

CHAPTER V¹

CARE OF THE POOR BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO THE REFORMATION

THE Christian Church itself—if we may apply that name to the Redeemer and His disciples during His life—was largely maintained from a common purse, into which offerings were put by those whose hearts were moved. There was, doubtless, often shelter for the night, and sometimes a meal was provided for the little company by the well-to-do in whose neighbourhood they were; but for the most part dependence for needful supplies rested on the common purse. The disciples who forsook all and who followed Christ are nowhere said to have sold all that they had and given it to Him. During His lifetime men and women ministered to Him “of their substance.” After His Death and Ascension it is obvious that the fervour of the first disciples caused

¹ Besides various authors cited in course of the chapter, special reference must be made to Uhlhorn's *Christian Charity*, being the first volume of his great history of Christian beneficence.

Harnack (*Expansion of Christianity*, p. 181) says Uhlhorn's masterly sketch is thorough, but unfair to Paganism. This caveat may well be doubted.

many of them to part with all personal property and to pour their possessions into the common treasury. There was, therefore, community of goods in the first ardour of the early Church, no one counting as his own anything he had. But while this was characteristic of the free-will generosity of the membership as a whole, there was no law of privation applied to the disciples. Mary still had her own house in Jerusalem (*Acts* xii. 12). Ananias is reminded that it had been in his own power to give as much or as little of the price of his land as he chose (*Acts* v. 4). As the little company increased, so that it became a large multitude instead of a large family (which it naturally was at first), recourse was had to other means of support than community of goods. We find that St. Paul had no injunction laid upon him as to the sinfulness of private property, but was simply told by the older Apostles to be mindful of the poor. In his Epistles he nowhere enjoins or recommends community of goods. He does enjoin rich men to distribute freely, and poor men to be honest and work for bread. Neither communism nor a levelling of ranks was part of either the temporary or the permanent polity of the Church of Christ. To have all things in common at the outset was the natural form of Christian zeal. But the Church outgrew that state of things.

There was still, there ought always to be, a fund for the necessitous. At a very early date we see that the rulers of the Church felt the necessity of guarding against the absorption of this common fund by the idle. They who would not work are by no means to eat of

the common supply ; and amongst the sayings ascribed to our Lord in early tradition there is one, "Woe to those who have and hypocritically take, or who, while they could help themselves, are willing to take alms from others ; for both will have to give account to the Lord God in the day of judgment."¹

Early provision for the poor seems to have been made by the Love Feasts, which were provided at least once every Lord's Day, and perhaps every time the congregation met. In them a table was spread for the poor, and the idea of a family meal was kept up. The abuses which crept into them, of which we see proof in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, led to their being separated from the Lord's Supper at the beginning of the second century. It appears that at an early date the Lord's Supper was transferred to the morning, though the beautiful name Supper was thereby made an anachronism, and the Love Feast was reserved for the evening meeting. The Love Feasts were eventually abandoned. Perhaps they were too simple to exist when the Church became very large. The Council of Laodicea forbids their being held in churches (Can. 28). Probably the work of the "Seven" (who are never called Deacons) had to do with this as with other distribution. In addition to this Love Feast there was a stated collection every week to replenish the Church purse, out of which the poor were relieved. The Roman law, which enabled

¹ See this, with variations, as often quoted in early writers, *Apostolical Constitutions*, v. 3 ;

Resch, *Agrapha*, Logion 9 (*Texte u. Untersuchungen*, v. 4, p. 99).

clubs and colleges to make periodical collections, was applied to the Church, so as to make those weekly offerings legal.¹ But although the custom was a Pagan one, the Church chest was called "corbona," from the Jewish worship, and the offering was made weekly, so that the Gentile and the Old Testament elements were blended in the name and practice of the Christian offertory. Cyprian says it was desecration of the Sabbath not to put a gift in the "corbona." This possibly was originally not a charitable fund but a fund for the Church expenses, as in the case of the Roman clubs, which spent their hoards on entertainments. Gradually, however, the corban is seen to be no longer the Church chest, but the fund for the poor.

Associated with this was the oblation connected with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The gifts which were brought to the President of the congregation²—as thanksgiving offerings—were gifts in kind, and were presented with a view to their distribution among the poor. We may here quote in full the words of Justin Martyr to which reference is often made. He says: "The wealthy and well-disposed give each what he wills, and the collection is laid before the President, and he succours orphans and widows and such as are in want through disease or other cause, and those in

¹ It was rather a stretch of law to do this every week, the Roman offerings being monthly.

² The table used in the Lord's Supper—when a special table for the elements came to be in use—

was sometimes called Altar and sometimes the Lord's Table for several hundred years after Christ (see Bingham, *Christian Antiquities*, bk. viii. vi. 12).

bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word he is the man who has for his care all that are in need" (*Apol.* i. 67. So Tertullian, *Apol.* c. 39). The actual distribution to the needy was the work of the Deacons, who in after-times of Episcopacy were consequently more closely related with the Bishop than were Presbyters. The idea of the Lord's Supper being a sacrifice or offering probably arose from there being a Thanksgiving [Eucharist] for the gifts brought to the Assembly, and for all the goodness given to men in Creation. Those gifts and prayers were an offering or sacrifice to God. After the congregation had saluted each other with a kiss of charity, there came the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The President usually took the "Elements" of the Sacrament from the oblations previously brought by the people, and again gave thanks, and the members partook.¹ In later days those oblations ceased to be laid upon the table, and were brought to the Bishop's house, or to a special chamber in the church buildings, and the idea of sacrifice, which had been originally attached to them—the sacrifice of thanksgiving—came strangely to be confined to the presentation of the elements used in the Lord's Supper.

¹ See the long prayers of thanksgiving before the communion in *Apost. Constit.* viii. 12. They, of course, belong to a later date in Church history. Even there, however, it is prescribed that "the Deacons bring the gifts to the Bishop at the altar" before those prayers are offered. "The

gifts"—an echo of the primitive custom. The prayer here and in the early liturgies—for example, St. James's *Liturgy*, §§ 28, 29—contains a thanksgiving for the gifts of Creation. Our text seems on the whole a probable account. See note on "Eucharist," p. 129.

Those who brought the gifts had been prayed for by name, and gradually, as the givers of past donations were remembered, a mass for souls—the souls of dead benefactors in the first instance—crept in course of time into the Eucharist celebration. We see at the end of the second century¹ that the presenting of those gifts of oblation is regarded as the thank-offering of the Church; but—a mark of advance in ritual in the course of next century²—the presentation of the body and blood of Christ is regarded as the proper offering, and alms for the poor are no longer a mere thank-offering, as in the previous century, but they are now regarded as a meritorious work.

The Christian community recognised its obligation to provide for any brother who was in need. Not only one of their own number had a right to support from the rest, but the passer-by, the homeless wanderer, was entertained. The modern mission among Jews and Gentiles has been timid in recognising this obligation. It is doubtless liable to abuse. The *Didaché* shows how unscrupulous “Apostles and Prophets” took unfair advantage of it. But it was, notwithstanding, a genuine outcome of the sense of brotherhood in the Church. The funds of the community were used; private hospitality also was freely extended.³

¹ Tertullian.

² Cyprian.

³ Pseudo-Clem. Hom. (*Ep. of Clement*), c. viii., says, “Give work to the artificer and alms to the incapable.” So also *Apost. Constit.*

bk. iv. c. 2, “Give to the young man assistance that he may learn a trade, . . . for certainly he is a happy man who is able to support himself.”

The simple provisions of the Church purse and the Love Feast could obviously only keep the poor of the particular congregation and an occasional visitor. Perhaps they would have been insufficient for that purpose¹ if there had not grown up a strong conviction that it was a right and proper thing for Christians to save money by the exercise of self-denial, and to apply that money to the maintenance of the poor. St. Paul had held up this as the ultimate aim of honest industry, that "he may have something to give to him that needeth." But something different from merely utilising the surplus funds of industry came into vogue. The idea of alms being meritorious prevailed largely in and after the third century; and alms were regarded as an outcome of fasting. What was saved by fasting on occasion, or by the stated fasts of Lent, was thus put into the poor's funds. To set apart a fixed portion of one's income, after the Jewish model, was not the practice or the principle of the Christian Church for 300 or 400 years after Christ. The first Council which speaks of it—the Synod of Tours in 567—simply exhorts to the practice. In 585, waxing bolder, the Council makes of it almost a binding law.² But earlier than this we may

¹ Afterwards the weekly offerings were partly given to the clergy, and partly for what we may call Church expenses; but in the early days the ordinary heads of the congregation seem, like St. Paul, to have wrought with their own hands for their living, and so their work did not

become chargeable to the Church funds. "The Bishops and Presbyters of those early days kept banks, practised medicine, wrought as silversmiths, tended sheep, or sold their goods in open market."—Hatch, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 151.

² See Hefele on Macon. Guizot

see it growing in the occasional notices of the Fathers of the fourth century. Some of the early Christian writers indeed contrast the Christian principle of giving as God hath prospered us, and as conscience prompts, with the fixed character of the Jewish law of tithes; but the directness and simplicity of settling that a fixed portion is right and requisite gradually prevailed. The tenth, or tithe, however, was outgrown as the Christian Church developed. The munificence of its benefactors could be measured by no such small standard. The grand liberality of Deuteronomy was remembered: "The poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt *open thine hand* unto thy brother, to thy needy, and to thy poor, in thy land" (Deut. xv. 11).¹

Now let us compare with the Christian customs those laws and customs which had prevailed in heathen nations. The Roman notion had been that a poor man

minimises the decrees. Under the Carlovingian kings the law was made general and regular, Guizot, ii. 58.

¹ Cyprian teaches the propitiatory value of alms-giving. "When past sinfulness has been obliterated by the blood of Christ in Baptism, the effectiveness of that Baptism is prolonged and subsequent frailties continually abolished, through the maintenance in all its freshness of the state of mind in which we leave the font by a constant flow of working and alms-giving" (Benson's *Cyprian*, p. 249). Cyprian's

treatise on "Works and Alms" is a noble one, and penetrates deeper than his accomplished Editor's summary indicates: "He who is pitiful teaches and warns us that pity must be shown; and because He seeks to save those whom at a great cost He has redeemed, He teaches that those who, after the grace of baptism, have become foul may once more be cleansed," c. 2.

About a century later the Church money was usually divided among Bishops, Clergy, Poor, and Church fabrics.

had a right to alms, or at least to relief, but that it was not the duty of any individual in particular to provide the relief.¹ It fell, accordingly, to the State to do this, and the Roman Emperors simply carried to a natural though absurd extreme the practice of feeding the poor which had grown up in the days of the Republic. Caius Gracchus had made the maximum price of a bushel of wheat five asses; Clodius distributed it gratis; Julius Cæsar reduced the number of men that were fed by the State to 150,000; Augustus found that it had again grown, and reduced it to 200,000. Trajan, about A.D. 100 provided a Guild of Bakers, the members of which were bound to supply bread cheap to the poor, the State reimbursing them for their losses when grain was dear. Add to this the enormous largesses when Emperors ascended the throne, or when it was needful to conciliate the mob, and it is obvious that in Pagan Rome the relief of poverty or idleness was a very costly matter. Aurelian (A.D. 270) wanted to distribute to each poor man a 2-lb. loaf of bread and wine, but the Prætorian prefect said that if he went on in that fashion there could be no reason for not presenting them with chickens and geese.² In Athens there was something more like a Poor Law, making special provision for those who were disabled, as the blind, the lame, the cripples, and the orphan children of citizens who had fallen in war. Athenians also got payment for

¹ Yet begging was never prohibited in the Roman Empire till Christian Emperors prohibited it.

² For the above see Ozanam, *Fifth Century*, ii. 48 ff.

attending the popular assemblies and sitting in the Courts of Justice.¹ The provision for the poor both in Athens and in Rome applied to the freeborn citizens. There was a large class of slaves and dependents whom even the lavishness of that provision did not reach ; but it was a great boon in Rome, and Rome did not bear the burden, as the taxation out of which those funds were taken was levied upon the distant parts of the Empire. It is said that in Vespasian's time the Land Tax amounted to £30,000,000 sterling, the whole population being somewhat under 100,000,000 ; and of this sum Gaul, with 8,000,000 of population, paid more than £19,000,000 in money, equal to 48s. a head of Land Tax upon the people of Gaul alone. The consequence of this was that the municipal functionaries in the provinces, who were bound to provide the sum due upon taxes, frequently gave up everything and fled away to escape responsibility for the taxation. Farms were deserted, and the whole social fabric overwhelmed in ruin. Sometimes a large landowner handed over his estate to what were called colonists—something between freemen and slaves—who paid him rent in kind. This payment of a rent to the proprietor was the distinctive mark of the colonist. After a time those slave colonists became serfs, and were sold along with the land.²

Through the growth of luxury in Rome, and the

¹ See Uhlhorn on *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, i. p. 10.

² See Guizot, *History of Civilisation in Europe*, vol. iii. p. 144.

increasing corruption of every rank, and of most individuals, Roman society was falling in pieces when the Christian Church came in to reconstruct it. We find that in this reconstruction it began at the base. Charity to the deserving poor, care for the slaves, of whom no man had taken account, visiting of the prisoners who had been previously neglected, ministering to the wants of the aged and infirm, who might otherwise have been deserted (for even the mother in a Roman home might be turned out in her old age)—it was through those functions of the ministry of Christ that His Church began to rebuild the social fabric. In regard to slaves there can be no doubt that Stoicism did much to mitigate their condition, because it taught the greatness and the equality of humanity. Yet it stopped short. Seneca is said to have had 20,000 slaves, whom it never occurred to him to manumit, though he did own that they were possibly human beings like himself. But the Christian Church was open to a slave as to a free-man. To avoid bloodshed, and all the anarchy that would have followed from the sudden elevation of a slave to social responsibility before he was prepared for it, Christ and His Apostles did not denounce slavery as an institution, but, on the other hand, by calling upon masters to treat their slaves as Christian brothers, and by enjoining on the slaves to render to their masters free-will obedience from love, Christianity took the sting from slavery, never again to be restored to it. Constantine forbade the separation of the families of slaves. In course of time, from Justinian onwards, a touching

feature in Sunday services was the manumission of slaves. Thus Christ proclaimed liberty to the captive. The enfranchisement was recorded on the fly-leaf of the Gospels or some other Church book. If any overworked slave was compelled to work on Sunday he was thereby set free from his bondage. "The legislator of the Christians," said Luceian, "has persuaded them that they are all brothers" (*Pereg.* 13). In regard to prisoners, Tertullian enumerates the visiting of the imprisoned (they were usually prisoners for political offences) as one of the primary duties of a Christian man and woman; and, as we have seen before, (p. 26), Lucian says that when his hero, Peregrinus, was in prison, the Christians made wonderful exertions and sacrifices, crowding round the prison doors from daybreak with food and comforts for him to make his position tolerable. The cynical observer says that from the cities of Asia certain Christians were deputed to comfort and help this pitied prisoner.

The gladiators, too, a great doomed, unhappy class, fed and medically attended as one might tend an animal in view of a show in which it would be exhibited, were blessed by the religion of Christ.¹ The first Christian Emperor was the first to condemn the so-called "Games," where their combats were the sport. How unlike Trajan—great and good as Pagans could be—who exhibited 10,000 gladiators on his return from Dacia! But the games lingered on, as cruel customs

¹ Yet as men who did deadly work in time of peace they were excluded from communion (Arles, Can. 3).

always do, for a human crowd is cruel, till a brave monk, nearly a hundred years after Constantine, rushed between the combatants to part them and was killed. That brave Telemachus was the last victim of gladiator games in the West.¹

One other thing may be mentioned. The hardships of the poor have under all despotic Governments been greatly increased by the exactions of the usurer. The Roman minimum interest was 12 per cent (*i.e.* one per cent for each month),² while it frequently rose to 24 or 48, and Horace even tells us of 60. One of the earliest concerns of the Christian Church was to prevent any office-bearer from becoming a money-lender.³ The clergy, as guardians of Church funds, must have been frequently tempted to lend money at interest; but the Council of Nicæa enjoined that any one who so did should be turned out and his name struck off the list of clergy.⁴ The Apostolic Canons (Canon 44) and many early Councils forbade, under the strongest penalties, the practice of usury. Cyprian charges it against the Bishops of the "Lapsed" that they attended markets and lent money at compound interest. The savings of the clergy—if they ever had any—belonged by canon law to the Church and to the poor, and were

¹ Compare Ozanam, vol. i. 121.

² This was re-enacted by Constantine in 325, just before the Council.

³ It does not appear that the same restriction was applied to laymen. Cyprian's enumeration of testimonies against the Jews con-

tains the passages from the Old Testament forbidding gain by lending, and implies that Christians were not like Jews making such gain. Even Christians exacted 50 per cent in Chrysostom's days.

⁴ Council of Nicæa, Can. 17.

therefore not to be turned against the poor by usurious interest.¹

The duties owing by Christ's disciples to the poor are indeed the very foundation of the activity of the Christian Church. We find the thought of God's message to the poor, which was the climax of our Lord's first sermon, running like a gold thread through all the subsequent history of His Church. A Roman poet might say that to give relief to a poor man was only to prolong his misery, which had much better come to an end. A philosophic Roman moralist might say that it was worth while being liberal because it did good to a man's own spirit to bestow alms on the poor. A Roman politician might feel that it was needed for his power that he should relieve the poor. Christianity takes up another thought. A poor man is valuable in God's sight and for Christ's sake. To relieve him and to minister to him is our simple duty and highest privilege; and the Church or the Christian failing to minister thus to the poor has forfeited all right to bear His sacred name. Chrysostom said, "As fountains flow near the place of prayer that the hands that are about to be raised to heaven may be washed, so were the poor placed by our fathers near to the door of the

¹ Usury was by ancient custom a mode of frightful exaction, and as such was a sin of great enormity in the eyes of true Christians. If the clergy had been allowed to be usurers their great opportunities would have made usury a means of amassing wealth.

It would have destroyed their brotherly relations with the poor. Alike in East and West the leaders of the Church denounce it. The Council of Nicæa in making deposition the penalty on any of the clergy who indulged in it was expressing the common

Church that our hands might be consecrated by benevolence before they are raised to God." ¹

Christianity, in short, created the people. The republics of Greece and Italy existed for their citizens and trod upon their slaves. Christianity existed for the mass of men, and when Ambrose took down the ornaments of his Church to relieve some prisoners, saying that God would be better served by the liberation of those in bonds than by the beauty of the furnishings of the altar, he was rightly expressing a central truth of his faith. When St. Francis of Assisi flung all his money to the poor in Rome and then parted with his fine clothes, that he might wear a beggar's garb, he was only uttering in his own impetuous fashion a needed protest against the luxury which adorned the official while it stinted the relief of the poor.

Until Constantine adopted Christianity all the benefactions of the Church were doubtless congregational. Even the 1500 widows and orphans, of whom Eusebius tells as supported in Rome by the Church at a cost of nearly £4000 a year, would doubtless be regarded by us as congregational poor. No doubt at times the Church went beyond the congregation, as when Cyprian raised 100,000 sesterces for the Numidian prisoners—that is about £850. And, which is more, in the appointment of hospitals the Church was passing

conviction of Christendom. Yet it seems to have lingered on until new commercial relations made it possible for a man to lend his money and receive it back with

reasonable interest (St. Luke xix. 23).

¹ See further illustrations in Ozanam, vol. ii p. 48 ff.

beyond the limits of the congregation. But for long, as in the early chapters of the Acts, those to whom ministrations were made had been in their better-off days members of the Christian community. It is not known at what time the congregational changed into the public provision for the poor through the Church, but we may see its progress under two heads:—

1. *Hospitals.* The old world was not acquainted with hospitals. Great physicians sometimes had small infirmaries connected with their own practice for the better attending to selected patients. Some of the more civilised nations (as Egypt) and some of the martial republics—Sparta, for example—provided medical attendance for the soldiers on a campaign. Alexander the Great had surgeons with him in his expeditions. But in the Roman Republic it does not seem that any similar provision existed. In the wars of Fabius the wounded were carried to private houses to be tended. Julius Cæsar began a new era, and after his day military surgeons and physicians were provided.¹ But even for military purposes it is doubtful whether there was any public hospital till a much later time. Tacitus (*Annal.* iv. 63) seems to say there was not. At all events there was none for the sick poor. But it is significant of Roman independence, and of the contemptuous kindness with which the haughty patricians treated their dependants, that there were

¹ See *Geschichte Christlichen Kranken-Pflege u Pflegerschaften*, von Dr. Heinrich Haefser, Berlin, 1857, and Sir J. Y. Simpson's *Archæological Essays*, vol. ii. 1882. See Note afterwards, p. 127.

Valetudinaria for slaves in connection with great country houses, and by and by town hospitals for slaves; and also in Rome, as in Greece, surgeons and infirmaries for gladiators. But, these things notwithstanding, it does not appear as though anything approaching to what we now mean by a hospital for the sick poor was ever seen until the time of Constantine. Public hospitals as places of compassion for the poor are a Christian institution. Jews had none. They are an institution of the Christian Roman Empire. At that era they burst out everywhere. We find Julian, in his attempt to rival Christianity in its usual beneficence, providing a Xenodochium (*i.e.* an institution for receiving strangers) in every city, partly, at least, at the public expense. "We see," he said, "what makes those enemies of the gods so powerful; it is their humane love of the stranger or orphan, their care for the dead, and their holiness of life, artificial though it be." Basil's great hospital in Cesarea was said to have been a world's wonder, and, when there was one built in Europe, Jerome congratulates men that this twig of the terebinth of Abraham had been transplanted to the Ausonian shore. Very soon those hospitals were thrown upon the Church funds for support. Some of them came from the Church from the first; and even those which were of lay origin had rules like those of the cloister (Haefer, p. 14). We read of special collections when great orators preached: Chrysostom, for example. The State at first did a little. This was systematised by Gratian's law, but the custom was abandoned after

Valentinian, and from that period hospitals were a part of Church organisation under the Bishop. The Bishop's bodyguard, in fact, at certain councils, when he wished to make an imposing appearance, consisted of the hospital attendants.¹ Monastic orders, male and female, became the ministrants of those hospitals, and so gradually they were identified not only with the Church but with the great monasteries and orders of the Church. Nothing that was ever done for the poor man made such a change in his position as the institution and spread of the system of hospitals for the sick. At a later period institutions more strictly confined to the sick than the older hospitals had ever been, were founded. Those homes of the sick—infirmaries—are not earlier than Charlemagne; some of them much later. [St. Bartholomew's, London, is 1102; St. Thomas's early in the thirteenth century.] As in our day hospital-nursing is the most popular form of woman's Christian work, so for some centuries before the Reformation. What a fruit of religion are those great Christian edifices as compared with the Roman amphitheatre and its bloodthirsty crowd, and its victims dying to make sport! A brilliant French writer says, "When they point to the grandeur of the heathen Colosseum we can bury them under our magnificent hospitals."

2. The next head is *Monasteries*. The monastic system, which began in the solitary hermitages of the Egyptian desert, and gradually led to the combinations of monks in Egypt until the fiery eloquence of Athanasius

¹ I.e. *Parabolani*.

brought it to Rome and Europe, did more to fashion the destinies of the Christian Church than all other institutions taken together. The connection of monasteries with the care of the poor is obvious, essential, and continuous. They were the home of the Christian poor for many a day, the pauper's House of Refuge, the sheltered nook where the tender flowers of purity and holiness had leave to grow. What teaching, what example the rude ages had were due in the main to the monasteries. When the barbarous hordes that had overthrown the Empire broke up into little clans, each under its marauding chief, and the unity both of the Empire and of the human race seemed about to be obliterated, the monasteries, maintaining not only the common credit but a uniform social order, led to the restoration both of the Empire and of the social system. The inhabitants of the monastery were the leaven of society and the ministers of the poor. The funds of the monastery were held in trust for the service of men, and very soon the State washed its hands of all concern for the lowest class of its citizens, and handed them over to the monasteries. Freedom from taxation and many other privileges granted to religious houses were simply the State's recognition of the great burden that it had thrown on those houses of God. This seems to have begun in the eighth century.¹ The only cultivators of the soil who had any security of tenure, and the best class, therefore, of agricultural labourers, were to be found within the precinct walls or in the villages

¹ See Hallam, *Middle Ages*, ii. chap. vii. pp. 140-169, 11th ed., 1855.

that clustered round the gates. Congregational relief of the poor had ceased, congregations themselves had become dependencies of the great abbey or monastery, whose members went out to the circle of parishes and churches in the neighbourhood. Thus the distribution of alms and giving of help to the poor, the education of the poor man's children, and the means of industrial livelihood, were amongst the benefits which the great monasteries conferred upon Christendom. It is quite true that, in consequence of this, country clergy were sucked into the abbey, rural bishops were suppressed, and anything like the relations of rich and poor in the Apostolic Church became impossible; but it is very doubtful if at any less price the Church could have been made strong enough to contend with the rude king or the ruder baron of the Middle Ages, or to preserve for future time the seeds of learning and virtue. The very hospitals of which we have spoken became adjuncts of the monasteries.¹ The school and the dispensary were parts of the monastic establishment as certainly as the Bible and the pulpit. Thus when we ask how for many hundred years the Church of Christ took care of the poor, we have to answer by pointing to the monks and the great houses in which they dwelt together.

¹ See further on Hospitals, p. 127.