

**AYTON PRIORY;
OR, THE RESTORED
MONASTERY**

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Ayton Priory; Or, the Restored Monastery by John Mason Neale

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JOHN MASON NEALE

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The Restored Monastery.

BY THE

REV. JOHN MASON NEALE, B.A.

LATE SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE;
AUTHOR OF "HERBERT TARKHAM," AND "AGNES DE TRACY."

"Thou gettest fables none ytold from mee:
For Paule, that writeth unto Timothee,
Reproveth them that weiven sothefastnesse,
And tellen fables, and swiche wretchednesse.
Why sholde I sowen draffe out of my fist,
When I may sowen wheat, if that I list?
For all, I say, if that you list to heere
Moralite, and vertuous matere,
And then that ye wold yeve me audiance,
I wold full well, with CHAUCER'S reverence,
Doen your pleasure.
And therefore, if you list, I will not glose;
I wold you tell a litte tale in prose."

CHAUCER. *The Parson's Prologue.*



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1843.

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PREFACE.

THERE is, perhaps, hardly any subject which has recently occupied a larger share of the attention of Churchmen, than the possibility and expediency of a revival of the Monastick System. Hints have been dropped, and papers circulated, recommending a return to it: but the former have been, for the most part, vague, and the latter have entirely confined themselves to generalities. The following tale is intended, as well to set forth the advantages, and all but necessity, of the re-introduction of monasteries, as to suggest certain practical details connected with their establishment and subsequent working.

It is put forth on the part of the writer with feelings of the greatest diffidence; not because he entertains any doubt as to the truth or reality of the views he has advocated, but from a sense of his own inadequacy to support them as they ought to be supported, and from a fear that his having undertaken such an office may be regarded as presumptuous.

The recommendation of a re-adoption of the system must, of course, proceed from our spiritual fathers, before it is seriously taken up by the inferior clergy or laity. Nor must we shut our eyes to the fact, that however much monasteries were the boast of the unreformed, and might be so of the reformed, Anglican Church, any step taken towards restoring them would, by some, be regarded with suspicion, by others, viewed with the greatest aversion. So intimately are they, in the minds of most, connected with the corruptions of Romanism, that it will be a matter of great difficulty to make the contrary clear. Though we may again and again quote the universal testimony of the early Church in favour of the monastick life, though monasteries abound in those Churches which view Rome with as much dislike as does the most bigoted Protestant, though we may bring forward passages in which Divines of all classes, in our own Church, have spoken of their re-introduction as a desirable thing, from Bramhall and Thorndike down to Latimer and Burnet, the prejudice against them will be as obstinate, the outcry as clamorous, as ever.

A positive recommendation from the highest authority in the Church will doubtless, in time, overcome opposition; till then, it may, perhaps, be

allowable to endeavour to show its unreasonableness, and to point out some of the many advantages which a revival of the old system would bring with it. It seems also allowable to consider some of those matters of detail, such as the question of vows, and the connexion of religious houses with the parochial system, which must some day be settled, and on which there is a difference of opinion, even between those who agree on the main subject. The writer desires to assume no higher a tone in discussing these topics than is consistent with that obedience which a priest owes to his superiors, and that deference which he is desirous of evincing towards his brethren; and the conversational form in which his pages are thrown, may sufficiently show that he has no desire either to dictate or to dogmatize.

While he can only wish that some more able hand had undertaken the task, he trusts that, if he shall not have succeeded in benefiting the cause it was his wish to support, he will, at least, escape being one of those injudicious advocates, who by their folly sometimes defeat or delay a scheme involving the interests which they thought to serve.

The points on which the following pages chiefly insist are these :

That the Dissolution of monasteries under Henry

VIII. was a horrible crime ; as involving not only the deepest sacrilege, but also cruelty to the tenants and injustice to the founders : that sacrilege has always been regarded, even in its lower degrees, by the Church, as one of the blackest of sins : that the curse by which every religious foundation was guarded, has followed the spoilers and their descendants, in a most remarkable manner, to the present day : that the defences urged in exculpation of Henry's proceedings, from the superstition, and abuses of monasteries, are totally false in point of fact, and if they were true, irrelevant to the matter : that the Dissolution was forced on, not approved by, the Church : that the testimonies in favour of the general good discipline of the dissolved houses is the stronger, as coming from the parties most interested in their downfall : that monasteries have from the earliest times existed in every branch of the Church : that the blessing of the intercessory prayer constantly made in them is incalculable : that the Church system, involving nightly, as well as daily, supplication, can no where else be fully acted out : that a body of men, deeply read in ecclesiastical history and controversy, and surrounded by an atmosphere of Church feeling, would be fostered in them, which would be ready to oppose any new at-

tack of heresy or infidelity : that colleges cannot, in this respect, possess the same advantages : that self-discipline could in religious houses be practised more regularly, and closer communion with God be more attainable : that they would be invaluable as abodes for young men between their leaving the University and entering on the cure of souls, as supplying a course of training, intellectual, moral, and religious : that aged priests might be thus provided with an asylum, who now, though physically unequal to their duty, must either retain it, or be reduced to poverty : that important ecclesiastical works might here be undertaken with the advantage of uninterrupted opportunities and leisure, hallowed by religion, and a division of labour : that an asylum would be furnished for such as were without friends, or who, in the decline of life, wished to devote all their time and thoughts to the preparation for their approaching change : that those, who are immersed in business, or otherwise entangled in worldly pursuits, might here, in such seasons as Lent or Advent, find a place of salutary retirement : that the diminution of personal and other expences on the part of the inmates would set free a large portion of wealth for the service of God : that the poor might be tended in them, both spiritually and corporeally ; education