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| <p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 93 News and Notes for our Friends March 1992</p> |
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FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

By the time you receive this letter, we will be in Lent once more and looking “forward with the joy of spiritual longing to the holy feast of Easter”, as St Benedict says (R.B. ch. 49). During this time our two monasteries at Petersham U.S.A. will have the joy of witnessing two Professions: the Solemn Profession of Sr Mary Paula Wenzel on 21st March, the feast of St Benedict, and the Simple Profession of Br Gregory on 5til March.

A new Abbot of Buckfast was blessed on 26th February, Dom David Charlesworth, who is the sixth Abbot of the new foundation. The monks of Quarr elected a new Abbot on 13th February in succession to Abbot Aelred Sillem, who has retired after 27 years as Superior. We remember his last visit to Pluscarden when he gave the homily at my Blessing in 1974. Abbot Leo Avery, his successor, will be blessed on May 1st. The diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has a new Bishop, Dom Ambrose Griffiths, titular Abbot of Westminster, who is to be ordained on the feast of St. Cuthbert, 202 March. During Vespers on 21st February, I was able to give the Ministry of Reader to Dom Benedict Hardy and Dom Ambrose Flavell.

Pluscarden can claim to be a Royal Foundation, since King Alexander II built and endowed the monastery in 1230, so it was appropriate that we should offer the Conventual Mass for Her Majesty the Queen on her 40th anniversary of accession, and should sing the anthem, *Domine salvum fac Reginam*, with the collect at its conclusion. When the monks returned here in 1948, Abbot Wilfrid wrote to Balmoral to promise that we would pray for the Royal Family in fulfilment of the wishes of King

Alexander; an obligation which had been interrupted by the years of dissolution. The gracious reply from King George VI and Queen Elizabeth is preserved on our archives.

Fr Giles and Br Meinrad went down to Prinknash in January to bring back another window which Br Gilbert has made for our church; a full lancet for the N.W. corner of the north transept. It depicts various Celtic saints. Br Gilbert has also designed another window dedicated to St Magnus the Martyr of Kirkwall in the Orkneys. Scotland had many saints in the early Middle Ages. Dom Michael Barrett of Fort Augustus records more than a hundred in his Calendar of Scottish Saints. But, with the exception of St Margaret (1093), St Robert of Perth and Rochester (c. 1301), St Gilbert of Dornoch (1245), St Waltheof of Melrose (1160), a friend of St Aelred, and of course the Jesuit Martyr St John Ogilvie, who was born at Keith near Pluscarden, sanctity does not appear to have flourished in the later centuries of Scottish history, which was marked by so much violence and disorder, or perhaps we should say there were many saints, but their lives were hidden with God.

The dioceses of Aberdeen and Argyll and the Isles are the only ones where a notable number of the Scottish Saints are honoured liturgically, since it was in these areas there they lived and died.

On 11th February the Gordonstoun Choir, Orchestra and Brass Ensemble gave a splendid concert here in aid of our West Wing Appeal. An appreciation appears elsewhere, but I want to record our gratitude to the Headmaster, Mr Piper and the heads of music departments and all taking part for a splendid evening.

Towards the end of June, the Abbot Primate will be coming from Rome to visit the monasteries in Ireland and Scotland and we hope he will be with us at Pluscarden for the feast of St John the Baptist.

Our cover picture shows Abbot Viktor at the meeting of the Monastic Union of Great Britain and Ireland last October, when he also visited the English monasteries. There are 51 monasteries in the Union with a total of 846 monk and 787 nuns, making a grand

total of 1633 Benedictines, black and white, in Great Britain and Ireland.

Since my last visit to Mexico, the first side of the monastery has been built, and, as you can see, it is very beautiful – all eight cells are occupied and work has begun on another side of the cloister.

The portrait of the Regent Morton is a reminder of our medieval history, since in 1577 he intruded his son, Lord James Douglas, as lay-Prior of Pluscarden, until Lord Seton regained possession in 1582.

Some time ago, a guest asked me, “At what time of the year does work begin in the garden?” Clearly he was from a city. Any gardener knows that work in a garden or on a farm never begins because it never ends. Even in winter, when all appears to be dead there is life stirring beneath the soil. It is a parable of monastic life. During the last thirty years or so, monasteries have felt the strains and tension which are affecting the whole world.

We too have our seasons of joy and sorrow, of growth and decline, but there is always life beneath the surface. After the sombre days of Lent, we live in the light of Easter. Monastic life is still very much alive in the world of today. May the great Paschal feast of Easter renew your faith and loyalty to the Church. May it bring you joy and peace.

Yours devotedly,

+D. Alfred, Abbot

THE COPTS

The great majority of the Copts are monophysite. There had always been a small group, though unorganised and without hierarchy or official recognition, which remained loyal to the Holy See, amid many persecutions. The monophysite Copts underwent much persecution too, of course, but there were times in the earlier

centuries under Moslem rule when the Coptic Patriarch was treated with great respect while the Catholic Copts suffered persecution.

From the 7th Century onwards great difficulties were the order of the day. Churches and monasteries were pillaged, Christians were forced to choose between paying taxes or tribute, conversion to Islam, or death. The use of the Coptic language was forbidden. For a time in the 9th Century Christians were even ordered to wear a black turban and sash, ride donkeys with wooden saddles and wear a 5 lb. cross around their necks. For the next ten centuries the Coptic Church was in chains, persecuted and humiliated.

Several attempts at reunion were made over the years; in the 13th, 152, and 17th centuries, but they all came to nothing.

In 1741, Athanasius, the Coptic Bishop residing in Jerusalem, became a Catholic. Pope Benedict XIV entrusted to him the care of the Catholic Copts scattered throughout Egypt, who, by this time, numbered only about 2,000. The number of non-Catholic Copts had fallen to around 150,000 out of a population of 3 million. The formal reunion with Rome dates from this time. Due to prejudice against him, Athanasius was never able to set foot in Egypt.

In the 19th Century Catholicism was encouraged by the Moslem ruler, thanks to the influence of this Prime Minister El Moa'lem Ghaly, himself a Catholic. In 1895 Leo XII restored the Catholic Patriarchate and appointed George Makaeros as Catholic Coptic patriarch of Alexandria. He was deposed in 1910, having fallen into schism. He submitted to Rome in 1921, but the Patriarchate remained vacant until 1947, since when there have been three Patriarchs. The current incumbent is His Beatitude Stephen II Ghattas C.M. He is resident in Cairo and governs with 4 metropolitans and an auxiliary. There are now 150,849 Coptic Catholics. This figure is almost double that of 1962 (83,000) while in 1934 the figure was 36,000.

At that time it was written, "Entire villages frequently ask for instruction and nothing is needed for wholesale conversions save a sufficiency of priests and means of transport." Whether the

same could be said to-day, I am unable to say, but it is to be hoped that the Catholic Coptic Church is undergoing the same renewal that is taking place within its non-Catholic counterpart.

This present-day renewal is largely influenced by the monasteries and the charismatic figure of Matta-el-Meskin (Matthew the Poor) of the Coptic Orthodox monastery of St Macarius in the Wadi-all-Natrun. When he was asked by the Coptic Patriarch to renew the monastic observance at this historic monastery there were only six old monks left. Matta-el-Meskin and several companions were living the monastic life deep in the desert at the time. Now, twenty years later, they have over 100 monks, a vast acreage to cultivate and much has been rebuilt.

Until recently relations between the Copts and the Moslem state were good. Nasser and Sadat both showed great deference towards the Orthodox Patriarch. President Sadat donated much land to the St Macarius monastery. A leading non-Catholic Coptic Bishop, in charge of ecumenical affairs, lost his life in the same hail of bullets that killed Sadat.

The language of the liturgy is mainly Arabic, with some chants in Coptic and Greek, and includes melodies that may go back to the Pharaohs. The Copts have also kept some Jewish customs: circumcision, the laws concerning impure animals still apply. They have also adopted the Moslem custom of removing their shoes before entering any holy place.

There were about 4 million non-Catholic Copts in the late 1960s and over 20 million Moslems. It is rare to meet Copts outside of Egypt, though less so nowadays; they are peasants and they do not often emigrate, in spite of their poverty and the contempt sometimes shown them by the Moslem majority. Recently a Coptic Orthodox church has opened here in Scotland at Kirkaldy.

D. F. B.

**CHOIR, ORCHESTRA AND BRASS ENSEMBLE
OF GORDONSTOUN SCHOOL
Friday 7th February 1992**

The large number of performers and variety of different ensembles made this concert a stimulating experience. Starting with a *Fanfare* by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the fifth of J.S.B.'s twenty children, which instantly drew all the attention, the orchestra, with Colin Saddington as soloist, charmed us with something much sweeter, an Introduction and Rondo by Saint Saens. Charles Camille Saint Saens was an unabashed romantic and published the first symphonic poem written by a French composer. The brass then returned and played *Salutaris Angelicus* by Nicholas Gombert. He was a pupil of Josquin des Prez and, after holding Church appointments in Brussels, in 1537 went to Madrid, where he later became chief musician to Charles V, the Netherlands at that time, of course, belonging to Spain.

Heinrich Shutz, born exactly a century before J. S. Bach, was his precursor in many ways and his setting of *Jubilate Deo in Chordis* for male voices and instrumental ensemble, not only consisting of strings, showed his mastery of this, then new, technique. The full orchestra then gave us a *Tocatta* and *Sinfonia* by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) whose work at Venice is well known.

After the interval a very large choir gave us more Monteverdi: *Beatus vir*, with instrumental accompaniment.

An interesting case of a professional copyist turned publisher is that of Susato of Antwerp, who changed his occupation in 1543, and, during the next eighteen years, published over fifty volumes of music, most of them including something written by himself. No doubt one of these pieces was the *Pavane Bataille* which the brass ensemble played next. The title speaks for itself.

Beethoven's music to Goethe's tragedy, *Egmont*, was written in 1809. These overtures are usually symphonies in

miniature and the orchestra gave a polished account of this one, the brass forgetting its fanfares and battles played this time with great suavity. I'm sure the audience departed well content with almost two hours of such varied fare.

D.A.W.

BOOK REVIEWS

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of St John of the Cross in 1991 St Bede's Publications chose "Asceticism Today" as the theme for the latest issue of *Word & Spirit* (13/1991).

Asceticism, as Jean Leclercq shows in his article "Asceticism: A Permanent Value in Monasticism Today", is as natural to man as its opposite. But as Abbot Aelred writes in *Purpose & Method*, strength is not enough, "it must be Christian strength". The litmus test of our asceticism is our motive for taking it up: "self-development" or love of God and neighbour? As St Basil puts it, "you can hang yourself up from your nostrils and it will not equal serving the sick".

In this issue most of the articles (whose subjects range from St John of the Cross to "ecology of the mind") discuss "why asceticism?"; an essay by A. de Vogüé, "On Regular Fasting", concentrates on "how". De Vogüé argues for only one meal a day, believing that everyone (monk and lay) eats three meals a day only from subjective attachments. "If I can break these attachments I will not have wasted my time"!

Two articles stand out for showing where, as Americans say, "the rubber hits the road"; "Obedience" by D. Aldhelm Cameron-Brown, and "Community and Asceticism" by M. Basil Pennington. What is THE asceticism of the Christian life? Whether our enclosure is the family, the factory, the office or the monastery Pennington shows that St Bernard was a wise man – *vita communis poenitentia maxima*!

Proof? An example from a new volume of *Analecta Cartusiana* (No 35:11 Spiritualität Heute und Gestern: "Health

care in the Cartae of the Carthusian General Chapter” by Dr James Hogg). From 1600-06 D. Hugo Elder was Prior of Buxhelm. He tried to kill 11 of his monks, wounded the husband of a spiritual daughter and stole the income of the house!

Among 7 other new *Analecta* volumes No 74:2, an illustrated history of the Charterhouse of Tribulti in the old Papal States, offers excellent pondering matter.

In the late 12th century Cardinal Deacon Lotario dei Conti di Segni owned a hunting lodge at Tribulti. He was friendly with a local hermit and with him saw a vision of souls being judged. All but three – one of whom was a Carthusian Prior – went to purgatory or worse. On checking the facts, Lotario discovered that the Prior had indeed just died and was so impressed with this angelic testimony to the sanctity of the Carthusian order that he vowed to found a Charterhouse. He forgot.

However he had a good excuse, he had just taken on a new and challenging job; in 1198 he had been elected Pope Innocent III! But St Bruno was determined – and well connected! A vision of Our Lady of Mt Carmel told the hermit to remind the Pope of his vow. Innocent promptly offered his hunting lodge to the Carthusians and in 1204 four laybrothers arrived. The following year the Pope approved the Rule of a small new order which had been founded by a Carthusian lay brother, the Valliscaulians. *In omni loco uni Domino servitur, uni regi militatur*: no Tribulti, no Pluscarden?

A final thought. At Tribulti a shooting lodge became a monastery thanks to a pope; at Pluscarden a monastery became a shooting lodge thanks to the Reformation. There are ways that men call right...

The 6 other new issues of the *Analecta* are:

35:12 Elenco dei Certosini the in qualsiasi modo hanno ricevuto il titolo di sancto o di beato; Syon MS.4 Office BVM and Office of the Dead

51:2 Les six premieres chartreuses de Belgique au XIV siècle

63: 1 Band 1 & 2 Die Ausbreitung kartausischen Lebens und Geistes im Mittelalter

92:18 Vol 1 Richard Whytford "A Looking Glace for the Religious"; Vol 2 Richard Whytford "The Boke of Pacience"

110: 1 2 Chartae of the Carthusian General Chapter, Lambeth Palace MS 413, 1461-1474

These are available from Dr James Hogg, Institut fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universitat Salzburg, A-5020 SALZBURG, Austria

D. D. R

SPRING AT PLUSCARDEN

The sound of the first cuckoo may be the may be the traditional herald of Spring in more southerly latitudes; at Pluscarden it is probably the peep peep peep of the oystercatchers. The 17th February was the first time it was heard this year. There was snow on the ground that day, but it did mean Spring was on its way. The oystercatchers spend the winter at the Moray Firth, coming inland to breed. Last year one chose to nest in a small heap of rocks a tyre's width from a passing place on the road to Elgin.

As the light gets stronger in the mornings, the birdsong becomes more noticeable, from the vehement wren to the blackbird, as territories are claimed and mates are sought. The Pluscarden jackdaws will soon be nest-building, an untidy business; which leaves the cloister roofs covered with twigs, rejected by the female builder.

Some birds are heard, but rarely seen, like the green woodpecker (uncommon this far north), others are both noisy and visible like the pheasants, who take one by complete surprise by

crashing into the air from under one's feet – it's no wonder people shoot at them.

D.M.S.

THE REGENT MORTIMER AND PLUSCARDEN

The National Gallery of Scotland has a striking portrait of James Douglas, fourth Earl of Morton. He was born c. 1516, younger son of Sir George Douglas of Pittendreich, a farm between Elgin and Pluscarden. The old house has gone, but the ancient doocot (dovecote) still stands, as well as the former mill, which in 1485 was the subject of a dispute between James Douglas and Prior Robert Hawor. The future regent's father was himself the younger son of the 6th Earl of Angus.

James Douglas worked for a time as a grieve and married Lady Elizabeth Douglas, daughter of the 3E1 Earl of Morton. The Earl had no sons, so chose James as his heir, thus he became 4th Earl in right of his wife. His Countess became insane. Ten children were born to them; seven died in infancy and the other three were insane. He was an ambitious man and amassed great wealth and power. After the execution of Archbishop Hamilton, he annexed the temporalities of his See, for which he was rebuked by Knox. The day Knox died, he became Regent.

He had four natural sons; James, the eldest, was intruded as Prior *in commendam* of Pluscarden by his father in place of Alexander Seton, Mary Stuart's godchild, who was studying at the Roman College. This was in 1577 and the younger James enjoyed the temporalities of the monastery until after the execution of his father. In 1582, they were returned to Seton and the gift to Douglas was declared invalid.

Macphail, in his *The Religious House of Pluscardyn* states that he was beheaded with his father, the Regent, on 2nd June 1581, but this is an error. He was restored to his property, but not to Pluscarden, in 1585. On 15th February 1578, he married Anna Home, only daughter of George Home of Spott and appears as

feuar of Spott in the Privy Council Records. He was forfeited again in 1592 and restored in 1603. By his wife Anna he had a son, Archibald, who received the lands of Pittendreich and married Elizabeth, daughter of William Sutherland of Duffus, who bore him a daughter, also Elizabeth, who married John Innes of Leuchars.

The whole of this period of history is very confused, but Dr Leslie Macfarlane has generously sorted out the confusion concerning the Douglas Prior of Pluscarden and it seems clear that his Priorship *in commendam* was declared invalid from the beginning, though not acts carried out by him during this time, such as the charters and commissions mentioned by Macphail (pp. 122-33). Seton regained possession of the Pluscarden estate and held it until he sold it in 1595 to Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, his son-in-law.

There is no known portrait of James Douglas, but that of his father, the Regent, is a striking one and no doubt there was a family likeness in the son. It is attributed to the Flemish artist Arnold van Brooklurst. Caroline Bingham describes it in *The Making of a King*, “a talking likeness and impressive portrayal of power. He was not above middle height, thickset and sandy-haired. His small blue eyes, tired and shrewd, look even smaller for being surrounded by puffy flesh and overshadowed by the deep ridge of his brows. A great sandy bush of a beard covers the lower ridge of his face, the visible portion of which shows the effect of good living and hard weather. Standing against a swirling green curtain and beside a window which looks out over a castle and the sea, a bulky figure in padded clothes, he has the massive immovability of a rock – whatever buffeted against him, must break against him.”

No friend of Mary Stuart, he was Regent for her son, James VI, in his minority. His fall from power came on 31st December 1580 when he was publicly accused before the King and Council at Holyrood of being accessory to the murder of the King's father, and on this charge was imprisoned. This event caused great consternation in England. Queen Elizabeth sent a special ambassador to Scotland with an earnest request for his release

“and offered men and money to aid the King in freeing Scotland from Popery”. The same advice as regards Popery came from the Prince of Orange. On 1st June 1581, Morton was tried, condemned and, on the following day, beheaded by the Maiden, a guillotine which he had introduced into Scotland. He met his fate with fortitude. His head was fixed to the Tolbooth in Edinburgh, where it remained for eighteen months. So died one who had been our neighbour in the valley, who had doubtless known the last monks and had walked in our precinct.

D.A.S.