the Prioress complained that one of the nuns persisted in sending messages to her friends, and at Romsey in 1509 Alice, wife of William Coke.

1 Ancren Riwle. (Kings Classics) p.67.
3 W.C.H. Oxon II p.104.
the cock of the nunnery was enjoined that she shall not be a messenger or bearer of messages or fabularum or signs between any nun and any lay person on pain of excommunication and as much as in her lies shall hinder communications of lay persons with nuns at the kitchen window. At St. Helens Bishopsgate it was even necessary to order the nuns to refrain from kissing secular persons. Sometimes the visitation detecta or comperta or injunctions give specific details as to the visitors who were most assiduous in haunting a nunnery. It is amusing to follow the references to scholars of Oxford in the records of those houses, which were in the neighbourhood of the University. Godstow was the nearest and the students seem to have regarded it as a happy hunting ground constituted specially for their recreation. Peckham, in his set of Latin injunctions to the Abbey, wrote after giving minute regulations as to the terms upon which nuns might converse with visitors: "When the scholars of Oxford come to talk with you, we wish no nun to join in such conversations, save with the licence of the Abbess and unless they be notoriously of kin to her, in the third grade of consanguinity at least; we order the nuns to refuse to converse with all scholars so coming; nor shall you desire to be united in any special tie of familiarity with them, for such affection often excites unclean thoughts." From a letter which he wrote to the Abbess on

1 Livinga, Records of Ramsey Abbey, p.232.
November 12th 1284 it appears that the Prioress had been defamed of incontinence, for while professing his belief in her innocence he repeated his injunction against casual conversations between nuns and seculars, adding "Oveke cec nous deffendons de part Deu ke nule nonein ne parle a escoler de Oxeneford se il nest sun parent prechein, e ovekes ceco saunz le conge la abbesse especial. E cec meisme entendons nous de touz pres-tres foreins, lequeus font mout de maus en mout de lus, e aussi de touz religieus ki ne venent pur precher u pur confesser que lautorite le apcoteile e le oveske de Nichole." 1 The most detailed information, however, is to be found in the injunctions sent by Bishop Gray to Godstow in 1432. "That no nun receive any secular person for any recreation in the nuns' chambers under pain of excommunication. For the scholars of Oxford say they can have all manner of recreation with the nuns, even as they will desire. ... Also that the recourse of scholars of Oxford to the monastery be altogether checked and restrained... Also that (neither) the gatekeeper of the monastery, nor any other secular person convey any gifts, rewards, letters or tokens from the nuns to any scholars of Oxford or other secular person whomsoever, or bring back any from such scholars or persons to the same nuns, nay, not even skins containing wine, without the view and knowledge of the abbess and with her special licence asked and had, under pain of expulsion from

his office (and) from the said monastery for ever; and if any nun shall do the contrary she shall undergo imprisonment for a year." In a commission addressed two years later to the Abbot of Osney and to Master Robert Thornton the Bishop spoke in very severe terms of the bad behaviour of the nuns, and ordered the commissioners to proceed to Godstow and to enquire whether a nun, who had been with child at the time of his visitation, had been preferred to any office or had gone outside the precincts and whether his other injunctions had been obeyed, especially if any scholars of the university of Oxford, graduate or non-graduate, have had access to the same monastery or lodging in the same, contrary to the form of our injunctions aforesaid. But the situation was unchanged when, thirteen years later, Alnwick came to Godstow. Elizabeth Felmersham, the abbess, deposed "that seculars have frequent access to the nuns in the time of divine office in the choir, and to the frater at meal times ... She cannot prevent the seculars of Oxford from having common access to the monastery and cloistral precincts against her will. The nuns have conversations with seculars coming to the monastery, without asking licence of the abbess." Other nuns deposed that although sister Alice Longepey often conversed in the convent church

with Hugh Sadler, a priest from Oxford who obtained access to her on the plea that she was related to him, and that dame Katharine Okeley was continually chattering with strangers 'in the church, chapter, door of the church, door of the hall and in divers other places.' Alnwick made a strong injunction on the subject: "Also we enioyne yow abbesse vnderpayne of fynale privacyeone of yowe fro your dignitee Abbacyalle, that for as mykelle as the saide monastery and diuerse singulere persones ther of are greuously noyses and scaun-
dred for the grete and contynuelle accesse and recourse of seculere and regulere persones and in specyalle of scolers of Oxonford to your said monastery and singulere persones ther of that fro hense forthe ye suffre no seculere persones, sco-
lers ne othere officiere of the said monastery ... to hafe any accesse or recourse to your saide monastery ne to any sin-
gulere persone ther of, ne there to abyde nyght ne day," and he added regulations for the proper supervision of nuns, holding conversations with visitors by licence. At Studley the nuns asked 'that the vicar of Burchester, who is reputed of mature discretion and age and of competent knowledge, be assigned to the convent as confessor, since it is not health-
ful that scholars of Oxford should have cause to come to the Priory.'

1 Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick. ff. 28, 28d. At both Gray's and Alnwick's visitations it transpired that the nuns were in the habit of going to Oxford to see their friends, so that the danger was a double one.

2 Ib. f. 26d.
But the most dreadful example of the ill effects of proximity to Oxford is certainly to be found in the history of Littlemore. At Alnwick's visitation Dame Agnes Marcham (a lady with a tongue) said 'that a certain monk of Rievaulx, a student at Oxford and belonging to the Cistercian order, has common and frequent access to the priory, eating and drinking with the Prioress and spending the night there, sometimes for three, sometimes for four days on end. Item she says that Master John Herans, master of arts in the schools of Oxford, now has access to the priory, dining, supping, and passing the night there.'

The state of the house in the fifteenth century was infinitely worse; indeed it was one of the most disorderly houses of which record has been preserved, and there was much reason for its early suppression in 1526. In 1517 there were six nuns in the house beside the Prioress. She (her name was Katherine Wells) had an illegitimate daughter by a Kentish priest named Richard Hewes, and had taken the "pannes, pottes, candilsticks, basynes, shetts, pellows, feder beds etc" of the house to provide a dowry for this girl; she had pawned all the jewels of the house, so that there was no money for the food or clothes of the nuns and when they rebuked her for her ill deeds she clapped them in the stocks. Another of the nuns had also had a child by a married man of Oxford. The Prioress was deprived, but allowed to perform her

\[\text{Ib. f. 31.}\]
functions for the present, with the result that when Bishop Atwater visited the house nine months later its condition was just as bad. She complained 'that one of the nuns "played and romped" with boys in the cloister and refused to be corrected. When she was put in the stocks, three other nuns broke the door and rescued her and burned the stocks; and when the prioress summoned aid from the neighbourhood the four broke the window and escaped to friends, where they remained for two or three weeks; and they laughed and played in church during mass even at the elevation.' The nuns, on their side, said that the Prioress "had punished them for speaking the truth at the last visitation, that she had put one in the stocks for a month without any cause, that she had hit another 'on the head with fists and feet, correcting her in an immoderate way' and that Richard Hewes had visited the prioress within the last four months." A bad business. 1 Nor does the proximity of Cambridge appear to have had a less disturbing effect upon morals and discipline. In 1373 it was found that the Prioress of St. Radegund 'did not correct Dame Elizabeth de Cambridge for withdrawing herself from divine service and allowed friars of different orders, as well as scholars, to visit her at inopportune times and to converse with her, to the scandal of religion,' 2 and in 1498, when John Alcock, Bishop of Ely, converted the nunnery into the college

1 V.C.H. Oxon II pp. 76-7.
2 Gray, Priory of St. Radegund, Cambridge, p. 35.
afterwards known as Jesus College, its delapidation was ascribed to 'the negligence and improvidence and dissolute disposition and incontinence of the prioress and religious women of the aforesaid house, by reason of the vicinity of Cambridge University.' Plainly the scholars who hung about the portals and tethered their horses in the paddocks of Godstow, and who gossiped with the sisters of Studley and Littlemore and St. Radegund were not of the type of that clerk of Oxenford, who loved his twenty red and black clad books better than 'robes riche or fithele or gay sautrye;' and it is to be feared that their speech was not 'souninge in moral vertu.' Rather they belonged to the tribe of Absolon, who could trip and dance in twenty manners.

After the sacle of Oxenforde tho,
And with his legges casten to and fro,
And pleyen songes on a small rubible,
or of hende Nicholas ('of derne love he coude and of solas'),
or of those two clerks of Cambridge, Aleyne and John, who harboured with the Miller of Trumpington, or of 'joly Jankin', the Wife of Bath's fifth husband. The nuns certainly got no good from these young men of light heart and slippery tongue.

Sometimes, as appears from the cases of Alice Longepey, Agnes Marcham, and Elizabeth de Cambridge, certain nuns rendered themselves particularly conspicuous for intercourse with seculars, or certain men were forbidden by name to frequent the precincts of a nunnery. At a visitation of St. Sepulchre

Dugdale, Mon. IV, p. 190.
Canterbury in 1367-8, it was found that 'Dame Johanna Chivyn-
ton, prioress there, does not govern well the rule nor the
religion of the house, because she permits the rector of Dover
Castle and other suspected persons to have too much access to
sisters Margery Chyld and Juliana Aldelesse, who have a room
contrary to the injunction made there on another occasion by
the lord (Archbishop), and these suspect persons often spend
the night there.'

At Nunmonkton in 1397 the Prioress Margaret
Fayrfax was ordered that John Munkton (the same who scandal-
ised the convent by feasting and playing at tables with her in
her room), Sir William Anschby, chaplain, William Snowe and
Thomas Pape were to hold no conversation nor keep any company
with her, nor with any nun of her house, except in the pre-
sence of two of the elder nuns, and she was warned not to
allow clerks to frequent the priory without reasonable cause.

At Godstow in 1392 the Abbess was ordered to forbid the visits
of John de Kirkeby, chaplain in the village of Wolvercot,
across the river. At Studley in 1445 a note in Alnwick's
register records the fact that 'there is a great flow of secul-
lar guests to sister Isabella Barton and to her room.'

Swine one of the comperta of Giffard's visitation in 1267-8
runs: "The household of Sir Robert de Hiltun, Knight, wanders
about far too freely (nimis dissoluto) in the cloister and

1 Lambeth Reg. Langham f.76d.
2 See above p.121. below p. 357.
3 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p.194.
4 V.C.H. Oxon. III. p.73.
parlour, and often holds very suspicious conversations with the nuns and sisters, whence it is feared that harm may come. And this same Robert is very injurious and dangerous to them, whence, for fear of his oppression, the canons of the house lately, without the consent of the convent, gave him a barn full of corn, with which the convent should have been maintained.\(^1\) At Rusper in 1524 'a certain William Tychenor has frequent access to the said priory and there sows discord between the prioress and sisters and others living there.'\(^2\) At Nuncoton in 1531 Longland writes, 'We charge you, lady prioress, undere payne of excommunicacion that ye from hensforth nomore suffre Sir John Warde, Sir Richard Caluerley, Sir William Johnson, nor parson .... ne the parson of Skotton, ne Sir William Sele to come within the precincts of your monasterye, that if they by chaunce do vnwares to you that ye streight banish them and suffre not theme ther to tary, nor noone of your susters to commune with them or any of them. And that ye voyde oute of your house Robert lawrence and he nomore resorte to the same.'\(^3\) Incidents such as these can be multiplied from the records of episcopal visitations. General complaints are even more common. At Nunburnholme (1318) there is scandal from the frequent access and gossiping of seculars with certain of the nuns.\(^4\) At Rosedale (1306) the fermery is to be kept from the passing to and fro of seculars. At Arthington

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3 Archaeologia. XLVII p.57.
4 V.C.H. Yorks. III. p.119.
(1318) they are not to frequent the cloister, fermery or other private places. At Ickleton (1345) the precincts are not to be made the resort of any secular woman, nor is any such person to come into the choir during the hours of service. At Heynings (1351) Bishop Gynwell writes 'pur ceo que nous auoms entendu graunt destourbaunce de vostre religion estre fait par gentz seculers, qui entrent vostre cloistre et quœer, nous vous chargeons que vous ne soffrez desore nul homme seculer, horspris vostre patrou ou autre graunt siegneur, entrer vostre cloistre ne tenir illoques parlauncce ou autre daillaunce od nul scer de vostre mesoun, par par vostre silence ou la religion purrait estre enblle.' At Gracedieu (1440-1) seculars and nuns eat together commixtum in the Prioress' hall. At Nunappleton (1281) external visitors come into frater and cloister. At Romsey (1492) people stand about chatting in the middle of the choir. It is clear that the nuns sometimes escaped to the guest house to gossip with their visitors, for at Marrick (1252) they were forbidden to sit with guests or anyone else outside the cloister after curfew, nor for long, unless the guests arrived so late that it was impossible to serve them sooner, nor was a nun to remain

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alone with a guest. At Hampole (1308) no nun except the hostillaria was to eat or drink in the guest house, save with worthy people, and at Wilberfoss in the same year they were forbidden to linger in the guest-house or elsewhere, for amusement with seculars. At Alnwick's visitation of Heynings in 1440 a lay sister deposed 'that the nuns indulge in late drinkings in "ly gestchaumbre," even after compline, especially when their friends come to visit them', and the Bishop wrote 'for as muche as we founde there are vset late drynkyngs and talkyng by nunnes, as wele wythe yn as wythe owte the cloystere wythe seculares, where thu(gh) som late ryse to matynes and some come not at thayme, expressly agayns the rule of your order, we charge yo(w and) yche oon singulere that fro this day forthe ye neyther vse spekyng ne drynkyng in no place aftere complyne sayde, but (that) after collacyon and complyne sayde ych oon of yow go wythe owte lengere tarying to the dormytorye.'

In the course of time a series of regulations was devised to govern the entrance of seculars into the nunneries, hardly less detailed than those which governed the visits of nuns to the world. An attempt was made to prevent certain

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1 V.C.H. Yorks III. pp. 117, 163, 126. At Elstow in 1432, however, Bishop Gray enjoined 'that when parents or friends or kinsfolk of nuns, or other persons of note and honesty shall journey to the same monastery to visit any nuns of the said monastery, the same nuns be nowise bound for that day to observance of frater, but be excused to this end by grace of the abbess or president. Visit. of Relig. Houses in Dioc. of Linc. ed. A.H. Thompson I, p. 54.
persons from being allowed to sleep in a house; also to keep all visitors out during certain hours and from certain places; and elaborate rules were made fixing the conditions under which nuns might hold conversations or exchange letters with seculars. In some cases friars or other men belonging to religious orders were not to be received as guests by nuns; at Nunappleton in 1318 the injunction was that no brothers of any order were to be received ad hospitandum, unless they arrived so late that it was impossible not to lodge them; 1 at Hample and Swine the rule was simply that they were not to spend the night in the inner guest house, or within the doors of the house. 2 At Godstow in 1284 Archbishop Peckham forbade the reception of religious men for the night, 3 and in 1358 Bishop Gynwell enjoined "par certeuy causes que nul des ffreres, de quel ordre il soit, soit herberge de nuit deinoz les portes de vostre mesoun, ne de iour sil ne soit pur graunt necessite et cause resonable et nemie communement. 4 William of Wykeham directed a special mandate on this subject to Wherwell ten years later. 'Lately, indeed,' he says, 'It has come to our ears by popular report of faithful men, that against the honesty of religion, you admit various religious men, especially of the mendicant orders, lightly and promiscuously to pass the night in your habitations, from which there

1 Ib. III. p.171.
2 Ib. III. pp.164, 181.
grows much matter for laxity and scandal, since the cohabita-
tion of religious clerks and nuns is altogether forbidden by
the constitutions of the holy fathers. He proceeds to for-
bid the reception of friars or other religious men to lodge
in the abbey, though food may be given to them in alms. 1
Attempts were sometimes made, though probably not insisted
upon with any great severity, to restrict the visitors who
might spend the night to near relatives. At Godstow, for in-
stance, Bishop Gray ordered in 1432 that strangers were to
converse with the nuns in the presence of the abbess or of
another discreet sister, "and they may so go away that they
in no wise shall pass the night there, unless they be father
and mother, brother and sister of that nun for whose sake they
have so come to the monastery;" 2 and Archbishop Lee wrote
to Sinningthwaite in 1534 "that from henceforth the prioress
shall diligently provide that no seculer nor religious par-
sons have any resort or recourse at any time to her or to any
of her said sisters by any occasion, onles it be their fathers
or moderors or other ther nere kynesfolkes, in whome no suspi-
cion of any yll can be thought."

The chief efforts of the authorities were, however,

p. 66.
Alnwick f. 83d., to Langley in 1440-1. Ib. f. 109, and to Catesby
in 1442. Ib. f. 95d.
directed not towards keeping certain persons altogether out of the nunneries, but towards keeping all visitors out during certain hours and from certain parts of the house. The general rule was that no secular was to enter after sunset or curfew and elaborate arrangements were made for locking and unlocking the doors at certain times. 'Auxi avoms ordine' wrote the Abbot of St. Albans to Sopwell in 1338 'que les hurs devers le gardyn ne soit pas deshore enavant overt, devaut prime; et en este en temps de la Myrienne soient les hus de la parlour et de le gardeyn, et les fenestres devers la cuisynes, et ne soient pas overtres taunque home soune a houre de noune qui serra chaunte apres le Myriene, et que les avaunt ditz hus de la parlour et de de gardyn chacun nuyt parmy lan taut tout apres cuvrefeu sone en labbye soient closes, s'il ne seit par resnable encheson, laquelle nous voulons estre a la consideracion de .... confessor.' At St. Helens Bishopsgate in 1432 the injunction ran: 'We ordeyne and injoyne yow, prioresse and covent, that noo secular be loykyd withinne the boundes of the cloystere, ne noo secular persones come withinne afyr the belle of compleyne, except wym-ment servauntes and mayde childeryne lerners ... Also we ordeyne and injoyne yow, prioresse and covent, that somme sadde woman and discrete of the seyde religione, honest, well named, be assigned to the shittyng of the cloysters dorys and kepyng of the keyes, that non persone have entre ne issu into the place afyr compleyne

belle; nether in noo other tyme be the wiche the place may be disclaunderid in tyme coming. At Esholt and at Sinningthwaite Archbishop Lee enjoined "that (the prioresse) provide sufficient lockes and keys to be set upon the cloyster doores, incontinent after the recet of thies injunctions and that the same doores surely be lookid every nyght incontinent as compleane is doone, and not be unlocked in wynter season to vij of the clock in the mornynge and in sommer unto vij of the clock in the mornynge; and that the prioresse kepe the keyes of the same doores, or committ the custody of them to such a discrete and religious suster, that no fault nor negligeence may be imputed to the prioresse, as she will avoyde punyshment due for the same." At the same time, for better security, he ordered the nuns to be locked into their dorter every night until service time. At Nunappleton in 1489 Archbishop Zouch enjoined 'yat ye cloistre dores be shett and sparn in wyntre at vij and in somer at vij of the clock at nyght, and ye keys nyghtly to be delievered to you, Prioress, and ye aftir ye said houres suffre no persone to come in or forth wout a cause reasonable.' At Nuncoton in 1531 Bishop Longland's regulation was 'that ye cause the cloistre doores to be shite half houre before vij of the clock every night att the

1 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 553.
2 Yorks Archaeol. Journ. XVI. p. 452. cp. p. 440. Peckham's rule for Wherwell (1284) was that no man was to enter after sunset at night or before the end of chapter (which followed directly after prime) in the morning. Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Ser.) II. p. 653.
3 V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 172.
uttermoste and so to stand shitt and nott opened till vj of
the clock in the mourning." 1 Sometimes the nuns objected to
being shut into the house so early in the summer time, when
the days were long and the trees in the convent garden green.
The nuns of Sheppey were plaintive on the subject in 1511.
Amicia Tanfeld said 'that the gate of the cloister is closed
immediately after the bell rings for vespers and remains shut
until it rings for prime; 2 this, in the opinion of the con-
vent, is too strict, especially in summer time, because it
might remain open until after supper, as she says. Elizabeth
Chatok, cantarista, said the same: 'Clauditur nimis tempes-
tive tempore presertim estiuale'; perhaps she was thinking of
better singers than herself, who piped their vespers outside
that closed door,

And songen, everich in his wyse
The most solempe servyse
By note, that ever man, I trowe,
Had herd; for som of hem song lowe, 3
Some hye, and al of oon accord.

Her sisters agreed with her, but the stern archbishop took no
notice of their plaints. 4

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1Archaeologia XLVII p.59. op. pp.54,56. For other injunctions
that doors should be closed at due times, see Moxby (1318) V.C
H.Yorke III.p.239. St.Mary Neasham V.C.H.Durham II.p.107. Rom-
sey 1302,1311. Liveing.Records of Romsey Abbey pp.102,103;
Vacante p.275.

This certainly seems very strict, for (as appears from the in-
junctions quoted above) it was customary to order the doors to
be shut when the bell rang for compline, the last office of
the day. Vespers was the service immediately before supper.

Strict regulations were also made for keeping secular visitors out of certain parts of the convent. The dorter, frater, fermery, chapter and cloister and the internal offices of the house were supposed to be entered only by the nuns. "And in order that the quiet of your cloister be in future observed better than has been customary" wrote Peckham to the nuns of Wherwell in 1284, "we order ... that no secular or religious person be permitted to enter the cloister, nor the interior offices, save for a manifest and inevitable reason, that is bodily infirmity, for which a confessor or doctor or near relative may be allowed to enter, but always in safe and praiseworthy company. So that no one shall hear the confession of a healthy nun or woman in cloister or chapter or in the interior offices ... And we consider healthy anyone who is able, conveniently and without danger to life, to enter the church or the parlour." At Romsey he further ordered four nuns to be made scrutineers "who shall expell from the cloister as suspect all persons of whatsoever condition wishing to stare at the nuns or to chatter with them (Volentes ibi moniales

curiose respicere vel cum eis garrulas attentare.\textsuperscript{1} But the rule was constantly broken and seculars seem to have penetrated to all parts of the convents. Injunctions order them to be excluded now from dorter, now from frater, now from fermery, according as visitations showed them to be in the habit of entering one part of a house or another. Sometimes special orders were given for the making and locking of doors separating the cloister from the outside court, or the nuns' choir from the rest of the church, a necessary precaution when the nave of a conventual church was used as a parish church. Thus Dean Kentwood wrote to St. Helen's Bishopsgate in 1432: 'Also we enjoyn yow, Prioress, that there may be a doore at the Nunnene quere, that no straungers may loke on them, nor they on the straungers, wanne thei bene at divyne service. Also we ordene and enjoyn yow, prioress, that there be made a hache of conabyll hythe, crestyd with pykys of herne, to fere the entre of youre kechyne, that noo straunge pepille may entre, with certyn olekettes avysed be yow and be yowre stivard to suche personys as yow and hem thynk onest and conabell. Also we enjoyn yow prioress, that non nonnes have non keyes of the postorne doore that gothe owte of the cloysetre into the church yerde but the prioress, for there is moche comyng in and owte unlefulle tymys.' Similarly Bishop Longland wrote to Elstow in 1531: "And forasmoche as the more secrete religious

\textsuperscript{1} Ib. II. p.663.
\textsuperscript{2} Dugdale. Mon. IV. p.554.
persons be kepte from the sight and visage of the world and strangers, the more close and enter yer ther mynd and deuocon shalbe unto god, we ordeyn and Inioyne to the lady abbesse that before the natuyte of our lorde next ensewing she cause a doore with two leves to be made and sett upp att the lower ende of the quere and that doore to be fyve foote in hight att the leaste and continually to stand shitt the tymes of dyvyne service excepte itt be att comming in or out of eny off the ladyes and mynthres off the said churche. And under like payne as is afore we chardge the said ladye abbesse that she cause the doore betwene the covent and the parishe churche continually to be shitt, unless itt be oonly the tymes of dyvyne service, and likewise she cause the cloistre doore towrdes the outward court to be continually shitt, unless itt be at suche tymes as any necessaries for the covent shall be brought in or borne out att the same, and thatt she suffre no other back doures to be opened but upon necessarye, grett and urgent causes by her approved.\(^1\) Special attempts were made to prevent secret communication between nuns and secular persons in corners and passages or through windows and to block

1 Archaeologia XLVII p.52. Compare Bishop Gray’s injunction to Godstow in 1432-4. "Also that all the doors of the nuns' lodgings towards the outer court, through which it is possible to enter into the cloister precinct, even if the other doors of the cloister be shut for the time being, be altogether blocked up, or that such means of barring or shutting be placed upon them that approach or entrance through the same doors may not be given to secular folk." Visit. of Relig. Houses in Dicc. of Lincoln. ed. A.H. Thompson p.68.
up unnecessary doors, by which such persons might enter. In 1320 Bishop Stapeldon wrote to Canonsleigh: "Et pur ceo que nous avons oyi et entendu par ascune gent de par my deus us dedenz votre abbeye ileges plusours mals esclandres et deshonestetes sunt avenues avant cest hure, et purront ense-ment avenir apres, si remedie ne soit mys, ceo est asavoir un usge est en lenclioistre au celer descou la Sale la Abbesse devers la court, voloms, ordinoms et commundoms ce melisme ceux deus us soyent bien estupees par mur de pere, entre oy est la Paske procheyn avenir." 1 "We ordeyne and injoyne yow, prioresse and covent," writes Dean Kentwood to St. Helems, "That ye, ne noone of yowre austres use nor haunte any place withinne the priory, thorogh the wiche evel suspectyone or sclaunder mythe aryse; weche places for certeyne causes that move us, wo wryte not here inne owre present iniuncyone, but wole notyfie to yow, prioresse: nor have no lokyng nor spec- tacles owtewarde, thoght the wiche ye mythe fall into worldly dilectacyone." 2 Archbishop Lee showed no such desire to spare the feelings of the nuns of Esholt by not openly specifying the places where they were wont to whisper with their friends.

1 Reg. of Bishop Stapeldon ed. Hingeston-Randolph p.96.
2 Loc. Cit. With this compare Alnwick’s visitation of Ankerwyke in 1441, at which one of Margery Kyrkeby’s charges against Clemence Medeforde was: "Also she has ... blocked up the view Thamesward, which was a great diversion to the nuns. She confesses blocking up the view, because she saw that men stood in the narrow space close to the window and talked with the nuns." Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick. f.58.
"Item, where there is on the backside of certen chambres, on the south side of the church where the sustres worke, an open way going to the water-side, and to the bridge going over the water, without wall or doore, so that many ylles may be committed by reason hereof; wherfore in avoydyng such inconveniences that myght follow ye it shuld so remayne, by thys presentes we inioyne the prioresse, that she, incontinent without delay after the recept herof cause a strong and heigh wall to be made in the said voyde place."

Above all it was reiterated at visitation after visitation that no nun was to receive a man in her private chamber or to hold conversations with any stranger there and that certain conditions were to be observed in all conversations between the nuns and their visitors. Archbishop Zouch's injunction to Nunappleton in 1489 is typical: 'Item yat none of your sustres bring in, receyve or take any laie man, religiose or secular into ye chambe or in any secret place, daye or knyght, not w† yaim in such private places to commyne etc or drynke, w†out lycence of you, Prioresse.'\(^2\) At Sopwell in 1338 an interesting addition was made to the ordinary rule: 'Et purge que coven-able chose est dames de religion en presence de seculers se eient ordinement de habite et en porture, nous volons et ordinons que nulle de vous des ore enavaunt viegne a parler ore seculers, si ele neyt son coq et son covert de

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\(^2\) V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 172.
cuver Chiefs et de veill ordine, com apent a vostre religion.
Et nulle persone soit suffert dentsrefe forsque honestes, si
tielle personne voille demorir a manger, mange en le parlour
denseyne par congé le confessour, et nemie en chambres,
sauns congé de nous especial, ou de nostre priour, si nous
scions absents. Des overours de queux vous aures mester pur
voz necessares, cest assavoir taillors et pelleters, volons
que pur tiels overours, soit une lieu ordine pres de lenclloistre,
on tiels overours facent leurs overaignes, et que tiels over-
ours ne soient mes appellez en chambres, ne en lieu prive.
Et soient les overours tiels de quey suspicion de mal ne
puisse estre.' At Barking Peckham ordered in 1279 that no
secular man or woman was to enter the nuns' rooms, unless a
nun was so ill that it was necessary to speak to her in a
room, in which case a confessor, doctor, father or brother
might have access to her. The rules laid down for the holding
of conversations between nuns and visitors required that
the permission of the head of the house should first be

Dugdale, Mon. III. p.366. But at Barking Peckham ordered in
1279 'in officinis, autem, quae per foeminas fieri nequeant
operariorum, cum eisdem cautelis intritus admittatur.' Reg.
Eps. L. Peckham i. p.84.
Loc. Cit. Bishop Flemyn's injunction to Elstow in 1421-2 is
contradictory: 'Also that no nun admit secretly into her
chamber any seculars or other men of religion and that if
they be admitted, she do not keep them there too long.' Visit.
At Godstow in 1432 the injunction ran "also that the beds in
the nuns' lodgings be altogether removed from their chambers,
save those for small children, and that no nun receive any
secular people for any recreation in the nuns' chambers under
pain of excommunication." Ib. i. 2.67.
obtained, and that the meeting should take place in the locutorium or parlour, or occasionally in the abbess' hall, and in the hearing of 'at least one other nun of sound character,' or more frequently two other nuns. Sometimes it was added that conversations were not to be too lengthy. 'Let it not be permitted to any nun' wrote Peckham to Romsey, 'to hold converse with any man save either in the parlour or in the side of the church next the cloister. And in order that all suspicion may henceforth be removed, we order that any nun about to speak with any man, save in the matter of confession, have with her two companions to hear her conversation, in order that they may either be edified by useful words, if these are forthcoming, or hinder evil words, lest bad eloquence corrupt good morals.' Alnwick's injunction to Godstow in 1445 was couched in very similar terms: "That ye suffer none of your sisters to speak with any secular person of religious, but all only in your hall in your presence and audience, or, by your special licence asked and had, in the presence of two auncient nunes approved in the religyon so that ye or the said two nunes here and see what they do and do, and so that thaire spekyng to gedre be not

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longe but in shorte and few wordes.\textsuperscript{1} It was also attempted to exercise control over communication between the nuns and the world by means of messages and letters. Alnwick sent injunctions on this point to St. Michael Stamford, Markyate and Langley, ('ne that ye suffre none of youre sustres to receyve ne sende owte noyre gyfte ne lettre, but ye see the gyftes and wyte what is conteyned in the lettres')\textsuperscript{2} and in 1432 Dean Kentwood wrote to St. Helen's Bishopsgate: "Also we ordeyne and injoyne yow, that noone of yow speke, ne comone with no seculere persone; ne sende ne receyve letteres myssyves or gyftes of any seculere persone, withoute lycence of the prioresse: ... and such letters or gyftes sent or receyved, may turne into honeste and wichepe and none into velanye or disclaundered of yowre honeste and religione."\textsuperscript{3}

It is common to find among episcopal injunctions to nunnaries one to the effect that no secular woman is to sleep in the dorter with the nuns. The fact that this injunction had constantly to be repeated shows that it was as constantly broken. Servants, boarders and school children seem in many houses to have shared the dorter with the nuns, an arrangement which must have been exceedingly disturbing to both parties.

\textsuperscript{2} Dugdale. Mon. IV, p.554, cp. Nuncoton 1531, Archaeologia XLVII p.60, Romsey 1587, New Coll. MS. f.86. See also below
Alnwick found the practice at eleven out of the twenty houses which he visited in 1440-5. At St. Michael Stamford, Stixwould, Catesby and Langley, little girls, between the ages of five and ten, used to sleep with the nuns; there were six or seven of them at that ill conducted house, Catesby, in the charge of Agnes Allesley who was so disobedient to the bishop. 1

At Gracedieu the cellaress had a boy of seven with her in the dorter. 2 At Legbourne a nun complained that 'the Prioress permits secular women, as well boarders as servants, to lie by night in the dorter among the nuns, against the rule' and at Heynings (which was much haunted by visitors) a lay sister deposed that 'the fermery is occupied by seculars, to the great disturbance of the nuns;...women servants lie in the dorter among the sisters, especially one who has bought a corrody there.' 3

At the other houses (Godstow, Nuncotan and Stainfield) it was simply mentioned that secular persons lay in the dorter, without details as to whether they were servants, boarders or children. In all cases Alnwick strictly forbade the practice, and a prohibition to this effect is common in episcopal injunctions.

2 Tb. f. 110d. 4 Cp ff. 110. 107d.
3 Tb. ff. 68 (63). 8b.
4 Ib. ff. 28, 28d, 71d (69d), 72(70), 77(75).


These injunctions against the use of the dutzer by seculars illustrate another aspect of the movement for enclosure. The majority of the other injunctions which have been quoted were attempts to regulate the intercourse of the nuns with casual visitors; strangers who came for a day or perhaps for a few nights. But a far more dangerous menace to the quiet of the cloister lay in the constant presence of secular boarders and corrodians, who made their home in a nunnery. Sometimes the hapless wives and daughters of the King's enemies were placed in the custody of some abbess or prioress, a kindlier fate than imprisonment in a fortress or in the charge of some loyal noble, whose women folk looked ascance at their prisoner and let her feel the sharp edge of their tongues. The course of Edward II's troubled reign may be traced in the story of the women who were successively sent as prisoners, or (worse still) as nuns to various priories. The first to suffer was the King's niece Margaret; she had been married by him to Piers Gaveston and had seen her husband miserably slain at Thomas of Lancaster's bequest; she was married again to Sir Hugh Audley and ten years later, poor pawn in the game of politics, she suffered for her second husband's share in that same Lancaster's rebellion, when the crime of Blacklow Hill was expiated on the hill of Pontefract; 'Margarete countesse de Cornewaille', says the chronicle of Sempringham 'la femme Sire Hugh Daudelee, e la niece le roi, fu ordinee a demorer en
guarde a Sempringham entre les nonaignes, a quel lieu elle vint le xvi jour de Mai (1322) e la demorra. 1 In the same year the Abbess of Barking was ordered "to cause the body of Elizabeth de Burgo, late wife of Roger Damory, within her abbey, to be kept safely and not to permit her to go outside the abbey gates in any wise until further orders." 2 In 1324 another rebel, Roger Mortimer, broke his prison in the Tower and escaped across the sea to France. But three poor children, his daughters, could not escape, and on April 7th of the same year the sheriff of Southampton received an order to cause Margaret, daughter of Roger Mortimer of Wygmore, to be conducted to the Priory of Shouldham, Joan, his second daughter, to the priory of Sempringham and Isabella, his third daughter, to the Priory of Chicksand, "to be delivered to the priors of those places (all were Gilbertine houses) to stay amongst the nuns in the same priories." The Prior of Shouldham had 15d. weekly for Margaret’s expenses and a mark yearly for her robe, and the other two little girls each received 12d. weekly for expenses and a mark for her robe. The she-wolf of France bided her time, and when the game was hers she was no less swift to avenge her wrongs; to Sempringham (where her lover’s daughter had gone two years before) now went the two daughters of the elder Hugh Despenser, to pray for the souls of a father

1 Le Livre de Engletere (Rolls Series) p. 344.
2 Cal. of Close Rolls (1313-1323) p. 423.
and brother done most dreadfully to death. 1 The perennial wars with Scotland also found their echo in the nunneries. In 1306 the Abbess of Barking was ordered 'to deliver Elizabeth, sister of William Clifard Knight, who is in their custody by the King's permission to Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, the King having granted her to the said Henry; 2 she was doubtless a relative of that 'Hugh Clyfard, a Scot, the King's enemy and rebel', who together with one 'William Sauvage the King's approver' had broken his prison at Colchester some three years before, and fled into sanctuary in the convent church. Barking was a favourite prison, doubtless on account of its situation, and in 1314 the sheriffs of London were ordered 'to receive Elizabeth, wife of Robert de Brus, from the Abbess of Berkynge', with whom she has been staying by the King's order and to take her under safe custody to Rochester and there deliver her to Henry de Cobham, constable of the castle.' 4 Sometimes, however, the King sent his friends as well as his enemies to board in a nunnery and occasionally he endeavoured to do so without paying for them. In 1339 he sent first to Wilton and then to Shaftesbury 'Sibyl Libaud of Scotland, who lately came to England to the King's faith, and besought that he would provide for her maintenance, requesting them to provide her and

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1 See above p.40.  
2 Cal. of Close Rolls (1307-13) p.114.  
3 Cal. of Close Rolls (1302-7) p.419.  
4 Cal. of Close Rolls (1313-18) p. 43.
her son Thomas, who is of tender age, with maintenance from that house, in food and clothing, until Whitsuntide next, knowing that what they do at this request shall not be to the prejudice of their house in the future.' John of Gaunt made use of the convent of Nuneaton to provide a home for five Spanish ladies, who had doubtless come to England with his duchess Constance of Castile; early in 1373 he wrote to his receiver at Leicester bidding him pay the prioress for their expenses 13/4 each week; but evidently they found the convent too dull for their tastes, for in August one of them was 'demourrant a Leycestre cvesque Johan Elmeshalle,' and in December the Duke wrote to his receiver again to say that he had heard 'que non damoisels d'Espaigne demurrantz a Nouneton ne voullont pas illoques plus longement demurrer'; it is probable that these 'damoisels' were quite young girls, and had been placed at Nuneaton to learn 'nortelry'.

The majority of boarders in the nunneries were not, however, royal prisoners or even royal protegées, but more ordinary folk. Ladies who wished to end their days in a nunnery, sometimes went there as boarders or as corrodians; it is decent sober women such as these, no doubt, who are sometimes excepted by name in episcopal injunctions ordering the exclusion of boarders from a house.) But more often women would seek the

1 Cal. of Close Rolls (1339-41) pp.261, 335.
John of Gaunt's Register (Royal Hist.Soc.) II pp.128, 231, 276-7. See, for more about these ladies, pp.320-1, 325, 338.
temporary hospitality of a nunnery when, for some reason, they wished to leave their homes. A monastic house was, on the whole, a safe refuge and many a knight going to the wars went with a lighter heart when he knew that his wife or daughter was sleeping within convent walls. In 1314 John of Drakensford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, licenced the Prioress of Cannington to lodge and board the wife and two daughters of John Fychet during his absence abroad, and in 1372 William of Wykeham sent letters to the Abbesses of Romsey and Wherwell on behalf of another wife left alone in England. "The nobleman, Sir William, Earl of Pembroke," wrote the Bishop "has begged us by his letters to direct our special letters to you on behalf of the noble and gently-born lady, Lady Elizabeth de Berkele, a kinswoman of the aforesaid Earl, that she may lodge within your house ... while Sir Maurice Wyht, the same lady's husband, remains in the company of the aforesaid Earl in parts beyond the sea;" and so, in spite of a recent prohibition to these houses to receive boarders, they are to take in Elizabeth. Sometimes the wording of these licences shows that the ladies required only a temporary shelter and had by no means retired from the world. Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury gave leave to Joan Wason and Maude Poer to stay at Canynngton from December 1336 till the following Easter, and Isabel Fichet received a similar licence; in 1354 Isolda wife of John Bycombe was licenced to stay there 1

1 Reg. of John of Drakensford (Somerset Rec.Soc.) p.61. The Isabel Fichet mentioned in 1336 was probably one of these ladies. 2 Wykeham's Reg. (Hants. Rec.Soc.) II. pp.162-3.
from March till August; Alice wife of John D'Aumale, domicellus, might stay at Cornworthy from January to the Feast of St. Michael (1333); Beatrix Paynell, sister of Sir John Foxley might stay at Wintney from December to the Feast of St. John the Baptist (1367); Avice de Lyncolnia, niece of William de Jafford, might remain for four years in Nunapleton; Alice, wife of Alan of Ayote might spend two years in Godstow (1363). Sometimes these ladies brought their servants or gentlewomen with them; Joan Wason and Maude Poer had permission to take two 'damoselloses' and Isabel Fichet one maid to Canymington; when Lady Margery de Teverbyyn, a widow, went with every profession of piety to Canonysleigh in 1328, she was accompanied by 'a certain priest, a squire (domicellus) and a damsel (domicella);' the widow of Sir John Pateshull was licenced to dwell in Elstow with her daughter and maids in 1350; the familia of Elizabeth de Berkele is mentioned in William of Wykeham's licence and in 1291 John le Romeyn, Archbishop of York, gave the convent of Nunapleton permission to receive Lady Margaret de Percy as a boarder for a year, 'provided that her household during that time shall not be other than respectable (honesta).'

1 Reg. of Ralph of Shrewsbury (Somerset Rec. Soc.) pp. 277, 278, 744-5
4 V.C.H. Yorks III. p. 171.
5 V.C.H. Oxon. II. p. 73.
Mr. Rye) of boarders in Carrow Priory during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, several ladies are mentioned as being accompanied by servants; Lady Maloysel and servant, Isabell Argentein and servant, the Lady Margaret Kerdeston and woman, Lady Margaret Wetherby, her servant Matilda and her chaplain William, Margaret Wryght and her servant. The same list shows that not only women but men were received as boarders, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by their wives, and though some of the names given are doubtless those of little boys who were receiving their education in the nunnery, others can clearly be identified as adults. Sometimes these gentlemen also brought a servant or a chaplain with them, William Wryght and servants, William Wode and William his chaplain, John Bernard and John his chaplain. The men were doubtless lodged outside the precincts of the cloister.

It is plain from visitation records that the boarders who flocked to the nunneries were exceedingly disturbing to conventual life, and sometimes even brought disrepute upon their hostesses by behaviour more suited to the world than to the cloister. Alnwick's register contains some amusing and instructive evidence on this point. At Langley a very worldly  

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1See this list in Rye. Carrow Abbey pp. 46-52 passim for the information which follows.
2For instance the will of John Daniel (mentioned 8 Henry IV) was proved in 1418, that of John Dykke (23 Henry VI) in 1477, that of William Walsyngham (26 Henry VI) in 1474, that of Thomas Mowting (26 Henry VI) in 1490, that of William Smyth (27 Henry VI) in 1499. Rye. Op. Cit., XIII, XVIII, XXI, XXIII.
person, Lady Langley, was occupying a house or set of rooms (domum) within the priory, paying 40s. yearly and keeping the house in repair; but she had no intention of giving up the ways of the world; pet dogs were her hobby, and the helpless Prioress complained to Alnwick (a Bishop must sometimes have had much ado to keep a straight face at these revelations).

"Lady de Audley, boarding there, has a great multitude of dogs, inasmuch as when she comes to church she is followed by twelve dogs, which make a great noise in the church, hindering the psalm-singers and the nuns are bewildered by this (et moniales ex hoc redduntur attonite)!" "Let a warning be directed to Lady de Audley to remove her dogs from the church and the choir" says a note in the Register; and Lady Audley, followed by her twelve dogs, recedes for ever from our view. A boarder at Legbourne had a different taste in pets. Dame Johanna Pavy informed the Bishop "That Margaret Ingoldeby, a secular woman, lies by night in the dorter among the nuns, bringing with her birds, by the noise of which the silence is broken and the quiet of the nuns disturbed." Exasperated Dame Johanna, trying to steal some sleep before groping her way down to matins, she had never heard of Vert-Vert, nor even of Philip Sparrow and she would not have given due appreciation to them if she had. The Bishop said nothing about the birds, but ordered all

1 Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick f.108. At this house there were also three women boarding with the Prioress and one with the Subprioress.

2 Ib. f. 68.
seculars to be turned out of the dorter. At Stixwould there were five boarders, two widows, Elizabeth Dymock and Margaret Tylney, with their maid servants, staying with the Prioress, and two other adult women staying with the cellaress; and "there is there a certain suspect woman" (she may possibly have been a servant) "dwelling within the clostral precincts, by name Joan Bartone, to whom a certain William Traherne had suspicious access, afterwards dragging her in causa matriculari before the ecclesiastical court, and she is much frequented by the nuns." At Gracedieu it was complained by two of the nuns that the Prioress divulged the secrets of the house to her secular boarders. At other houses also it was complained that the boarders not only disturbed convent life, but attracted many visitors. At Nuncotan the subprioress 'asks that boarders be removed from the house, so that they mingle not with the nuns, because if there were none the Prioress would be able to follow the frater; and because there is a great flow of outside folk to the boarders, at a great cost to the house'; another nun also deposed 'that there is a great flow of guests because of the boarders' and a third asked that boarders of marriageable age should be altogether removed from the house, frater and dorter, 'on account of many inconveniences'.

which come to the house from their sojourn there. At
Godstow in 1432 Bishop Gray enjoined 'that Felmersham's wife
with her whole household, and other women of mature age be
utterly removed from the monastery within one year next to come,
seeing that they are a cause of disturbance to the nuns and
an occasion of bad example by reason of their attire and
those who come to visit them.' It is indeed easy to under-
stand why bishops objected so much to the reception of these
worldly married women as boarders. If instead of Felmersham's
wife we read 'the wife of Bath' all is explained. That lady
was not a person whom a Prioress would lightly refuse; the
list of her pilgrimages alone would give her the entrée into
any nunnery as a pious woman. Smiling her gap-toothed smile
and riding easily upon her ambler, she would enter the gates
and alight in the court, and what a month of excitement would
pass before she rode away again. It is hard not to suspect
that it was she who introduced 'caps of estate' (were they
'as broad as is a buckler or a targe'? to the Prioress of
Ankerwyke and crested shoes to the nuns of Elstow; and it may

1 Ib. ff. 71d (69d), 72 (70). Compare the state of affairs at
Hampton in 1411, when the Archbishop ordered the removal of
'secular servants and corrodarii' who attracted to themselves
other secular persons from the country, by whom the house
was burdened. V.C.H. Yorks III p. 145. When Bishop Grandisson
of Exeter licenced the reception of Alice D'Aumarle at Corn-
moedi, secularium personarum non patet suspectis horis
liberier frequencia vel accessus.' Reg. Grandisson. Pt. II.
P. 724.
2 Visit of Relig. Houses in Dioc. of Lincoln ed. A.H. Thompson
I. p. 67.
have been she (alas) who taught some of them to step 'the olde
daunce'. Bad enough for their peace of mind to meet her at a
pilgrimage, but much worse to have her settled in their midst,
gossiping as endlessly as she gossiped in her prologue, and
amplifying her reminiscences for a less sophisticated audience:
The wyff of bath was so wery, she had no will to walk;
She toke the Prioress by the hond: 'madam, wol ye stalk
The Prioress, as womman taunt of gentil blood and hend,
Passyng forth (ful) softly in-to the herbery;
And al the Aleyis feir I-parid, I-raylid and I-makid;
The sauge and the isope, I-frethid and I-stakid.

and while they stalked among the herbs she talked, and talked
and talked. This was one reason why the Bishops made a special
injunction against the reception of married women. The presence
of men was open to even more serious objections. At Hampole
in 1411 the Archbishop of York made the significant injunction
that the prioress was not to allow any corrodarii or others to
retain suspected women with them in the house. At St. Michael
Stamford in 1442 Alnwick discovered 'that Richard Gray, lately
boarding in the priory together with his legitimate wife,
procreavit prolem de domina Elizabetha Wylugby monialib ibidem,
and boarded there until last Easter against the injunction of
the lord (bishop). So also at Basebourne in 1478 it was
deposed that 'a certain Sir John Senoke much frequented the
priory or house, so that during some weeks he passed the night

1 The Tale of Eurn. (Chaucer Soc.1887) p. 10.
2 V.C.H. Yorks II. p. 162.
3 Linc. Epis.Reg. Visit. Alnwick f. 39d. See account of his ex-
amination and penance at end of visitation.
and lay within the priory or monastery every night, and was the cause ... of the ruin of two nuns who had gone into apostasy at the instigation of various men.  

The reception of secular women as boarders without the consent of the diocesan was forbidden as early as 1222 by the Council of Oxford and the bishops henceforth pursued a steady policy of ejection. "Since" wrote Bishop Flemyn to Elstow "From the manifest conjectures and assurance of our eyes we have learned that by reason of the stay of lodgers, especially of married persons, in the said monastery, the purity of religion (and) pleasantness of honest conversation and character, (which) in their fragrance in our judgment far surpass temporal goods, and the destruction of which far exceeds the waste of temporal wealth, have suffered grave shipwreck, and may suffer, as is likely, more heavily in future, we ordain, enjoin and charge you who are now abbess and the other several persons who shall be abbesses in the said monastery, under pain of deprivation, beside the other penalties written beneath, which likewise, if you do contrary to that which we command, it is our will that you incur thereupon, that henceforward you admit or allow to be admitted or received to lodge or stay within the limits of the cloister, no persons male or female, how honest soever they be, who are beyond the twelfth year of their age, nor any other persons soever, and married persons in special, without the site

of the same monastery, unless you have procured express and
special licence in the cases premised from ourselves or from
our successors, who for the time being shall be bishops of
Lincoln.' Always the reason given is that these boarders are
a disturbance to conventual discipline. 'Item pur ceo que la
religion ad este moult destourbe entre vous par cause des fem-
mes seculers soijourauntz en vostre meson' wrote Bishop Gynwell
to Heyningo in 1351 "Nous vous defendons sur peyn descomesenge-
ment que apres la fest seynt michel procheyn auenir nul femme
seucer soit demurrant en vostre priorie horspris vos servauntz
necessaires pur vous servir.'2 'Also for as myche as we fynde
detecte' Ainwick wrote nearly a century later to the same
house 'That for the multitude of subjoursnaunte wythe (yow)
as wele welded as other ofte tymes ye qwere and the rest of
yowe in your observaunces is troubled, we charge (yow) pryor-
esse vnder payne of the sentence of cursyng that fro this day
forthe ye receyve no sodejoursnauntes that pas(se a man) x yere,
a woman xiii yere of age, wytheowten specyalle leve of hus or
our successours busshops of Lincoln he asked (and had).13 But
at Stixwould he was even more severe. "Also we charge and
enjoyne yow, prioresse, in lyke wyse that ye receyve ne holde
no suioursnauntes, men, women ne childerne wyth ymne your place,
and thoe that nowe are there, ye voyde thaym wythe yn a quater

1Visit. of Relig. Houses in Dioc. of Linc. ed. A. H. Thompson I. 22
of a yere after the receyvyng of thys our lettres, but if ye
here yn have specyalle licence of hus or our successors, bys-
shops of Lincolne, except our wele beluyde doghters, dame
Elizabete Dymok and Dame Margaret Julney, by whose abydyng,
as we truste, no greve but rathere avayle is procured to your
place.' Put the attempt to clear the convents of secular
boarders was entirely unsuccessful. The bishops had two power-
ful forces against them, the desire of the impoverished nuns
to make money and the desire of seculars for a quiet and inex-
pensive hostel; and the nuns continued to take boarders, in
spite of a series of prohibitions. At Romsey, for instance,
Peckham forbids boarders c. 1284; in 1311 Bishop Woodlock has
to repeat the prohibition 'because of the continual sojourn of
seculars we find the tranquility of the nuns to be much dis-
turbed and scandals to arise in your monastery'; in 1346
Edynton orders the removal of all secular persons within a
month; in 1363 he has to write again, complaining that he has

Ib. f.75d. (73d). For other injunctions against boarders see:
Godstow 1445, Nuncotn 1440, Gracedieu 1440-1, Langley 1440,
Harroid 1442-3, ib. ff. 28d, 71d (79d), 107d, 108, 114d.
Coatesleigh (1391). Reg. of Bishop Brantyngham Pt. II. p.724.
Folsom (1319) Reg. of Bishop Stapeldon p.317. Wherwell,
653, 654. III p.924. Farewell (1367) Reg. of Robert de
Stretton. p.112. Wilberfesse, Nunkeeling and Nunpleston
1281-2. Reg. of William Wickware pp.112-3, 140-1. Polesworth
1352, 1456, V.C.H. Warwick II. p.63. These are only a few
examples; the registers of the Archbishops of York and the
Lincoln episcopal records afford many more. See the Victoria
County Histories for the counties in these dioceses, passim.
heard by public report that they have not obeyed his former
letter and ordering them to remove all perhendinatrices within
fifteen days. At Godstow injunctions to this effect are made
in succession by Gynwell (1358), Gray (1432-4) and Alnwick
(1445); at Elstow by Gynwell (1359), Bokyngham (1387),
Flemyng (1421-2) and Gray (c.1432). Moreover the Bishops
themselves were sometimes obliged to leave the nuns a loop-
hole of escape, by excepting certain women from the general
prohibition; thus Alnwick excepted the two widows Elizabeth
Dymnok and Margaret Tylney at Heynings; Brantyngham excepted
the noble woman Lady Elizabeth Courtenay, wife of the noble
man Sir Hugh de Courtenay, Knight' at Canonsleigh (1391);
and Archbishop Zouch at Nunappleton (1482) excepted children
or elis old persones, by which avail belikelywood may growe
to your place.' Often too they were persuaded to grant li-
cences to boarders, at the prayer of influential persons who
must not be offended. And so the secularisation of the con-
vents went on.

The largest loophole, which the bishops were obliged,
by the presure of circumstances, to leave open was, however,

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1 See Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham II p.664, Liveing. Records of
Romney Abbey pp.102, 165.
4 Reg. of Bishop Brantyngham. Pt. II. p.724.
5 V.C.H. Yorks III p.173.
6 See examples above pp.281-2.
the permission to receive small children for education. Certainly the presence of children was not open to the same objection as that of adult women, but the authorities of the church regarded them as subversive of discipline and as distracting the nuns from their religious duties. The nuns on the other hand, received school children for exactly the same reason that they received boarders, sold corrodies, cut down wood, leased farms and pawned jewels, because they were perpetually in need of ready money. It is not necessary here to enter into the vexed question of the extent to which the nunneries acted as schools for girls and their qualifications for doing so; but it is clear that a great many houses did take in children for financial reasons, and took in not only girls but also very young boys. "Abstinence the abbesse myn a.b.c. me taunte" says Piers Plowman, "And conscience com aftur and kenne me betere." When Alnwick visited his diocese in 1440-5, he found children at twelve of the twenty houses, which he visited. At Stixwould there were 'boys and girls boarding with different nuns, in number about eighteen, and aged between fourteen and sixteen.' At Catesby there were six or seven children 'utriusque sexus'. At St. Michael Stamford

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1 On the whole subject see Coulton, Monastic Schools in the Middle Ages (Medieval Studies No. X. 1913). And Journal of Education. 1909. 1910.


4 Re. f. 94.
"the Prioress has seven or eight children, some boys and some girls, aged twelve years or less, to board and to educate." At Littlemore 'the daughter of John fitz Aley, Seneschal of the house and the daughter of Ingelram Warrand are boarders in the house and each of them pays fourpence a week.' At Harrold there were two, aged six or seven; at Gracedieu one little boy of seven lay with the cellareas in the dorter.

At first the policy of the bishops was altogether to exclude school children from the nunneries; Endes Rigaud, the great Archbishop of Rouen, habitually removed all the girls and boys whom he found in the houses of his diocese, when he visited them in 1249-69. But, in England at least, the nuns were too strong for the bishops and, as Mr. Coulton has shown, 'during the later fifteenth and earlier sixteenth century, English visitors show as clear a tendency towards relaxation as German visitors, with the Council of Évér behind them, show towards a fight for the original strictness.' By degrees the English bishops adopted the policy of fixing an age limit, beyond which no children might remain in a nunnery. Since the danger of secularisation could not be removed, it was at least reduced to a minimum, by ensuring that only very young boys and only girls, who had not yet attained a marriageable age

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1. Ib. f. 83.
2Ib. f. 31.
3. Ib. f. 114.
4. Ib. f. 109. See also Legbourne, Godstow, Heynings, Gokewell,
should be received by the nuns. The age limit varied a little with different visitors and different houses; Alnwick wrote to Gracedieu in 1440, "Also we enicyne yow prioress, undere peynes of cursyng and priuacyone a foresaide and yche oon of yow of the counet under peyn of cursyng, that none of yowe receyve ne admitte into your place any subiournauntes of whate estate, condicyone or age so thai be, man ne woman, but if ye haue therto specialle leve of vs or our successors, bysshops of Lincolne, save childerne, males the ix and females the xiiij yere of age, whom we licencede yow to hafe for your relefe." At Godstow he fixed the age at nine for a boy and twelve for a girl; at Heynings ten for a boy and thirteene for a girl; at Catesby ten for a boy and eleven for a girl; at Harrold eleven for a boy and twelve for a girl.

In the Yorkshire diocese early in the fourteenth century the age limit was twelve for girls; boys are rarely mentioned, but at Hampole in 1314 the nuns were forbidden to permit male children over five to be in the house 'as the Archbishop finds has been the practice.' At Lymbrock in 1437 no sister was to receive any "sargyner, mon or woman weddyd, othir maydens of lawful age to be wedded, knave childeren abouen eght yere

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2 See e.g. V.C.H. Yorks III. pp.119, 120, 124, 129, 161, 177.
of age." At Elstow in 1359 Gynwell permitted boys up to six and girls up to ten years of age; but at Heynings he ordered 'que nul enfant femelle seculer gest passe dis aunz de son age, ne nul enfant mascole de quel age il soit soit receu pur demorer entre vous.' Sometimes an attempt was made to limit the number of children received in a house. "Nous ordinons" wrote Gynwell to Godstow "que nulle dame de vostre dit messoun ne eit enfantz, mes seulement deux ou vne femelles soiurnantz cueque eux." At Farewell in 1367 Bishop Stretton ordered that no nun should keep with her for education more than one child, nor any male child over seven years age, and even that not without the Bishop's leave. At St. Helen's Bishopsgate Dean Kentwood made the ambiguous injunction "that no nonne have ne receyve noo schuldrin wyth hem into the house forseyde, but yf that the profite of the comony turne to the vayle of the same house." These relaxations of the strict enclosure which was accepted as the ideal for nuns are significant. They show that Bishops were unable, here as in the attempt to keep nuns within their

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1 Hereford. Epis. Reg. Spoford I. f.77d. Compare Thomas of Cantilupe's injunction to this house c.1277 'quod nulla secularis domicella nubilis estatis inter vos aliquatenus commoretur, quantumcumque amicorum vestrorum aut potentium instancia super hoc sollicitet vestram quietam; et vobis fit hoc inhibicio propter multa incomoda que ex hoc vobis acciderent.'


3 Lb. f. 34d.

4 Lb. f. 100.

5 Reg. of Bishop Stretton. p.119.

6 Mugdale. Mon. IV. p.554.
convents, to enforce the ideal. "Cause to be observed! but surely there is scarce any mortal man who could do this: we must therefore here understand 'so far as lieth in the prelate's power.'" And the permission to receive young children shows also (perhaps) a realisation that the financial straits of the nunneries imperatively demanded some such assistance.
CHAPTER IV.

The Head of the House.
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The Head of the House

'My lady Priorese, by your leve
So that I wiste I sholde you not greve,
I wolde demen that ye tellen sholde
A tale next, if so were that ye wolde.
Now wol ye vouche-sauff, my lady dere?
'Gladly' quod she, and seyde as ye shel here.

Chaucer.

It usually happened that the head of a nunnery was a woman of some social standing in her own right. All nuns were Christ's daughters, but an earthly father in the neighbourhood, with broad acres and loose purse strings, was not to be despised. If a great lady retired to a nunnery she was very like to end as its head; Barking Abbey in Essex had a long line of well-born abbesses, including three queens and two princesses; and when Katherine de la Pole (the youngest daughter of that Earl of Suffolk who was slain at Agincourt) is found holding the position of abbess at the tender age of twenty-two, it is an irresistible inference that her birth was a factor in the choice. The advantage in having a woman of local influence and rich connections as Prioress is illustrated in the history

1 V.C.H. Essex II pp 120-122. Margaret Botetourt became Abbess of Folesworth in 1362, by episcopal dispensation, when under the age of twenty. "This early promotion was not the only mark of favour which this prioress obtained. In 1399 the Pope granted her exemption from the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Bishop of Lichfield." V.C.H. Warwick II. p.63.
of Crabhouse nunnery under Joan Wiggenhall;¹ how she worked
and built "be the grace of oure Lord God an be the helpe of
Edmund Perys, Person of Watlington", her cousin; and how
"whanne this good man beforeseyde was passid to God, oure Lord
that is ful gracieuse to alle his servauntis that have nede
and that troste on hym, sente hem another goode frende hem to
helpe and conforte in her nede, clepid Mayster Jon Wygenale,
Doctoure of Canon and person of Oxbarow, and Cosyn to the same
Prioress"; and how "in the xix yere of the same Prioress,
ffel a grete derth of corne, wherefore sche must medis have
lefte werke, withoute relevenge and helpe of sum goode creature,
so, be the steringe of oure Lord, Mayster Jon Wygenale befor
sayde sent us of his charite an hundred cowmbe malte and an
hundred cowmbe Barly and besyde this procured us xx mark. And
for the soule of my Lord of Exstyr, of whose soule God of his
pyte he wil have mercy, we had of him xl pounte and v mark to
the same werke, whiche drewe occ mark, withoute mete and drinke.

And within these vij yere that the dortoure was in the makyng
the place at Lynne cleped Corner Bothe was at the gate downe

¹ "I take it that Prioress Joan was an heiress, and, in fact,
the last representative of the elder line of her family and
the nuns knew perfectly well what they were about when they
chose a lady of birth and wealth, and highly connected to
boot, to rule over them. They certainly were not disappoint-
ed in any expectations they may have formed. The new prior-
ess set to work in earnest to make the nunnery into quite a
new and imposing place and her friends and kinsfolk rallied
round her nobly." Jessopp. Ups and Downs of an Old Nunnery.
In Frivola. pp. 59-60."
and no profite came to the place many yeris before. So that Mays- 

tir Jon before seyde of yns grete charite lente the same prioresse 
good to make it up ageyne and procured hir xx mark of the sekatouris 
of Roger Chapeleyn."1

The election of a superior was a complicated business, as may 
be gathered from the list of seventeen documents relating to the 
election of Alice de la Flagge as Prioress of Whiston in 1308, and 

enrolled in the Sede Vacante Register of Worcester diocese. 2

1 Reg. of Crabhouse Nunnery ed Mary Bateson (Norf. Archæology XI) 
  pp. 57-62 passim.

2 They are as follows: (1) conge d'élire by the Bishop-Elect as 
  patron, (2) notification by the subprioress and nuns of the date 
  appointed for the election, (3) formal warning by the subprioress 
  that all who ought not to be present should leave the chapter 
  house, (4) notification of the election of Alice de la Flagge, 
  (5) declaration of Alice's assent, (6) letter from subprioress 
  and convent to the Bishop-Elect praying him to confirm the elec-
  tion, (7) letter from the Prior of Worcester to the same effect, 
  to the Bishop-Elect, (8) the same to the commissionary general, (9) 
  commission from the Bishop-Elect to the Prior and to the commis-
  sary general, empowering them to receive, examine and confirm the 
  election, (10) instrument by the subprioress and convent appoint-
  ing Richard de Bereburn, chaplain, their proctor to present the 
  elect to the Bishop-Elect, (11) another appointing two of the nuns 
  as proctors to instruct and do things concerning the business of 
  the election, (12) decree by the subprioress and convent, describ-
  ing the method and result of the election and addressed to the 
  Bishop's commissaries by Richard de Bereburn, proctor, by 
  the subprioress and by the two nuns, instrucrices, examined on 
  oath, (14) certificate by the Dean of Christianity of Worcester 
  that he had proclaimed the election, (15) confirmation of the elec-
  tion by the commissaries (16) final declaration by the Prior 
  of this confirmation and of the installation and benediction of 
  the new prioress and of the injunction of obedience upon the nuns 
  and (17) a certificate by the commissaries of the Bishop-Elect 
  that the business was completed. Reg.Sede Vacante (Worc. Hist. 
  Soc.) pp.111-114; the text in Nash, Hist. and Antiquitates of Wor-
  cestershire (1781) I pp.212-5, which also contains many documents 
  relating to the election of other prioresse of this house. There 
  are frequent notices of elections in episcopal registers; for 
  other very detailed accounts see Reg. of Bishop Grandisson of 
  Exeter ed. Hingeston-Randolph Pt. III pp.999-1002. (Canonleigh) 
  (Cannington) See also Eckenstein, Woman under Monasticism pp. 
  367-8.
Indeed there were so many formalities to be fulfilled that the
nuns seem often to have found great difficulty in making a
canonical election, and there are frequent notices in the episco-
pal registers that their election has been quashed by the
Bishop on account of some technical fault; in such cases, how-
ever, the Bishop's action was merely formal and he almost al-
ways reappointed the candidate of their choice. An election
was, moreover, not only complicated but expensive; it began
with a journey to the Patron to ask for his congé d'élie and
it ended with more journeys, to the Patron and to the Bishop,
to ask for confirmation, so that the cost of travel and the
cost of paying a clerk to draw up the necessary documents were
sometimes considerable; moreover a fee was payable to the
Bishop's Official for the installation of the new head. The
account of Margaret Ratcliff, Prioress of Swaffham, in 1482,
contains notice of payments 'to the official of the lord
Bishop, at the installation of the said prioress for his fee
i 1 l', and to one Bridone 'for the transcript of the decree of
election of the prioress v s'.

An account roll of St. Michael Stamford for the year 1375-6 illustrates the process
in greater detail; under the heading of 'expenses de nostre
Blit' are the following items: 'Paie pour louver de chiuels
oue les despenses alaunz al abbe de Burgh 3 pour avoir licence

1 See e.g. V.C.H. Glouc. II. p.93; Reg. of Bishop Grandisson
Pt II. p. 742. V.C.H. Yorks III pp.114-5, 120, 124; Dugdale
2 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 438.
3 The Abbot of Peterborough was patron.
Evidently this was the usual payment here, for in the roll for 1392-3 there is an item 'Paye al officiale pour stalling de prioris xs.' \(^3\) P.R.O. Mins. Acts. 1280/4.

The following examples are representative of many others:

Based on priories from Rosedale in 1524 and 1527 (York Arch. Soc. XVI.p.431 note); Rosedale from Nunappleston in 1527, Thackhead from St. Clement York in 1525 (Dugdale Mon. IV.pp.317, 325) Kington (Wiltz) from Bromhale in 1325 (ib. IV p.398) Sometimes the Prior of one house left it to rule another e.g. Alice Davy, who occurs as Prior of Castle Hedington in 1472 was afterwards Prior of Wix (V.C.H. Essex II. p.123) and Eleanor Bernard, Prior of Little Marlow (c.1518) became Prior of St. Mary de Pre. (Dugdale Mon. IV.p.419) For a form of licence from a Prioress, permitting a nun to accept the office of prioress elsewhere see Ms. Harl. 862. f. 94, 'Literae Priorissae de Bromhale, quibus licentiam impetit Dominae Clementiae Medforde ejusdem Domus consortor et commontali, ut Prioriatui de Ankerwyke sit priorissa praesesse valeat.'
from a letter written by Mary (daughter of Edward I.), a nun of Amesbury, to her brother the King, in 1316; she protested against the action of the Abbess of Ponteauralt (with whom, as head of the order, the appointment to Amesbury lay), who was reputed to be sending 'a prioress from beyond the sea', instead of acceding to the convent's request that one of their own number should succeed to the office.

As a rule the nuns possessed the right of free election, subject to the congé d'élie of their patron and to the confirmation of the Bishop, and they secured without very much difficulty the leader of their choice. Often enough it must have been clear, especially in small communities, that one of the nuns was better fitted to rule than her sisters, and, as at Whiston, they "unanimously, as if inspired by the Holy Spirit chose lady Alice de la Flagge, a woman of discreet life and morals, of lawful age, professed in the nunnery, born in lawful matrimony, prudent in spiritual and temporal matters, of whose election all approved, and afterwards, solemnly singing Te Deum Laudamus, carried the said elect, weeping, resisting as much as she could, and expostulating in a high voice, to the church as is the custom, and immediately afterwards, brother William de Grimeley, monk of Worcester, proclaimed the election. The said elect, after being very often asked, at length, after due deliberation, being unwilling to resist the

But Jocelin de Brakelond has taught us that a monastic election was not always a foregone conclusion, that discussion waxed hot and barbed words flew in the season of blood letting, "when the cloistered monks were wont to reveal the secrets of their hearts in turn and to discuss matters one with another", and that "many men said many things and every man was fully persuaded in his own mind." Nuns were not very different from monks when it came to an election, and the chance survival of a Bishop's register and of another formal document among the muniments of Lincoln, has preserved the record of an election comedy at Elstow Abbey, almost worthy to rank with Jocelin's inimitable account of the choice of Samson the Subsacristan.

After the death of Abbess Agnes Gascoigne in July 1529, the nineteen nuns of Elstow, having received Henry VIII's congé d'élire, assembled in their chapter house on August 9th, to elect her successor. They chose Master John Rayn 'utriusque juria doctor!', as director, Edward Watson, notary public, as clerk, and the Prior of Caldwell and the rectors of Great Billing and Turvey as witnesses. Three novices and other lay persons having departed, the Director and the other men explained the forms of election to the nuns in the vulgar tongue and they agreed to proceed by way of scrutiny. Matilda Sheldon, subpriorress, Alice Boffield, precentrix and Anne Preston,

ostiaria (doorkeeper) were chosen as scrutineers and withdrew into a corner of the chapter house, with the notary and witnesses. There Matilda Sheldon and Anne Preston nominated Cecilia Starkey, refectoria, while Alice Boifeld nominated Elisabeth Boifeld, sacristan, evidently a relative. The three scrutineers then called upon the other nuns to give their votes; Anne Wake, the prioress, named Cecilia Starkey; Elisabeth Boifeld and Cecilia Starkey (each unable to vote for herself, but determined not to assist the other) voted for a third person, the subsacristan Helen Snaue; and Helen Snaue and all the other nuns, except two, gave their votes in favour of Elisabeth Boifeld. Consternation reigned among the older nuns, prioress, subprioress, refectoria and doorkeeper, when this result was announced. "Well" said the Prioress, in English, "Some of thies yong Nunnes be to blame," and on the Director asking why, she replied: "For they wolde not shewe me so muche; for I asked diverse of them before this day to whome they wolde gyve there voices, but they wolde not shewe me." "What said they to you?" asked the Director. "They said to me," replied the flustered and indignant prioress "They wolde not tell to whome they wolde gyve their voices till the tyme of the election, and then they wolde gyve their voices as God shulde put into their mynds, but this is by counsaill. And yet yt wolde have beseemed them to have shewn as muche to me as to the others." And then she and Dame Cecilia said, "What, shulde the yong nunnes gyve voices? Tushe,
they shulde not gyve voices!" Clearly the situation was the
same which Jocelin of Brakelond had described over three cen-
turies before: "The novices said of their elders that they
were invalid old men and little capable of ruling an abbey."
However the Prioress was obliged to admit that the younger
nuns had voted in the last election and the sub-prioress there-
upon, in the name of the scrutineers, announced the election
of Dame Elizabeth Boifeld by the "larger and wiser part of the
convent," (poor Anne Wake!). But the Prioress and dis-
appointed Dame Cecilia still showed fight; the votes must be
referred to the Bishop of Lincoln. Further discussion; then
Dame Cecilia gracefully gave way; she consented to the elec-
tion of Dame Elizabeth Boifeld and would not proceed further
in the matter. Master John Rayn published the election at
the steps of the altar. Helen Snaue (whom after events show-
ed to be a leading spirit in the affair) and Katherine Wingate
were chosen as proctors, to seek confirmation from the Bishop,
and Dame Elizabeth was taken to the altar (amid loud chanting
of Te Deum Laudamus by the triumphant younger nuns) and her
election announced. She, however, preserved that decorous
semblance of unwillingness, or at least of indifference, which
custom demanded from a successful candidate, even when she
had been pulling strings for days, suborning her younger rela-
tive and flattering Dame Helen Snaue; for when the proctors
came to her at two o'clock 'in a certain upper chamber called
Marteyns, in our monastery' and asked her consent to her
election, 'she neither gave it or refused'. Away went the proctors, without so much as a wink to each other; leave our elect to meditate upon the will of God. At four p.m. they came to her 'in a certain large garden, called the Pond Yard, within our monastery'; and at their repeated instances she gave her consent. 'Wherefore we, the above-named nuns, pray the Lord Bishop to ratify and confirm our election of the said Elisabeth Boyfeld as our Abbess.' Which the Lord Bishop did.

But this was by no means the end of the matter. A year later the whole nunnery was in an uproar. The Bishop, for reasons best known to himself, had removed the prioress Dame Anne Wake and had appointed Dame Helen Snawe in her place; perhaps Dame Anne had said 'Tush' once too often under the new régime; perhaps she was getting too old for her work; or perhaps Abbess Elizabeth Boyfeld had only commanded Dame Snawe's intrigues at a price; evidently the sub-sacristan was no less adroit than that other sub-sacristan of Bury St. Edmunds. At any rate Dame Anne Wake was put out of her office and Dame Helen Snawe ruled in her stead. It might have been expected that this change would be welcomed by the nuns, considering how strong the Boyfeld faction had been at the election of the Abbess. But no; in her year of triumph Helen Snawe had aroused the hearty dislike of her sisters; led by

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1 From a document preserved at the Exchequer Gate, Lincoln. For the following account see Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Longland. ff. 22-25.
Dame Barbara Gray and Alice Bowlis they had strenuously opposed her substitution for the old Prioress; they had been impertinent to the Abbess of their own choice (indeed she was only a figure head); they had written letters to their friends and refused to show them to her; and finally when the election of Dame Snaue was announced, they had risen in a body and left the chapter house as a protest. This was intolerable and the Bishop's Vicar General came down to examine the delinquents.

Matilda Skelton, the sub-prioress, admitted to having left the chapter, but denied that she had done so for the reason attributed and said that she did not know of the departure of the other nuns, until she saw them in the dorter. Margaret Nicolson showed more spirit; she said that she went out "because she wold not consent that my lady Snaue shulde be prioress," and that "ther was none that ded counsell hir to goo" and that "my lady abbes did commaunde them to tary, that not withesstandyng they went forthe"; and she gave the names of eight nuns who had followed the sub-prioress out. Dame Barbara Gray was next asked "yf she ded aske licence of my Lady Abbas to wryte letters to hir frends", and replied "that she ded aske licens to wryte to hir frends and my Lady Abbas sade, 'Yf ye showe me what ye wryte I am content,' and she saide agene,'I have done my devoir to aske licence, and yf ye wyll nede see it I will wryte noo letters.'" Asked whether she had left the chapter house, this defiant young woman...
declared that "yf it were to do agene she wolde sooo doo", and moreover "that she cannot fynde in hir hert to obey my lady Snaue as priores, and that she wyll rather goo out of the house by my lord's licence, or she wyll obey hir ... and that she wyll never obey hir as priores, for hir hert cannot serve hir"; asked for her objection to Dame Snaue she said that "she wyll shewe noo cause at thys tyme wherfor she cannot love hir"; but after a little pressure she declared with heat that 'the priores make every faute a dedly syne', treats all of them ill except her own self and if she "doo take an oppynyon she wyll kepe it", whether it be right or wrong.

Dame Margery Preston was next examined and was evidently rather frightent at the result of her actions; she said that she had left the chapter house as a protest against the deposition of the old priores and not for any ill will that she bore Dame Snaue, "and she sais," the record continues, "that she ys well content to obey my lady Snaue as priores. And she desiers my lord to be a good lord to the olde priores, because of her age." Ill-used Dame Cecilia Starkey, so unkindly circumvent by Dame Snaue a year ago, next appeared before the Vicar General and said "that she went forthe of the chapter howse, but she sais she gave moo occasion to eny of hir susters to goo forthe. And says she knewe not howe many of hir susters went forthe whyle she come into the doter;

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saynge that she cannot fynde in hir hert nor wyll not accepte
and take my lady Snae as priores," (an amusing comment on
her vote in 1529). Next came dame Alice Foster, who admitted
to having left the chapter house "and sais that they war
commanded by the Abbes to tare styll. But she and other went
forth because the olde priores was put done (i.e. down) wrong-
fully and my lady Snae put in agenst ther wylle, saynge that
she wyll never agre to hir as long as she lyvys; she says
the sub-priores went forthe of the chapter howse fyrst and
then she and other folowyde;" and evidence in almost the same
words was given by Dame Anne Preston and by Dame Elizabeth
Sinclere, the latter adding that "she wyll take tholde priores
as priores as longe as she levys and no other, and she says
yf my lord commaunde vs to take my lady Snae to be priores,
she had lever goo forthe of the howse to sum other place and
wyll not tare ther." Dame Alice Bowlis, another young
rebel, asked "yf she ded aske lycence of the Abbes to wryte,
she sais she ded aske licens to wryte and my lady Abbes seyde
'My lord hathe govyng vs soo strate commaundement that none
shuld wryte no (letter) but ye shewe it to me, what yc doo
wryte'; and she sais she mayde aunsuer agene to thabbes, 'It
hathe not bene soo in tymis paste and I have done my dewty. I
wyll not wryte nowe at this tym'; she admitted that she left
the chapter house, 'but she says that nobody ded move hyr to
goo forthe; she says that she must neds nowe ob bey the priores
at my lords commaundement, saynge that my lady Snae ys not
mete for that offes, but she wolde shewe noo cause wherfor."

Two other nuns declared with great boldness "That my lord de
not commaunde vs to tak my lady Snaue as priores, but he saide,
"Yf ye wyll not take hir as priores I wyll make hir priores!"
and that "they was wont to have the priores chosyn by the
Abbes and the convent, and not by my lord, after seynte
Bennet's rule," one of them remarking cryptically "that she
wyll take my lady Snaue as priores as other wyll doo" and not
otherwise. Meek little Dame Katherine Cornwallis was then
interrogated and said, "that she was going forthe of the
chapiter house wt. other of hir susters and then when she
herde my lady abbes commaund them to tary, she ded tary be-
hynde, but she sawe that she thinke that none of the oder
susters that went forthe ded here hyr, but only she" (kind
little Dame Katherine), "and she is sorry that tholde priores
ye put out of hir offes. She sayes that my lady abbes ded tare
styll and domina Alicia Boyftele, Domina Snaue, domina
Katherina Wyngate, domina Dorothia Commafurthere, domina
Elizabethe Repton, and Domina Elizabeth Stany smore." Finally
the ill-used abbes made her complaint; she had bidden saucy
Dame Alice Bowlis and others to stand up at matins, according
to the custom of the house, "and went out of hir stall to
bye them soo doo, and lady Bowlis ded make hir awnswere agene
that, 'ye have mayde hir priores that maybe ye abbes!',
brekyng her silence ther." Evidently poor Elizabeth Boyfeld
had not succeeded in living down the intrigues which had preceded
her election, and the convent suspected her of rewarding a supporter
at the expense of an old opponent.

Here was a pretty state of affairs in what should have been a
peaceful abbey. But the commissary general acted firmly. Barbara
Gray and Alice Bowlis were given a penance for their disobedience;
they were to keep silence; neither of them was to come within "the
howse calde the misericorde", but they were always to have their
meals in the frater; neither of them was to write any letters; and
they were to take the lowest places of all among the sisters in "pro-
cessions and in other placys". Finally all the nuns were enjoined to
be obedient to the abbess and to the hated prioress. Their protests
that they would never obey Dame Alice Snewe, while the old prioress
lived, were all in vain; and when some ten years later the Reformati-
ton put an end to their dissensions by casting them all upon the
world, Dame Elizabeth Boyvill, 'abbesse', received an annual pension
of £50, Dame Helen Snewe 'prioress' one of £4 and Dame Anne Wake
'prioress quondam' one of 66s. 8d.

Dugdale. Mon. III p.415. For another instance of disturbances in a
convent caused by the appointment of a Prioress (here the head of the
house) by the Bishop contrary to the will of the nuns, see two let-
ters written by the nuns of Stratford to Cromwell, about the same
time that Longland was having such trouble at Elstow. In one they ask
his help 'for the removing of our supposed prioress', explaining 'Sir,
since the time that we put up our supplication unto the king, we have
been worse entreated than ever we were before, for meat, drink and
threatening words; and as soon as we speak to have anything remedied
she biddeth us to go to Cromwell and let him help us; and that the
old lady, who is prioress in right, is like to die for lack of susten-
ance and good keeping, for she can get neither meat, drink nor money
to help herself.' In another letter they report 'that the chancellor
of my lord of London (the Bishop) hath been with us yesterday and
that he sayeth the prioress shall continue and be prioress still, in
spite of our teeth, and of their teeth that say nay to it, and that
he commanded her to assault us and to punish us, that other may be-
wary by us.' Wood. Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies I.Nos.
xxx and xxxi pp.65-70.
The turbulent diocese of York provides us with an even more striking picture of an election-quarrel. In 1308, after a vacancy, the election of the Prioress of Keldholme lapsed to the Archbishop, who appointed Emma of York. But the nuns would have none of Emma. Six of them refused obedience to the new prioress and six being probably at least half of the whole convent, Emma of York resigned. Not to be daunted the Bishop returned to the charge; on August 5th he wrote to the Archdeacon of Cleveland stating that as he found no one in the house capable of ruling it he had appointed Joan de Pykering, a nun of Rosedale, to be Prioress; 'as a number of persons (named) had openly and publicly obstructed the appointment of the new prioress the Archdeacon was to proceed immediately to Keldholme and give her corporeal possession and at the same time he was to admonish other dissentient nuns (named) that they and all others must accept Joan de Pykering as prioress and reverently obey her'. It is clear in this case that the feuds of the convent had spread beyond its walls, for the Archbishop at the same time warned all lay folk to cease their opposition on pain of excommunication and shortly afterwards imposed a penance upon one of those who had interfered. But pandemonium still reigned at Keldholme and he went down in person to interview the refractory nuns; the result of his visitation appears in a mandate issued to the Official of Cleveland on September 3rd, stating that he
had found four nuns, Isabella de Langetoft, Mary de Holm, Joan de Roseles and Anabilla de Lokton (all had been among the original objectors to Emma of York) incorrigible rebels. They were therefore to be packed off one after another, Isabella to Handale, Mary to Swine, Joan to Nunappleton and Anabilla to Wallingwells, there to perform their penances. In spite of this ruthless elimination of the discordant elements, the convent of Keldholme refused to submit. On February 1st following the Archbishop wrote severely to the sub-prioress and convent bidding them at once to direct a letter under their common seal to their patroness, declaring that they had unanimously elected Joan de Pykering as prioress; on February 5th he issued a commission to correct the crimes and excesses revealed at his visitation; and on February 17th he directed the commissioners 'to enquire whether Joan de Pickering' (luckless exile in the tents of Kedar) 'desired for a good reason, of her own freewill, to resign and if they found that she did to enjoin the sub-prioress and convent to proceed to the canonical election of a new prioress'; and on March 7th the triumphant convent elected Emma of Stapelton. At the same time the Archbishop ordered the transfer of two other nuns to do penance at Esholt and at Nunkeeling, perhaps for their share in these disorders but more probably for immorality. But this was not the end. Emma of York could not
forget that she had once been prioress; Mary de Holm (who had either returned from or never gone to Swine) was a thoroughly bad character; and in 1315 the Archbishop "directed Richard del Clay, custos of the monastery, to proceed at once to Keldholme and to summon before him in the chapter Emma of York and Mary de Holm, who like daughters of perdition were disobedient and rebels against the Prior and to admonish the two nuns for the first, second and third times that they must humbly obey the Prior in all lawful and canonical injunctions. They were not to meddle with any internal or external business of the house in any way, nor to go outside of the enclosure of the monastery, nor to say anything against the Prior, on pain of expulsion and of the greater excommunication". At the end of the year, however, harassed Archbishop Greenfield went where the wicked cease from troubling; and the two malcontents at Keldholme seized the opportunity to triumph. Scarcely a couple of months after his death Emma of Stapelton resigned; she said she was "oppressed by age", but since Emma of York was at once elected and confirmed in her place, it is probable that her age, like Joan de Pickering's freewill, was something of a euphemism; her reason doubtless took a concrete and menacing shape and wore a veil upon its undiminished head. The last we hear of
these very unsaintly ladies is in 1318, when the new Archbishop enjoined a penance on Mary de Holm for incontinence with a chaplain.¹ It is noticeable that this was the second case of the kind which had occurred in the diocese of York within fifteen years. At Swine in 1290 the appointment by Archbishop Romayn of Josiana de Anlaby as Prioress had been followed by similar disorders and he ordered an enquiry to be held and the rebellious nuns to be sent to Rosedale.²

Much trouble might arise within a convent over the election of its head, as these stories show. But sometimes external persons interfered; great ladies used their influence and their wealth to secure the coveted post for a protegee of their own; and the protegee herself was not averse to oiling the palms of those in authority with good marks of silver; 'blood-abbesses', Ensfrid of Cologne would have called them, ('that is foisted in by their kinsfolk') or 'jester-abbesses' ('that is, such as had been thrust in by the power of great folks') or 'simoniacs, who had crept in through money or through worldly

¹ V.C.H. Yorks III pp. 167 - 169.
² Ib. III. p.150 and Reg. of John le Romayn (Surtees Soc). I. pp.213-4. Whether any nuns were sent to Rosedale does not appear, but shortly afterwards two nuns Elizabeth de Rue and Helweis Darains were sent to Nuneburnholme and to Wykeham respectively; these punishments may not have been connected with the election trouble. Reg. Romayn pp. 177, 214 note, 226; compare p. 216. Josiana appears to have been twice Prioress; she was confirmed in 1290 and finally resigned because of old age in 1320, but Joan de Moubrai is mentioned as Prioress in 1308 and she resigned in 1309. V.C.H. Yorks III, p. 161. There was discord over an election at St. Clement York in 1316, one party in the convent electing Agnes de Methlay, the other Beatrix de Brandyk. See vacante; the Dean & Chapter appointed the former. Br. III p. 169.
services'. In these cases there was likely to be more trouble still, for great ladies were not always careful of the character of a friend or relative whom they wished to settle comfortably as head of a convent. In 1528 the Abbess of Wilton died and Mr. John Carey thought he would like the appointment for his sister Eleanor, one of the nuns. He was brother-in-law to lovely Anne Boleyn, and a word in her ear secured her warm support; the infatuated king wished to please Anne; and Wolsey, steering his bark in troubled waters, wished to please the King; so he promised that the lady should have the post, the election to which had been placed in his hands by the nuns. It seemed that all would go well with Dame Eleanor Carey, when Anne Boleyn pulled the strings; but trouble arose, and the action taken by the Cardinal and by the future oppressor of the monasteries is greatly to the credit of them both, for both had much to lose from Anne. 'As touching the matter of Wilton' Henry wrote to her 'My lord cardinal hath had the Nuns before him, and examined them, Mr. Bell being present; which hath certified me, that for a truth that she hath confessed

herself, (which we would have had abbesse) to have had
two children by two sundry priests; and furder, since,
hath been kept by a servant of the Lord Broke, that was,
and that not long ago; wherefore I would not for all 
the gold in the world clog your conscience nor mine to 
make her a ruler of a house, which is of so ungudly 
demeanor, nor I trust you would not that neither for 
brother nor sister I should so destain mine honor or 
conscience. And as touching the prioress (Isabel Jordan) 
or Dame Eleanor's eldest sister, though there is not any 
evident case proved against them, and that the prioress 
is so old that of many years she could not be as she 
was named (ill-famed): yet notwithstanding to do you 
pleasure I have done that neither of them shall have 
it, but that some other good and well disposed woman 
shall have it, whereby the house shall be the better 
reformed (whereof I ensure you it had much need) and 
1 Wolsey, however, gave 
the appointment to Isabel Jordan, who in spite of her 
having been the subject of some scandal in her youth, 
was favoured by the greater part of the convent as being 
'ancient, wise and discreet'; whereupon he brought 
down upon himself a severe rebuke from Henry, who had 
"both reported and promised to divers friends of dame 
Elinor Carey that the Prioress should not have it";

1 Dugdale. Mon. II. p 318
without doubt pretty Mistress Anne was sulking down at

Not only did outside persons thus concern themselves in
a conventual election; the nuns themselves were not always
unwilling to bribe, where they desired advancement. A series
of letters written by Margaret Vernon to Cromwell, concerning
the office of Prioress of St. Helen Bishopsgate, throws a
lurid light upon the methods, which were sometimes employed.
"Sir," she wrote to her powerful friend in 1529, "Pleaseth it
you to understand that there is a goldsmith in this town,

Patrons were not always as scrupulous as Wolsey and the king
were on this occasion, if we may believe a letter (of which
much use has been made by Froude) from Archbishop Morton to
the Abbot of S. Alabans in 1490, charging him, among other
notorious crimes, with having 'admitted a certain married
woman, named Elena Germyn, who has separated herself without
just cause from her husband and for some time past has lived
in adultery with another man, to be a nun and sister in the
house or Priory of Pray (St. Mary de Pré), lying, as you
pretend, in your jurisdiction. You have next appointed the
same woman to be prioress of the said house, notwithstanding
that her said husband was living at the time and is still
alive. And finally Father Thomas Sudbury, one of your
fellow monks, publicly, notoriously and without interference
or punishment from you, has associated and still associates
with this woman as an adulterer with his harlot ... At
the nunnery of Sopwell which you also contend to be under
your jurisdiction, you change the prioresses and superiors
again and again at your own will and caprice. Here, as well
as at Pray, you depose those who are good and religious; you
promote to the highest dignities the worthless and the vic-

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again and again at your own will and caprice. Here, as well
as at Pray, you depose those who are good and religious; you
promote to the highest dignities the worthless and the vic-
dious.' (Froude's translation; for original see Wilkins,
Concilia III p.632) These serious charges (though it is
unlikely that they were without foundation) must be taken
with some discretion, in view of the fact that the Archbishop
was just then engaged in a struggle with St. Alabans over its
exemption from episcopal visitation and had received a papal
bull enabling him to visit all monasteries in his diocese,
whether exempt or not, 'not only because the former strictness
of life is abandoned .... but also because life is luxurious
named Lewys, and he sheweth me that Mr. More hath made sure
promise to parson Larke that the subprioress of St. Helen's
shall be prioress there afore Christmas-day. Sir, I most
humbly beseech to be so good master unto me, as to know my
lord's grace's (Wolsey's) pleasure in this case and that I may
have a determined answer whereunto I shall trust, that I may
settle myself in quietness; the which I am far from at this
hour. And furthermore if it might like you to make the offer
to my said lord's grace of such a sum of money as we were at
a point for, my friends thinketh that I should surely be at an end." Soon afterwards she wrote again. "Sir, it is so
that there is divers and many of my friends that hath written
to me that I should make labour for the said house unto your
mastership, shewing you that the King's grace hath given
it to master Harper, who saith that he is proffered for his
favour two hundred marks of the King's saddler, for his sister;
which proffer I will never make unto him, nor no friend for
me shall, for the coming in after that fashion is neither
godly nor worshipful. And beside all this I must come by my
lady Orell's favour, which is a woman I would least meddle
with. And thus I shall not only be burdened in conscience for
payment of this great sum, but also entangled and in great
cumbrance to satisfy the avidity of this gentlewoman. And
though I did, in my lord cardinal's days, proffer a hundred
pounds for the said house, I beseech you consider for what
purpose it was made. Your mastership knoweth right well that
there was by my enemies so many high and slanderous words, and your mastership had made so great instant labour for me, that I shamed so much the fall thereof that I foresaw little what proffer was made; but now, I thank our Lord, that blast is ceased, and I have no such singular love unto it; for now I have two eyes to see in this matter clearly, the one is the eye of my soul, that I may come without burthen of conscience and by the right door, and, laying away all pomp and vanity of the world, looking warily upon the maintenance and supportation of the house, which I should take in charge, and cannot be performed, master Harper's pleasure and my lady Orell's accomplished. In consideration whereof I intend not willingly, nor no friend of mine shall not, trouble your mastership in this case." In another letter she mentions a saying of Master Harper, that from the good report he has heard of her, he would rather admit her without a great than others who offer money; but her conscientious scruples were not rewarded with St. Helen's, though she almost immediately obtained an appointment as prioress at Little Marlow, and on the dissolution of that house among the lesser monasteries, received and held for a brief space the great abbey of Malling. It is true that these instances of simony and of the use of influence belong to the last degenerate years of the monasteries in England. But cases hardly less undoubtedly occurred at

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1 See Wood. Op. Cit. II. Nos. xxi, xxii. pp.52-6. (See Nos.xxiii, xxiv, xxv, lxxiii and lxxiv for further letters from Margaret Vernon).
an early date. The gross venality of the papal curia, even in
the early thirteenth century, is not a very happy omen for
the behaviour of private patrons; smaller folk than the Pope
could summon a wretched abbot 'Amice, ut offeras'; nor was
it only abbots who thus bought themselves into favour. The
thirteenth century jurist Pierre Du Bois, whose enlightened
plans for the better education of women included the suppres-
sion of the nunneries and the utilisation of their wealth to
form schools or colleges for girls, mentioned the reception
of nuns for money and rents, by means of compacts (i.e. the
dowry system) and the election of prioresses by the
same illicit bargains, as among the abuses practiced in
nunneries.

Once having been installed, the head of a house held
office until she died, resigned or was deprived for incompe-
tence or for ill behaviour. Sometimes Prioresses continued
to hold office until a very great age, as in the case of
Matilda de Flamstead, Prioress of Sopwell, who died in 1430
aged eighty-one, having lived in the rules of religion for

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1 See for example the account in the St. Albans Chronicles
(Rolls Series) of the great costs incurred by the Abbeys of
St. Albans in seeking confirmation here. A detailed account
of expenses incurred at Rome for the confirmation of Abbot
John IV in 1302 has been translated in Coulton. Medieval Gar-
ner p.517; the total was 2561 marks sterling, i.e. about
£34,000 in modern money. See also Froude's essay entitled
'Annals of an English Abbey' in his Short Studies on Great
Subjects.

2 Pierre Du Bois. De Recuperatione Terre Sancte ed. Chr-V.
Langlois (Paris 1891) p.83.

Prioresse of St. Michael Stamford and of Gracedieu prove that an aged and impotent head was bad for the discipline of the house and it appears that, in most cases, a Prioress who was too old or in too weak health to fulfil her arduous duties, resigned or was relieved of her office. Sometimes an ex-superior continued to live a communal life as an ordinary nun, under her successor, but sometimes she was granted a special room and a special allowance of food and attendance. In some houses certain apartments were apparently reserved for the occupation of a retired superior; for Sir Thomas Willoughby, writing to Cromwell on behalf of his sister-in-law, who had resigned her office as Abbess of Malling, begs that she may 'have your letter to my lady abbess of Malling (her successor), that she at your contemplation will be so good to her as to appoint her that room and lodging within the said monastery that she and other of her predecessors that hath likewise resigned hath used to have, and as she had herself a little space, or else some other meet and convenient

1 At the time of the suppression Joan Scott 'late prioress' is placed second in the list of nuns at Handale and is described as "aet. 90 and blynd". V.C.H. Yorks III. p.166; and at Esholt the ex-prioress was over 70 and is described as "descrepita et non abilis ad equitandum, neque eundum". Ib. p. 162.
lodging in the same house." When Katherine Pilly, Prioress of Flixton, 'who had laudably ruled the house for eighteen years', resigned in 1432 because of old age and blindness, the Bishop of Norwich made special arrangements for her sustenance: 'she was to have suitable rooms for herself and her maid; each week she and the maid were to be provided with two white loaves, eight loaves of "hool" bread and eight gallons of convent beer, with a dish for both daily from the kitchen, the same as for two nuns in the refectory, and with two hundred faggots and a hundred logs and eight pounds of candles a year. Cecilia Crayke, one of the nuns, was to read divine service to her daily and to sit with her at meals, having her portion from the refectory.'

Similarly on the resignation of Jocosa Brome, Prioress of Wroxall in Warwickshire, she was given a chamber with its furniture and 'the food-allowance of one woman and one boy and her own board with the prioress, together with an annual pension of three pounds sterling, for a part of her sustenance, during her natural life, to be paid down at the four quarterly terms, upon the high altar, within the conventual

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These aged ladies probably ended their days peacefully, withdrawn from the common life of the house. But sometimes a prioress resigned while still young enough to miss her erstwhile autocracy and to torment her unlucky successor. Then indeed the new head could do nothing right and feuds and factions tore the sisterhood. Such a case occurred at Hunkeeling early in the fourteenth century.

Avice de la More resigned in 1316, and the Archbishop wrote to the nun making the usual provision for her; she had

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1 Dugdale, Mon. IV. p.39. note. Compare the letter from Archbishop Zouch to Isabel Spynys, prioress of Wilberfoss in 1346, commending her for her good government and granting her, if she decided to resign (a broad hint!), the occupation of certain buildings adjoining the common cellar, which had been constructed by the alms of her friends and relatives V.C.H. Yorks. III. p.126. It was not unusual to make provision in the form of conditions, such as these, for other nuns, who were prevented by age and infirmity from taking part in the communal life of the convent. Isabel Warde of Moxby 'impotens et surda' held such a grant for life at the time of the dissolution (Ib. p.239) and in 1314 the Archbishop of York granted his licence to Margaret de Shyrburn, a nun of Yedingham who was ill of dropsy, 'that a secular girl ... who used to wait upon her, but who had had to leave on attaining the age of twelve, might return and serve her as before.' (Ib. p.127, note) An amusing case came to light at St. Helen Bishopsgate in 1366; Joan Heyronne, one of the nuns, appealed secretly to the Pope, on the plea that she was so crippled with gout that she could not fulfil her canonical duties and that she should not be kept in a room, refused her proper food and would not allow her to move about the house. (V.C.H. London I.p.458) For a similar arrangement made at Romsey in 1507 for a nun who had hurt her shin, see Living. Op. Cit. p.230. For a case at Malling in 1400 v. Cal. of Pap. Letters V. p.355. Op. also case of ex-prioress of St. Mary, Neasam 1427. V.C.H. Durham II. p.107. For an example of such an arrangement in the case of a prioress of monks, see the very detailed 'Ordinances for the Living of John Assherly, ex-prior of Daventry' by Bishop Fleming of Lincoln in 1420. Visit of Relig. Houses in Dioc. of Lincoln Ed. by H. Thompson pp 39-42.
'for a long period laudably and usefully superintended the house'; she was to have a chamber to herself and one of the nuns assigned to her by the Prioress as a companion; and daily she was to receive the portion of two nuns in bread, ale and victuals and her associate that of one nun; an end, one might suppose, of Avice de la More. But the Yorkshire nuns were quarrelsome ladies; the blood of wild border families ran in their veins; and two years later the Archbishop addressed a severe letter to Avice, threatening to remove the provision made for her if she persisted in her 'conspiracies, rebellions and disobedience to the prioress', and imposing a severe penance upon her. But seven penitential psalms with litany upon Fridays, a discipline in chapter and fasting diet could not calm the temper of Avice de la More; she stirred up the nuns to rebellion and spread the tale of her grievances 'to seculars and adversaries outside'; there was some family feud perhaps between her relatives and the de Quentina, to whose house the unhappy Prioress belonged; at any rate 'clamorous information' reached the Archbishop concerning the intrigues of certain of the nuns. Once more he wrote to Avice 'with a bitter heart'; she had broken her vow of obedience in arrogancy and elation of heart towards her prioress, 'who was placed in charge of her soul and body and without whom she had no free will'; let her desist at once and study to live according to the rule; and a commission was sent to enquire into the misdeeds of the

[V.C. York III. 181.100-2]
rebellious nuns of Keeling. But alas, the finding of that commission has long since powdered into dust and we hear no further news of Avice de la More. Two centuries later, however, an almost precisely similar case occurred at Flixtone in Suffolk. Margaret Punder, the Prioress in 1514, was a disagreeable woman; she lost her temper when the nuns got money from their friends and she was so fierce that they hardly dared to tell the truth; when benefactors of the house gave alms in food, she turned all to her own uses; and she favoured the younger nuns at the expense of their elders; moreover she was conversabilis (most suspiciously, they thought) with her kinsman, John Wells. Shortly after this she resigned, but she remained (like Avice de la More) to be a thorn in the side of her successor. In 1520 the commissioners of Bishop Nicke came on a visitation and out poured all the pent-up grievances Dame Alice Wright, the Prioress, 'complained of the disobedience of Dame Margaret Punder her predecessor'; Dame Margaret Punder, not to be outdone, complained of the Prioress and said that she had no pension, and sometimes no food, and in winter-time no fuel. Four days later the visitation was resumed by other commissioners; once more the Prioress complained of Dame Margaret Punder and once more Dame Margaret reeled off her grievances; the commissioners interrupted a flood of petty complaints about the inadequate food and the lack of an account and the Prioress' mother, to enquire pertinently why she would

1 V.C.H. Yorks III. pp.120-1.
not obey the Prioress; to which she made the comprehensive reply that to do so was against the rule of religion. Whether she still considered herself to be superior, or meant merely that the Prioress' uncanonical refusal to give an account (a fault which had been repeatedly charged against herself) absolved the nuns from the duty of obedience, does not appear clear. When there was another visitation in 1526 the storm had calmed down; Margaret Punder was apparently living apart from her sisters, perhaps in a separate chamber like other ex-prioresses, perhaps enclosed as an anchoress; and in 1532 the Visitor found that she 'was not of the community' (non est de gremio), but examined her all the same and ascertained that she knew of nothing which needed reform. 1 In cases when a prioress was deprived for misconduct there was likely to be the same discord unless (as was often the case) she was sent to do penance in another nunnery, where she was unknown.

When Joan de Percy, Prioress of Basedale was deprived in 1307 for 'dilapidation of the goods of the house and perpetual and notorious misdeeds (crimina)' she promptly left the nunnery, taking with her some of the nuns; the Archbishop wrote to his official bidding him warn them to return and not to go outside the cloister precincts and 'in humility to take heed to the salutary monitions of their prioress'; but humility dwelt not in the breast of a Percy; and in 1308 Joan was packed off to Sinningthwaite 'as she had been disobedient at Basedale'. 2

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1 Visit. of the Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) pp.142-4, 188, 2190, 261, 318.
V.C.H.Yorks III p.159. For what is probably a similar occurrence at Hampole in 1313 see ib. p.164; in this case the refractory ex-prioress was transferred to Swine. Similar discord occurred at Monkham Barran after the deprivation of the Prioress Joanna de Guynn for misconduct & the election of the sub-prioress Agnes de Cruce in her place in 1325. Hugo, Nunneries of Somerset; Monkham Barranopp. 104-6.
The head of a house was an important person and enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom, in relation both to her convent and to the outside world. In relation to her convent her position laid her open to various temptations: she was, for instance, beset by three which must be faced by all who rule over communities. The first was the temptation to live with too great luxury and independence, escaping from the daily routine of communal life, to which her vows bound her. The second was the temptation to rule like an autocrat, instead of consulting her sisters. The third was the temptation to let human predilections have their way and to show favouritism. To begin with the first of these temptations, it is obvious that the fact that the Superior nearly always had a separate room, or suite of rooms, 1

1 The Abbess' or Prioress' chamber is constantly mentioned in the surveys of nunneries made at the time of the Dissolution e.g. at Arthington, Wykeham, Basdale and Kirklees (Yorks Archaeol. Journ. IX, pp. 212, 326, 327, 322); at Cheshunt (Cussans. Hist. of Herts: Hertford Hundred II p. 270), Sheepy (E. C. Mackenzie, Inventories of St. Mary's Hospital Dover etc. p. 28), Kilburn (Dugdale, Mon. XII p. 424). See also the inventory of the goods of Langley in 1485 (Walcott. Inventory of St. Mary's Benedictine Nunnery at Langley (Leic. Archit. Soc. 1672) p. 4.) The last three contain interesting inventories of the furniture of the Prioress' Chamber. At Sheepy it was hung with green 'saye' and contained "a trussyn bed of waynscot with testar, sylar and cortens of red and yellow sarcenet"; at Kilburn it was hung with "four peces of sey redde and grene, with a bordure of story", and contained "a standinge bedd with four poste of waynscott, a trundle bedd under the same ... a syller of yelowe and redde bokerame and three curteyns of the same work". At Langley also there were two beds in the Prioress' chamber "hur owne bed" and "ye secunde bed in hur chambre". Clearly the Prioress nearly always had a nun to sleep with her, and the evidence of visitations bears this out; see e.g. cases at Ridingfield 1427 (V.C.H. Suffolk II p. 83), Littlemore 1445 (Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick 131, 'iacet de nocte in eodem lecto cum priorissis') Flamstead 1630 (V.C.H. Herts IV p. 433). For the position of the Prioress' chamber see plan of the nunnery buildings of St. Radegund Cambridge (now Jesus College) (Gray. Priory of St. Radegund Cambridge p. 53.)
and servants, and had the duty of entertaining important guests, gave her much freedom within her house, especially if she were the head of one of the great abbeys. The Abbess of St. Mary Winchester, at the Dissolution, had her own house and a staff consisting of a cook, an undercook, a woman servant and a laundress and she had also a gentlewoman to wait upon her, like any great lady in the world. The Abbess of Barking had her gentlewoman, too, and her private kitchen; she dined in state with her nuns five times a year, and "the under celereuse must remember," says the charte longynge to the Office of Celereuse, 'at ech principall fest, that my lady sytteth in the fraytour; that is to wyte five times in the yere, at ech tymne schall aske the clerke of the kychyn super eggs for the covent, and that is Estir, Wytsontyd, the Assumption of our Lady, Seynt Alburgh and Cristynmasse, at ech tymne to every lady two eggs, and ech double two egges, that is the priorisse, the celeresse and the kychener'. The stern reformer Peckham was forced to take in hand the conduct of the Abbesses of Barking, Wherwell and Romsey, who were abusing their independence of ordinary routine. The Abbess of Barking was forbidden to remain in her private room after sunset, at which hour all doors were to be locked and all strangers excluded; she might do so only very rarely, in order to entertain distinguished guests or to transact important business; and he ordered her to eat with the

1 Dugdale. Mon. II p.458. The cooks are distinguished from the
2 convent cooks'; probably their business was to cook for guests
Ib. I. p.443.
convent as often as possible, 'especially on solemn days' (i.e. great feasts). The Abbess of Wherwell had apparently stinted her nuns in food and drink, but caused magnificent feasts to be prepared for her in her own room, and Peckham ordered that whenever there was a shortage of food in the convent, she was to dine with the nuns, and no meal was to be laid in her chamber for servants or strangers, but all visitors were to be entertained in the exterior guest-hall; if at such times she were in ill health, and unable to use the common diet, she might remain in her room, in the company of one or two of the nuns; at times when there was no lack of food in the convent and when she was entertaining guests in her own room, all potations were to cease and all servants and visitors to depart at the hour of compline. About the same time (1284) Peckham wrote two letters to the Abbess of Romsey, who had evidently been guilty of the same behaviour. She was not to keep 'a number of' dogs nor monkeys, nor more than two maid servants, and she was not to fare splendidly in her own rooms while the nuns went short; his injunctions to her are couched in almost precisely the same language as those which he addressed to the Abbess of Wherwell.

1 Reg. Epis. Johannis Peckham (Rolls Series) I. p. 84.
2 Ib. II pp. 651-2.
3 Ib. II. pp. 659-660, 662-3. For another instance of a prioress faring better than her nuns see Archbishop Lee's injunctions to Nunappleton in 1534: "That there be no difference between the brede and ale prepared for the prioress and the bredde and ale provided for the convent, but that she and they eat of onn brede and drink of onn drinke of onn ale." Yorks Archaeol. Journ. XVI. pp. 443-4.
According to the Benedictine rule the superior, when not entertaining guests, was supposed to invite the nuns in turn to dine with her in her own room, for their recreation, and notices of this custom sometimes occur in visitation reports; at Thicket (1309) the Prioress was enjoined to have them one by one when she dined in her room; at Elstow (1421-2) the Abbess was to invite those nuns whom she knew to be specially in need of refreshment; at Gracedieu (1440-1) the Prioress was ordered "that ye do the fraytours be keppe daylye ...... and that no mo of your susters entende up on yow, save onely your chapeleyn and otherwiles, as your rule wyll, ye calle to your refeccyone cron or two of your susters to your recreacyone; and at Greenfield (1519) there was a complaint that the Prioress did not invite the nuns to her table in due order, and at Stainfield it was said that she frequently invited three young nuns to her table and showed partiality to them and she was ordered to invite all the senior sisters in order. In

1 See the Northern metrical version of the Benedictine rule, written for nuns in the fifteenth century:

A Prioress bord aw forto be
Euer-mor vntil al gestes fre,
Fat es to mene vnto powre men;
Ande when nom cumes, scho sal take Fen
Of Fe eldest and Fe most nedy
Of his sisters Fat was hir by,
In stede of powre folk Fm to fede,
So may scho wyn hir mykil mede.

Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet. ed.
3 V.C.H. Yorks III p. 214.
4 Visit. of Relig. Houses in Dio of Lincoln (Linc. Rec. Soc.) II p. 50
Cistercian and Cluniac houses the superior was supposed to
dine in the frater and to sleep in the dorter with the other
nuns and even in Benedictine houses it was considered desir-
able that she should do so. But the temptation to live a
more private life was irresistible and visitation records con-
tain many complaints that the head of the house is lax in her
attendance at dorter and frater and even in following the
divine services in the choir. Bishops frequently made injunc-
tions like that given by Alnwick to the Prioress of Ankerwyke
in 1441, "that nyghtly ye lykke in the dormytorye to ouersee
your susters how thai are there gouerned after your rewle and
that often tymes ye come to matynes, messes and other houres....
also that oftentymes ye come to the chapitere for to correcte
the defaute of your susters .... and that after your rewle
ye kepe the fraytour but if resonsable cause excuse yowe there
fro". Sometimes a minimum number of attendances was demanded.

At St. Michael Stamford Alnwick ordered the old Prioress
"that nyghtly ye lyg in the dormytorye among your susters and
that every principale double fest and feste of xij or ix
lessouns ye be at matynes, but if grete sekenes lette yowe;
and that often tymes ye be at other howres and messes in the

1 Sometimes, however, bishops licenced the head of a house to
hear the service separately e.g. in 1401 Wykeham licenced
Dame Lucy Everard, Abbess of Romsey to hear divine service in
her oratory during one year, in the presence of one of her
sisters and of her servants (familia). Wykeham's Reg. (Hants.
Rec. Soc.) II. p.538. Op. similar licence to the Prioress of
Polsio in 1388 Reg. of Bishop Brantyncham of Exeter Part II.
p.675.

2 Op.Cit.f.59 (57) The same injunction was sent to Stixwoulde.
Ib. f.75d (75d).
were, and also that ye be present in chapitres helpyng the
suppriories in correctyng and punishtyng of defaultes. 1 Similarly the Prioress of Langley was ordered 'that ye at the
leste ones in the weke come to hold your chapiters ..... and
also that ye somtyme in the monethe or fourte nyght lyg by
nyght in the dormitory;' 2 the same injunction was made at
Gracediu 3 and at Godstow the Abbess was to lie in the dorfer
and rise to matins 'at the leste in alle double festes.' 4
It was further attempted to restrict the dangerous free-
dom of a superior's life, by ordering her always to have with
her one of the nuns as a companion and as witness to her beha-

1 Op. Cit. f.63d. The next year when Alnwick came again this
prioress announced that she did not lie in the dorfer, nor
keep frater, cloister and church on account of bodily weak-
ness; she alleged that he had dispensed her from these obser-
vances, which he denied. Ib. f.59d.

2 Ib. f. 108.

3 Ib. f. 107d.

4 For other injunctions on these points see Ib.f.
78 (Nuncoton 1440); V.C.H. Yorks III pp. 119 (Nunburnholme
1318), 120 (Nunkeeling 1314), 124 (Thicket 1309) 188
Arthington 1318) 239 (Moxby 1318).

'So that no sinister suspicion of lewly should arise'.
V.C.H. Yorks III p.113.

6 A nun and a waiting maid. Ib. p.239.
chaplain. It will be remembered that Chaucer says of his Prioress 'another Nonne with hir hadde she, That was hir chapeleyne' and episcopal registers contain frequent allusions to the office. William of Wykeham gave a comprehensive account of its purpose when he wrote to the Abbess of Romsey in 1387, "since, according to the constitutions of the holy fathers, younger members must take a pattern from their rulers (prelati) and those prelates ought to have a number of witnesses to their own behaviour, we strictly order you (lady abbess) in virtue of obedience, that you annually commit the office of chaplain to one of your nuns ... and thus the nuns themselves, who shall have been with you in the aforesaid office, shall

1 Before it was realised that this office was often held by a woman in nunneries, scholars were much exercised to explain this passage in Chaucer's Prologue, though a search through Dugdale would have provided them with several instances. The office is still held in modern convents and Dr. Furnivall printed an interesting letter from a Benedictine nun, describing the duties attached to it. "It is in fact the Nun who has special charge of attending on the Abbess and giving assistance when she needs it, either in writing when she (the Abbess) is busy, or in attending when sick etc., but that which comes most often to claim her services is, on the twelve or fourteen great festivals," when the chaplain attends the Abbess in the choir and holds her crosier, while she reads the hymns, lesson etc. Anglia IV. pp.238-9. In the middle ages the chief stress was laid on the constant presence of a witness to the superior's mode of life, that it might be beyond suspicion. Miss Eckenstein has pointed out that in the allegory of the "Ghastly Abbey", by the béguine Mechthild of Magdeburg, in which the nuns are personified Virtues, Charity is Abbess and Meekness her Chaplain; and in the English version of the poem printed by Wynkyn de Worde (1500) Charity was Abbess and Mercy and Truth were to be her 'chapeleys' and to go about with her wherever she went. The Prioress (Wisdom) and the Sub-Prioress (Meekness) were also to have chaplains (Righteousness and Peace) because they were "most of worship". Eckenstein. Woman under Monasticism. pp. 339, 377.
(by means of laudable instruction) be the better enabled to excel in religion, while you will be able immediately to invoke their testimony to your innocence, if (which God forbid) any crime or scandal should be imputed to you by the malice of any person." 1 So at Easebourne in 1478 the Prioress was ordered "that every week, beginning with the eldest ... she should select for herself in due course and in turns, one of her nuns as chaplain for divine services and to wait upon herself." 2 The Norwich visitations of Bishop Nicke afford further information; at Flixton discontented Dame Margaret Punder complained that the Prioress had no sister as chaplain, but slept alone as she pleased, in a chamber (cubiculo) outside the dorter, 'without the continual testimony of her sisters' and the visitors enjoined that henceforth she should have with her one sister in the office of chaplain for a witness, and especially when she slept outside the dorter. At Blackborough one of the nuns complained that the Prioress had kept the same chaplain for three years and at Redlingfield it was said that she never changed her chaplain; the Abbess of Elstow in 1421-2 and the Prioress of Markyate in 1442 were ordered

1 M.S. at New Coll. Oxford. f.86d.
2 Sussex Archaeol. Coll. IX. p.15.
3 Visit. of Dioc. of Norwich (Camden Soc.) p.190.
5 Ib. p. 128.
7 Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick. f.6. The Prioress was Denise Lowelyche (see p.375 below) and at the visitation Dame Margaret Lowelyche 'cappellana priorisse' (evidently a relative) said that she had held the office for the last eight years. Another nun said, 'That the Prioress ever held and for seven years hath held one and the same nun as chaplain, without ever replacing her by another, and when she goes out she always has this young nun with her'.
to change their chaplains every year and this seems to have been the customary arrangement. The title of 'chaplain' is sometimes found after the name of a nun in lists of the inmates of nunneries.

Besides the temptation to live too independent an existence the head of a house had also the temptation to abuse the considerable power given to her by the monastic rule. She was apt to govern autocratically, keeping the business of the house entirely in her own hands, instead of consulting her sisters (assembled in chapter) before making any important decision. There were constant complaints by the nuns that the Prioress kept the common seal in her own custody and performed all business without consulting them. Peckham's letter to the Abbess of Romsey illustrates the variety of matters which might thus be settled without any reference to the nuns; she had evidently been misusing her power for he wrote sternly:

"Know that thou art not mistress of the common goods, but rather the dispenser and mother of thy community, according to the meaning of the word Abbess ...... We strictly command thee that thou study to transact all the more important business of the house with the convent. And by the more important business we intend those things which may entail notable expenditure in temporalities or in spiritualities, with which we wish to be included the provision of a seneschal; we order for

1 E.g. at Campsey (1532) and Ridlingfield (1526 and 1532). Visit. of Docc. of Norwich pp.291, 224, 297; at Elstow(1539) Dugdale Mon.iii.p.415; at Barking (still in receipt of pension in 1553) Ib. I.p.438 note;
the peace of the community, that H. de Chalfhunte, whom thou hast for long kept in the office of seneschal contrary to the will of the convent, no longer intermeddle in any way with this or with any other bailiff’s office (bajulatu) of the monastery. Moreover we make the same order concerning John le Priière. Let each of them, having accounted for his office before Master Philip our official ..., look out for an abode elsewhere. Besides this thou shalt transact all minor business of the church according to the rule with at least twelve of the senior ladies. And because thou hast been wont to do much according to the prompting of thine own will, we adjoin to thee three coadjutresses of laudable testimony, to wit dames Margery de Verdun, Philippa de Stokes and Johanna de Rovedoune, without whose counsel and attempt thou shalt not dare attempt anything pertaining to the rule of the convent in temporalities or in spiritualities. And whenever thou shalt wittingly do the contrary in any important matter, thou shalt know thyself to be on that account suspended from the office of administration. And we intend by an important matter the provision of bailiffs of the manors and interior obedientaries, the punishment of delinquents, all alienation of goods in gifts or presents, or in any other ways, the sending forth of nuns and the assignment of companions to those going forth, the beginning of lawsuits and all manner of church business. And if it befal that any of the aforesaid three be ill or absent, do thou receive in her stead Dame
Leticia de Montgomery or Dame Agnes de Lidyerd, having called into the discussion others according to the number fixed above. And whenever thou shalt happen to fare forth upon the business of the church, thou shalt always take with thee the aforesaid three ladies, whom we have joined with thee as coadjutresses in the rule of the monastery both within and without; and if ever thou goest forth for recreation thou shalt always have with thee two; in such wise that thou shalt in no manner concern thyself to pursue any business without the three. ¹ Similarly in 1345 the Abbess of Chatteris was forbidden to appoint or to remove any seneschal, bailiff or administrator of the external goods of the monastery, to undertake any new work within or without, the construction of which would cost more than ten marks and to receive any money, goods, alms or oblations without the common consent of all the nuns. ² The danger of autocratic government to the convent is obvious; and it is significant that a really bad prioress is nearly always charged with having failed to communicate with her sisters in matters of business, turning all the revenues to any use that she pleased. Moreover the head of a house not only sometimes failed to consult her convent; she constantly also omitted to render an annual account of her expenditure and by far the most common complaint at visitations was the complaint that the Prioress non reddidit compotum. At Bishop Nicke's Norwich

visitations the charge was made against the heads of Flixton, Crabhouse, Blackborough and Ridlingfield. At Bishop Alnwick's Lincoln visitations it was made against the heads of Ankerwyke, Gracedieu, Studley, Stixwould, St. Michael Stamford, Langley, Heynings, Harrold, Catesby; at Ankerwyke Dame Clemence Medforde had not accounted since her arrival at the house; at St. Michael Stamford the Prioress had held office for twelve years and never done so; at Studley it was said that the last Prioress, who ruled for fifty eight years, never once rendered an account during the whole of that period, nor had the present Prioress yet done so, though she had been in office for a year. Sometimes the delinquent gave some excuse to the Bishop; the Prioress of Catesby said she had no clerk to write the account; at Blackborough one of the nuns said that her object had been to avoid the expense of an auditor and another that she gave them a verbal report of the state of the house. Sometimes she flatly refused and the bishop's repeated injunctions on the subject seem to have been of little avail; the Prioress of Flixton had not rendered account since her installation et dicit quod non vult reddere; she was replaced, but six years later the

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1 Visit. of Dioc. of Norwich (Camden Soc.) pp.108, 109, 138-9, 143, 185, 190-1.  
2 Linc. Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick ff. 22, 26d, 57d, 68, 83, 94, 103, 109d-110, 114; and an injunction was also made at Stixwould. f. 76.  
3 Ibid. f. 57d.  
4 Ibid. f. 83.  
5 Ibid. f. 25d.  
6 Ibid. f. 94.  
same complaint was made against her successor and the Visitors ordered the latter to amend her ways, under penalty of deprivation, quia dixit se nolle talem reddere compotum. The bishops always enquired very carefully into the administration of the conventual income and possessions by the head of each house, and invented a variety of devices for controlling her actions. Of these devices — provision for the custody of the common seal, the appointment of coadjutresses or of a male custos and the rest — more must be said hereafter.

There remains to be considered the third pitfall into which the head of a house was liable to fall. The wise Benedictine rule contained a special warning against favouritism:

A priores aw to be alike
But scho luf ilkon in-like,
And nought til on for fauor spare,
And make an ofer travel mare;
Bot serue ilkon in fair degre,
Semen als sisters aw to be.

Human nature, indeed, cannot avoid preferences and it is the hardest task of a ruler, to subdue personal predilections to perfect fairness. The charge of favouritism is a fairly common one in medieval visitations. Alnwick met with an amusing case when he visited Gracedieu in 1440-1. The elder nuns complained that the old prioress did not treat all equally; some of them she favoured and others she treated very rigorously; Dame Philippa Jecke even said that corrections were made so harshly and so fussily that all charity

2 See below p. 148 ff.
and all happiness had gone from the house. Moreover there were two young nuns whom she called her disciples and who were always with her; these nuns had many unsuitable conversations, so their sisters thought, with the Prioress' secular visitors; worse than this, they acted as spies upon the other nuns and told the Prioress about everything that was said and done in the convent, and then the Prioress scolded more severely than ever; but her disciples could do no wrong. The nuns, indeed, were among the most voluble that Alnwick visited and he must have remarked with a smile that the two disciples were the only ones who answered 'Omnia bene'; but he did not intend to let them off without a rebuke. "Agnes Poutrelle and Isabella Jurdane" runs the note in his Register, "Calling themselves disciples of the Prioress, are the cause of discord between her and the sisters, because they immediately report to her everything which they hear and see among the nuns. Each of them appeared, and on being charged with this article, denied it and everything contained in it, and they purged themselves with their single hands; nevertheless, lest they should be held suspect or transgress in this matter, each of them swore upon God's holy gospel that henceforth she would reveal nothing.

1Among "greuous defautes" enumerated in the 'additions to the rules' of Syon Abbey (XV cent.) is the following: "If any lye in a wayte, or in a spyse, or els besyly and curiously serche what other sustres or brethren speke betwene themselfe, that they afterwarde may reveale or schewe the saynge of the ope-
kers to ther grete hurte"; others are "if any sowe dyscorde amonge the sustres and brethren", and "if any be founde a preuy rowner or bakbyter". Aungier. Hist. and Antiquities of Syon Monastery. p.257.
concerning her sisters to the Prioress which might give rise to discord or kindle ill feeling among them, save only such things as might be to the damage of the prioress' person or of her honour.  

At two other houses there were complaints against the head; at Legbourne Dame Sibilla Papelwyk said that the prioress was not indifferent in making corrections, but treated some too hardly and others too favourably; and at Heynings Dame Alice Porter said that the Prioress was "an accepter of persons in making corrections, for she passes lightly over those whom she likes and speedily punishes those whom she does not like .... and she favours her secular servants, in whose words she places more faith than in those of her sisters, ad reprehendendum ipsas sorores suas, and thereby are stirred up dissensions between her and her sisters." In neither of these cases, however, was the charge corroborated by the evidence of the other nuns; probably the two malcontents considered themselves to have a grievance against their ruler; at Legbourne Dame Sibilla's complaint that the Prioress would not let her visit a dying parent gives a clue to her annoyance. Another charge sometimes made was that the Priores gave more credence to the young nuns than to those who were older and wiser. Injunctions that the head of a house was to show no favouritism were often made by visitors. One of

2 lb. f. 68d. (66d)  
3 lb. f. 22.  
4 See e.g. Visit of Diocese of Norwich (Camden Soc.) pp. 143, 230.
Alnwick's injunctions may stand as representative: "Also we charge yow, prioresse, vnder payn of contempte and vndere the peynes written here benethe, that in your correccions ye be sad, sowbre and indifferent, not cruelle to some and to some fauoryng, agayn your rule, but that ye procede and treet your susters moderly, the qualytee and the quantitee of the persons and defautes, wythe owten acceptyone of any persone, euely considered and weyed." 1

So far the position of a Superior has been considered solely from the point of view of internal government, of her power over the convent and of the peculiar temptations by which she was assailed. But the head of a house was an important person, not only in her own community, but also in the circumscribed little world without her gates; though here the degree of importance which she enjoyed naturally varied with the size and wealth of her house. In the middle ages fame and power were largely local matters; roads were bad and news moved slowly and a man might live no further away than the neighboring town and be a foreigner. The country gentry were not great travellers; occasionally they jaunted up to London, to court, or to Parliament or to the law courts; sometimes they followed the King and his lords to battles over sea or on

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the Scottish border; but for the most part they stayed at home and died in the bed wherein their mother bore them. The comfortable burgesses of the town travelled still less; perhaps they betook themselves upon a pilgrimage, 'clothed in a liverye Of a solempne and greet fraterniteit' and bearing a cook with them, lest they should lack the 'chiknes with the marybones', the 'poudre-marchant tart', the 'saligale', the 'mortreux', the 'blankmanger' of their luxurious daily life; but they seldom had the Wife of Bath's acquaintance with strange streams. And the lesser folk - peasants and artisans - looked across the chequered expanse of the common fields at a horizon, which was in truth a barrier, an impassable line drawn round the edge of the world. The fact that life was lived by the majority of men within such narrow limits gave a preeminent importance to the local magnate; and among the most local of local magnates (since a corporation never moved and never and never relaxed the grip of its dead fingers) must be reckoned the heads of the monastic houses. Socially in all cases and politically when their houses were large and rich, abbots and abbesses, priors and prioresses, ranked among the great folk of the country side. They enjoyed the same prestige as the lords of the neighbouring manors and some extra deference on account of their religion. It was natural that the Prioress of a nunnery should be 'holden digne of reverence'. The gentlemen whose estates adjoined her own sent their daughters to
her as novices, or (if her house were poor and the Bishop not too strict) as school girls to receive their 'nortelrye'; and they did not themselves scorn the discreet entertainment of her guest chamber and a dinner of capons and wine and gossip at her hospitable board. The artisans and labourers on her land lived by her patronage; 'item, the seid monastery.... standith nigh the middell of the citye, of a great and large compass, envryoned w't. many poore houshoulds which have theyr onyly lyuyng of the said monastery, and have no demayne whereby they may make any prouysion, butt lyue onyly by theyr lands making theyr prouysion in the marketts'; 'and in the towne of Pollesworth ar xliij tenements and never a plough but one; the resydue be artifycers, laborers and vitellers and lyve in effect by the said house.' All along the muddy highroads the beggars coming to town passed word to each other that there stood a nunnery in the meadows, where they might have scamps left over from the convent meals and perhaps beer and a pair of shoes. The head of a house, indeed, was an important person from many points of view, as a neighbour, as a landlord and as a philanthropist.

The journeys which a Prioress was sometimes obliged to take upon the business of the convent offered many occasions of social intercourse with her neighbours. It is, indeed, striking how great a freedom of movement was enjoyed by these

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1Dugdale, Mon. II, p.455 (St. Mary Winchester)
2Dugdale, Mon. II, p.363. (Polesworth)
clistered women. There are constant references to journeys in account rolls. When Dame Christian Bassett, Prioress of St. Mary de Pré, rode to London for the suit against her predecessor in the Common Pleas, she was accompanied by her priest, a woman and two men on one occasion and on two other occasions she took four men; and during the whole time that the suit dragged on, she was continually riding about to take counsel with great men or with lawyers and journeying to and fro between St. Albans and London. On another occasion the account notes a payment "in expenses for the prioresse and the steward with their servants and for hores hyre and for the wages of them that went to kepe the courte wyth the prioresse atte Wynege atte two tymes xvjs vd, wherof the stewards fee was that of vjs viijd; item paid to the fermour of Wynege for his expense ixxd". The accounts of St. Michael Stamford are full of items such as 'in the expenses of the Prioress on divers occasions going to the Bishop, with hire of horses 3/-', 'in the expenses of the Prioress going to Rockingham about our woods 1/2s', 'paid for the hire of two horses for the prioress and her expenses going to Ldington to the Bishop for

1 Dugdale Mon. III pp. 359-60. There are various other references to 'Wynge' in the account e.g. 'Item receyv'd of Richard Saye for the ferme of the personage of Wynege for a yere and a half within the tyme of this accomplte xlviij li. Item rec. of the same Richard Saye as in part of payment of the same ferme for a quarter of a yere x s', 'item, paid to the same Richard Saye for a quarter of a yere x s', 'item, paid to the seame Richard Saye for a quarter of a yere x s'. Item paid to the ferme of Wynege for his gonne for ij yere xlij s iiiijd'. For the London lawsuit see below p. 122 ff.
a certificate 2/8', 'paid for the expenses of the Prioress at (Peter)burgh for two days 5/8'; twice the Prioress went very far afield, as usual (it would appear) on legal business, for in 1377-8 there is an entry, 'Item for the expenses of the Prioress and her companions at London for a month and more, in all expenses £5.13.4', (a large sum, a long distance and a lengthy stay), and in 1409-10 there is another payment 'to the Prioress for expenses in London 15/-'. In spite of repeated efforts to enforce stricter enclosure upon nuns, it is evident that the head of the house rode about on the business of the convent and overlooked its husbandry in person, even where (as at St. Michael Stamford) there was a male prior or custos charged with the ordering of its temporal affairs. The general injunction that an abbess was never to leave her house save 'for the obvious utility of the monastery or for urgent necessity' was capable of a very wide interpretation and it is clear from the evidence of visitations and accounts that it was interpreted to include a great deal of temporal business outside the walls. If a house possessed a male custos the Prioress would have less occasion and less excuse for journeys, though for important affairs her presence was probably always necessary; Bishop Brookesford appointing a custos to Minchin Barrow, warns the Prioress no longer 'to intermeddle with rural business (negociis

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1 See P.R.O. Ming. Accts. 1260, passim. The London references are in 1260/7 and 1260/17 respectively.
2 Constitutions of the Legate Ottobon in 1268. Wilkins, Concilia II, p.18.
...and other secular affairs' but to leave these to the custos and to devote herself to the service of God and to the stricter enforcement of the rule. But in houses where no such official existed the prioress doubtless undertook a certain amount of general estate management. One of Alnwick's orders to the Prioress of Legbourne in 1440 was "that ye bysylly oversee your baylly, that your husbandry be sufficently governede to the avayle of your house"; and in the intervals of their long struggle to keep nuns within their cloisters, the Bishops seem to have recognised the necessity for some travel on the part of the heads of houses, and to have facilitated such travel by granting them dispensations to have divine service celebrated wherever they might be; thus in 1400 the prioress of Haliwell obtained a licence to hear divine service in her oratory within her mansion of Camberwell, or elsewhere in the diocese, during the next two years and in 1406 the Abbess of Tarrant Keynes was similarly allowed to have the service celebrated for herself and her household anywhere within the city and diocese of Salisbury.

It is significant that among the arguments used to oppose

1 Hugo. Nunneries of the County of Somerset: Minchin Barrow.
4 V.C.H. Dorset II. p. 89. In 1394 the Abbess of Canonsleigh had licence to have divine service celebrated in her presence in the chapel of St. Theobald in the parish of Durlescombe 'dicto monasterio contigua', but her nuns were not to leave the cloistral precincts on this pretext. Reg. of Bishop Brantingham ed Hingeston-Randolph Pt. I. p. 335.
Henry VIII's injunction that monks and nuns should be strictly enclosed (which was after all, only a repetition of Pope Boniface's decree of three centuries earlier) was that of the difficulty of supervising the husbandry of a house, if its head were confined to cloistral precincts. "Please it you to be advertised" wrote Cecily Bodenham, the last Abbess of Wilton, to Cromwell in 1535, "That master doctor Leigh, the King's grace's special visitor and your deputy in this behalf, visiting of late my house, hath given injunction that not only all my sisters, but I also, should continually keep and abide within the precincts of my house: which commandment I am right well content with in regard of my own person, if your mastership shall think it so expedient; but in consideration of the administration of mine office and specially of this poor house, which is in great debt and requireth much reparation and also which without good husbandry is not like, in long season, to come forward, and in consideration that the said husbandry cannot be, by my poor judgement, so well by an other overseen as by mine own person, it may please your mastership of your goodness to license me, being associate with one or two of the sad and discreet sisters of my house, to supervise abroad such things as shall be for the profit and commodity of my house. Which thing though, peradventure, might be done by other, yet I ensure you that none will do it so faithfully for my house's profit as mine own self. Assuring your mastership that it is
not, nor shall be at any time hereafter, my mind to lie forth
of my monastery any night, except by inevitable necessity I
cannot then return home."

It is, however, very plain that the journeys taken by
abbesses and prioresses were not always strictly concerned
with the business of their convents, or at least combined that
business most adroitly with pleasure. These ladies were of
good kin; and they took their place naturally in local society,
when they left their houses to oversee their husbandry, to
interview a bishop or a lawyer about their tithes, or quite
openly to visit friends and relatives. They emerged to attend
the funerals of great folk; Sir Thomas Cumberworth in his
will (1451) left the injunction "I will that Ilke prior and
prioress that comes to my beryall at y\(^t\) day hafe iii s iiiij d
and ilke chanon and Nune xij d ... and Ilke prior and priores
that comes to the xxx day (the month's-mind) hafe vj s viij d
and Ilke chanon or none that comes to the said xxx day haf
xx d." Sometimes they even attended the deathbeds of rela-
tives; among witnesses to the codicil to the will of Walter
Skirlaw, Bishop of Durham, in 1404 was "religiosa femina
Domina Johanna Priorissa de Swyna, sorore dicti domini epis-
copi"; and it was not unusual for an abbess or prioress to

1 Wood. Op.Cit. I pp.156-7. Even as Rice seems to have con-
dered Dr. Legh's enforcement of enclosure as overstrict 'for
as many of these houses stand by husbandry they must fall to
decay if the heads are not allowed to go out'. Gairdner. IX.
No. 129. op. preface p.20.
3 Testamenta Eboracensia I. p.314.
be made supervisor or executrix of a will. Margaret Fairfax of Nunmonkton (of whom more anon) was one of the supervisors testamenti of John Fairfax, rector of Prescote in 1393, and of Thomas Fairfax of Walton the next year; the Abbess of Syon was one of the three overseers of the will of Sir Richard Sutton, steward of her house, in 1524; Emmota Farethorpke, Prioress of Wilberfoss was an executrix of John Appilby of Wilberfoss in 1438, Margaret Delaryver, Prioress of St. Clement York was executrix of Elizabeth Medlay (probably a millboarder there); Joan Kay in 1525 left most of her property to her daughter the Prioress of Stixwould to found an obit there, and made her executrix, and Sir John Beke Vicar of Aby, who left the greater part of his property to Greenfield for the same purpose, made Isabel Smith, the prioress, executrix. Nor was the sad business of death beds the only share taken by these priories in public life. Clemence Medeforde, prioress of Ankerwyke, went to a wedding at Bromhale; and unfortunately a sheepfold, a dairy and a good timber granary Chose that moment to catch fire and burn down, setting fire

1 lb. I. pp. 190, 204.  
2 Aum. Hist. of Syon Monastery p. 532.  
3 V.C.H. Yorks III p. 126 note.  
4 lb. III p. 150.  
6 lb. I. p. 162. These offices were sometimes filled by nuns other than heads of houses e.g. the will of John Suthwell, rector, was witnessed by his sister Margaret, a nun, in 1390. Gibbons, Early Lincoln Wills p. 76, and Alice Conyers of Nunappleton was made coadjutress of the executors of Master John de Woodhouse in 1345. Test. Ebor. I. p. 15.
also to the smouldering indignation of her nuns; whence many recriminations when the Bishop came on his rounds. Stranger still at times were the matters for which their friends sought their good offices. The aristocratic Isabel de Montfort, Prioress of Easebourne, was one of the ladies by whose oath Margaret de Camoys purged herself on a charge of adultery in 1295.

The fact that these ladies were drawn from the wealthy classes and constantly associated on terms of equality with their friends and relatives, sometimes led them to impart a most unmonastic luxury into their own lives. They came from the homes of lords like Sir John Arundel, who lost not only his life but "two and fiftie new sutes of apparell of cloth of gold or tissue," when he was drowned off the Irish coast, or Lord Berkeley, who travelled with a retinue of twelve knights, twenty-four esquires 'of noble family and descent' and a hundred and fifty men-at-arms, in coats of white freize lined with crimson and embroidered with his badge'; or else of country squires and franklins, like the white-bearded gentleman of whom Chaucer says that

mansions hung with arras and lighted with glass windows, rich enough to provoke sumptuary laws and to entertain kings. It is perhaps not surprising that abbesses and prioresses should have found it hard to change the way of life, which they had led before they took the veil and which they saw all around them, when they rode about in the world. Carousing, gay garments, pet animals, frivolous amusements, many guests, superfluous servants and frequent escapes to the freedom of the road, are found not only at the greater houses but even at those which were small and poor. The diverting history of the flea and the fever shows that the luxurious abbess was already a byword early in the thirteenth century. It is thus related by the great preacher Jaques de Vitry, (d.c.1240) to point the moral of his assertion that nuns use soft beds and garments and will live more daintily in the cloister than secular women in the world: "The flea and the fever were gossiping together, concerning the lodging which each had found the night before. Said the flea: 'I was lodged in the bed of a certain abbess, betwixt two white, fine-woven sheets, upon an excellent and most soft mattress, and I thought to have the best of cheer, for the abbess had very plump and tender flesh and thereon it was my hope to feast. But at the first bite she set up a screeching and a calling for her hand-maidens to come with candles and seek to take me; but I hid

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1 Exempla ex sermonibus vulgaribus Jacobi Vitriacensis ed T. F. Crane No LIX pp.23-4.
myself and when they departed again I returned to the Abbess. 

But each time I hied me to her, she caused me to be hunted with candles, and so that night I might never rest and I escaped only in imminent peril'. Then replied the fever, 'And I was lodged in the house of a certain poor widow and when I would have laid hold on her, up rose she, and boiled water, and set to washing linen, thumping it mightily, and then bore it on her shoulders into the river, so that I escaped but hardly, nigh frozen by the cold and half drowned by the river.' Then said the flea, 'Let us exchange lodgings tonight and see how it shall be with us'. The exchange was made and the next day back came the flea, and said he 'The best of entertainment have I had this night. For I found that woman who was thy hostess so tired and foredone with sleep, that I reposed quietly with her and devoured all that I would'. To him the fever answered: 'The best of counsel thou gavest me, for that abbess warmed and cherished me all night beneath a coverlet of grey fur (grie) and delicate sheets and though, hidden in her soft bed, I tormented her, never once did she disturb me. Wherefore so long as she continueth thus kindly to treat me, never do I desire to depart from her hospitality.' Thus it is apparent," adds de Vitry "That the dainty one was afflicted and the poor little woman slept in peace, after her work, upon straw; a moral which seems a little forced in view of the fact that abbess and washerwoman
alike passed a night of oblivion and doubtless rose alike to
day of discomfort. The Durham man, William of Stanton, who
went down St. Patrick's Hole on September 20th 1409, and was
shown the souls in torment there, has much the same tale to
tell. He witnessed the trial of a prioress, whose soul had
come there for judgment, and "the fendis accusid hir and said
that she come to religion for pompe and pride and for to have
habundance of the worlde riches, and for use of hir bodi
and not for deuotion, mekenesse and lowenesse, as religious
men and women owte to do; and the fendes said, 'It is wel
knowen to god and to al his angels of heven and to men dwell-
yng in that contree where she dwelld iyne, and all the fendes
of hell, that she was more cosiuer in puler (fur) weryng, as
of girdelles of siluer and overgilt and ringes on hir fingers,
and siluer bokeles and overgilt on hir shone, esy lieng in
nyghtes as it were or an emprise in the world, not daynyng hir
for to arise to goddis servis; and with all delicate metes
and drinkes she was fedde .... and then the bishop (her
judge) enjoyned hir to payne enduryng evermore til the day
of dome".

Visitation documents show us many abbesses and prior-
resses like the fever's hostess or the tormented lady in St.
Patrick's Purgatory. In the matter of dress the accusations
brought against Clemence Medforde, Prioress of Ankerwyke, in

1 'Item Priorissa raro venit ad matutinas aut missas'. Ling.

2 Epis. Reg. Visit. Alnwick f.56d (56d)."

Krapp, J.P. The Legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory; its later
Literary History (1899) pp.78-6.

3 "Domina Kataeina Hughe dicit quod quedam moniales sunt quademmodo
compotentee, tarde veniendo ad matutinas et alias horas canonicals".

6-f.32
1441, will suffice for an example. "The Prioress wears golden rings exceeding costly with divers precious stones and also girdles silvered and gilded over and silken veils and she carries her veil too high above her forehead, so that her forehead being entirely uncovered, can be seen of all, and she wears furs of vair ... Also she wears shifts of cloth of Reynes which costs sixteen pence the ell ... Also she wears kirtles laced with silk and tiring pins of silver and silver gilt and has made all the nuns wear the like ... Also she wears above her veil a cap of estate furred with budge. Item she has round her neck a long cord of silk, hanging below her breast and on it a gold ring with a diamond." She confessed all except the Rhenish cloth, which she totally denied, but pleaded that she wore fur caps 'because of divers infirmities in the head'. Alnwick made an injunction carefully particularising all these sins: "And also that none of yow, the prioresse ne none of your couente, were no vayles of sylke ne no syluere wynnes ne no ryrdles herryed with syluere or golde ne no mo rynges on your fyngres than oon, ye that be professed by a bysshople, ne that none of yow use no lased kyrults, but butoned or hole be fore, ne that ye use no lases a bowte your nekkes wythe crucyfixes or rynges hangyng by thayme, ne cappes of astate above your vayles ... and that ye so atyre your hedes that your vayles come down..."
Manyghe to your yene." If anyone doubts the truth of Chaucer's portrait of a prioress, or its satirical intent, he has only to read that incomparable observer's words side by side with this injunction of Alnwick:

But sikerly she had a fair forheed;
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;
For hardly, she was nat undergroue.
Ful fetis was her cloke, as I was war,
Of smale coral aboute hir arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene;
And ther-on hung a broche of gold ful shene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A
And after, Amor vincit omnia.

Margaret Fairfax of Nunmonkton (1397) and the lady (her name is unknown) who ruled Basebourne in 1447 are other examples of worldly prioresses; they clearly regarded themselves as the great ladies they were by birth and behaved like all the other great ladies of the neighbourhood. Margaret Fairfax used divers fur, including even the costly grey fur (gris) - the same with which the sleeves of Chaucer's monk were "purfiled at the hond"; she wore silken veils and "she frequently kept company with John Munkton and invited him to feasts in her room ... and John Munkton (by whom the convent had for long been scandalised) frequently played at tables " (the fashionable game for ladies, a kind of draughts) "With the Prioress in ther room and served her with drink." No wonder she had to sell timber in order to procure money. The Prioress of

Basebourne was even more frivolous; the nuns complained that the house was in debt to the amount of £40 and this principally owing to her costly expenses, 'because she frequently rides abroad and pretends that she does so on the common business of the house, although it is not so, with a train of attendants much too large, and tarries long abroad, and she feasts sumptuously both when abroad and at home, and she is very choice in her dress, so that the fur trimmings of her mantle are worth a hundred shillings', as great a scandal as Clemence Medforde's Rhenish cloth at sixteen pence the ell. The Bishop took strong measures to deal with this worldly lady; she was deposed from all administration of the temporal goods of the priory, which administration was committed to "Master Thomas Boleyn and John Lylis, Esquire, until and so long as when the aforesaid house or priory shall be freed from debt". It was also ordered 'that the Prioress with all possible speed, shall diminish her excessive household and shall only retain, by the advice and with the assent of the said John and Thomas, a household such as is merely necessary and not more. Also that the Prioress shall convert the fur trimmings, superfluous to her condition and very costly, to the discharge of the debts of the house. Also that if eventually it shall seem expedient to the said Masters Thomas and John at any time, that the Prioress should ride in person for the common business of the house, on such occasions she shall not make a lengthened stay abroad, nor shall she in the interval...
incurred expenses in any way costly beyond what is needful, and
thus when despatched to go abroad she must and ought rightly to
content herself with four horses only"; and those perhaps
'both foul and lene', like the jade ridden by the Nonnes Preseste
when Chaucer met him on the Canterbury road.

The charge of gadding about the country side, sometimes (as
in the Priorress of Basebourne's case) with a retinue which
better beseeemed the worldly rank they had abjured, was one not
infrequently made against the heads of nunneries. The Priorress
of Stixwould was accused, in 1519, of spending the night too
often outside the cloister with her secular friends and the
Bishop ordered that in future she should sleep within the monas-
tery, but might keep a private house in the precincts, for her
greater refreshment and for receiving visitors. The Priorress
of Wroxall was ordered to stay more at home in 1323 and in

Compare the anecdote related by Caesarius of Heisterbach about
Ensfrid of Cologne. "One day he met the abbess of the holy
Eleven Thousand Virgins; before her went her clerks, wrapped
in mantles of grey fur like the nuns; behind her went her
ladies and maidservants, filling the air with the sound of
their unprofitable words; while the Dean was followed by his
poor folk who besought him for alms. Wherefore this righteous
man, burning with the zeal of discipline, cried aloud in the
hearing of all: "Oh lady Abbess, it would better adorn your
religion, that ye, like I, should be followed, not by buffoons
but by poor folk!" Whereat she was much ashamed, not presuming
to answer so worthy a man." Translated in Coulton, A. Medieval
3 V.C.H. Warwick II.p. 71.
1303 Bishop Dalderby even found that the Prioress of Greenfield had been absent from her house for two years. Even more frequent was the charge that abbesses and prioresses repaid too lavishly the hospitality which they doubtless received at neighbouring manors. Many abbesses gave that 'discrete enter-tenement', which Henry VIII's commissioners so much admired at Catesby; but others entertained too often and too well, in the opinion of their nuns; moreover family affection sometimes led them to make provision for their kinsfolk at the cost of the house. In 1441 one of the nuns of Legbourne deposed that many kinsmen of the prioress had frequent access to the house, though she did not know whether it was financially burdened by their visits; Alnwick ordered "that ye susteyn none of your kynne or allyaunce wyth the commune godes of the house, wyth owen the hole assent of the more hole part of couent, ne that ye suffre your saide kynne or allyaunce hafe suche access to your place, where thurghe the hourse shall be chargeede"; a similar injunction had been made at Chatteris in 1345, where the abbess was warned not to bestow the convent rents and goods unlawfully upon any of her relatives. The charge is, however,

1 V.C.H. Lincs. II p.165. Sometimes, however, the heads of houses received episcopal dispensations to reside for a period outside their monasteries, for the sake of health. Joan Formage, Abbess of Shaftesbury, received one in 1368, allowing her to leave her abbey for a year and to reside in her manors for air and recreation. V.C.H. Yorks II p.78. Josiana de Anlaby (the Prioress of Swine about whose election there had been so much trouble) had licence in 1363 to absent herself on account of ill-health. Dugdale Mon. V p.493.

2 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p.638.


most common in the sixteenth century, when discipline was in all ways relaxed. At Easebourne in 1478 one of the nuns complained 'that kinsmen of the prioress very often and for weeks at a time frequent the priory and have many banquets of the best food, while the sisters have them of the worst'.

The neighbouring nunnery of Rusper was said in 1521 to be ruinous and 'greatly burdened by reason of friends and kinsmen of the lady prioress who continually received hospitality there'; at Studley in 1520 there were complaints that the brother of the prioress and his wife stayed within the monastery and ten years later it was ordered that no comody should be given to the prioress' mother, until more was known of her way of life, and at Flixton in the same year one of the nuns asserted that the mother of the prioress had her food at the expense of the house, but whether she paid anything or not was unknown; it appears, however, that she was in charge of the dairy so that she may have been boarded in return for her services.

A characteristic instance is preserved in Bishop Longland's letter to the Prioress of Nuncotan in 1531, charging her 'that from henceforth ye do nomore burden ne chardge your house with suche a nombre of your kinnesfolks as ye have in tymes past used. Your good mother it is meate ye have aboute yow for your comforte and hire bothe. And oon or ij moo of suche your saddest kynnes folke, whose ye shall thynk mooste conuenyent

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1 Sussex Archaeol. Coll. IX. pp.18-19.
2 ib. V. p.256.
3 ib. V. p.256.
4 V.C.H. Oxon. II p.78.
but passe not ..... And that ye give nomore soo lyberally the goods of your monastery as ye haue doon to your brother george thomson and your brodres children, with grasing of catell, occupying your lands, making of Irnewerke to pleugh, and carte, and other like of your stuff and in your forge."

Much information about the conduct of abbesses and prioresses may be obtained from a study of episcopal registers, and in particular of visitation documents. An analysis of Bishop Alnwick's visitations of the diocese of Lincoln (1440-5) gives interesting results. In all but four houses there were few or no complaints against the head. Sometimes it was said that she failed to dine in the frater or to sleep in the dorter, sometimes that she was a poor financier and in two cases the charge of favouritism was made, but the complaints at these sixteen houses were, on the whole, insignificant. The four remaining heads were unsatisfactory. The Prioress of St. Michael Stamford was so incompetent (owing to bodily weakness) that she took little part in the common life of the house and regularly stayed away from the choir, dined and slept by herself, though the Bishop refused to give her a dispensation to do so; the administration of the temporalities of the house was committed by Alnwick to two of the nuns, but when he came back two years later one of these had had a child and the other was unpopular on account of her autocratic behaviour; the moral condition of the house (one nun was in apostasy with a man in 1440, and

1 Archaeologia XLVIII. pp. 56, 58.
in 1442 and 1445 two nuns were found to have borne children) must in part be set down to the lack of a competent head. The Prioress of Grace dieu was also old and incompetent; her subprior was deposed that 'on account of age and impotence the prioress abdicated from all rule of the temporalities, nor did she attend the divine offices, so that she was useless; but if she made any corrections she did so with opprobrious and scolding words ... She told the secrets of religion to secular boarders, and beneath her it was as though all religion perished.' Other nuns gave similar evidence and all complained of her favouritism for two young nuns, whom she called her disciples. Here, as at St. Michael Stamford, the autocratic behaviour of the nun, who was in charge of the temporalities, had aroused the resentment of her sisters and the whole convent was evidently seething with quarrels. The Prioress of Ankerwyke, Clemence Medforde, was equally unpopular with her nuns. The ringleader against her was a certain Dame Margery Kirkby, who poured out a flood of complaints when Alnwick came to the house. The chief charge against her was that of financial mismanagement. She was obliged to admit that she received, paid and administered everything without consulting the convent, keeping the common seal in her own custody all the year round and never rendering account. She was also said to have allowed the sheepfold, dairy and granary to be burned down owing to her

carelessness, one result of which was that all the grain had to stand in the church. She had alienated the plate and psalters of the house, having lent three of the latter and pawned a chalice; another chalice and a thurible had been broken up to make a drinking cup, but as she had been unable to pay the sum demanded, the pieces remained in the hands of a monk, who had undertaken to get the work done. She was charged with having alienated timber in large quantities and with having cut down trees at the wrong time of year, so that no new wood grew again; but she denied this accusation. Another charge made against her by Margery Kirkby, that of wearing jewels and rich clothes, has already been described; she admitted it and the fault was the more grave in that she omitted to provide suitable clothes for the nuns, who went about in rags. It was also complained that she behaved with undue severity to her sisters; she made difficulties about giving them licence to see their friends; and she had a most trying habit of coming late to the services, and then making the nuns begin all over again. It is obvious that she was greatly disliked by the convent, perhaps because she was a stranger in their midst, having been imported from Bromhale to be Prioress; she evidently sought relief from the black looks of her sisters by visiting her old home, for she was away at a wedding in Bromhale when the farm buildings caught fire, and one of the missing psalters had been lent to the prioress of that place. Her régime at Ankoryke had been fraught with ill results to the convent, for no less
than six nuns had (without her knowledge, so she said) gone into apostasy; perhaps to escape from her too rigorous way. Nevertheless one cannot help feeling that Margery Kirkby may have been a difficult person to live with; the Prioress complained that the nuns were often very easily moved against her and that Dame Margery had called her a thief to her face; and though it may have been conducive to economy that the triumphant accuser (elected by the convent) should share with the Prioress the custody of the common seal, it can hardly have been conducive to harmony.\(^1\) At any rate poor luxury-loving Clemence died in the following year and Margery Kirkby ruled in her stead.\(^2\)

But the most serious misdemeanors of all were brought to light when Alnwick visited Catesby in 1442. Here the bad example of the Prioress, Margaret Watere, seems to have contaminated the nuns, for all of them were in constant communication with seculars and one of them had given birth to a child. The Prioress' complaint that she dared not punish this offender is easily intelligible in the light of her own evil life. The most serious charge against her was that she was unduly intimate with a priest named William Taylour, who constantly visited the nunnery and with whom she had been accustomed to go into the gardens in the town of Catesby; and one of the younger nuns had surprised the two in flagrante delicto. She was a woman of violent temper; two nuns deposed that when she was moved to anger against any of them she would tear off their veils and drag them about by the hair, calling them

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\(^1\) Ibb. pp. 57d (55d) - 59 (57).
\(^2\) Cal. of Pat. Rolls (1441-6) p. 41.
\(^3\) Ibb. pp. 94-96.
beggars and harlots, and this in the very choir of the church; if they committed any fault she scolded and upbraided them and would not cease before seculars or during divine service; 'she is very cruel and severe to the nuns and loves them not,' said one; 'she is so harsh and impetuous that there is no pleasing her,' sighed another; 'she sows discord among the sisters', complained a third, saying "so-and-so said such-and-such a thing about thee" if the one to whom she speaks has transgressed. More serious still, from the Visitor's point of view, were the threats by which she sought to prevent the nuns from revealing anything at the visitation; two of them declared that she had beaten and imprisoned those who gave evidence when Bishop Gray came to the house, and sister Isabel Benet whispered that the Prioress had boasted of having bribed the bishop's clerk with a purse of money, to reveal everything that the nuns had said on that occasion. Her practice of compelling the nuns to perform manual labour was greatly resented - why should they

Swinken with hir handes and laboure
As austin bit? How shal the world be served?
Lat Austin have his swink to him reserved.

1 Compare the complaint of the sisters of the hospital of St. James outside Canterbury in 1511, that the Prioress was a damascatrix of the sisters and used to say publicly in the neighbourhood that they were incontinent at publice meretrices, to the great scandal of the house. The ages of the sisters were 84, 60, 50 and 36 respectively and the Prioress herself was 74. Eng. Hist. Rev. VI. p.23.
It appeared, however, that they were anxious to studie and make hemeselven wood
Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure,
or so they informed Alnwick. One Agnes Halewey complained that though she was young and wished to be instructed in her religion and such matters, the Prioress set her to make beds and to sew and spin; another sister declared that when guests came the Prioress sent the young nuns to make up their beds, which was 'full of danger and a scandal to the house'; another deposed that the choir was not properly observed, because the Prioress was wont to employ the younger nuns upon her own business. There were also the usual charges of financial mismanagement and of wasting the goods of the convent; she had let buildings fall to ruin for want of repair and two sheepfolds had stood roofless for two whole years, so that the wood rotted and the lambs died of the damp; whereas thirteen years ago, when she became prioress, the house was

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1 Compare Archbishop Bowett's injunction to the Prioress of Hampole in 1411 that 'Alice Lye, her nun who held the office of hostillaria, or anyone who succeeded her in office, should henceforth be free from entering the rooms of guests to lay beds, but that the porter should receive the bedclothes from the hostillaria at the lower gate, and when the guests had departed, should give them back to her at the same place.' V.C.H. YORKS III. p.165. For the charge that the Prioress made the nuns work, compare the case of Eleanor Prioress of Arden in 1396. (p.... below); also the case of the Prioress of Easebourne in 1441: "Also the Prioress compels her sisters to work continually like hired workwomen (ad modum mulieres conducticiarum) and they receive nothing whatever for their own use from their work, but the prioress takes the whole profit (totum percipit)." Sussex Archaeol. Coll. IX p.7.
worth £50 a year, now it was worth a bare £50 and was in debt, owing to the bad rule of the Prioress and of William Taylour, and this in spite of the fact that she had on her entry re-
ceived from Johanna Catesby a sack and a half of wool and twelve marks, with which to pay debts and make repairs. She had cut down woods. She had pawned a sacramental cup and other silver pieces, and the tablecloths "fit for a king" (mappalia conven-
iencia pro seruiendo regi), the set of a dozen silver spoons which she had found at the priory, all had vanished away. She had not provided the nuns with clothes and money for their food for three quarters of the year, and she never rendered an ac-
count to them. Moreover all things in the house were ordered by her mother and by a certain Johanna Coleworthe, who kept the keys of all the offices; and both the Prioress and her mother revealed the secrets of the chapter to people in the town.

Examined upon these separate counts, the Prioress denied the majority of them; she said that she had not been cruel to the nuns or laid violent hands upon them, or called them liars and harlots or sowed discord among them; that she had not set them to make beds or to do other work; that she had never punished the nuns for giving evidence at the last visitation or bribed the Bishop's clerk; that she had never allowed her mother and Johanna to rule everything; and that she had never revealed the secrets of the chapter; on the contrary those secrets were spread abroad by the secular visitors of the nuns. She admitted
her failure to render account, and gave as a reason that she had no clerk to write it for her; she said that she had pawned the cup with the consent of the convent, in order to pay tithes and that she had cut down trees for the use of the house, partly with and partly without the consent of the house; as to the ruinous buildings, she said that some had been repaired and some not, and as to the outside debts she professed herself ready to render an account. The most serious charge of all, concerning William Taylour, she entirely denied. The Bishop thereupon gave her the next day to purge herself with four of her sisters for the things which she denied; but she was unable to produce any compurgatresses and Alnwick accordingly found her guilty and obliged her to abjure all intercourse with Taylour in the future.

It might be imagined that such a case as that of Margaret Watere was in the highest degree exceptional, likely to occur but once in a century. Unfortunately it appears to have occurred far more often. In the fifty years, between 1396 and 1445, the case of Margaret Watere can be matched by no less than six other cases, in different parts of the country, of Prioresses guilty of immorality and bad government; and it must be realised that this is probably an understatement, because so much evidence has been destroyed, or is as yet unexplored in episcopal registries. Of these cases two belong to the diocese of York, one (besides the case of Margaret

\[1\] Compare the case of Denise Lowelyche below pp. 140–141
Watere) to the diocese of Lincoln, one to the diocese of Salisbury, one to the diocese of Winchester and one to the diocese of Norwich. Fully as bad a woman as Margaret Watere was Eleanor Prioress of Arden, a little Yorkshire house which contained seven nuns, when it was visited by Master John de Suthwell in 1396 (during the vacancy of the see of York). 1

The nuns were unanimous and bitter in their complaints. The Prioress kept the convent seal in her possession, sometimes for a year at a time, and did everything according to her own will without consulting her sisters. She sold woods and trees and disposed of the money as she would and all rents were similarly received and expended by her. When she assumed office the house was in good condition, owing some five marks only, but now it owed great sums to divers people, amounting to over £16 in the detailed list given by the nuns, and this in spite of the fact that she had received many alms and gifts during her year of office - £18.13.4 in all; indeed the two marks which had been given her by Henry Arden's executors that the convent might pray for his soul, had been concealed by her from the nuns, "to the deception of the said

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1 Testamenta Eboracensia I. pp.283-5. (Summary in V.C.H. Yorks III pp.115-6.)
An analysis of receipts and expenditure by the Prioress during her term of office, given at the end of the comperta, stands thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Receipts</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the first year:</td>
<td>£22.7.6.</td>
<td>£27.6.6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the second year:</td>
<td>£25.3.0.</td>
<td>£40.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the third year:</td>
<td>£26.9.6.</td>
<td>£27.5.0.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Henry's soul, as it appeared to them." She had pawned the goods of the house, at one time a piece of silver with a cover and a maser worth 40s, at another time a second maser and the Prioress' seal of office itself, for which she got 5s; even the sacred vestments were not safe in her rapacious hands and a new one was pawned, with the result that it was soiled and worn and not yet consecrated. The walls and roof of the church and dorter and the rest of the house were in ruins; there were no waxen candles round the altar, no lights for matins or for the other canonical hours, no Paschal candles; when she first took office she found ten pairs of sheets of good linen cloth (cloth of "lake" and "inglysch-clath," to wit) and now they were worn out and in all her time not one new pair had been made; the nuns had only two sacred albs and one of them had been turned to secular uses, viz. to "bulyng mele", and on several occasions had been found on the beds of laymen in the stable. The allowances of bread and beer due to the nuns were inadequately and unpunctually paid; sometimes she would withdraw them altogether and the sisters would be reduced to drinking water. She was not even a good bargainer, for by her negligence a bushel of corn was bought by an agreement for 1ld, when it could have

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1 The nuns of Swine made the same complaint in 1268. "Binis, tamen, diebus in ebdomada aqua pro cervisia eisdem subministratur." Reg. of Walter Clifford (Surtees Soc.) p.148.
been had in the public market for 9d, 8d or 7d. Domineering she was, too, and sent three young nuns out haymaking, so that they did not get back before nightfall and divine service could not be said until then; and she prodded secular boys and laymen to chatter in the cloister and church in contempt of the nuns. There were graver charges against her in connection with a certain married man, John Bever, with whom she was wont to go abroad, resting in the same house by night; and once they lay alone within the Priory, in the Prioress' chamber by night; and for the whole summer she slept alone in her principal room outside the dorter and was much suspected on account of John Bever. It will be noticed that this case presents many points of similarity with that of Margaret Watere, the chief difference being that at Arden the Prioress alone seems to have been in grave fault; she made no accusation against her nuns, save that they talked in the choir and other offices and that the sacristan was negligent about ringing the bell for divine service, nor had they anything to say against each other. The other Yorkshire case came to light in 1444, when Archbishop Kemp stated that at his visitation of the Priory of Wykeham very grave defects and crimes had been detected against the Prioress Isabella Westerdale, 'who after she had been raised to that office had been guilty of incontinence with many men, both within and outside the monastery'; she was deprived and sent to do penance at Nunappleton.
After the case of Eleanor of Arden the next scandal concerning a prioress was discovered in 1404 at Bromhall in Berkshire; the nuns complained in that year to the Archbishop of Canterbury that the Prioress Juliana had for twenty years led an exceedingly dissolute life and of her own temerity and without their consent had usurped the rule of Prioress, in which position she had wasted, alienated, consumed and turned to her own nefarious uses the chalices, books, jewels, rents and other property of the house. The next year an even more serious case occurred at Wintney in Hampshire, if the charges contained in a papal commission of 1405 were true. The Archdeacon of Taunton and a canon of Wells were empowered to visit the house, 'the Pope having heard that Alice, who has been Prioress for about twenty years has so dilapidated its goods, from which the Prioress for the time being is wont to administer to the nuns their food and clothing, that it is 200 marks in debt; that she specially cherishes two immodest nuns one of whom, her own (suam) sister, had apostatized and left the monastery and, remaining in the world, had had children, the other, like the first in evil life and lewdness but not an apostate, and feeds and clothes them splendidly, whilst she feeds the other honest nuns meanly and for several years past has not provided them with clothing; that she has long kept and keeps Thomas Ferring, a secular priest, as companion at board and in bed (in commensalem et sibi contubernalem), who

1 Dugdale. Mon. IV. p. 506 note.
2 Cal. of Papal Letters VI. p. 55.
has long slept and still sleeps, contrary to the institutes of the order, within the monastery, beneath the dorter, in a certain chamber (dormo), in which formerly no secular had ever been wont to sleep and in which the said priest and Alice meet together at will by day and night, to satisfy their lust (pro explenda libidine), on account of which and other enormous and scandalous crimes, which Alice has committed and still commits, there is grave and public scandal against her in those parts, to the great detriment of the monastery. If these things were found to be true the commissioners were ordered to deprive the Prioress. In 1427 there occurred another very serious case of misconduct in a Prioress, which (as at Catesby) seems to have tainted the whole flock and is a still further illustration of the fact that a bad prioress often meant an ill conducted house. By her own admission Isabel Hermyte, Prioress of Redlingfield in Suffolk, had never been to confession nor observed Sundays and double principal feasts since the last visitation, two years before. She and Joan Tates, a novice, had not slept in the dorter with the other nuns, but in a private chamber. She had laid violent hands on Agnes Brakle on St. Luke's Day; and she had been alone with Thomas Langeland, bailiff, in private and suspicious places, to wit in a small hall with closed windows, "and sub hegerowes". Nor was the material condition of the house safer in her hands. There were only nine nuns instead
of the statutory number of thirteen and only one chaplain instead of three; no annual account had been rendered, obits had been neglected, goods alienated and trees cut down without the knowledge and consent of the convent. Altogether she confessed that she was neither religious nor honest in conversation and the effect of her conduct upon her charges was only too apparent, for the novice Joan Tates confessed to incontinence and asserted that it had been provoked by the bad example of the Prioress. The result of this exposure was the voluntary resignation of the guilty woman, in order to save a scandal, and her banishment to the priory of Wix; the whole convent was ordered to fast on bread and beer on Fridays and Joan Tate was to go in front of the solemn procession of the convent on the following Sunday, wearing no veil and clad in white flannel.¹

The last case to be considered is that of Denise Lowelyche, Prioress of Markyate in Bedfordshire.² It had come to the ears of Bishop Gray that many grievous offences had been concealed from him at his last visitation and that since then one of the nuns had gone into apostasy 'in the default of the prioress, who observes not our injunctions and commands nor causes them to be observed by the others her sisters, but herself scorns them, albeit they are healthful, and at presents rejects them with contempt'; accordingly in 1433 he

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sent his official to examine into the matter. The particular
offence which seems to have been concealed concerned the
Prioress herself, for the Bishop's commissary read aloud
before the nuns certain articles charging her with having
been guilty of incontinence with the late seneschal of the
priory "for five years and more up to the time of the death of
the said Richard, to the grievous offence of God, to whom you
devoted your stainlessness, to the evil report of religion
and to the damnable example both of your fellow nuns and of
very many other folk", and asserting that "public talk and
rumour during the said time were and are busy touching the
premises all and sundry in the town of Markyate and other
places, neighbouring and distant, in the diocese of Lincoln
and elsewhere". The rest of the story can be told in the
Official's own words. "The which articles all and sundry
being laid to her charge ... the aforesaid Dame Denise steadfastly
denied and offered herself in readiness to purge her-
self of and concerning such charges and was instant to this
effect. Wherefore I ... enjoined and appointed the same
dame Denise to purge herself of and concerning such crimes
with five other of her fellow nuns and sisters; and because
at that time in the same place she came short of the number
of her compurgatresses appointed to her, at the urgent re-
quest of the said dame Denise, I prorogued the business of
such purgation to wait until the sixth hour of the same day
after none, so that she might be able meanwhile to communicate and take counsel with her sisters, and also I granted of a more liberal grace, that she might purge herself of four other nuns at the said sixth hour, if she could, touching the said crimes. She was, however, unable to find even four of the nuns to speak for her and accordingly resigned her office. But although the Official formally admitted her resignation, she was still prioress of Markyate at Alnwick's visitation in 1442. It is indeed surprising to notice how often persons who were obviously unsuitable and often immoral were elected to the headship of a house, or continued to hold that position after conviction. Sabina de Apelgarth, who had been in apostacy when a simple nun of Moxby, apparently became prioress in spite of this, for her removal on account of

References to other cases may be noted more briefly. Alice de Chilterne, Prioress of White Hall, Ilchester, was deprived for incontinence with John de Passelawe the chaplain and for wasting the goods of the house to such an extent that the nuns were reduced to begging their bread. (1323) Hugo, Medieval Nunneries in the County of Somerset. Whitehall in Ilchester pp. 72-3, and Reg. of John of Brokensford (Somerset Rec. Soc.) pp. 227, 245, 259. In 1325 Joan de Barton Prioress of Moxby was deprived 'super lapsu carnis' with the chaplain. V.C.H. Yorks III p. 240. In 1495 Elizabeth Popeley was deprived, two years after her confirmation as Prioress of Arthington, for having given birth to a child and for wasting the goods of the house. Ib. 2. 183. The case of Katherine Wells, Prioress of Littlemore, who put her nuns in the stocks and took the goods of the house to provide a dowry for her illegitimate daughter is noted above pp. 256-7. See also the cases of Elizabeth Sroke, Abbess of Romsey, and Agnes Tawke, Prioress of Easebourne. Below pp. 222-3. Joan Fletcher, Prioress of Basedale, resigned from fear of deposition in 1527, and then cast aside her habit and left the house; see Archbishop Lee's letters about her in 1534: Yorks. Arch. Journ. XVI. pp. 431-2.
misconduct is noted in 1328. In 1310 Archbishop Kemp wrote
to the nuns of Nunkeeling that, in consequence of what had
been revealed to his commissaries, they were within three days
to remove Isabella de St. Quintin from the office of cellarer
in the presence of the whole convent, and not to appoint her
to any other office nor to permit her to leave the house; but
in 1316 Isabella de St. Quintin was elected Prioress. Abbess
Elizabeth Broke of Romsey was actually re-elected, after hav-
ing been found guilty of perjury and of adultery and was final-
lly forced to resign in 1502, when scandals arose through her
'evil and suspicious conversation' with a certain Master Bryce.

Even if the original charge of adultery (as is just possible)
referred to a period before she became a nun, it is remarkable
that she should ever have been allowed to undertake the rule
of her house, with such a shady past behind her. But though
a bishop will sometimes emphasise the rule that no nun con-
victed of immorality should be admitted to any office, it

1 V.C.H. Yorks III p. 239. She returned in 1310, was ordered
to be removed from all offices and not to go out of the
cloister in 1312 and was finally removed from the office of
Prioress ten years later. Compare the case of Isabella de
Berghby, Prioress of Arthington, who apostatized in 1312,
returned 18 months later and was re-elected Prioress in
1349. Ib. p. 188.
2 Ib. p. 120.
4 The case of Agnes Tawke, Prioress of Easbourne, is very
similar. A vague accusation was brought against her in 1478
of having several years previously given birth to one or two
children; she was about fifty years of age at the time and
the charge may belong to a period before she took the veil;
but it would not seem to indicate that she was a suitable
person to be prioress. Sussex Arch. Coll. IX p. 188.
5 E.g. Bishop Flegyngs at Elstow in 1441-2. Visit. of Relig.
Houses in Dioc. of Lincoln (Lincoln Rec. Soc.) I p. 50. Archbish-
op Melton at Moxby in 1318. V.C.H. Yorks III p. 239.
is not unusual to find that a papal mandate absolving a nun from this offence, also orders her restoration to her place in stall and chapter and dispenses her to be elected to abbatial and other dignities, even in particularly bad cases;\(^1\) on the other hand the office of Abbess is occasionally exempted from such dispensations.\(^2\)

It is the darker side of convent life that these ancient scandals call up before our eyes. The system produced its saints as well as its sinners; we have only to remember the German nunnery of Helfta to be sure of that. The English nunneries of the later middle ages produced no great mystics, but there have come down to us word-pictures of at least two heads of houses worthy to rank with the best abbesses of any

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\(^1\) Such for instance as that of Cecily Marmyll, nun of Amesbury, rehabilitated in 1424, who 'after having lived laudably for some time in the said monastery, allowed herself to be carnally known by two secular priests and had offspring by each of them', but had since lived chastely in the convent for six years. (Cal. of Papal Letters VII. p. 373; and of Margaret Grenefielde of the same house, rehabilitated in 1396, 'who formerly allowed herself to be seduced by an unmarried man, and after making her profession in the said monastery, bore a child. (Ib. V. p. 161) The nunnery of Amesbury had borne a very bad character in earlier times and had been reconstituted by Henry II according to the order of Pontius, after the deposition of its abbess 'propter infamiam ipsius. Ipsa enim, postquam religionis habitum susceperat, tres infantes perperisse comprobata fuit; et disperserunt sanctimoniales quas earum turpcuris vitae detumeraverat'. Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbas (Rolls Series) I pp 100-5. The transaction is thus described by Ralph Niger, 'Juratus se tria monasteria constructuram, duo ordines transvertit, personam de loco ad locum transferens, meretricies alias alis, cenomannicas Anglicas substituens'. Ib. II p. XXX.

\(^2\) Alice Wilton, nun of Shutesbury, was reinstated to the position which she had forfeited by the sin of incontinence and declared eligible for any office except that of Abbess. V.C.H. Dorset. II. p. 78. note.
not women of genius, but good, competent housewives, careful in all things of the welfare of their nuns, practical as well as pious. The famous description of the Abbess Euphemia of Wherwell (1226-57) is too well-known to be quoted here in full.¹

¹'It is most fitting' says her convent chartulary 'That we should always perpetuate the memory, in our special prayers and suffrages of one who ever worked for the glory of God, and for the weal of both our souls and bodies. For she increased the number of the Lord's handmaids in this monastery from forty to eighty, to the exaltation of the worship of God. To her sisters, both in health and sickness, she administered the necessaries of life with piety, prudence, care and honesty. She also increased the sum allowed for garments by 12 d. each. The example of her holy conversation and charity, in conjunction with her pious exhortations and regular discipline, caused each one to know how, in the words of the Apostle, to possess her vessel in sanctification and honour. She also, with maternal piety and careful forethought, built, for the use of both sick and sound, a new and large farmery away from the main buildings and in conjunction with it a dorter and other necessary offices. Beneath the farmery she constructed a watercourse, through which a stream flowed with sufficient force to carry off all refuse that might corrupt the air. Moreover she built there a place set apart for the refreshment of the

Freely exercising hospitality, so that she and her daughters might find favour with One Whom Lot and Abraham and others have pleased by the grace of hospitality. Moreover, because she greatly loved to honour duly the House of God and the place where His Glory dwells, she adorned the church with crosses, reliquaries, precious stones, vestments and books. Finally she 'who had devoted herself when amongst us to the service of His house and the habitation of His glory, found the due reward for her merits with our Lord Jesus Christ', and died amid the blessings of her sisters.

Less famous is the name of another mighty builder, who ruled, some two centuries later, the little Augustinian nunnery of Crabhouse in Norfolk.\(^1\) Joan Wiggenhall was (as has already been pointed out) a lady of good family and had influential friends; she was installed as Prioress in 1420, and began to build at once. In her first year she demolished a tumble-down old barn and caused it to be remade; this cost £45:9:6, irrespective of the timber cut upon the estate and of the tiles from the old barn, but the friends of the house rallied and Sir John Ingoldesthorpe gave £20 "to his dyings" and the Archdeacon of Lincoln 10 marks.

Cheered by this the Prioress continued her operations; in her second year she persuaded the Prior of Shouldham to co-operate with her in roofing the chancel of Wiggenhall St. Peters, towards

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\(^1\) See the account in the Register of Crabhouse Nunnery ed. Mary Bateson. (Norfolk Archæology XI. pp. 59-63.) Also a charming account of Crabhouse (Founded largely on this register) in Jessopp. Ups and Downs of an Old Nunnery (Frivola, 1896, pp. 23. ff. The English portion of the register was written some time after 1470.
which she paid 20 marks, and she also made the north end of her own chamber for 10 marks, and in her third year she walled the chancel of St. Peters and completed the south end of her chamber. Then she set to upon the great work of her life, the church of the nunnery itself, and for three years this was the chief topic of conversation in all the villages round, and the favourite charity of all her neighbours. "Also in the iiiij yere of the same Jone Prioresse", runs the account in Crabhouse Register, "For my schefe that was on the chyrche whiche myght not be reparid but if it were newe maid, with the counseyle of her friendys did it take downe, trostynge to the helpe of our Lord and to the grete charite of goode cristien men and so with helpe of the persone before seyde (her cousin, Edmund Perys, the parson of Watlington) and other goode frendes as schal be shewyd afyerward, be the steringe of oure Lorde and procuringe of the person foresyde sche wroght there upon iiiij yere and more contynuali, and made it, blesydy be God, whiche chyrche cost cocx mark, whereof William Harald that lith in the chapel of Our Lady payde for the ledynge of the chyrch vii skore mark. And xl li. payede we for the roofe, the whiche xl li. we hadde of Richaund Steynour, cytesen of Norwich, and more hadde we nought of the good whiche he bequeathe us on his ded bed in the same lyte, a worthy place clepyd Tomlode whiche was withholde fro us be untrewe man his seketoures. God for his mekyl mercy of the wronge make the ryghte". The indignant complaint of the nuns, balked of their worthy place clepyd Tomlode, is very typical; there was always an Executor in Hell
as the middle ages pictured it, and a popular proverb affirmed that "too secturers and an overseere make thre theves".¹ In this case however, other friends were ready to make up for the deficiencies of those untrewe men. "And the stallis with the reredose, the person beforeseyde payde.fore xx pownde of his owne goode. And xxvi mark for ij antiphoneres, whiche liggen in the queer. And xx li. Jon Lawson gaf to the chirche. And xx mark we hadde for the soule of Jon Watson. And xx mark for the soule of Stevyn York to the werkys of the chirche and to other werkys doon before. And xxi mark of the gylde of the Trinite whiche Neybores helde in this same chirche. The glasynge of the chirche, the scripture maketh mencony; onli God be wor-shipped and rewarde all cristen soules." After the death of the good parson of Watlington, another cousin of the Prioress, Dr. John Wiggenhall, came to her aid, and her ninth year, she set to work once more upon the church, and she "arrayed up the chirche and the quere, that is for to seye, set up the ymagis and pathed the chirche and the quere and stolid it and made doris, which cost x p ounge.

¹ Reliquiae Antiquae L. p. 314. See also a little further on in the Crabhouse Register: "And xx mark we hadde of the gifts of Edmund Peis persoun of Watlington before seyde, sekatour to the same Roger, whiche was nought pay ed tyl xvj yere afyr his day." Compare the complaint at Rusper in 1478: "Item dicit quod Johannes Wood erat executor Domini Ricardi Hormer ... qui fuit a retro in solucione pensionis v s. per xxx annos priorisse et con ventui de Rushper". But this may mean that the late Richard (a rector) had failed to pay. Sussex Archael.Coll V. p. 255.
the veyl of the churche with the auter clothis in sute cost
xl s." 1

During the building of the churche the Prioress had not
neglected other smaller works and a long chamber on the East
side of the hall was built; but it was not until her tenth
year, when the building and 'arraying' of the Church was

1 With this account of the building of Crabhous Church it
is interesting to compare the costs incurred in building
the 'new churche' of Syon Abbey in 1479-80. Two small
schedules of accounts dealing with this work are preserved
in the Public Record Office. The first is particularly
interesting for its list of workmen employed: "Summa of
the wages of Werkmen wirchynge as well opon and wyane the
newe churche of the monastery of Syon, as opon parte of the
newe byldyng of the Brethe Cloyster, chapitetr-hous and
library, that is to say fr. the xxth day of October in the
xvijth yere of the reigne of kyng E. the iiijvth vnto the
vijth day of October in the xxvth yere of the reigne of the
same kyng, as it is declared partly in ij jurnalles of
werksthoof examyned. It, ffremasons coxlv li xij s
xj d. It, hardehewers xxx li xj s viij d. ob. It. Breke-
leyers xvj li. xvj s. iij d. It. chalkehewers xlj s. iij d.
It. Carpenterys and joynours xlvj s. ix d. It. Tawyers ix
li. xvj s. iij d. It. Smythes xlijlxijgxijd. It. Laborers
xxxvj li. xix s. viij d. I.Paid to J ames Powle Brekmeman
for makynge of breks lxxvj li. viij s. iij d. Summa tol.
ccccxxijxj li. viij s. iij d. ob." (P.R.O. Ministers'
Accts. 1261/2) The other schedule gives further details:
"Expenses vpon our newe churche. The makynge of the rof
wt tymber and cariage and werkmanship ix'3ljxvi s. xviij s.
iij d. qa. lede castyng,ynyng, leyng swawir with
diuers cariage cariage vc xxxv li. x s. x d. Iron
bought with cariage, weyng and wharteys lxxiiij li. xvi s.
xd. Rysgham asshefer ffreston with cariage, masons
and laboryrs for the vaultynge and ffurrying of the
pilers and purvyvaunys vnto the xxvij of mail m-l'-yxxlx-ix
li. xj s. jld. ob. Summa total for the church mlm-lmlm
xxxiiij li. xviij s. ob. qa. Expenses of the cloyster and
dortour vnto the xxvij day of maili vj'iijvxxvij li.
x s. xd. Summa tol. mlm-lmlm-viiijxxxiiij li. vj s. x d.
ob. qa." (Ib. 1261/3.)
finished, that she had time and money to do much; then she made some necessary repairs, built a new barn at St. Peters and a new malthouse, which cost ten marks, and 'for mischief that was on the halle toke it down and made it agen'; but alas, on the Tuesday next after Hallowmas 1432, a fire broke out and burned down the new malthouse, and another malt house with a soler above, full of malt. This misfortune (so common in the middle ages) only put new heart into Joan Wiggenhall: "thanne the same prioresse in here xiiij yere with the grace of owre Lord God and with the helpe of mayster Johnne Wygenale beforseyd, and with the helpe of good cristen men which us relevid made a malthouse with a Doftcote that now ovyr the kylne, whiche house is more than eyther of tho that brent. And was in the werkyng fulle ij yere tyl her xiiij yere were passyd out, which cost l pounde. Also the same prioresse in her xv yere, sche repared the bakhous an inheyned (heightened) it and new lynghthde it, which cost x marc. And in the same yere she heyned the stepul and new rofyd it and leyde therupon a fodyr of led whiche led, fres-tun, tymbur and werkmanshipe cost x pounde. Also in the same yere sche made the cloystir on the Northe syde and slattyd it, and the wal be the stepul, which cost viij li". Then she began her greatest work, after the building of the church: "Also in the xvj yere of the occupacion of the same prioresse (1435) the dortoure that than was, as fer forthe as
we knowe, the furste that was set upon the place, was at so
grete mischeef and at the gate-doun (fallen down), the Prior-
esse dredeynge perisschyng of her sisters whiche lay there-
ine took it donee for drede of more harmys and no more was
doon thereto that yere. But a mason he wande with hys prent-
tise, and in that same yere the same prioresse made the litle
soler on the sowthe ende of here chaumber standyng in to the
paradise, and the wal stondynge on the west syde of the halle,
with the lityl chaumber stondynge on the southe syde, and the
Mylle house with alle the small houses dependyng there upon,
the Cart house, and the Torfe house, and ij of stabulys and
a Beerne stondynge at a tenauntry of cure on the Southe syde
of Nycolas Martyn. Alle these werkys of this yere with the
repare drewe iiiij skore mark. In the xvij yere of the same
Prioress, be the help of God and of goode Cristen men sche
began the grounde of the same dortoure that now stondith and
wrought thereupon fulli vij yere betymes, as God wolde sende
hir good". In the twenty-fourth year of her reign Joan
Wiggenhall saw the last stone laid in its place and the last
plank nailed. The future was hid from her happy eyes; she
could not foresee the day, scarcely a century later, when
the walls she had reared so carefully should stand empty and
forlorn, and the molten lead of the roof should be sold by
impious men. She must have said with Solomon, as she looked
upon her great church 'I have surely built thee an house to
dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever'; and no flash of tragic prescience showed her the sheep feeding peacefully over the spot, where its 'heyned stepul' pointed to the sky. In 1451 she departed to the heaven she knew best, a house of many mansions; and her nuns, who for four and twenty years had lived a proud but uncomfortable life in clouds of sawdust and unending noise, buried her (one hopes) under a seemingly slab of brass in her church.

The mind preserves a pleasant picture of Euphemia of Wherwell and of Joan Wigenhall, when Margaret Watere, Eleanor of Arden, Isabel Hermyte and the rest are only dark memories, not willingly recalled. Which is as it should be. The typical prioress of the middle ages, however, was neither Euphemia nor Margaret. As one sees her, after wading through a hundred and fifty odd visitation reports or injunctions, she was a well meaning lady, doing her best to make two ends of an inadequate income meet, but not always provident; ready for a round sum in hand to make leases, sell coinsides, cut down woods and to burden her successor as her predecessor burdened her. She found it difficult to carry out the democratic ideal of convent life in consulting her sisters upon matters of business; she knew, like all rulers, the temptation to be an autocrat; it was so much quicker and easier to do things herself - 'What, shulde the yong nunnes gyfe voices? Tushe, they shulde not gyfe voices!' So she kept
the common seal and hardly ever rendered an account. She found that her position gave her the opportunity to escape sometimes from that common life, which is so trying to the temper; and she did not always keep the dorthe and the frater as she should. She was rarely vicious, but nearly always worldly; she could not resist silks and furs, little dogs such as the ladies who came to stay in her guest room cherished, and frequent visits to her friends. When she was a strong character the condition of her house bore witness, for good or evil, to her strength; when she was weak disorder was sure to follow. Very often she won a contented 'omnia bene' from her nuns, when the Bishop came; at other times, she said that they were disobedient and they said that she was harsh, or impotent, or addicted to favourites. In the end it is to Chaucer that we turn for her picture; as the Bishops found her, so he saw her, aristocratic, tender-hearted, worldly, taking pains to 'countrefete chere of court', smiling 'ful simple and coy' above her well-pinched wimple; a lady of importance, attended by a nun and three priests, spoken to with respect and reverence by the not too mealy-mouthed host; (no 'by Corpus Dominus', or 'cockès bones', or 'tel on a devel wey!' for her, but 'cometh neer my lady prioresse', and 'my lady Prioresse, by your leve!'); clearly enjoying a night at the Tabard and some unseemly stories on the road (though her own tale was exquisite and
fitting to her state). Religious? perhaps; but save for her singing the divine service 'entuned in her nose full semely' and for her lovely address to the Virgin, Chaucer can find but little to say on the point;

But for to spoken of hir conscience
She was so charitable and so piteous -
that she would weep over a mouse in a trap or a beaten puppy! For charity and pity we must go to the poor Parson, not to friar or monk or nun. A good ruler of her house? doubtless; but when Chaucer met her the house was ruling itself somewhere at the 'shires ende'; the world was full of fish out of water in the fourteenth century, and, by Sëynt Loy, Madame Eglantine (like Dan Piers) held a certain famous text 'nat worth an oistre'. So we take our leave of her on the road to Canterbury.
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