

Strange Pilgrimage

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*At Place de Tertres
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Foreword

It was a practice in my childhood to encourage children to keep an album in which their relations and friends wrote edifying or amusing sayings. I still have in my possession the album given to me as a birthday gift in 1925 on my tenth birthday. In it my Mother wrote "A rolling stone gathers no moss but it gathers polish". I wonder if the mantle of prophecy descended upon her as she wrote those words, for I was destined to travel far from the quiet village in which I was born, though in the end to return and settle in a hermitage not far away from the place of my upbringing. I turned out to be indeed a rolling stone, and my family and friends always wondered where I would roll to next. Whether I acquired polish the readers of this story must judge for themselves, but I present it in the hope that it may lead people to reconsider the place of religion in their lives and the place of tradition in religion. The reader will soon perceive that I have been delving for Christian roots in the spirit of the Prophet Isaiah "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged".

This story of my life has been compiled at various stages in the past twelve years. The reaction of some readers might well be that it is "Much ado about Nothing", since they cannot see the necessity to change from one Christian denomination to another, but this is to overlook the problem of doctrine, dogma and authority, and the importance of these to certain people. There are many apologies by those who secede to the Roman Church, e.g. R. H. Benson's "Confessions of a Convert" and B. W. Maturin's "Price of Unity" and most notable of all that by Newman, "Apologia pro Vita Sua". There are also accounts of people's conversion to Protestantism such as Pastor Chiniquy's "Fifty years in the Church of Rome".

This is a story of a journey to a country less well known in the West and though it is not intended in any way as propaganda, nevertheless I hope that it may awaken in my readers something of the vitality and viability of Orthodoxy. The Church can draw people in many ways: its music, worship, spirituality, icons, doctrine, antiquity, continuity and certainty. But all should realize that to belong to the Orthodox Church is indeed to tread the narrow way that leads to life eternal (Matt VII: 14) and a real taking up of the Cross and a following of the Master, for its demands in the way of discipline, prayer and fasting are very great.

This story then is of a search. Many will see the answer as too simplistic and regard any dogmatic decisions as an imprisonment of the human mind which can no longer content itself with thought processes crystallized by the Bible and Tradition. This is the great cry of the intellectuals in the Roman and Reformed Churches to-day. A seemingly simplistic answer, may, paradoxically, prove to be the answer to life's problems and the key to its mystery. "Ask, seek, knock" says Christ in Luke XI.9, and the asking results in receiving, the seeking in finding, knocking in opening for those who rely on His Grace through all the ups and downs of life's pilgrimage.

ARCHIMANDRITE BARNABAS
St. Elias Monastery, Wales
1985.

1

Boyhood and Youth

I was born in the remote but beautiful village of Pennal in the County of Merionethshire and on the border of Montgomeryshire on September 3rd, 1915, and baptized by the Reverend Gomer Price, then Rector of Pennal, ten days later. This took place at the house and not in Church, for I was an ailing baby and Mr Gomer Price said that baptism often gave health of body as well of soul. This proved to be true in my case since I have survived until the age of 69 with very few complaints up to date.

My parents were Peter Jones Burton and Margaret née Latham and I was their third child, a first, Janie having died in 1911, and a second, Annie Elizabeth, born in 1913 and who survived until 1960 dying at the age of 47. Two other children came—a sister, Morwenna Jones Burton, and a brother, Owen Wyn, who lived until 1967 dying at the age of 45. We were all born in the little cottage at the entry to the village of Pennal along the Machynlleth road, 1 Rhys Terrace as it was called, a property belonging to the Marquis of Londonderry who at one period had a residence at Machynlleth and owned much property in the region.

Both my parents were of good, honest, hard-working stock and were highly respected in the area, in which indeed they passed practically the whole of their lives. My father's father, Owen Burton, was a small farmer and builder and carpenter of the village of Llanwrin and on his small farm there, Esgair Fôr, he brought up two sons and two daughters, all the children of his first wife. My father was born at the death of his mother and was baptized in Llanwrin Church while his mother's body was waiting to be buried — a Welsh custom known as

“baptizing over his mother’s coffin”. Later my grandfather remarried, this time a staid respectable elderly spinster (called Jane like his first wife) who served him faithfully until her death in the early twenties. By this time Owen Burton had retired from his farm and settled in a cottage in the centre of the village of Llanwrin and passed all his time in making exquisite oak chairs and other pieces of accurate workmanship in wood. He lived until nearly 90 and died in 1928, having been Church Warden of Llanwrin Church for many years, though not always in agreement with the Rectors of the Parish for he was a man of very independent views and quite unafraid of expressing them.

My mother’s family, Edwin and Jane Latham, came remotely from the Wrexham area but Edwin Latham became gardener at Talgarth, a mansion in Pennal, where he met Jane Williams, a Welsh girl in service in a neighbouring big house, but a native of Tre’r Ddol, a small village southwards across the river Dyfi from Pennal. Of this union there were ten children, four boys and six girls, of whom my mother Margaret was the eldest but three. They lived at first in the Lodge at Talgarth Hall, but later moved to 1 Rhys Terrace as Edwin Latham ceased to work at Talgarth and was now working at Glandyfi Castle across the river Dyfi, going there early on Mondays, returning on Wednesdays to ring the bell for evening service, for he was sexton and bell-ringer of Pennal Church, returning for the rest of the week on Thursday morning and coming home with his meagre pay packet on Saturday evening. Later he gave up gardening and impelled by the urge which then seized several North Wales men he went to the Rhondda Valley to earn more money by working in the mines, Alas! He had left it too late and soon returned to Pennal a sick man where he was cared for by my mother until he died in 1913.

My father was brought up on the farm at Llanwrin, one of his sisters acting as mother and housekeeper to the widowed

father. He was by all accounts a clever boy but hated school and escaped whenever he could. At that time the Rector of Llanwrin was the distinguished scholar, Dr. Silvan Evans, whose dictionary of the Welsh language remains a classic to this day. My father frequented the Rectory and had many tales to tell of “the Doctor”, but was really friends with the Rector’s unfortunate son, an alcoholic, from whom, alas, he early learned to love strong drink. When the 1914 war broke out my father, having by this time married my mother, enlisted and was in France during most of his four years service. There his propensity for drink was accentuated and remained his weakness during the whole of his life. After the war he settled down in Pennal as builder in the region, for most of the time in conjunction with his second cousin, Richard Burton-Davies, the builder, contractor, carpenter and undertaker of the village, and a highly respected deacon of the local Calvinistic Methodist Chapel of Pennal.

My mother, like most girls of the village, left home at the age of 13 to enter service with a Welsh family running a dairy in East London. From there she went to other situations as parlour-maid, finally ending up with a big business family in Liverpool, whence she returned home at the death of her mother to keep house for her sick father, an ailing younger sister and a younger brother. At her marriage to my father she moved to 3 Rhys Terrace thus minding two houses at the same time, but at her father’s death, she moved in to No. 1. It was here that she passed the rest of her life until she died in 1960 within sight of her 82nd birthday. She was a wonderful mother, devoted in her service to all of us, taking part fully in all the religious and social life of the village, never discontented though there was often not enough money to pay the house-keeping expenses. Her home was the focus for all the members of her family who would come for holidays to Pennal always certain of a welcome.

My elder sister, whom we called Nancy, and I grew up together in these early years of which I have vague recollections. In No. 5, Rhys Terrace lived a dynamic character called Lisa Lewis, together with her brother Richard Lewis. I loved to visit Lisa, because she always had a good fire and gave me any tit-bit that she might have prepared. She shared the pew with us in Church and I still remember as a very small boy the impression the Church atmosphere, the stained glass windows, the Rector and the service made upon me. In those days the Rector was the Reverend Gomer Price.

At this same time there was a very fine Congregational Minister in Pennal, the Reverend Owen Davies, who had a strong influence for good over people. As my father had returned from the war a lover of strong drink, my mother, after a disagreement with the Rector over Church cleaning, decided to frequent the chapel so that Mr. Davies' good influence might have some effect on my father. So, for some of our very early years we went to chapel services (all in Welsh) but went to Church whenever my mother's relations came to stay with us. I must say I hated the long dreary services of the chapel and loved the beauty and mystery of the Church. I well remember how moved I was at seeing the then Bishop of Bangor conduct a Confirmation service in Pennal Church. This must have been in the early twenties. His cope and mitre made an indelible impression upon me. All this was in sharp contrast with the bleak, severe form of worship at that time prevalent in Welsh non-conformist chapels. As I grew older I became convinced that chapels were schismatic and that one could not be a frequenter of both, and the dichotomy ceased about the end of the twenties when all of us were uniformly Church in our membership. At about this time too we had as Rector the Reverend Robert Davies, who by his friendliness and sincere goodness attracted many people to Church so that on Sunday evening at the Welsh

Evensong the Church would be full and the singing harmonious and deeply moving.

This beautiful village of Pennal, set in a valley formed by the extreme end of the Berwyn range of mountains and the lower hills of the Fron and the Taran, was unique in that though small (the population in those days was about 300) it had several manor houses. It was a village of Welsh peasantry (*y werin*) and English gentry, and though relations were friendly there was no intimacy. The gentry went to the 11 a.m. English Matins on Sunday mornings; the Welsh people were mostly chapel, and the morning and evening services there were always in Welsh. For the few Welsh Church people, like ourselves, there was Holy Communion once a month at 10 a.m., and Evensong at 6 p.m. every Sunday. The gentry never came to these services. In addition to the ancient parish Church there were three dissenting chapels, Congregational, Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodist, and beside the Rector there were two other resident ministers in the village while the Wesleyans were cared for by the pastor at Corris. To-day (1985) there is still the Rector in residence but the dissenting ministers have all disappeared from the village and their manses sold. The Wesleyan chapel has been sold to a printer and the three dissenting congregations now greatly reduced in number amalgamate on Sundays and worship in one of the two remaining chapels. Yet in my youth everybody in the village belonged to one or other of the religious denominations. There was only one Roman Catholic in the parish, a Mr. Meek of Cwrt, of Irish origin, but there was not then any papist place of worship nearer than Aberystwyth.

An interesting picture of the village even earlier was given in a paper my mother once read to the Women's Institute of Pennal in the forties, and I reproduce it here in her exact words:—

“I am keeping my promise to write a little more of the history of Pennal as I remembered it as a child [This would be towards the end of the 19th century, my mother being born in 1878]. I shall start with the school. Over a hundred children attended it. There were four teachers besides the headmaster who was called Mr. H. Lewis. I can only remember the name of one of the teachers, Lewis Owen. He came from Bryn-crug and walked home on a Friday night over the mountains and the same again on Monday morning. He taught the infants. Two dressmakers, one from the village and one from Cwrt came to school on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon to teach the girls sewing.



Pennal at the turn of the century.

“Now I come to the Smithy. It stood on the piece of ground near where we catch the bus to Towyn. Tom Dafis, y Gôf, was the Blacksmith and a very busy man he was and it was nice to hear the sound of the anvil. Round the corner was a place called the Pentil, where the horses were shoed, and there were always a lot of children watching this work being done.

“Despite all the children that were born in the village there was not a qualified midwife, yet there were very few deaths at birth. My mother had a woman called Margied Humphreys, very clean and a humorous person. She looked after her for the two weeks and the payment at the end was 2lbs of lump sugar and ½lb of tea. You see these people of long ago believed in the charity that is mentioned in the Bible.

“All the mansions about were full then and Talgarth and Pennal Towers owned nearly all the farms and a lot of cottages in the village, which I am sorry to say were not to their credit, very poor houses especially at Callan Bach (as it was called then) now Arddol. They were sold one by one with a bit of land, and R. Burton-Davies rebuilt them on the old foundation after the First World War, and also a few other houses. There was no water supply. For working purposes we had to carry it from the river and for drinking, from Ffynnon Penllan, Rhos Goch, and Pistyll y Felindre.

“There was a slate quarry here called Cwmebol and a good few men worked there, also at Bryneglwys. They walked over the mountain on Monday morning and returned on a Friday night. Wages were poor and with a large family it was hard to make both ends meet. Everybody baked their own bread, planted potatoes out in the fields, kept a pig, plenty of fresh butter at eight pence a pound in the Summer and one shilling in the Winter, bacon eight pence a pound, cheese four pence a pound, coal one shilling and six pence a cwt. When herrings were in season an old sailor from Aberdovey used to

come with a big barrel full. One could buy a dozen for a shilling and what was more nourishing than a fried herring and potatoes boiled in their skins?

“The religious life of the village was very good indeed. Everybody that could go went to chapel or church on a Sunday and a week-day as well.

“There was a service in Church every Wednesday night, and in the Chapel Monday and Thursday: Band of Hope and a children’s service during the Winter months and a good concert was held now and again by the local people in the Church room. Also there was a band and a ladies’ choir, — a very good one which had won first prizes. The late T. R. Jones was their conductor. So you see Pennal was quite an active little village in those days, although they had not the advantages we have now, but all seemed to pull together and do what they could.

“There were four shops, Edward Rowlands, Tom Lewis, William Roberts, and Mrs. Davies, “Siop fach”, a very hard working person who baked bread to sell, also made currant loaves. The boys used to buy a slice for a half-penny. She also had a donkey and cart to carry the goods from town three times a week. Jim the donkey was a great favourite, and you would often see him half in the doorway waiting for some titbits. The shops were open then until ten o’clock, and we children loved to go to Siop Tom (as it was called then) to get the weekly goods. Tom Lewis would shake the bottle of sweets to give us a handful before we went out. He was a very kind and generous man.

“Rabbits were plentiful about the place then, but no one was allowed to shoot them as landed gentry liked to have a day’s shooting. But they didn’t have it all their own way. There lived in the Marian an odd character called Huwkin William who was a bit of a poacher when the rabbits were in season. When it got dark we would hear a gentle knock at the door. Mother would answer it. There was much whispering going on, and in the end

when the bargain was struck out would come a rabbit from under Huwkin's coat and the cost was four pence — a great deal of difference from what they cost now: four shillings!

"Dafydd Dafis was the builder and constructor for the village and his workshop was where Catherine Dafis lives now. Many a young man from the village served his apprenticeship with him and did well in the world after.

"The Riverside Hotel was called Ty Bricks and was a real country inn with a big stone floored kitchen, a large open fireplace and an old fashioned settle. It was kept by a brother and sister called Hugh and Shani Price. I don't remember ever seeing Shani Price out. She suffered from rheumatics, so could not walk very well. Hugh Price had his pipe always in his mouth and always upside down!

"Clothes were worn very long at that time and far more underclothing was worn then than now. Bonnets and capes were also fashionable and the women wore little shawls over their shoulders in the house during the cold weather for Winter was more severe than it is now. We only had oranges once a year and that was at Christmas time".

So much for a glimpse of village life in the concluding years of the last century. Apart from a decrease in the number of children (there were about fifty in the village school in my youth) and a few modernisations the changes were not many, and Pennal still had its quota of "characters". There lived in a cottage near Tom Lewis's shop a bent old woman called Margied Fach, who was used by my mother to frighten me into being good.

I started at the village school at the early age of three being taken there by the hand of my elder sister, Nancy, to whom I was devoted. The infants' class was presided over by Miss Perkins, one of the three daughters of a former Congregational Minister of Pennal. She lived at a very ancient house, Bettws,

("Bead House" or "Baptism House") in the hamlet of Cwrt, and we would go to meet her along the Cwrt road in the morning so great was our love for this good and lovable woman. At the age of about seven I passed to Miss Mary Davies' class. She also was a most estimable person, an excellent teacher, though she had never passed through any college course. I particularly loved her history lessons which always took place on Friday afternoons and can remember being puzzled that the Pope, who seemed in the past to have played such an important part in British history, now no longer seemed to exist, whereas Kings and Queens still continued. My interest in religious affairs thus began very early, and was to play an increasingly dominant and formative influence in my life.

At the age of nine I passed to the headmaster's class. He was a well known, greatly respected and much feared personality, Mr. Edward Jones, for he never scrupled to use the cane freely, sometimes bringing the children's parents to school to complain of his cruelty. He had the gift of versifying, and place names were committed to memory by this means. At the age of eleven all children sat the Scholarship examination to the nearest county grammar school. Thus I passed coming quite high in the county results but surpassed by my contemporary and friendly rival all the way through school, Hugh David Pugh, a handsome attractive boy of very quick intelligence in those days. Later he went to Bangor University intending to go into the ministry, but suffered a mental break-down at the age of twenty one, which meant his being sent as a patient to Denbigh Mental Hospital where he remained until he died at the age of forty-seven.

Of my years at Towyn Grammar School I have many clear memories, but I never liked the school and longed for the week-ends when I returned home, for I stayed the week at the house of one of my mother's sisters, Auntie Annie, a very strict

Methodist believer. There were subjects like History, English, Latin which I liked and others, like Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics which I detested and did very badly in. I finally ended up after four years with a School leaving certificate in which I gained five credits in arts subjects but as I had no science subjects this did not qualify as a matriculation.

An event during the second year at this school left a deep impression upon me, and gave me a more serious orientation. In the bungalow next door to my Auntie Annie's lived a boy of my age named Maldwyn. We left for school together and returned home daily in one another's company. Returning one week-end after having been home I was told Maldwyn had died suddenly of a syncope. I remember still seeing his white waxen body and the shock this first encounter with death gave me. He would be eleven or twelve and I a year older when this happened, - a very impressionable age for so tragic a break in a deep friendship. Apart from this close tie I had no other attachments during these years and must have appeared a singularly strange and solitary boy. It is in those years that there began my deep involvement with religion. I loved the Church services and never missed any in Pennal Church, ringing the bell, putting up the hymn-numbers, lighting the candles and singing in the choir. As I grew older the Rector allowed me to read the lessons, first at the Welsh services and later in the English Mattins as well.

I left school in 1931 and continued to study Latin and Greek with the Rector, the Reverend Robert Davies. This would take up all the morning and led me on to reading more widely. I eventually started preparing for Ordination in the Church in Wales. At this time — the early thirties — there was widespread unemployment in Britain and one saw numbers of young men bicycling to Machynlleth every Friday morning to collect the dole. I did not qualify for this so I helped out with odd-jobs in and around the village. For instance in the afternoons I used to

do some gardening for the gentle folk, particularly the Misses Anwyl, daughters of the squire of Pennal, Miss Katie, Miss Bessie, and Miss Annie. They lived together in a charming small house on a hill overlooking the river Dyfi and a mile outside the village. They were (in the thirties) in their eighties and nineties, so belonged altogether to a different age, were old-fashioned in their clothes, snobbish and kept themselves from contamination with the peasantry. The Misses May and Olwen Thruston were the greatly impoverished daughters of yet another landed family of Pennal Towers, and Talgarth. But by the time I knew them they were living in a keeper's cottage called Cwmdwr. Pennal was indeed a real Cranford in those days with its coterie of spinster ladies, of great culture and refinement but as indigent as ever poor Miss Mattie was after the bank broke! I saw to the gardens of all these ladies and in addition to that of Miss Mary Williams of a cottage in the village called Hardford. She had a small garden yet it was filled choc-a-bloc with plants which I pruned regularly under Miss Williams' direction. This lady, the daughter of a Welsh farmer, was a Celt to her finger-tips and in constant contact with the other world. She told me of her father's experience in seeing his own phantom-funeral as he trudged up the Felindre Road to his farm Rhydgaled. She was feared by some of the villagers as it was believed she could cast a spell on any who displeased her.

Through my contacts with these Cranfordian ladies I learnt of the cultivated civilized polite world; I also developed a love of gardening which has remained with me all my life. All these relics of another age, the ladies of Pennal, passed on into the other world in the thirties and forties and no one quite resembling them ever took their place. They were the products of a refined, leisurely age which the First World War badly damaged and to whom the second gave the coup-de-grace. But

they remain to me a precious memory and I owe them a great debt.

There was a great deal of activity in the village in my childhood days. On Mondays and Thursdays there were prayer-meetings or Seiat in the chapels, on Wednesdays a Bible-class was held by the Rector, (the Rev'd Henry Williams) in the Church Room, and on Fridays, Band of Hope. From time to time there was a Concert made up of local talent, singing, recitations, speeches, a Social evening which always included a good supper, a dance, whist-drive, an occasional film given by a travelling cinema and held in the assembly room of the School. I greatly loved these films, usually of the Wild West or Charlie Chaplin variety, as they took me into the wide, exciting world beyond the confines of our Welsh mountains. There would also be a Gymanfa, that is, a festival of religious music held in the Congregational Chapel (the only one which had a galley for the singers), or a preaching festival when nationally known preachers visited our little village to deliver a stirring sermon, two at each service! Also at this time there began a series of extra-mural lectures on a variety of subjects — Welsh history, economics, philosophy — given by lecturers from Aberystwyth University.

My parents were proud of their children so we were pushed into as many activities as possible, and usually one or other of us would win some of the prizes.

I cherish the memory of my boyhood friends to this day, — Willy with whom I went round all the big houses on Christmas Eve to sing carols; Reggie, Basil, Meirion, Hugh David, with whom I played so many games, and some of whom are now “within the veil” (tu fewn y llen) as we say in Welsh.

2

Growing Maturity

The question may now rightly be asked as to how one born in such peasant and Welsh surroundings ever became a priest-monk of the Eastern Orthodox Church and I must now try my best to analyze the steps of my religious development which finally brought me to the position I now hold.

Despite the fact that my father sometimes drank heavily (Saturday night was particularly dreaded by us because of the rows between him and my mother), nevertheless the whole setting of our family was religious, as indeed it was for all the Welsh peasantry of those days. I have already indicated how both Church and chapel played their part in my growing awareness of religious truth. The Church was infinitely more attractive than the chapel could ever be. In the Church there was ritual and ceremonial, a surpliced choir of men and boys in those days, an altar, lights, flowers, altar frontals, a pipe organ, a longer chanted service and a shorter sermon than in the chapels. The Welsh Evensong on Sunday night in the lamp-lit church, the hearty singing, and the Rector's sermons remain a perpetual memory of my youth and are as vivid today as in those years of long ago. Through this early training I obtained a thorough acquaintance with both Bible and Prayer-Book, mainly in the Welsh language. From time to time 'supply' clergy would take the place of the Rector when he was away on holiday, and these proving more high Church than the Rector introduced me to the fascinating mystery of Catholicism.

In these early thirties, too, a Roman Catholic Church was opened in the former garage of a family living in Machynlleth.

Needless to say I found my way there, and was delighted and awed by the array of crucifixes, statues and vestments. I did this unknown to my parents and friends since Roman Catholicism was anathema in those days to decent Welsh folk. Rome was indeed the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse and everybody kept clear of Papists. On one occasion some Redemptorists came to preach on the village green of Pennal on a lovely summer's evening. When they began everybody fled indoors, shut all doors and windows till the mobile group had finished, when they all came out again. One day I met the priest, Msgr. Hook, a delightfully friendly man who passed on to me any literature he had done with which I eagerly devoured. I was thus made aware of the existence of this great and dominating Church, called by our local stone mason, the Grandmother of Churches, the Anglican being the Mother and his own beloved Calvinistic Methodist and other non-conformist Churches the children!

But the turning point in my religious development was reached when I met a solitary Nun who had settled, of all places in the little cottage in Llanwrin where my grandfather lived after retiring from his farm, Esgair-fôr, till he died in 1928. This nun, wearing a white habit, formerly belonged to the distinguished Anglican religious community of St Mary the Virgin, of Wantage. She had always been drawn to the eremitical life, but her release could not be considered by the community. Today things would be treated differently, but in those days all singularity was suppressed and a penchant for solitude was singular in the extreme. Finally Sister Mary Fidelia took the law into her own hands, as is often done in the Anglican Church, and leaving the Community she set up on her own, at first in a cottage in Hascombe, Surrey, but attracted by the mountains, remoteness and solitude of Wales, she finally found this empty, rentable (it belonged to my Uncle, Owen Burton of Llangedwyn) cottage, which she arranged as a hermitage.

What a sensation her presence in Llanwrin made in that rural Welsh area, largely Non-conformist and low Church in opinion! Nevertheless in time the villagers began to trust her and even to venerate her. She said the Night Office at 2 a.m. daily, and the day was divided into its canonical Hours of Prayer. She rarely went out, though on one occasion she attended a Quiet Day at Machynlleth conducted by Brother Charles of Cerne Abbas who was then head of the Franciscan Home for Wayfarers at Ffestiniog. From this visit came the offer of a cottage in their grounds, and thither she went early in 1933. It was just before this move that I met her, having cycled over from Pennal.

Because it led to every subsequent religious development in my life I must regard this meeting with Sister Mary Fidelia as crucial. We talked together in the presence of two local young women, and later alone, when she showed me her chapel upstairs and taught me how to say the Rosary as well as lending me some books on the hermit life. I was greatly moved and remember how my excitement prevented my sleeping that night. Within four years Sister Mary Fidelia was to die having passed from Llanwrin to the Franciscan property in Ffestiniog, thence to St David's where she was taken ill and had to be moved to a Home for the Dying near London, run by Anglican Sisters of the Divine Compassion. We corresponded regularly in these years and I still have copies of her letters to me, full of good advice and hopes for the future.

I shall never forget the impression made on me by this first encounter with a Nun, our conversation, the way she talked to me of the possibility of becoming a Monk in the Anglican Church, finally giving me the address of Father William Sirr, founder and sole occupant of St. Mary at the Cross Monastery, Glasshampton, Worcestershire. So in March 1933 I met Father

William, being a guest for a short time at the Monastery he had built.

This Anglican Solitary had been released some years earlier from his community, the Society of the Divine Compassion (since defunct) to build his monastery for contemplative monks in the ruins of some stables at Glasshampton near Worcester. Here he led an enclosed and deeply ascetical and fruitful life of prayer till his death in 1937. But though men came to him to try their vocations none of them stayed, and by the time I went there, in 1933, four years before his death he was no longer accepting novices, but living alone with the help of a lay-brother, who in Orthodox terminology would be known as a cell-attendant. He had built a lovely Monastery and created a beautiful garden around it, all of which fascinated me, who had read Conan Doyle's "White Company", "The Gathering of Brother Hilarius" by Michael Fairless and other books such as Scott's where Monasticism is seen in romantic colours.

I was a naïve seventeen at the time and too young to be able to appreciate so aged and well-trying a person as Father William. Reading while a guest his book "The Blossoming of the Desert" I was inflamed with the desire to become a monk, and Father William recommended me to the Superior of the Cowley Fathers at Oxford.

I became a postulant there on September the 7th, 1933, when there were 13 novices, six lay, and seven already ordained. In those days the community had a very stern Superior, Fr W. B. O'Brien, and his style of life was ascetic to a degree. The day began with Lauds and Prime at 6 a.m., followed by Mass; Breakfast at 8 a.m.; Meditation 9-10 a.m.; Terce and Reading of the Rule at 10 a.m.; Housework till Sext at 12.45 p.m.; Dinner 1p.m.; followed by recreation on all days except Wednesdays and Fridays which were silence days; None at 2 p.m.; followed

by outdoor work or a communal walk on Thursdays; Evensong 6 p.m.; Supper 7 p.m.; and Compline 9.30 p.m.

After three months I was clothed in the habit of the Society and known as Brother Ian. This period in my life was one of development in every way. At Cowley one associated with educated, cultivated and deeply sincere spiritual men, and one was steeped in liturgical prayer, theology and monastic spirituality, for Cowley in those days, ruled as it was by an ascetic Superior General, was run on Cistercian lines, silence periods were rigorously observed, the food was plain and austere, and every encouragement was given to the development of the life of Prayer. At the same time it was a happy novitiate as we all got on well together, and the friendships formed there were unbroken till death.

But at that time at Cowley a lay-brother was not allowed to proceed to Holy Orders but must remain in his subordinate position in the Community and not, in consequence, receive further education on formal lines. I was a great reader, spending every free moment I had in devouring the literary treasures which surrounded one at Cowley. I still have the list of books I read while there and they are formidable, giving in fact an indication of the lines on which my life would plan out. Even then I was fascinated by the Celtic Church and the Christian East, and because of this my doubts about the Anglican position had already begun to trouble me.

I was puzzled by the fact that the mode of religion into which I was now introduced — the Anglo-Catholic — was different from that which I knew from my Pennal Church days, and indeed differed on several points with the many Churches which abounded in Oxford. St Clement's not far away from Cowley was distinctly Low Church whereas the Parish Church of Cowley, St Mary and St John, was distinctly higher. Among the novices too, there were different levels of Churchmanship and

there were arguments among us from time to time. These helped considerably in my theological formation.

We had to ask permission of the Novice Master before we could borrow books from the Fathers' library. I had read the leading books on the Eastern Churches, Attwater and Fortescue, and now wished to borrow more. "No, Brother Ian" said the stern voice of Father Pridham, the Novice Master, "you have already read enough about the Eastern Church. Read Wake-man's History of the Church of England."

Cowley was a real monastery in those days, where a very rigorous programme of prayer, silence, fasting, meditation, and self discipline was maintained. Though the community was called 'Mission Priests of the Society of St John the Evangelist' missions were always seen as the fruit of the intense inner spiritual life that we led. Evensong was sung daily in the big church and many lay people attended. On Sundays there was a popular Sung Mass at 9.30 for parish people and a dignified, totally Plainsong High Mass and Sermon at 11 a.m., to which people came from far and wide. There was nothing like this in the rest of the Church of England in those days — austere, mysterious and beautifully rendered by the choir of monks, the boys' choir, the servers and celebrants. This was the highlight of the week and of course the same happened on the major feast days. Since then Cowley has abandoned its Mother house having given it to a theological college and a few brethren live in a semi-detached house in the Iffley Road. But it remains for me a fragrant memory which time can never obliterate. We were given lectures and classes daily on the Rule and Spirituality. I still have the notes I made in those days and find them as relevant to me now at 70 as they were to Brother Ian at 18 years of age.

When I became sure that I had to receive further education and eventually be ordained, I approached Fr. Pridham, and

later on I saw the Superior-General himself. Both were sorry at my departure, but I was allowed to go and left, sadly indeed and in tears, at the end of 1934. I returned to my home in Pennal, but what a contrast my life now with the monastic routine of Cowley! These were difficult days of re-adjustment, but I maintained the recitation of the offices in a little wooden hut which I had erected in the garden and which, beside a “bed, stool, and candlestick” contained an altar, statues, lamps, censer, prayer desk and liturgical books. I have kept a register of the services held at “the cell Bethlehem, in the village of Pennal, West Wales”, and still have it in our archives here. Time can never obliterate the anguish caused by leaving a Monastery to return to the world. I well remember I used to take solitary walks into the mist-enveloped mountains which surrounded our village, and to brood deeply on the past and future.

It was decided by the Rector that I should apply for admission to St. David’s College, Lampeter, but in order to qualify for entrance I needed Mathematics on my School Certificate. Accordingly I went to a Crammer’s School, — an ancient foundation nevertheless — known as St. John’s College, Ystrad Meurig, run by the Vicar of that Cardiganshire village. I lodged at the village of Pontrhydfendigaid, within a mile of the ruins of Strata Florida Cistercian Abbey, and I was happy in this, since it preserved my link with Monasticism. Each day I walked the three miles to the College, and studied hard, not only Mathematics but other subjects too, Latin and Greek especially. I passed the examination in June and was admitted to the degree course in Theology, known in those days as Pass A, in October 1935.

I remained at Lampeter until I took my degree in 1938, and profited greatly from the lectures given there. I took a full part in the College activities and formed friendships which have remained until today. There was of course a cleavage in religion

here between the high and low Church, and I belonged to the Society of St. David which was a supporter of Catholic ways, and whose chaplain was Canon W. H. Harris, learned, devout, and yet curiously aggressive, but an outstanding personality. The rival society was termed the “Evangelical Fellowship”, and by far the larger numbers of students belonged to this group. College Chapel services were based on a broad Anglican position, but freedom of practice was allowed to the clerical members of staff and the differences became apparent by the sermons we heard on Sunday mornings. I remember hearing a sermon denouncing the Monastic life in terms like Luther or Calvin. The following Sunday a preacher of Catholic views began his homily thus: “We heard last Sunday how evil the Monastic life was. I suggest we re-dedicate this College and call it St. Calvin’s since St. David was, after all, a Monk!” This provoked much laughter but was not conducive to helping students to strike roots. The Catholic Society of St. David would organise talks, retreats, pilgrimages, whereas the Evangelical Fellowship would arrange for visits to the college of well-known Protestant clergy. So the dichotomy regarding the Anglican position was accentuated by Lampeter, and indeed, in one of my talks with the Principal, Dr. Maurice Jones, he said that I would be happier and more in my right setting in the Roman Catholic Church.

However I completed my three years’ course there creditably, and passed the first part of the General Ordination Examination (G.O.E.), before I took my degree so would have only the second part to complete in any theological college I went to. I decided to apply for admission to Ely, and having taken my degree in June 1938, proceeded to Ely in late July for the Summer Term. But en route I returned to Cowley as a guest, and what joy it was to see that beloved Monastery again and talk to the novices of ’33-35, who had persevered. There remained in

me this great leaning towards Monasticism and inwardly I resolved to return to Cowley after Ordination.

Ely Theological College (since closed down) was in those days a place of piety, culture and learning, under its Principal, Canon C. J. Smith. Having read theology at Lampeter and having only Part II of G.O.E., to pass I read widely on my own and was excused many lecture courses. During my stay there Dr. Zernov came to speak on the Eastern Church, and I of course found his talk fascinating.

Dr. Zernov was a Russian refugee who finally settled in Britain, spending his time as a lecturer at Oxford and going around to various theological centres. I came to know him well in my Orthodox years and mourned his passing at a ripe old age and full of honours in 1982. A choir of Russian theological students also toured Britain at this time and performed the beautiful liturgical music of the Russian Church in several Cathedrals and Churches, thus gaining friends and money to keep their seminary going in Paris — St. Sergius' Institute.

At Ely all were graduates, mainly Oxford or Cambridge, so one mixed with people of a wider culture than was the case at Lampeter. But in 1938 the political scene was a deeply troubled one as the storm clouds were gathering engineered by Hitler and Mussolini and their Nazi and Fascist followers. As I passed all my examinations and was 23 years of age in September 1938 I was advised to seek a title for Holy Orders and be prepared for the diaconate in St. Asaph diocese in Advent. (A 'title' is the name given to the post which a future cleric will hold, since no deacon or priest can be ordained to a non-existent parish. He has, in any case to have a means of livelihood or stipend, and place of residence and conditions of service are stipulated in this legal agreement with the bishop.)

As I was known to have strong Catholic leanings I was directed to Canon Clement Thompson of Colwyn Bay, and after

being interviewed by him I was promised a title in his parish where he normally had three curates and a lady parish-worker. So my days of academic and spiritual preparation drew to a close and I looked forward to beginning work as a deacon at the close of 1938.

I look back with pleasure, even nostalgia, at my student years. They were a period of development and growth and a happy memory of much fun and work, of gaiety and sobriety, before the world was once again plunged into the holocaust of war.

I left Ely for Pennal in mid-December to get ready to go to St. Asaph to be ordained deacon.

SHRINE IN HIS BACK GARDEN

From Daily Mail Correspondent

ABERDOVEY, Tuesday.

WHAT must be the smallest sanctuary in the world is hidden away in the back garden of a house at Pennal, Merioneth, six miles from here.

A young man prays in it daily.

He is Mr. Ian Burton, aged 22, of Rhys-terrace, Pennal, and is being trained for the Church at Lampeter College.

A small shed in the back garden, only a few feet square, is lined with tapestry. The wooden floor is carpeted.

Facing the door is a tiny altar, complete with crucifix and candle. Nearby is the lectern fashioned out of plain wood.

Every day when he is at home Ian goes through the full order of morning prayer and evensong.

He sings hymns, reads the appropriate lessons, and intones the proper collects for the day.

He told me "We need prayer every day—in the home, in the workshop, on the roadside."

From the Burton Family Scrapbook.

3

Clerical Activity

The Ordination service took place on Sunday, December 18th, 1938, in St. Asaph Cathedral. It was a very cold day, but my parents and elder sister, and my father's brother and wife, all motored over for this service. I was greatly moved by the experience, particularly as I was the gospeller. After the service we had lunch together, then my relations returned home to Pennal, and I to Colwyn Bay to share lodgings in a private house with two other curates.

The Vicar of Colwyn Bay at this period was Canon Clement Thomson, then just raised to the dignity of Chancellor of St. Asaph Cathedral. He had been a foundation member of the Community of the Resurrection which subsequently based its Mother-house at Mirfield.

This Community, founded by the learned scholar Charles Gore, later Bishop of Worcester and then Birmingham, started off as a brotherhood of celibate Anglican clergymen, in which, after a period of probation, vows were taken to remain faithful to poverty, chastity and obedience for one year. If the candidate wished to persevere he renewed his vows. Clement Thomson was one of the original band of men who gathered around Charles Gore and Walter Frere (later Bishop of Truro). He was in charge of the Community's large and flourishing school in South Africa when he decided to leave and marry a Miss Stone, head-mistress of a corresponding Church school in Johannesburg. At his marriage he reverted to his state of pastoral ministry, and was incardinated into the diocese of St. Asaph, where, because of his great abilities, he gained rapid promotion. He and his wife were cultivated, upper-class English gentle people and

there were times when they found the manners and expressions of Celtic temperaments difficult. He remained an Anglo-Catholic at heart, but never did anything violently, introducing a sung Eucharist alongside the normal Anglican Mattins.

We were three assistant curates, Frs. James and Roberts beside myself. The former was a good, solid, dependable person who has done excellent work in the diocese ever since. Fr. Roberts was a deeply devout idealist, and he and I conceived the idea of forming a monastic community in Wales, and our discussions of this project continued over many years. But in the course of time he was appointed priest-in-charge of Esclusham, a suburb of Wrexham. There he fell in love and eventually married a young lady. Alas! Their married life was brief since within just a year she died giving birth to a stillborn child. Fr. Silyn Roberts, when he recovered from this tragedy turned his gaze once again to the religious life and eventually became a novice of the Society of St. Francis in Cerne Abbas, Dorset. In 1975 he returned as a friar of many years standing to found a religious house in Wales. In that year his Community opened their Welsh Friary in Llandudno and Fr. Silyn was one of the three Friars who ran this house. He died in 1983 at the age of 73 and the Welsh house was closed in June of that year.

I have indicated above that Canon Thomson was a moderate and cautious Catholic. There never has been moderation in my own make-up and given my youthful enthusiasm I had many unpleasant interviews with my vicar. The points of disagreement between us concerned matters of high church practices. I felt he was too cautious and a greater impetus should be given to the Catholic side; for example, I used to wear a biretta and put in several prayers from Roman sources which annoyed Canon Thomson as he was very much an Anglican at heart and no friend of the Western Rite of the Church of Rome. He always referred to Catholics as Romanists. In those days ecumenism

did not exist and we had no contact with 'Romanists' or Dissenters but continued along our stately way, safe in the knowledge that most Christians then belonged to the Anglican Church in that part of Wales.

In my diaconal year Canon Thomson decided to resign and seek a less exacting living at Norton near Presteigne in the diocese of Swansea and Brecon. His successor at Colwyn Bay, Canon T. J. Davies, a good, devout man, was of low Church leanings, and on his appointment he made changes in this direction. I well remember how some rejoiced and others grieved at the decision not to wear eucharistic vestments at Communion Services other than the 9 a.m. Sung Eucharist. This emphasised once again to me the uncertain foundation of Catholic practices in the Anglican Church and renewed my uneasiness on the question of Authority.

I was never seriously disturbed over the question of the validity of Anglican Orders, considering that Orders depend on the authenticity of the Church. There are two words which recur in the pages of the New Testament — *exousia* and *dynamis*, the former meaning authority and the latter power. They are not always correctly translated in the Authorised Version of the Bible nor in subsequent translations, but great harm comes if we confuse these two. Authority depends on the unbroken link with the Apostolic Church, but power is often shown in numerous Pentecostal denominations which do a lot of good for a while and then disappear.

In the Anglican Church it is not easy to convince people of the Authority behind Catholic practices since the Prayer Book and 39 Articles are interpreted in widely different ways by each person. This accounts for the comprehensive character of the Anglican Church. It can embrace at one end those who believe in every Papal definition and at the other those who accept extreme Protestant teachings. To some this is the glory of

Anglicanism; to me it was its shame, and in practice is a great hindrance since one can never appeal to an Authority clearly recognised by everybody.

It was quite clear to me at this point in my life that there had been a break at the Reformation, and though one could argue that the tactical succession had not been broken, could one maintain that a valid continuation in doctrine had been kept? These problems were to trouble me for many years and lay at the root of my restless wandering during my Anglican ministry. However I mastered my doubts sufficiently well to accept Ordination to the Priesthood in St. Asaph Cathedral on December 21st 1939, the feast of St. Thomas in the Western Calendar.

My first Mass was held with due regard to all the Catholic customs then in vogue in the Roman Catholic Church; and a goodly number attended including my Vicar who later expressed great surprise at the very "extreme" nature of the event.

As there happened to be a vacancy in the diocese in a church of higher views than Colwyn Bay, I was allowed by the Bishop to move to Buckley in April 1940. The 1939-45 war was then in progress and though I asked to be allowed to serve, thinking thereby that my religious doubts would be solved, my request was refused and I served in various ways as an Air-Raid Warden in Buckley and in this way made friends with a far larger circle than would have been the case had I confined my activities to ecclesiastical affairs only.

In this my second parish, Buckley near Hawarden, Flintshire, I served under an admirable Vicar, again a cautious Tractarian type of Catholic leanings but devout and learned. I often provoked him to rebuke me because of my unabated zeal for Tridentine practices, but he allowed me a free hand in the little Mission Church of the Good Shepherd, in the lower part of the village, which I refurnished on very Catholic lines. The Second World War was of course raging at this time and one

had to continue one's ministry under many restrictions. Bells could not be rung; evening services were cancelled unless one had blackout on the windows. Yet parish life went on. There were always baptisms, funerals, children to instruct and visits to be made to homes where men were engaged on war service, some never to return and some to be killed in air raids. I was always an assiduous visitor as I was interested in people and felt involved in their doings. I visited not only people who attended the services but called at all the homes in the parish and was on friendly terms with the Non-Conformist Ministers, who were quite a few in those days.

Though a village where the brick industry prevailed and of mainly working class people, there was cultural activity on quite a wide scale and out of this parish came a woman who eventually became a nun in an enclosed Anglican Community, (St. Clare, Freeland, Nr. Oxford), another who on turning to the Roman Catholic Church became a nun of the Redemptoristine order, and myself, who became a monk of the Orthodox Church. Buckley must be unique in having produced Sister Gwenda Mary, Community of St. Clare, Sister Mary Clement O.S.S.R., and Father Barnabas!

My doubts of course followed me in Buckley and I was on the point of making my submission to the Roman Church more than once. I made friends with a former vicar of Ruabon, the Reverend Herbert Davies, who had been received and was then living in Flint. He had married a rich widow and lived in some degree of style and comfort. Though his arguments in favour of submission carried some weight, the setting in which they were given rather influenced me against a move to Rome at that time. There also still remained in me a "hiraeth" for the monastic life as I had known it at Cowley, and I even got as far as applying to be received as a postulant and being accepted

again, but war time conditions did not allow me to pursue the scheme.

My family of course were opposed to the idea and it was pointed out to me that such a course could be regarded as selfish in war time conditions as clergy were in short supply in the parishes. Looking back with hindsight I made a right decision not to go to an Anglican Monastic Community. I would never have been able to persevere in view of the hidden doubts which gnawed at my soul the whole time.

At the end of the years in Buckley I applied for the post of Minor Canon of Bangor Cathedral and after a test of my musical abilities I found I was the successful candidate. I moved there in July 1942 and again stayed my customary two years in this position.

As Minor Canon it was my duty to sing the offices in English at the Cathedral and to be in charge of the Welsh services. There was Mattins and Evensong daily and a daily celebration of Holy Communion all in English, then on Sundays, Holy Communion at 8 a.m. in English, Mattins at 9.30 in Welsh and at 11 a.m. in English, Evensong in English at 3 p.m. and in Welsh at 4 p.m. There were twelve on the Canonical Chapter of the Cathedral who came every month to fulfil their duty. This consisted of attending the daily services and preaching once or twice on Sundays. During my sojourn there the Bishop for the first part was Archbishop Green, and in 1944, on the resignation of the Archbishop, Bishop Edwardes-Davies was appointed.

Charles Alfred Howell Green was of that type of Anglican clergyman now completely vanished, a gentleman of the old school, a church statesman, and in belief a Tractarian. He had learnt to speak Welsh and always preached in it when on visitation. He never became fluent but was accurate if pedantic. He always pontificated with due solemnity in as Catholic a manner as was possible in the setting of the Church in Wales.

He was cold and aloof but just and honourable in all his dealings. He and his wife, a daughter of Lord Merthyr, lived in great seclusion at Bishops court, and people did not call unless an appointment had been made.

The Canons of the Cathedral were a cross section of the clergy of this large rural and Welsh diocese, all good men: some quite learned and some quite simple but all friendly and ready to conform to the moderate Catholic usages of the Cathedral, though not doing anything so daring in their own parishes. The Dean of those days was J. T. Davies who had married a daughter of that redoubtable bishop of St. David's, John Owen. By her he had six children. He was certainly Catholic-minded but not an easy man to deal with, no great preacher nor impressive in taking the services. In these years he seemed greatly taken up with his family all of whom were growing up and doing well in school and college. My colleague, Wallis Thomas, later Archdeacon of Merioneth, was an urbane friendly but elusive personality, with whom it was a delight to work. He and I being musical, interested ourselves in that side of city life.

But Bangor remained a disappointment to me. I used to ask myself if this could have been in a line of development with the original foundation of St. Deiniol and other Celtic Saints of the sixth century. I could not honestly believe that this was the ancient Catholic Church of Wales, and again my gaze turned longingly to the Roman Church, which indeed was making great headway in Wales in those days.

One happy connection must be recorded here. I became acquainted with a dynamic person in Llaneilian near Amlwch in Anglesey, a certain Mrs. Barnsley, the wife of a retired clergyman who, though English, had become ardently pro-Wales. At her request I often went to speak at a prayer group which met in her charming house, and on one occasion I conducted the Quiet Day for the village in the local church, a church which is unique

in having an anchorite's cell attached and a lovely screen with a pre-reformation icon of the patron, St. Eilian. My visits to Llaneilian were among the happiest memories of my stay in Bangor.

My stay came to an end through the offer of a curacy in the most advanced parish in Wales, and possibly not surpassed by any parish in any place in the Anglican Communion, Landore near Swansea. Here at this period was the Reverend Archibald Samuel and his curate Kenneth Gillingham. They had created an advanced stronghold of Anglo-Papal-Catholicism in this wholly working class parish, not without much opposition and even censure from parishioners and Church authorities. A small convent of nuns who cared for old ladies had also been established in the upper section of the parish called Treboeth, and I was invited to take charge of the daughter church there, St. Albans, and act as chaplain to the nuns.



A Parish group at Treboeth with a visiting Anglican bishop.

Until 1944 I cannot be said to have been a Papalist in my views. I always knew of the existence of the Orthodox Church in which I had been interested in for many years already. I suppose I held a form of the Branch Theory, that the Catholic Church was composed of the Orthodox, Roman, and Anglican branches, and that these three would eventually re-unite after the next general Council.

I saw that there was a serious flaw in this theory in that the other two branches did not hold this view, believing themselves to be the true Church of Christ and other bodies in heresy or schism in varying degrees from the parent body. In view of this flaw I was ready to adopt a Papalist view, that the Anglican Church was a severed province of the Roman Church, severed not by its own volition but by state action at the Reformation, and that it was our duty to repair the breach, and behave as far as possible as if we were Roman Catholic priests. Fr. Gillingham said the full breviary in Latin every day, but the Vicar and I said the Anglican offices of Mattins and Evensong supplemented by the breviary in day hours.

In 1944 therefore I moved to a lively, hard working, but not cohesive milieu. I found St. Albans a depleted church owing to the exodus of those who could not stand high church ways. I gathered together a group of faithful, formed a choir of boys and girls who sang beautifully, and even organised a Choral Society for adults which also enjoyed a brief success. There were times of great joy in Landore-Treboeth, but the underlying sadness at the heart of things “*lacrimae rerum*” remained, and indeed was accentuated by the un-canonical situation into which the parish drifted. We had started lesser Benediction with the Holy Sacrament, then later used a Monstrance, then the Mass from the Roman Missal, sometimes in Latin. All this was reported to the Bishop and we were laid under discipline until the Vicar promised to be less Roman. It seemed to me then, and still seems to

me, dishonest to be paid as Anglican clergymen while doing work for the Church of Rome.

The Bishop of Swansea and Brecon (Williamson) in those days was in himself a good and even holy man, but curiously shy and thus apt to be sometimes tactless in his approaches. It must have been grievous to him to have to discipline Catholic minded clergy when his own private views inclined in that direction. But he must have had protests made to him about the increasing Romanism of Landore and had to appear to control our excesses. This he did in his usual diffident and apologetic manner and we promised to give up Benediction with a Monstrance, the Roman Missal etc.; a promise we kept for a time.

A dichotomy, which always existed within me, was, therefore, accentuated by my going to an extreme Anglo-Catholic parish, though in my simplicity I thought it would be solved. Also, as is always the case when there is division within, the devil attacks from without, and I passed through a period of grave temptation best summed up by the term worldliness and a lowering of moral standards. In Anglo-Catholicism there has always been, in a section of the clergy, a levity which borders on the blasphemous, flippancy which goes beyond the borders of propriety. I found this in some clerics of the extreme circles in London and who frequented the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. I cannot say that in some of my moods this was uncongenial to me, but deep down I knew it was not right to speak about these things in the way we did and I prayed for a greater seriousness of life, which temporarily seemed to have forsaken me. It is true to say that I sought escape in levity of life from the complexity of the ecclesiastical problems which bedevilled me.

The monastic aspiration never died within me, and I now turned towards The Society of St. Francis, Cerne Abbas, where

my friend Fr. Silyn Roberts had been professed. Unfortunately I had not considered this Community in all its aspects, but was simply drawn there by the fact that it worked in Wales and my friend was a member. When I arrived there in May 1947 I found the place uncongenial and the concentration on manual labour excessive. Also I must say that I was completely lacking in the degree of humility necessary to begin any postulancy in a Religious Community. When I look back on this episode I blush with shame for my vanity and pride and total inability to settle in under the guidance of the then Superior. He was a man of great value in the eyes of the majority of Anglicans, but I did not find him sympathetic and left the house in July 1947.

My intention in going to Cerne Abbas was in itself defective. At the back of my mind was the idea of founding a monastic house in Wales and I thought that this might be achieved through this Anglican Franciscan Brotherhood.

They had had after all two houses in Wales, one at Ffestiniog and one at Brecon before the War. However I had not reckoned with the nature of this Community. It was based on Franciscan ideals — its apostolate though grounded in prayer and liturgical observance in its main house, came second to its work among outcasts, poor, deprived people. My own ideal was a monastic one, that is, a house where prayer, the *Opus Dei*, was the main work of the monks. I had always been drawn to St. Benedict rather than St. Francis, to the classic monastic ideals of undivided Christendom.



May 1947.

4

Years of Wandering

I now entered a painful and confused period of my life which I can only refer to as a tunnel or the years of wandering. I had a distinct feeling of being abandoned by the Spirit, and had also a form of nervous disability which showed itself in a fear of the dark and of death. Another priest having replaced me at Treboeth I had to seek a post in order to earn money, though I felt inwardly that I ought to seek my submission to Rome. I went to stay awhile with the Redemptorist Fathers at Machynlleth, and though they were kindness itself I never felt they could understand the intellectual problems which were mine. How could they possibly do so, seeing they were all cradle Catholics of Irish background who had no knowledge of the Anglican Church let alone that section which claimed to be Catholic? Their unconsciously derogatory tone towards Anglo-Catholicism also displeased me, as I know inwardly that some of one's experiences as an Anglican were wholly authentic. I could not, therefore, at that time go on towards Rome, and after a month at Walsingham, kindly treated and understood by the Administrator, Fr. Patten, I found a temporary post as Chaplain to a newly founded congregation of nuns, then living in the old Episcopal Palace at Cuddesdon.

I stayed at Cuddesdon from October 1947 until March 1948, and have the most happy and good memories of the Prioress and sisters of the Salutation of St. Mary the Virgin. One of them was an elderly learned woman from Bontddu, Dolgel-lau. She was soon to be released to return there to live as a Solitary in the manner of Sister Mary Fidelia at Llanwrin years

before. She became a great friend of mine and even a spiritual guide until she died in 1958.

My duties were few at Cuddesdon, saying Mass daily, officiating at Vespers and Benediction, teaching plainsong and preaching on Sundays. The nuns, under the inspiration of their capable Prioress, were drawn even more and more to a contemplative form of life, and after my departure in 1948, they moved to the Priory of Our Lady at Burford, where they became Benedictine nuns, under the direction of the Abbot of Nashdom.

In March 1948 I moved for a brief period to a smaller convent at Wingrave near Aylesbury. These nuns of the Community of the Transfiguration, soon to be absorbed into the Benedictine nuns of Edgware, took care of mentally afflicted girls. Their lovely Convent was formerly a Manor House overlooking the Chilterns and the village of Wingrave, which is a picturesque Buckinghamshire village built around its beautiful parish church. The parish was an ordinary Anglican one, and the nuns were of the extreme wing of the Anglo-Catholic section, so the gulf was very large between us. I felt this isolation very much, but despite friendly overtures one was never accepted by the village.

In June 1948, I became temporary curate of Wantage Parish Church under its redoubtable Vicar, Bishop Roscoe Shedden. I never quite felt at home with him. The hiraeth for Wales remained and the uneasiness about the Anglican Church. However I worked with a will and seemed to please Bishop Shedden as will be seen later.

Things had not gone too well with my successor at St. Alban's, Treboeth and after a breakdown he resolved to resign. The Vicar, Fr. Samuel, came to Wantage to see me and asked me to return as curate-in-charge there. This I did in November 1948 and it was a happy return, though it is not always wise to do this and certainly it was not easy to take up the reins again.



Fr. Burton (later Fr. Barnabas) with Bishop Shedden and Fr. Gardner, August 10th, 1948.

I must now turn to family matters to explain the subsequent step in my chequered career. By this time my elder sister, Nancy, was headmistress of the village school at Darowen near Machynlleth. She and a friend lived there and were very happy for some years. My younger sister, Morwenna, a teacher in Manchester, had in 1944 married a brilliant young lecturer at the University, a refugee from Hitler's Germany and a native of Prague, Wilhelm Schenk. Later they moved to Exeter where he had been appointed lecturer in History at the University. A young girl was born to them in 1947 and a boy was on the way when Willi died of a brain abscess in June 1949. After the funeral was over we had a family council and it was decided that I should if possible seek a post where there was a house attached and my sister and her children could come and live with me. This was not possible in Treboeth neither could I expect the

Church in Wales to offer me a living in view of my instability and extreme position. A post offered me in Cardiff did not materialise because the Bishop, John Morgan, then Archbishop of Wales, resolutely refused to licence me in his diocese. Bishop Shedden hearing of my plight and having a house at his disposal offered this to me and in November 1949 I returned to Wantage, now to live in a house in Springfield Road and resume my former duties.

All might have gone well but for the fact that my sister and her children were Roman Catholics. There was therefore a division at the very centre of our family, and given my leanings towards Rome, and, at this time profound melancholy of spirit, my days as an Anglican were numbered, and I was received by a Jesuit Father in the chapel of East Hendred House, the home of the recusant Eyston family, in April 1949. I was never happy about this and grieved at the pain it caused Bishop Shedden and so many friends but I knew inwardly I had to go to Rome.

We left our house in Wantage and bought one in Reading where I had hoped to obtain a post as assistant master in a preparatory school. This post however did not materialise and I eventually obtained a post in a boarding school near Worthing where I spent a year teaching French, Latin and Divinity.

How can I possibly describe my feelings at this time? I had always wanted to be a priest, had always dressed as such, and now I found myself fully in the lay state. I was indeed lost, and strange to say, less happy in ultramontane Rome, as it was in 1950, than I was in the Anglican Church. I wondered whether I really believed in the Papal claims which seemed the foundation stone on which the Roman Church was based. I was tempted to return forthwith to the Anglican Church, but felt I needed some degree of punishment, and in my case it would hardly be serious to return without really having given myself time to taste Roman Catholicism.

Having always had Catholic leanings I should have found peace in my reconciliation with the Roman Church in 1950, but in fact, from inside, the Roman Church was very different from what it seemed from outside. I speak of the church of pre Vatican II days, when there was no friendliness to heretics and schismatics, and when Anglo Catholics, — apists not Papists — were very severely criticised. There was then a harshness which greatly irritated me, and curiously enough there was already an incipient Modernism in the better educated ranks of the clergy.

It seemed as if there were a Catholicism of the simple where miracles, relics, devotions etc., were the order, and a refined intellectual form of belief practised by the better educated. I found Rome by no means the monolithic structure which it seemed to be from outside, and of course subsequent events following on Vatican II have proved this to be true.

It was on November 1st 1950 that Pope Pius XII solemnly defined the doctrine of the Corporal Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the papal development of the Roman Church was most forcibly brought home to me by this pronouncement. I could not but contrast this definition with the wonderful Christological definitions of the early Oecumenical Councils, and the way the whole Church was then engaged in defending the faith and not one Patriarch alone defining a peripheral doctrine which was not even under attack. Though I knew Cardinal Newman's famous "Essay on The Development of Christian Doctrine" and had been impressed by its learning, I now felt there was some flaw in the argument as I could not see a clear line of development between the Roman Church of Pius XII's day and that of the undivided church.

It seemed to me that Newman's theory of an ongoing development from a deposit of the faith in Apostolic days could justify every development made by Rome up until then (1844), the year of Newman's reception, since he wrote this essay before

he was received and indeed, it did encompass Pius IX's definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and Vatican I's definition of Papal Infallibility in 1870. The Orthodox unexpressed theory of development, is that the theory is discovered from its practice, is that a period of maturity is reached in theological growth in the light of which the Church must practice its Christian life. Orthodoxy believes that just enough has been revealed to enable us to live by faith. There must be no probing into Mystery in a cerebral intellectual fashion and certainly no defining of new doctrines in matters not clearly provable by Holy Tradition and Scripture.

Unconsciously I was being led to Orthodoxy, and indeed I would go to Russian or Greek services when in London without fully understanding the service and never dreaming that one could possibly belong to a Church so Eastern, mystical and mysterious. Yet some chord within me was touched each time I listened to the Liturgy or Vespers.

During the course of my year at the Prep School near Worthing I was offered a similar post at a newly-opened school at Llanarth near Raglan under the direction of the Dominicans, the headmaster of which was Fr. Henry St. John, himself a convert Anglican clergyman and the son of a parson. He was an ecumenist of note already and some of his ideas seemed revolutionary indeed in the pre-Vatican II era. I liked him greatly but cannot say I was happy during this year, never having really taken root in the Roman Church. I had long talks with Fr. Henry who understood my difficulties only too well. I was still drawn to the monastic life and my thoughts always turned to the classic form of it — the Benedictine. I eventually applied to Douai Abbey, Nr. Reading to be received as a postulant, and this was accorded to me for September 15th, 1952.

The abbot of Douai, Dom Sylvester Mooney and the Prior, Dom John Grimbaldston were outstanding people and

examples in monastic virtue, but the Novice Master was a limited person who could deal adequately with the few school-boy Novices but found difficulty in his approaches to three of us who were well over thirty years of age. There was one monk whom I found to be a truly sympathetic person, Fr. Anthony, but such were the stern rules of protocol in Monastic life in those days that I could never have recourse to him for guidance. Alas! Fr. Anthony was to die at an early age quite soon and Douai lost one of its unusual and great Religious.

My Novice Master liked to humiliate me on every occasion by emphasising the non-validity of Anglican Orders. I am sure I needed humility but this was not the way to learn it. I received the habit here, and remained in the Novitiate till early Summer, becoming more ill at ease daily and finally resolved that this was not the place for me. I left with the good will of the Abbot, who kindly offered to find me a post as a secular master in one or other of the schools run by the Abbey, but I refused his offer, not knowing where I could turn to for help. I stayed in various cheap hotels in London doing a few odd jobs here and there. Then came the offer of shelter at Cowley, and after some months here I resolved to be re-integrated into the Anglican Church as a layman. I cannot say I did this with any deep conviction since I had not solved the grievously tormenting problem of Authority, *exousia*, but I disliked Rome and could not go living in an ecclesiastical no-man's-land. The Cowley Fathers were, as ever, courteous and kind, and in return for service in the house I was maintained free, as I had no money at this time.

In September 1953 I took up a post as assistant master in All Saint's Choir School, Clifton, Bristol, and in 1954 the Bishop of Bristol allowed me to function as a priest again. My year in Bristol was one of bewilderment. I was still lost and not completely happy in my renewed ministry. In September 1954 I

moved to another choir school, St. Michael's College, Tenbury, where there was moderate Catholic ceremonial and the most glorious singing imaginable. In January 1956 I moved back to Wales having been offered a post as Vicar Choral of St. Asaph Cathedral under an old and valued friend Dean Spencer Ellis. It was a joy to be back again in Wales and near my family, all of whom were then living in Wales, my parents and sister Nancy in Pennal, my widowed sister Morwenna and her two children in Aberystwyth, and my brother and his wife and later two girls in Ruthin. Soon we were able to arrange re-unions in the house I lived in as Vicar Choral, and these family re-unions are a happy memory of these years in North Wales.

Dean Ellis was a Catholic of the old school, but he resigned during my two years there and a man of my own age replaced him, Dean John Charles. He also proved a delightful person to work with and our brief period together was a happy one. But inside I was full of doubts and questionings. There were many Catholic things I missed and the dead-pan level of Anglican worship then prevalent depressed me sometimes beyond words. I felt I would be happier teaching and applied for the post of Convent chaplain to an Anglican Sisterhood at Baldslow near St. Leonards-on-Sea. To my surprise I obtained the post and moved there in June 1958.

The Community of the Holy Family was a Sisterhood on very Anglican lines given to teaching, though with a background of offices and meditation which prevented the Sisters from forgetting their first duty as Religious. Many of the Sisters were graduates, some of them of high intellectual distinction, and the schools they ran had a good name. I taught some secular subjects and acted as chaplain to the girls and Sisters, but though everything should have been pleasing my interior discontent remained and was accentuated by the fact that in 1956 I had met

an Orthodox Priest who was to have a decisive influence on my life.

I had gone to Paris to search for an old friend, Brother Robert Roberts of Cerne Abbas days, who I knew had been received into the Orthodox Church. I enquired first at the well known Cathedral of rue Daru and was directed thence to the Patriarchal Exarchate in rue Pétel. From that centre I was directed to 26 rue d'Alleray where my quest was answered. I was told I could stay there as a guest of the house until the return of the Hegumenos (Abbot), Archimandrite Denys Chambault the following Saturday.

I met Père Denis for the first time in the chancel of the old rue Pétel Russian Patriarchal Cathedral. He came in late, clad as he always was in his Benedictine habit, and though he was always unobtrusive and hidden some radiance spread from him, and out of this meeting grew a spiritual friendship which was to have a decisive influence in my life. In the days that followed we had long searching talks on the nature of the Church and his own idea that the Western part of the Church should be re-integrated into Orthodoxy. He had been engaged on this task ever since his reception into Orthodoxy in 1937, and in the post-war years he had founded a small community of monks who followed the Benedictine Rule yet were completely Orthodox in belief.

I maintained my friendship with Père Denis, staying with him and his brethren each Summer and having him as my guest in England altogether three times. He loved England, having a mother whose family was English and came from Rye in Sussex. Through Père Denis I met Metropolitan Exarch Nicholas, then in charge of all the Russian Patriarchal Parishes in Western Europe, Archbishop Basil (Krivoschein) and Père Serge (Schevich) all of whom helped me to clarify my ideas concerning the Church and see in the Orthodox Church the

continuation of the undivided Church founded by Christ. I had already been convinced of this in mind, but the practical difficulties in the way of becoming Orthodox seemed insuperable. How could I “go into the wilderness” again, renounce my Anglican position, salary and house, since this would be incumbent on me if I took this step? I could see that Orthodoxy was not a luxurious Church, far from it: poverty as a reality was evident on every hand.



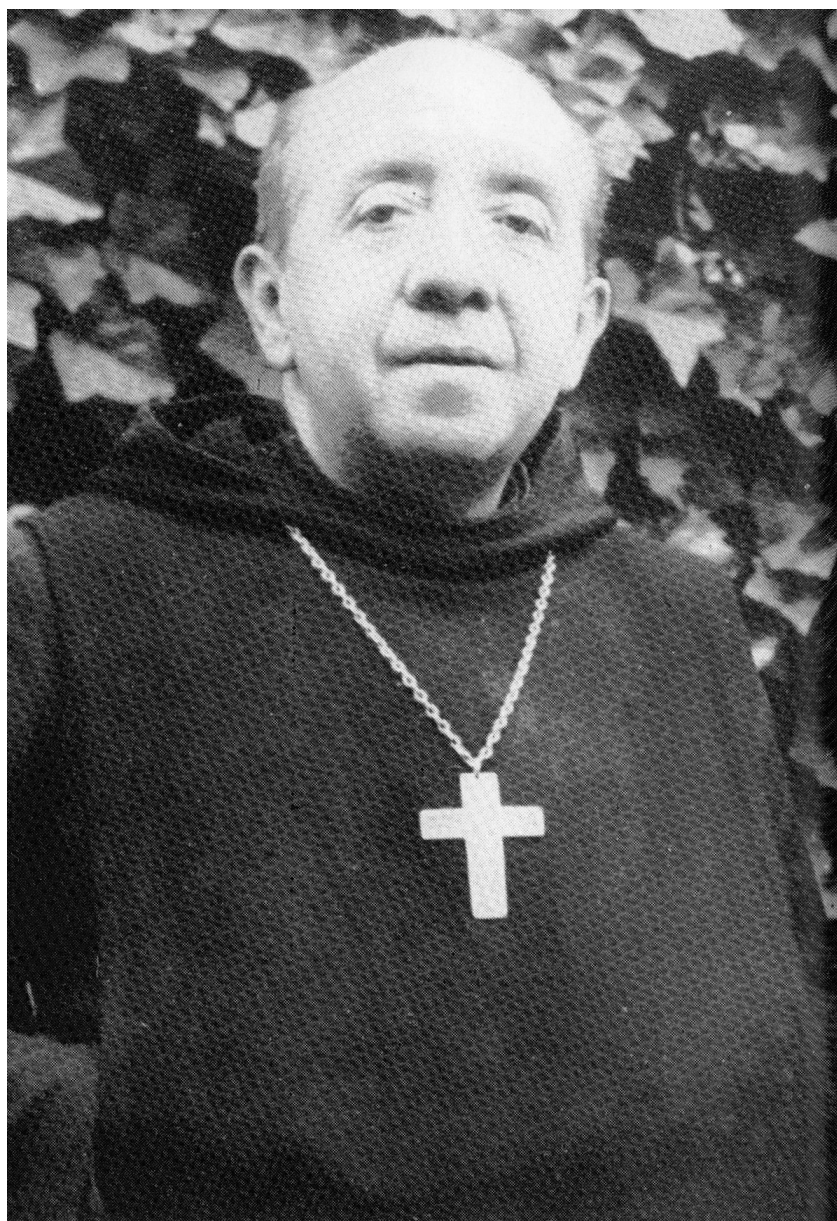
26 rue d'Alleray, Priory of St Dennis and Western Rite Church.



A Western Rite group in Italy with Bishop Alexis van der Mensbrugge.



Group of clergy of the Moscow Patriarchal Church in Western Europe, 1958.



Archimandrite Denys Chambault, 1965.



Frs George, Denys, and John, 1958.

5

Conversion

An incident occurred while I was Baldslow, which showed me that the Anglican Church was fundamentally a compromise. This incident is a small one in itself, but small things can finally tip the balance and it was so in my case. It proved that I had neither understood nor accepted the Anglican theory of comprehensiveness. I had given the pupils a copy of the Church Union's "Catechism of Christian Faith and Practice" which was an Anglican adaptation of the Roman Catholic Penny Catechism. It contained all Catholic teaching apart from articles on the Pope as infallible and supreme Head of the Church. A pupil's father saw this book and reported it to the Bishop of Chichester. He made enquiries of the nun Headmistress and told her of the distress this book caused the Protestant-minded parent. The result was that all copies were called in and teaching on certain subjects had to be soft-pedalled. Now if the Church of England had a definite doctrine such a situation could not exist. This seemed to me to be a pointer in the Orthodox direction, and in 1960 I left the school at the end of the Summer Term, resigned my post as Chaplain, wrote a letter of explanation to the Bishop, stored all my household goods and proceeded to Paris where I was received into the Orthodox Church by Archimandrite Sergius (Schevich), and later made novice in the small Benedictine Community in 26 rue d'Alleray.

Small or not it gave me the impetus I needed to resign. But Orthodoxy never having declared Anglican Orders to be absolutely null and void, treated me kindly and did not seek to humiliate me in the Roman fashion. I knew I could not be

received in my Anglican Orders and accepted the Orthodox Church's judgment in this, as Orders are derivative of the Church.

The community had passed through several severe trials and by September 1960, Père Denis was alone, so all the work of the house, Church and exterior activities devolved on me. I would recite the Benedictine office daily, and join in the Byzantine Rite services in rue Pétel and other Orthodox Churches in Paris when free to do so. In this way I acquired a knowledge of the Orthodox services in French and Slavonic, and on certain days of the week I attended lectures at the newly opened Seminary of the Three Holy Doctors at Villemoisson-sur-Orge. So began the work of transforming me at the age of forty-five, from a Western cleric into an Orthodox, a process that was sometimes humiliating, always demanding, and occasionally joyful. With Père Denis my relations were always friendly and I grew to love and respect him for his noble, courageous fidelity to his vows. He spent his days in helping the large number of *désequilibrés* who came to consult him, some of whom he exorcised of evil spirits.

I cannot say that the years I spent in France were easy. Poverty is all very well as an ideal when one knows that one is secure as one is in the ancient well founded Monasteries of the East or West, but when it is a reality and there is no guarantee of the next meal as was the case sometimes in rue d'Alleray, it has a wearying effect. We were so poor that sometimes we had no food at all and no money to buy any. When this happened we generally managed to beg a plate of chips from a friendly Greek restaurant. This situation was not so acute when I joined Père Denis in 1960 as it had been in earlier years, nevertheless we always had many deep anxieties as we had no settled source of income.

By this time Père Denis had acquired a great reputation as a healer and exorcist. He would receive clients in the parlour where he heard confessions, gave counsel, exorcising as need arose, but though some of his clients regarded him as magician, he himself was always careful to see the whole operation in the context of his priesthood. He never charged for his services but grateful clients gave him alms which enabled us to live and keep the house going. We also let rooms in the house. Archbishop Basil and Mother Katherine lived there paying rent for their rooms. These resources together with the weekly collections at Saturday's Liturgy assured the rent, rates and food, as well as subsidising the two publications we produced at rue d'Alleray, *Bulletin Orthodoxe*, and *Leaflets on Orthodoxy*. Père Denis had been a journalist for many years and was very keen on propagating the faith through the written word, and while Mlle Natasha, his able and talented Russian secretary, did the typing of articles, I did the printing on our Gestetner machine. This was a lot of work as copies were posted all over the world, and both publications have survived Père Denis' death.

I was constantly amazed at the stream of clients who visited Père Denis. This was quite unlike anything I had experienced in Britain, but when I pondered more deeply I saw that, whereas in Britain people in trouble have recourse to doctors, psychiatrists and social workers, in Orthodox and Catholic countries they turn to the priest. They found in Père Denis someone who resembled the old style of French cleric, since he never became outwardly Eastern, with beard and long hair, and he wore a Benedictine scapular over his tunic. People therefore turned to him with confidence. It was a time of change in the Church in France, and though every diocese had its official exorcist — a priest with episcopal authority to cast out evil spirits, many rejected this ministry, so they turned to a Church where there is still belief in the activity of the Devil and a means

of casting him out of souls by prayer and fasting. Père Denis did this with great reverence and had many healings to his credit. He never did it lightly and would always ask if they had recourse to their own Church's pastor first. In this way his influence was spread over many souls and some of them embraced the Orthodox faith in consequence.

This very extensive work of healing in the 50's and 60's sprang from the deeply compassionate heart of Père Denis who in the wartime years had helped his spiritual guide, Archimandrite Athanasius, to save Jews from the gas-chambers by baptizing them and giving them an antedated certificate.

Père Denis was outwardly very Western in his appearance and was intent on propagating the Western Rite in Orthodoxy with the full blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow. He became, however, totally integrated into the Russian Patriarchal Church milieu which was mainly concentrated in the XVth arrondissement of Paris. It seems that a million refugees were accepted by France after the 1917 Marxist Revolution and several thousand more came after the Second World War. Most of these refugees found a niche in the West but some returned to Russia after 1950 when they were given Soviet citizenship. However some failed to take root and became pathetic in their poverty and misery. They were usually of the class of nobles, but whatever their rank they found consolation and material help from the Russian Church. Père Denis organised relief for such people and every Christmas we went round to several houses taking gifts of food and clothing.

I was drawn to the spirit of this house of Père Denis. His attempts at bringing the West into Orthodoxy also appealed and this was one of the reasons why I applied to Paris for reception into Orthodoxy. It would not, in any case, have been easy for an Anglican cleric to be received into Orthodoxy in those days, as it would have strained the friendly relations between Orthodoxy

and Anglicanism. Canon Waddams, the foreign relations secretary at Lambeth stated the position thus; "We will not tolerate a third Catholic Church in Britain". He was content for Orthodoxy to stay as a foreign Ghetto, but not as a Church claiming authority in Britain which clashed with the Anglican Church's boast of being the Catholic Church of the land.

I must admit that being received abroad, and being blessed to continue to pray and worship in the old ways of the West eased the change which my conversion effected. Later I was to perceive the inadequacies of the Western Rite, but in those years of 1960-62 my days were so filled with work, study, visits to the needy, and the offices of the Church, that I did not analyse things deeply and tried to make progress in the spiritual life now in the fullness of Orthodoxy.

6

Memories of Père Denis

At the time of the centenary of the Oxford Movement in 1933 a series of tracts was issued under the title of "Heroes of the Catholic Revival". If the time ever comes when we commemorate the pioneers of Orthodoxy in the West, the name of Archimandrite Denis of Paris will surely figure among them. Lest he and his ideals should be entirely forgotten I feel I must record such reminiscences as I have in the hope that they may serve the cause of implanting Orthodoxy in the Western World.

Lucien Chamboult was born in Paris in 1900, his father, a journalist and amateur artist, was French, and his mother half English, whence came his knowledge of English and his connection with England. His parents had no religious belief and Lucien was, accordingly, never baptized. However, while on a visit to a practising Anglican aunt in Rye, he was taken as a boy to be baptized in Rye Parish Church. On a subsequent visit, now being 13, he was taken by this same aunt to be confirmed at Christ Church, St. Leonard's-on-Sea. So he was an Anglican while in England and unattached while in France until he searched and found the British Embassy Church and later St. George's Anglican Church. It is strange that this boy was so drawn to religion seeing that the whole atmosphere of his home was critical and hostile to religion. That something of their scepticism and irony passed to Lucien is evident from his subsequent history, because while in adult life fully committed to religion and indeed a professional clergyman, he still retained this strain of scepticism and did not hesitate to apply it when ecclesiasticism became too oppressive.

He would of course visit Catholic Churches but there was in the French Catholicism of those days an element which he found totally anti-pathetic. Not that he found Anglicanism altogether satisfactory. He records that on one Sunday he was present at a Confirmation in St. George's, Paris, in the morning, and in the Embassy Church in the evening. Though it was the same bishop who officiated, his attire and teaching were markedly different, since the setting in the morning was that of a high Church and in the evening that of the broad Church. This fact filled him with disillusion about Anglicanism. Though he toyed with the idea of becoming a clergyman, he was told that as he was French the Anglican Church could not use him.

After completing his *école primaire* he became apprenticed to the printing trade and owing to his knowledge of English found himself on the staff of the Daily Mail as their photographer. During this epoch he adapted himself to the ways and habits of the world and acquired many friends who remained true to him when they knew his parallel ecclesiastical role as well. I went with Père Denis on several occasions to the offices of the Daily Mail and noted the affectionate respect they had for him. This, however, did not help when he applied for a pension because he had not fulfilled the necessary number of years on their staff.

Though he delighted in his secular profession his real interest lay undoubtedly in religion. He was a searcher for truth, unsatisfied with the wares of Rome and Canterbury, and finally found in Louis-Charles Winnaert a spiritual guide, to whom he became an indispensable help-meet.

Fr. Winneart, born in 1880 at Dunkirk, ordained priest in 1905, was unsettled in his Catholic obedience after he had built a new church in the Parisian outskirts, and after some years of wandering, opened a place of worship in rue de Sèvres, Paris, which he called "Eglise Catholique Libre". Here it was that

Lucien Chambault became his assistant, accompanying Winnaert later on to London to receive episcopal consecration from the hands of an *episcopus vagans* named Wedgewood, then presiding over the Liberal Catholic Church.

According to Père Denis, Winnaert was very naïve, and never realised that this group had pronounced theosophical leanings. He did not speak English it is true and so was unable to understand all that was said in the various gatherings that he attended in England, Holland, and France. Later he realised where their errors lay, and breaking communion with this group renamed his Church, “Eglise Catholique Evangelique”. Here it was that Lucien received his ordination to priest’s orders and helped his bishop by celebrating daily and a full round of services at the rue de Sèvres Church each Sunday. A group soon gathered around Winnaert, some of whom were ordained by him and a few fragile centres were opened in other towns.

As the years passed Fr. Winnaert became increasingly aware of his isolation from the mainstream of Catholic Christianity. According to Père Denis he made overtures to Rome with a view to being received as a group, but Rome’s answer was that if he returned he would have to do penance and his flocks dispersed to their respective parishes. He then applied for recognition to Constantinople but their reply was equally unacceptable since it involved adopting the Byzantine rite in toto. So he turned to Moscow which had indeed blessed a Western rite in 1870 in the days of Dr. Overheck, and after some protracted negotiations he and his group were received, Winnaert as a priest (his marriage being dissolved) and all the others as laymen, and their rite subject to revision but guaranteed to remain recognisably a Western rite.

By this time, Fr. Winnaert’s health, never very robust, gave great cause for alarm. He was ill at the reception of his group in December 1936 and died soon afterwards. In view of

this Père Lucian Chambault had to be hurriedly ordained by an Orthodox bishop to ensure the continuity of sacramental life of the group. He would often refer to this period in his conversations with me, how he spoke through an interpreter to Metropolitan Eleutherios and how, in his interrogation on theological matters before ordination, he nearly always gave the wrong answer.

By 1937 a young Russian layman, Evgraph Kovalevsky, had joined the group. A man of vision, dynamism and considerable learning he also took a leading part in the group. His inclinations were towards the original historic liturgies of Paris which he had studied and revised. Père Denis was certain that they must take the rites in actual use by Western Catholics of this age, hence his own rite was a composite service with Roman, Anglican and Liberal Catholic elements in it, together with Orthodox additions e.g. the epiklesis, and without certain Roman Catholic developments such as the merits of Saints and the filioque.

It can readily be understood how, after Fr. Winnaert's death in 1937, the rift between the two leaders widened until ultimately there were two main groups, those who followed Evgraph (Mme. Winnaert, a powerful personality, was among these) and those who followed Fr. Lucien.

After some further vicissitudes at the chapel of rue de Sèvres and owing to the outbreak of war in 1939, Fr. Lucien went to live with Archimandrite Athanasius at 26, rue d'Alleray, who was then rector of the Russian Patriarchal parish in rue Pétel. Though neither spoke the other's language a great spiritual bond grew up between both of these remarkable and unusual men. Under Fr. Athanasius's guidance Fr. Lucien finally pronounced his vows as a Monk (in the Eastern profession service) and was given the name of Denis after St. Denis of Paris.

It was after this that he gathered around him a group of young men who ultimately became members of the Orthodox Benedictine community, fully recognised by Moscow, reciting the Benedictine breviary in French and wearing the traditional Benedictine habit of tunic, scapular, hood, and cowl. In all there were five men in this experimental community, Père Jean, Père Georges-Benoit, Père Timothée, Pere Etienne, and myself, but it did not last and all departed one after the other; Père Jean gave up in despair and disappeared; Père Georges-Benoit returned to the Roman Church and is today Vicaire of a parish in Paris; Père Etienne, also discouraged, left to be married, and I was transferred to the Byzantine rite in the Russian monastic community at Villemoisson in 1962.

There are many reasons for this seeming failure and here are some of them: Père Denis had no training as a theologian or as a monk of the Benedictine tradition and found the regular recital of the office one of the greatest crosses of his life; there was too diverse a collection of nationalities – French, Breton, Hungarian, Roumanian, and British, and the house was too small for a happy family life; there were no funds and sometimes no meals because the coffers were empty; the community was regarded with suspicion by both Orthodox and Catholics, the idea being too novel for acceptance in the religious climate of those days.

During the forties and fifties Père Denis gave himself entirely to Church work. He had fled to Bordeaux with other members of the Daily Mail staff, and though he could have escaped to England, he refused, and eventually made his way back to Paris where he passed all the years of the German occupation. Together with Père Athanasius he baptized Jews, giving them an antedated certificate so that they might avoid the gas-chambers. This activity on the part of Père Athanasius was eventually discovered by the Gestapo and one evening Père

Denis was arraigned before the police. He himself escaped arrest and Père Athanasius, being dead, was beyond the reach of the Germans.

When peace came to Europe there was much work to be done in rebuilding the waste places. Together with the Russian émigré clergy Père Denis worked for the re-establishment of canonical links with the Mother Church in Russia. Only a section of the Russians desired such a link, the majority under Metropolitan Eulogius preferred independence, with yet another group, by this time under Metropolitan Anastasius, preferring open hostility to the Moscow Patriarchate as traitors having betrayed the Tsarist cause by coming to terms with the Soviet Government. Yet for the last year of Metropolitan Eulogius' life union was achieved with Moscow, only to be broken when he died and replaced by Metropolitan Vladimir. This group was ultimately accepted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and after some vicissitudes is still in that canonical situation, leaving a small Patriarchal group and a small Anastasian (Synod) Group in France. Père Denis remained faithful to Moscow until the end of his days, while Père Evgraph and his Western Rite Group moved from one jurisdiction to the other, finally landing in that of Roumania, where it now remains, let us hope, peacefully and fruitfully.

One of Père Denis' most responsible activities was his work in connection with the Exarchate. He served on the Exarchal Council, made several journeys to Moscow, established links which became strong and friendly with Patriarch Alexis and Metropolitan Nicholas of Krutitsky (then foreign Minister of the Russian Church), and acted as unofficial liaison between the French Government and the Patriarchal Exarchate. He was in frequent correspondence with the Church in Russia and received regular personal greetings from Patriarch Alexis. In fact he was more highly regarded by the Russians in Russia than by

those of the emigration. Metropolitan Nicholas visited his Church at 26, rue d'Alleray officially and I was present when Metropolitan Nikodim paid him similar honours later on. Of the Russians in Exile Archbishop Basil (now of Brussels) who later had his residence in rue d'Alleray, was the only one who took a real interest in what Père Denis was trying to do. He would preside in choir at all the great feasts, though not being a liturgical scholar, his knowledge of the Western Rite was slight. Metropolitan Nicholas (Irmia) the last bishop under whom Père Denis served, was always ready to do what Père Denis required in the way of Ordinations and permissions, but the bishop having very little connection with the non-Orthodox rites preferred not to be involved in liturgical experiments.

The Western Eucharistic Rite used by Père Denis until he died in 1965 was that of Fr. Winnaert's devising, revised, corrected and 'Orthodoxised' by a group of Orthodox scholars of whom Vladimir Lossky was one. It had in it elements of the Catholic rites, some echoes of the Anglican Communion service, but certainly strong echoes of Liberal Catholic practices. To observe it outwardly it was like a Catholic Mass in French and many Catholics came to the chapel for that reason. The offices were those of the Benedictine Breviary in French, adapted and arranged and officially approved by the Holy Synod at Moscow. To produce this work Père Jean visited several Benedictine Monasteries in all of which he was well received. There thus grew up a friendship between Père Denis and several Catholic Monasteries, notably Trimadoc, the Cistercian Monastery in Brittany.

In the early fifties the offices were said regularly and Mass celebrated daily. But there was always the problem of finance, which, strange to say, was solved in a curious way, by the next great activity of this monastic community. There began to gather around Père Denis, Jean and Georges Benoit afflicted

people, unbalanced, nervous cases for the most part, to whom these three were able to afford consolation, and in cases of necessity Exorcism. Most of those who came were consoled, and some even healed, and were so grateful for this that they gave alms. No payment was ever demanded but alms, freely offered, were always gratefully accepted, for it was in this way that Père Denis and his brethren lived, paid the rent, carried on their Church activities and dispensed alms to the poor of Paris.

The regular congregation which gathered every Sunday was never very large — about fifty people altogether on the books, but it was organised as a canonical parish with a Church Council and Warden as is the Orthodox custom. Of these Père Denis himself used to say very few were Orthodox. Many came because of him and his ministry of compassion; some because the Mass was in French; others because Holy Communion was given in two kinds (by intinction); some because they did not get on with their own Catholic parish, but few from a conversion to Orthodoxy for they did not know the Orthodox parishes of Paris and had never assisted at services of the Byzantine rite.

Père Evgraph's group, on the contrary, was less Western having returned to the original sources of Western rite, that of St. Germain of Paris. It is sad that so deep a rift occurred between these two leaders. I was present when they met for the first and last time, two years before Père Denis died. Now both are within the Veil, though Père Evgraph did not attend the funeral service of Père Denis in 1965, and in a fairly recent biography of Fr. Winnaert by a member of the Père Evgraph Group, there is no mention of Père Denis by name.

Concerning his rite, Père Denis was himself dissatisfied with it, but he felt it would suffice until he died, as indeed it did. He was convinced that the Western Church was complementary to the Eastern, and though he rejected Papalism and Protestantism, he longed for the day when Western Christians would be

united with the Mother Church. To this end he started the "Bulletin Orthodoxe" in French and "Leaflets on Orthodoxy" (now "Orthodox Observer") in English. It was he who financed both of these publications until he died, and both are at present flourishing. The monastic community could be said to be still-born, but the idea of a Benedictine Community in Orthodoxy is by no means an idle dream. If responsible people could undertake this and have sufficient support there is no reason why it should not succeed. Père Denis regretted that he never learnt the Byzantine rites properly, and stated that no Orthodox should take up the Western Rites until he had mastered the Byzantine. But he remained totally against the mixing of the two traditions, maintaining that both had their place and met the deep needs of Christians. During the later years of his life when all seemed to be collapsing around him and his fellow monks were leaving, one by one, he became Job-like in his sufferings. He was not ashamed to confess his sadness, and tears often bedewed his face. Though deeply attached to Orthodoxy he was never blind to the failings of Orthodox people and ecclesiastical administration. One of his ironic remarks was: "The Orthodox will do nothing for one when one is alive, but they give one a marvellous funeral."

I first met Père Denis at the old Pètel before they pulled down the old, dilapidated buildings and put up the new block of flats, and the Russian Church of those days was in the cellar of the old building. It had an unforgettable charm of its own which only those who can remember those days will appreciate. In the course of the Vigil Service that Saturday Père Denis came in and I was presented to him. He struck me straightaway as a man of integrity, humility, humour, and deep understanding as he stood there in that very Russian Orthodox setting clad, as he was in those days, in a Benedictine habit. I never had occasion to alter my opinion of Père Denis in the years when I came to

know him better. All the above adjectives applied and many more positive qualities could be added to them. He was a very rare personality.

I saw much of Père Denis in the latter years of the fifties. He came three times to England as my guest and met a number of people who were interested in Orthodoxy. I joined his community in 1960, though by this time he had passed through deep waters which left their mark on him. One by one of the brothers left Père Georges-Benoit (Lamotte) to return to the Roman Church and eventually to become vicaire of a Parisian parish; Père Jean (Peterfabir) to disappear from view after an unsuccessful attempt to live as a hermit in the Alps; Père Etienne (Trailescu) to forsake his monastic life and diaconate to live with a lady and her child; Père Timothée (le Pape) had died in a drowning accident off Jersey in 1956; and two married priests, associates of the Community, Père Gard and Père Civel, had both died. Père Denis was really alone when I came and for two years we worked together in complete harmony. He would start to receive people about 10 a.m. and continue with a break for lunch until 7 p.m. At the end of the day he was exhausted, yet he never treated people as cases; each one was a person to be understood and if possible loved back to a positive way of life. One really saw the underworld of Paris in those days since every kind of sick person used to come, some to be healed permanently, some for a while, but all to leave the house with the knowledge that in Père Denis they had someone who really cared for them.

He was never taken in by a facade of piety and soon unmasked frauds, of which there were not a few in that milieu. With some personalities he was not popular, and it was known that he wrote letters and regularly received replies from Moscow from the Patriarch (Alexis) himself and the highest dignitaries. He visited Moscow several times and was always treated with

immense respect. Of course, while there he celebrated the Byzantine rite, and records an amusing story of their finding him a mitre as Archimandrite. He was very short in body but had a large head. No mitre would fit him except the one used for dead hierarchs as they lay in their open coffins before burial. So he wore this! He never wore a Western mitre though he retained two that formerly belonged to Monseigneur Winnaert. The keynote of his whole life was humility and a self-effacing modesty.

He was a deeply religious man, and while concerned about the right running of the Exarchate to which he belonged he was in essence against ecclesiasticism. How he would have revelled in some of the ideas which have issued from the Second Vatican Council and joined hands with those who criticize the "Structure"! But he died while Rome was just loosening its bands and he never saw the result. Though anti-papal he was by no means anti-Catholic and always said that there was a greater and more positive residue after Catholicism than after Protestantism. He loved the Anglican Church in ideal, but always said it was like an animal without a backbone.

In 1962 he sustained a fracture due to a mysterious fall in his chapel. I was present when it happened; he seemed pushed by an invisible force, lost his balance and fell heavily on a corner of the altar-step. This was the beginning of a period of ill-health culminating in his death on May 3rd, 1965. He ate very little, went out less and less and became virtually a hermit in rue d'Alleray. His *homme d'affaires*, the Greek-Roumanian Jean Haits and his wife, ministered faithfully together with certain ladies of the congregation, and his end though painful owing to inability to breathe, was peaceful. His last words were: "It is only the Gospel that matters: il n'y a que l'Evangile qui compte", and these words summed up his life. It had always been ruled by Gospel precepts and because of this he had brought consolation to innumerable souls.

He always used to say: "I have been baptized twice, confirmed twice and ordained twice", and on one occasion a witty Archimandrite said: "And you will be buried twice." It happened so, since we had the full Western form (in French) of the Requiem services and the Pannikhida of the Eastern rite. There was a crowd at his funeral and a long procession to sprinkle the coffin with holy water. The service was a true mingling of East and West, of French, Greek, and Slavonic elements and the tributes paid him were eloquent and sincere.

After his death an attempt was made to continue the parish, and various priests, some from as far as Brussels, came to supply on different Sundays in the month. It would have been better to close down with dignity since rue d'Alleray was Père Denis and no one could adequately take his place. He had left everything in his will to me, but apart from paying succession duties and taking some books and a few icons I gained nothing since I passed it over to the continuing parish. This dragged on for about two years and then closed down, all the lovely things so carefully gathered together by Père Denis being scattered to various places by the people then in charge. He was a great collector, and all the archives of the house were carefully documented. If a serious attempt is made to write the story of the Western Rite these letters and documents must be studied together with the carefully kept registers. As the house was rented it was sold later by the owner, and because of its precious memories to me I once returned. It was like returning to a tomb haunted by ghosts.

It was in this chapel that I was clothed and professed (according to the Benedictine rites, though ordained later by the normal Byzantine rite at rue Pètel), and from this chapel I saw depart the beloved earthly remains of one who was both spiritual guide and friend. His memory is cherished by many: such men are rare and therefore worthy of eternal remembrance.

Although he was not a community man, Père Denis had gone to great trouble to secure a canonical basis for his Western-rite Benedictine community, and full official authorisation for the setting up of the Priory of St Denys and Seraphim had been obtained from the Patriarch and Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate. I suppose the community persists as long as I live, though I have not done the Benedictine office since those early days in rue d'Alleray. That such a community could exist in Orthodoxy remained the firm conviction of Père Denis until the end. It might be owing to the sad confusion among the religious orders in the Roman Church since Vatican II that a monastery could now be received into Orthodoxy. I do know from painful experience how hard it is to form a community and how necessary it is to have serious people, money, a house and the full support of an enlightened hierarchy. In my years in France (and the view is confirmed since then) the Orthodox hierarchs gave the impression that the Western Rite was not serious, that the only thing that mattered was the full Byzantine Rite. But Père Denis was convinced of the opposite; that the two sides are complementary and both express the fullness of Tradition and suit the temperaments of East and West. It is the view of certain theologians such as Fr. Georges Florovsky, that Orthodox truth cannot be fully expressed except through the medium of Byzantine rites, but a contrary view was on one occasion expressed by Archbishop Basil (Krivosheine), that inasmuch as the Latin rite persisted until the Great Schism of 1054 and was regarded as quite Orthodox, being the rite indeed of the Patriarchate which was "The first among equals", there is no reason to regard the Latin rites as unorthodox. As Rome has recently changed her rites (causing great confusion thereby) a new assessment must now be made of these rites by competent Orthodox scholars. They contain an epiklesis of the Holy Spirit (before the recital of the Dominical words it is true) and are drawn from primitive

models, though it must be said that in their performance much depends on the celebrant and the result can be banal and even depressing.

I have tried to indicate some of the problems raised by the witness of Père Denis. He lived these problems without analysis and saw from experience the long road that has to be travelled before reunion between East and West can be accomplished. There are trivial ecumenists who dismiss these problems as of no account: it is by living these experiments that one can see the deep nature of our division: schism was not the result of superficial disagreements, it went to the heart of the matter, which is theology. Liturgy, for Catholic Christians, is not an adornment of Christianity, it is of its essence, because in the heart of the Liturgy he finds Christ, and it is from this heart that Christ is radiated. Any attempt to avoid grasping this nettle will finally end up in a benevolent humanism and will come to have less and less to do with Christ or the Gospel. The liturgisers par excellence are the monks, therefore their main work, the *Opus Dei* as St. Benedict rightly called it, is Prayer. If they fail here their failure is indeed total and the monastery becomes a charade. When it was proposed that services in the Roman Church should be in the 'langue vulgaire' Père Denis said that the Monasteries should go on in the classical tongue of the great Roman Patriarchate and set a standard of dignity and reverence which would inspire the pastoral clergy in their efforts to communicate the truths through the spoken language. Alas! A process of simplification has gone on to such a degree that reverence and dignity have been left behind and a familiarity has crept in which finally breeds contempt for the very things so rightly cherished by Catholic Christianity in past ages.

7

Visit to Russia

With the blessing and encouragement of Père Denis and our Archbishop, I made a journey to Moscow from Paris towards the end of 1961. This made a deep impression on me, enlarged my vision of Christendom and greatly strengthened my roots in the Orthodox Church. I append here an account of the visit which was printed in Leaflets on Orthodoxy, No 6 November 1961, a bulletin which came into being in that year and which I have continued to publish ever since:

“The liturgy of Thursday, October 12th in our chapel at 26 rue d’Alleray concluded with the recitation of the Itinerary when Archimandrite Denis commended me to God’s protection as I was about to set out on the long train journey to Moscow. It was a beautiful, sunny and warm day as we set out — a very long train which broke up en route into several portions destined for Northern European capitals. We passed through Liège, Cologne, Berlin, Warsaw, Brest and Smolensk before eventually reaching Moscow at 7pm on Saturday evening. There I was met by the interpreter with whom I drove to the hotel assigned for me during my stay. It was less cold than I expected, and the hotel, though not luxurious, was comfortable.

“The following day, Sunday, October 15th, I attended Divine Liturgy in the Epiphany Cathedral, the main Church now open in Moscow where the Patriarchal Throne is placed. The Church was packed with people, several thousands, young and old, men and women and several children. It happened that this Sunday the Patriarch of Serbia was visiting Moscow and at the close of the Liturgy the two Patriarchs, Alexis of Moscow and

German of Serbia, came outside the Iconostasis to greet one another and the people of Russia. At the end of the service I had the honour of being presented to His Holiness the Patriarch Alexis, when I conveyed to him the respectful greetings of my Superior and other clergy in Paris.



Visit of Patriarch Alexis of Moscow to London, 1966.

“On emerging from the Sanctuary I was surprised to see that the crowds in church had by no means dispersed. They were awaiting the marriage of a young theological student of St. Sergius Seminary, Zagorsk, who was being married before Holy Orders were conferred upon him.

“The two antiphonal choirs in this Church were magnificent. Their singing in harmony reminded me of the best Welsh choirs, and this applies to the choirs of all the churches I visited while in Russia.

“On Monday, October 16th after a visit of respect to Bishop Cyprian at the Patriarchate we made a tour of the

Kremlin and the Red Square. The Cathedrals of St. Basil, the Archangel, the Annunciation and the Assumption (where are buried the Czars in impressive bronze sarcophagi) are exceedingly beautiful but are now museums full of lovely ikons and frescoes, all in a very good state of preservation. In the evening I was joined by Mr. Novikov, the Churchwarden of the Orthodox parish of the Holy Trinity of Clichy who formed part of the same delegation as I did.

"Tuesday, October 17th saw us once again in the city when we visited the Tretiakoff Gallery where specimens of all the best known works of art are to be found, including many priceless ikons several centuries old, among which are the Holy Trinity of Roublev and the original of Our Lady of Vladimir.

"In the evening we went to Vespers and Matins of St. Alexis and other Holy Metropolitans of Moscow in the Cathedral of the Epiphany; again a packed Church and the two choirs. The presiding bishop was Metropolitan Pitirim assisted by Archbishop Pimen, Mgr. Cyprian and other bishops as well as several priests and deacons. The following day I had the privilege of concelebrating at the Divine Liturgy in this Church with the same clergy. Although a working day the Church was full and the service continued from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. In the evening we went to the Bolshoi Theatre to see Tchaikovsky's "Queen of Spades", a wonderful performance in an exquisite setting.

"On Thursday, October 19th we set out by car to visit the great Laura of St. Sergius at Zagorsk. Here is a Monastic building in the classic Russian style containing several separate Churches, the relics of St. Sergius and his disciple St. Micah, a holy well, the Patriarchal quarters (as the Patriarch of Moscow is Archimandrite of this monastery) a magnificently decorated Refectory, the monastic quarters, a Museum, an Academy, and a Seminary.

“The Rector, Archpriest Rujitsky, received us with charming courtesy and conducted us through the Seminary. I was particularly impressed by the number of young students and their seriousness as well as the compass of their studies which included everything necessary for the formation of an Orthodox priest. The life of a priest is always heroic if the ideal is followed: it is particularly so in countries where an atheistic government rules.

“After lunch with the Rector we saw the beautiful Museum adjoining the College, then returned to Moscow in the early evening.

“On Friday we were due to leave Moscow Airport at 10.30 am for Leningrad, but a thick mist kept us back until 6.30, so I can say I know Moscow airport very well! We landed safely at Leningrad an hour later, to be met by Mr. Ivanov who supervised our stay on behalf of Mgr. Gury, Metropolitan of Leningrad. He and later Fr. Vladimir were kindness itself to us and spared no effort or expense to make our visit agreeable. I stayed at the Hotel Europe where everything was in very good style.

“The following day, Saturday, October 20th, we paid our respects to Mgr. Gury at the Leningrad Academy, then were kindly shown round the College, the Chapel, and the Library by the Rector, Archpriest Speranskv. Here again I was impressed by the number and quality of the students and the breadth of the courses of instruction given them.

“Before lunch (at 4.30 p.m.) we visited the famous Hermitage Museum, which includes now the former Winter Palace of the Czars; like the Tretiakoff in Moscow it contains art treasures of all ages and nations arranged in a perfect setting in this beautiful palace.

“In the evening we attended evening service in three Churches, the length of Orthodox services making this possible. First we went to St. Vladimir (which contains the miraculous

ikon of Our Lady of Kazan) then to the Transfiguration; everywhere the same packed congregations and the most lovely singing.

“On Sunday I had the honour of concelebrating with Mgr. Gury in the Church of the Holy Trinity in the former monastery of St. Alexander Nevsky. Here there are two liturgies each Sunday and the big church is said to contain 10,000 people for both. His Eminence ordained a sub-deacon to the diaconate during this Liturgy at which the music was that of Tchaikovsky.

“After Mass we visited the Russian Museum, a museum dedicated to Russian artists only and housed in the Michael Palace. Then we motored into the country northwards to visit the rector of a country parish called Fox’s Nose. Here we found a charming wooden Church, a group of faithful gathered for evening service and a friendly young priest.

“Monday, October 23rd saw us again en voiture speeding, this time by road, 300 miles south-west to Pskov and the monastery beyond, Petchersk.

“We arrived at 3 p.m. and were warmly welcomed by Mgr. John, Bishop of Pskov and Archimandrite Afanasy, Prior of the Monastery. Petchersk is a proper monastery, not a college of seminary, containing about 70 monks, some old and some quite young. After dinner we visited the Churches and the caves where the monks and many famous people are buried. The sandstone is very easy to dig and we saw the coffins of two ascetics who had dug their own graves in readiness for their death. A peculiar property of the air of these caves renders the bodies immune from corruption.

“Evening service in the main monastic Church was followed by an Akathist (service of prayer and praise to Christ and the saints) to St. Michael. It seems that an Akathist to various saints is held every night and the Church, though situated in a village, is always full.

“The following day I concelebrated with Mgr. John and several priest-monks in the normal monastic Liturgy for the day. This was followed by dinner in the monks’ refectory. Then the bishop led us to the cells of three ascetics, schema-monks. These are monks who have taken the Angelic or Greater Habit and who live a life of unceasing prayer. It was a great privilege to meet these three venerable Staretz, Frs. Michael, Nicholas and Luke. They reminded me of Fr. William of Glasshampton, the Anglican Solitary whom I knew well in my youth.

“We went back on the road to Leningrad about 1 p.m. and reached the city soon after 7p.m.

“On Wednesday, October 25th Fr. Vladimir took us to see the next largest Cathedral after St. Peter’s Rome and St. Paul’s London, that of St. Isaac in Leningrad. Now a museum it is still a mute witness to the glory, beauty, and majesty of God and to the devotion of past ages in Russia. We then motored out to Tsarskoe Selo, formerly a palace of the Czar now called Pushkin and a museum. The school in which Pushkin was educated is a museum to his memory. But the great palace was badly damaged by German troops, and though many rooms here have been beautifully restored, the greater part was still closed being in process of repair. Fr. Vladimir then took us to see the enormous cemetery outside Leningrad where are buried the thousands who died during the Nazi siege of the city. A loud-speaker was playing Mozart’s Requiem as we surveyed the graves but there was no other religious sign of any sort in this cemetery.

“In the evening we attended an Akathist of St. Nicholas in St. Nicholas church, an ordinary Wednesday evening devotion. There was a vast congregation all of whom chanted the responses in harmony.

“We left Leningrad on the midnight express and arrived in Moscow at 9 a.m. The following day we visited the Soviet

Exhibition which is a permanent affair covering several acres of ground in Moscow.

“On our last day in Moscow, Sunday, October 29th, I concelebrated with Mgr. Cyprian in the Church of Our Lady Consolation of the Afflicted. In his sermon Mgr. Cyprian mentioned the Orthodox of the West, how we need the prayers of our brethren in Russia and how in turn we support them with ours.

“Monday morning saw us early at Moscow Airport which we left at 8.45. It was a nice morning and when we reached 9,000 metres altitude (and travelled at 850km per hour) it was brilliant sunshine in a blue sky. We passed over Riga, Copenhagen and Amsterdam, then owing to bad weather conditions in France were forced to return to Copenhagen and stay there two hours. It gave me time to slip in and see this beautiful capital bathed in warm Autumn sunshine. We left Copenhagen at 12.30 in brilliant sunshine, but as we approached Paris we entered thick mist. It must have been an anxious time even for our very capable Soviet pilot and his four co-pilots, however the huge machine landed safely at 2 p.m. at Le Bourget, and our adventure was over.

“It was a great and moving experience to have seen Russian ecclesiastics and lay-people and so many aspects of Church life as well as the cultural life of Russia, and our gratitude to the Patriarchate is sincere and profound. I should like to think that those of you who read this diary of our visit will sometimes pray for our fellow Christians in Russia. I know that they remember us and are grateful for the support they receive from Christians the world over. ‘Until the day break and the shadows flee away!’”

I cannot say that I was ever at ease in the weeks I spent in Russia. There was every evidence that it was a Communist atheist state, but I was impressed with the faithful believers, the lovely services, the superb choirs, and with most of the clergy

whom I met. About some of these clergy I had reserves, and as Père Denis and I had some uneasiness about the integrity of some people in the Moscow Patriarchate, my doubts were somewhat confirmed when I visited Russia. Some of the younger Bishops have been brought up in an atheist and anti-western atmosphere. It is not surprising therefore that their loyalty is to the USSR and that they are so suspicious of the West. Only those ecclesiastics who are deemed trustworthy by the State are allowed to travel abroad, and no person may achieve episcopal office in the Russian Church until his nomination has been approved of by the State.

Nevertheless, despite uneasiness, this visit to Russia was of great importance to me. I wished however that I was not there as a priest-monk of the Western rite, with Benedictine habit and shaven face and head. This was almost impossible to explain to the ordinary people or even to the clergy.

8

Transfer to the Byzantine Rite

The question of Liturgy is an important one for Catholic Christians since liturgical prayer is at the heart of the Church. I had never been entirely at home in Père Denis' Western Rite. This was the form first compiled by Monsigneur Winnaert when he had his independent body known as "Eglise Catholique Libre" in rue de Sèvres, Paris. At his reception into Orthodoxy in 1937 by the Moscow Patrairchate he was allowed to retain his Western Rite though the form of the Mass was examined, revised and corrected by a team of Orthodox theologians then living in Paris, among whom was Vladimir Lossky and Vesevelod Palaschkovsky. Nevertheless even after this the liturgy of rue d'Alleray retained certain Liberal Catholic, and Anglican elements, and the whole thing showed its composite origin — Eastern, Roman, Anglican and Liberal Catholic. Père Denis himself was not wholly satisfied with it, but having used it for so many years he could not contemplate changing it though he discussed this many times.

In the meantime there had arisen another Western rite development. Père Evgraph Kovalevsky was also a disciple of Mgr. Winnaert, but his group preferred to use the primitive rites of France, the liturgy known as St. German of Paris. This rite whose exact form cannot to-day be determined, was re-written by Père Evgraph and Père Alexis (van der Mensbrugge) though their two versions did not agree with one another. This provided a great deal of dissension since at one time there were three variants of the Western rite in vogue, that of Père Denis at rue

d'Alleray, Père Evgraph at rue Blanqui, and Mgr. Alexis (a former Benedictine Monk and founder member of Chevetogne, later received into Orthodoxy and consecrated bishop in 1960) at Villemoisson.

As for me, I felt that to enter fully into Orthodoxy, I must learn and even be steeped in the Byzantine rites. With Père Denis' blessing and that of our bishop, Metropolitan Nicholas, I was transferred to Villemoisson in 1962 and remained in this small Monastery-Seminary until my return to England in 1965. Though Père Denis felt my departure, it was in no sense a real break as I came back regularly to help Père Denis, and as his health deteriorated I deputized increasingly for him.

I shared his vision of the Western Rite but saw that the rite we used could never satisfy people for long since it bore few marks of authenticity. Also I was aware of the fact that without an inside knowledge of the authentic Byzantine rite of Orthodoxy, one could not truly appreciate the place of the Western rites alongside the Eastern.

Thus I was led then to the next phase of my development, though it was sad to leave Père Denis alone once again as our two years of co-operation and seven years of knowing one another had been pleasant and fruitful. Our life at 26 rue d'Alleray was on the whole Western in its ethos, our daily horarium, meals, language, and customs, yet it had a distinct Orthodox atmosphere too. Altogether it was a unique place, but the creation of one person who had a unique personality, and though the Exarchate sought to keep it going after Père Denis' death in 1965, the attempt failed because rue d'Alleray was Père Denis.

From 1962-1965 I had my residence in the Monastery-Seminary-Russian Home of St German and St Varlaam at Villemoisson-sur-Orge. The fact that this house through force of circumstances and poverty was obliged to fulfil three roles is

probably the reason why it did not fulfil any of them adequately. There were several ageing Monks there transferred from the old rue Pètel Church, all Russian émigrés who had been obliged to flee their homes in 1918 or afterwards. They earned a living as best they could, and became monks in the fraternity of Pètel when they were elderly. They were under the direction of Metropolitan Exarch Nicholas, a competent liturgical scholar and a great lover of the Divine Office. It was to this group that I was integrated, and prayed daily therefore with Fathers Sergius, Nicholas, Boris, Tikhon, Mitrophan, German, Benjamin, all of whom were strong characters of sturdy individuality, and whom I respected and grew to love. They were aware of the Roman Church, I suppose, as a powerful, heretical body, but had no knowledge of or interest in any other form of Christianity. To them the Orthodox Church was the Church, and though it was always undergoing attack from the Communists it would never be overthrown. Some of these monks were suspicious of converts, and one or two believed that to be truly Orthodox one must be Russian! Certainly all services were in Slavonic and there would be audible protests if any other language were heard in Church.

Some laymen and women of the Russian emigration also found lodging in the dilapidated Chateau where they were fed and warmed at very little cost because of their poverty.

The Seminary had been founded by Metropolitan-Exarch Nicholas in 1960 and was under the presidency of Bishop Alexis (van der Mensbrugge). I was a student there and also taught New Testament, Old Testament, and Latin. Our students came from America, Spain, Italy, France, and Germany. They were never numerous and the question of a common language was always a burning one. The lecturers were priests in the Exarchate who were paid for each lecture they gave. Some of the lectures were in fact excellent and gave me great insight into

Orthodoxy. But the College was not well run and its discipline was slack, otherwise it might have served a useful purpose. When Bishop Anthony (Bloom) of London succeeded Mgr. Nicholas as Exarch in 1965 the Seminary was closed, the house becoming a Russian Home for refugees subsidised by the French Government. At the time of writing (1985) the house is scheduled for demolition. The chapel was a converted barn and was very lovely. It was my privilege to daily serve as priest there during these years, and it was there that I learnt the intricacies of the Byzantine Rite.

In my free time I would go for long walks in the environs of Villemoisson, and meditate on my condition. Certainly it was a strange milieu to be in, but I saw it as a necessary phase in my evolution. I would often go to the local parish churches, and became friendly with several of the curés (Parish Priests) for whom I always had great esteem. Years earlier I had read Georges Bernanos' "Diary of a Country Priest" and saw in some of these curés the types depicted so vividly by Bernanos. I arranged a joint service during the Week of Prayer of Christian Unity (January 18th-25th) but it was with difficulty that I got the Monks to come to the local parish Church, though the Seminarists were quite willing.

It was during these years that the pressing problem of Orthodoxy was borne upon me, and the mode of its propagation in the West, — a problem still unsolved. The first groups of Russian émigrés set up Churches wherever they were able to and the services were of course in Slavonic. Their children were brought up at home in a Russian atmosphere if both parents were Russian as was the case among the early émigrés. But as they lived their lives outside the home in a French atmosphere the French language became easier for them as time went on. Nevertheless they felt at home in the solemn Slavonic services in their respective Churches. But their children, the third genera-

tion from the émigrés, if they spoke Russian at all spoke it badly and preferred French. This generation did not feel at home in the Slavonic of the Church services, yet their elders frowned on Orthodox services in French. It was my lot in France to deal with such children in the weekly Catechism at Pètel each Thursday and in the annual camps in the country. Though they were supposed to speak only Russian and were given daily classes in this language they freely spoke to one another in French and were indeed indistinguishable from the French children among whom they lived. There was also inter-marriage with Catholics or atheists (of whom there are not a few in France) with the result that their Orthodox allegiance was strained to breaking point, and they either lapsed entirely or became integrated into the Roman Catholic Church.

To counter this decline a Church was set up in Paris under the Moscow Patriarchate, largely through the efforts of the devout and learned Lossky family, where the services were all in French, and this Church is amazingly successful. Its curé at first was Fr. Michael Belsky and he was succeeded by a converted Frenchman, Père Pierre L'huillier, now Mgr. Pierre — Bishop of Chersonèse and in charge of a diocese in America. There was an authentic Orthodox atmosphere which could not be found in the Western rite churches whether of Père Denis or of Père Evgraph.

What I have outlined above concerning the difficulties of Orthodoxy in the West applies also to the Greek Exarchate whether in Europe or in America. The Greek Church conceives its mission as that addressed to the Greek diaspora and therefore regards it as a duty to do everything in church in Greek. As the Greeks are not exiled from their country but are outside it because of their work, they are free to return to Greece or Cyprus as they like. Meanwhile their Church serves as a real link with their fatherland. But their children have become English

and find services in Greek a real hardship, with the result that many lapse from Orthodoxy or grow up knowing little or nothing about their traditional faith.

Before I leave this phase of my life I would like to tell my readers of the sort of life we lived in France in those post-war years of the Russian Emigration. In the old chateau of Villemoisson, dedicated to the Saints of Northern Russia, Germanos and Varlaam, we lived as monastic a life as was possible given the mixed character of the inhabitants of the house, composed as it was of Monks, male and female Russian pensioners, seminarists, and the odd stranik (pilgrim traveller). The divine office was recited as fully as possible every day in Slavonic, beginning with the Midnight Office at 6 a.m., followed by Matins and First Hour. The little Hours of Terce and Sext were said privately in our cells, as there were lectures during the morning and late afternoon. Divine Liturgy would be celebrated on all the great feasts and on Thursdays every week. The Ninth Hour was said at 5.30 p.m., followed by Vespers, and Compline would follow immediately after supper. Msgr. Nicholas, the Metropolitan-Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate who latterly lived entirely at Villemoisson was devoted to the offices and rarely permitted any shortening whatever other duties called. He was severe in his correction of mistakes and did this in public regardless of the position of the person so corrected or the presence of lay-people. I was often so corrected and though I resented it inwardly I accepted it and in this way learnt the intricacies of the Byzantine rite. The atmosphere of the house was totally Russian, and we existed in that French village as an enclave totally apart from the native population. The monks themselves did not feel the isolation as they lived happily in their own world and were indeed immersed in a very real life of prayer. They had all passed through the fires of tribulation in Russia before their escape, had left all their possessions behind,

and had lived in Russian ghettos in France until they joined Mgr. Nicholas' community in Paris. Their memory is dear to me, and I pray for their spirit to accept life's trials with resignation holding fast to my faith in Jesus Christ.

The Russian emigration to France was a very large one, over a million people after the Revolution, but it became divided in time into three rival jurisdictions. The main body which had its headquarters in the well-known Russian Cathedral at rue Daru was under its own bishops but they refused the yoke of the Patriarchate of Moscow because of its close alignment with the Soviet Government, and were accepted under the wing of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is to this group that St. Sergius Academy in rue de Crimée belongs, also the famous and beautiful Russian Cemetery in St. Genevieve des Bois. Such names as Father Belgakov, Dr. Zander, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and Fr. John Meyerdorff are connected with this group, but Lossky and Berdiaev were of the Moscow Patriarchal jurisdiction which had its centre in the Cathedral of the Three Holy Doctors in rue Pétel. This Church had been beautifully decorated by the iconographic paintings of Fr. Gregory Krug and Leonid Ouspensky, whom it was a privilege to have known during these years.

The third group considered itself the lineal descendent of the authentic Russian Church, and as it could not acknowledge the primacy of Moscow due to its alliance with the Soviet State, it grouped itself around a Metropolitan Archbishop, at first at Karlovićy in Yugoslavia and later in New York. This group is the most conservative of all the Russian groups, bitterly opposed to Moscow, and critical, even hostile, to all the other jurisdictions because of their dalliance with ecumenism.

From the foregoing it can be seen that the Russian emigration did not present a cohesive front, and in this way was not an advertisement for the sobornost (togetherness) that is

supposed to characterise Orthodoxy. Their Orthodox faith was the same but their canonical jurisdictions were in conflict, and this did have an oppressive effect on one, as one realised how deep were the treasures of the Orthodox faith, and how hard these conflicts made it when one tried to present them to the heterodox world.

Nationalism has always been a feature of Orthodoxy because it is a collegial grouping of ethnic units in one Church, yet it has always claimed to be the one true Church founded by Christ and has sent missions to pagan peoples. It has regarded itself free to receive converts though it has never felt at ease in receiving converts from other Christian bodies lest it should be accused of propaganda, and lest it should suffer penalties from the local government, as was the case in the Turkish Empire when the penalty for baptizing a Moslem was death.

9

Family Events

I must now return to the chronicle of family events, since the succession of deaths which happened between 1949 and 1965 had a profound effect upon me. I have already referred to the death of my brother-in-law, Wilhelm Schenk on June 18th, 1949. He was in the flower of his age, being just 30 years old, had already obtained degrees at London University and been appointed lecturer in the history department at Exeter University. There were two books to his credit and a third partly written, but he was struck down by an abscess in the brain, and though a first operation at the Frenchay Brain Hospital near Bristol was successful, a second one was not a success and he died on the operating table. His sudden and unexpected death left a great void, and to his widow, mother, brother, and sister-in-law the loss seemed irreparable. But life had to go on and somehow my sister coped with the situation and brought up her daughter, Eleanor, and her son, Christopher, born four months after his father's death, in a wonderful way. This was the first death which touched us all as a family and made me try to see the sadness at the heart of things in the context of Christ's sufferings.

My father had a singularly healthy constitution, and rarely missed a day's work through illness. He was 74 when he was suddenly struck down by a coronary thrombosis, and died quite quickly and peacefully in his chair. My sister Nancy was the only person in the house that night, December 5th, 1956, my mother having gone to the Women's Institute Meeting at Aberdovey. The then Rector of Pennal, the Reverend David

Evans went there to break the sad news to her, and though she bore it bravely at the time, nevertheless the long term effect on my mother's memory and reason was very great. Though their marriage had passed through perilous passages owing to my father's fatal love of "yr hen ddiod" — drink, and a streak of irresponsibility in his nature, nevertheless there was a real bond of love between my parents, and when the separation came in so sudden and brutal a manner it certainly accelerated the end in my mother's case too. My father, despite his obvious failings, was generally liked and admired as a builder. His funeral at Pennal Church on December 8th, was the largest gathering in living memory. No one would have been more surprised at this than he himself since he was always modest and simple in his attitude.



Owen Wyn, Morwenna, Nancy, Fr. Barnabas, and parents.

My mother survived my father by four years, dying on April 1st, 1960, within a few weeks of her 82nd birthday. She lived during these years in our cottage in Pennal with my elder sister Nancy,

latterly headmistress of the Infants' School in Machynlleth. But she became increasingly confused, forgetful and muddled, and as my sister was never, even at the best of times, a patient person, things were not too happy in the house. She would go for visits to my sister [Morwenna] in Aberystwyth, and it was during one of these visits that the end came. She had been failing visibly for a long time and slowly she faded from this world into the other, finally crossing the threshold on the evening of April 1st, 1960, being buried with my father a few days later in Pennal Churchyard. In the burial ground surrounding the Parish Church of Pennal, incidentally a round churchyard showing its extreme antiquity, there is one tombstone with simply these words inscribed on it; — "Elizabetha Jones; Optima Mater". Great was my joy when having learnt Latin I was able to translate this epitaph and others in various Churches. I can apply "optima mater" to my beloved Mother, since no one could have excelled her in her devotion to us as a family.

She fed us well despite the low wages of those days; we were always well-clad, and above all she saw that we all received every opportunity of education within our means. Life had not been an easy pilgrimage for her but she left behind her a fragrant memory since all four of her children cherished the memory of a wonderful Mother.

The year 1960 saw the deaths of several members of our family — my mother's sister, Mrs. Nellie Baker: our cousin twice removed, Sarah Burton-Davies: our father's brother, Owen Burton, but little did any of us think that before 1960 was out my elder sister, Nancy, would also pass beyond the veil. She had a severe stroke on December 11th, 1960, was taken to hospital that Sunday evening, with the snow falling on the ambulance as it set out from Pennal, never recovered consciousness, and died in the evening of Sunday, December 18th. This was the very day that I was ordained Priest by Metropolitan-Exarch Nicholas in

Paris. The next day I was given permission to come to her funeral at Pennal on December 21st, which as it happened was the 21st anniversary of my ordination to the Anglican Priesthood in St. Asaph Cathedral. As she had gained a good repute as headmistress in Penrhos, Darowen, and Machynlleth, and had interested herself in various Church activities, her funeral was also well attended and included the Bishop of Bangor, the Archdeacon of Merioneth, and several other clergy. But it was a sad day for me; it meant the break-up of the family and a final severance with one's native village, since Nancy had willed the cottage and all its effects to a friend of hers, who in due course sold it, and somehow there now seemed no focus where the family could meet together.

In the Welsh Church Periodical called "Y Llan" there appeared a very just but accurate obituary of my sister written by the Bishop of Bangor, Rt. Revd. G. O. Williams. I append it here in translation...

"Sorrow has come on the vigil of the Nativity to the Bangor Diocese through the death of Miss Nancy Burton at the age of 47. She was suddenly struck with a fatal illness and died in Aberystwyth Hospital within a few days. The Funeral took place in Pennal on the feast of St. Thomas. Together with the Rector of Pennal, the Rural Dean — David Evans — the service was conducted in Church by the Archdeacon of Merioneth and the Rev. A. L. Evans Rector of Machynlleth. The Bishop officiated at the Grave together with the Rector of Penegoes and Darowen and the Vicar of Aberdovey.

"No one was more unlike the conventional picture of a religious woman than Nancy Burton. In her normal attire, trousers, shirt, tie, and sports coat, she faced the world with a poise that belonged only to herself. Fun, broad humour without poison, plain honesty in thought and speech, tremendous kindness in her dealings, these are some of her characteristics —

but not one catalogue can adequately sum up a personality so unique.

“Here are some memories of her showing her as she was. First in the Church School at Darowen where she was Headmistress before she moved to Machynlleth. I remember her especially one afternoon when she was there and she was supervising the children as they collected their own stories of the life and the work of the district. Under her direction one boy of nine had collected the number of the stock of all the farms of the district and the names of all the fields. Every child kept his own note book with his attempts at illustrating and writing poetry. Acting formed part of the daily presentation of the work before judgment was given on any performance. The children learned to speak pure and sound Welsh. Strange to say they succeeded in learning good English at the same time. It was no wonder that specialists travelled from far to Darowen to see a Welsh Country school at its best. I know of strong men in whose character remains an indelible mark of having been in Darowen School under Miss Burton. She was trained in St. Mary’s College. If there is need of proof in the value of Church Training Colleges — teachers like her are such a proof.

“Then consider the Diocesan Board of Education in Bangor, she having started early from Pennal to be there. The tendency of committees, even the most responsible, is to wander from the point in many words. She would listen astonished before breaking in pointedly to hit the nail on the head and settle the matter. She could not treat Education without remembering the Schools, nor of Schools without remembering the children, nor of children without acknowledging that each one among them was a separate personality. Her death is a heavy blow to the Education Committee and its work in the Diocese.

“But I remember her chiefly at her place faithfully every Sunday in Pennal Church. That is a church where the congregation have learnt to offer the Service together. Nancy was bred on the Prayer Book and it was clear to everyone who saw her in church how real to her was the privilege of prayer from the Prayer Book. This year she was elected Warden. The Deanery perceived her ability when she visited all the parishes at the time of the Wardens Appeal. But it was in her own parish that she was seen at her best in her unshaken faithfulness to her Duties.

“In sympathy with her Brothers and Sister, we remember especially the Rev. Ian Burton who is now a member of an Orthodox Monastery in Paris.”

+ Gwilym Bangor

The angel of Death had not yet finished his depredations in our family, and now it struck my younger brother, Owen Wyn Burton. It was also cerebral in his case, but he recovered from his first stroke, though it left him a sadly changed personality. He was at this time assistant Librarian in Ruthin, married and with two lovely girls, Helen and Catrin. As his malady increased, he developed strange quirks of behaviour and in time had to become a patient at the Mental Hospital in Denbigh, where he died in April 20th, 1967. His early death at the age of 45 had also its tragic side, since he left a young widow (Gwyneth was nine years younger than her husband) and small children, besides a host of friends. He also was very extrovert, taking a lively interest in the Ruthin Choral Society, acting as Churchwarden of the Welsh congregation of Ruthin Church, beside being very interested in his duties as Librarian. Of all the four of us, distinct individuals and characters as we all were, Wyn was probably the most easily understood and loved of all of us, and his death least easy to comprehend.

Nothing can be the same again after the death of someone one greatly loves. It either moves one into another dimen-

sion, strengthening one's faith and deepening one's religious experience or it shakes one to such a degree that one loses faith in the life to come and in time develops an agnostic or even atheistic position. Many people do not analyse the situation, but in fact many people have ceased to believe in an after-life. Yet if one reflects deeply it is death, the ultimate trauma of life, which brings us before the problem of God, and one is forced to either of two conclusions:

- a) There is nothing and nobody and we are the result of combustion or blind chance, or
- b) There is a purpose, a plan, since we come from a source of life, and shall be gathered back again to this ultimate source of our being.

In point of fact the second alternative is the more credible, since it postulates a Mystery, explains the love and compassion which lie deep in the human heart, and necessitate a compelling compassionate and loving Being as the source of man's being. If one can accept the mystery and Paradox at the heart of things one can accept life, since it is mysterious and paradoxical, and quite inexplicable in some of its phases. Thus our religious belief and mode of worship should always retain the elements of mystery and never attempt to give an answer to all life's problems. Here probably lies the appeal of Orthodoxy; it is not afraid to say that the answer to some problems lies in the hereafter and that "now we see through a glass darkly, but there face to face; now I know in part, but then also I know even as also I am known" (I Corinthians XIII. 12).

10

Return to Britain

In 1964 Metropolitan Nicholas gave me his blessing to return to Britain knowing that it was always my desire to do this. A great friend of mine Margaret Tribe D.Sc., former lecturer in Zoology at King's College London, secured the use of a flat for me at 21a, St. Matthew's Gardens, St. Leonard's-on-Sea, and early in 1964, when I had brought out from storage all my furniture, I set up a little Orthodox Chapel in one of the rooms of this flat, but as I was not permanently domiciled in England I could not have regular services here. I was still attached to the Seminary at Villemoisson but came to England in the holidays. This flat was only intended to serve as a place where I could look around for a more permanent abode.

At this time I made the acquaintance of a young English convert to Orthodoxy who later became a student at St. Sergius Seminary in Paris. He evinced the desire to become a Monk and as this was my calling he attached himself to me and came to stay occasionally in St. Leonard's where we said the offices together in the chapel of the flat. Peter Alderson came of a very wealthy family and on his mother's side it was titled, his uncle being Viscount Barrington. He offered money to buy a house at 21, Springfield Road, St. Leonard's-on-Sea, a large semi-detached house of 12 rooms with a garden, garage and loft which we transformed into a chapel. There we moved after Easter 1965 and began the regular recitation of the office. Here it was that Peter was clothed as a rasophore monk, spending his holidays in St. Elias Hermitage, (as we named the house) but in term-time continuing his studies at St. Sergius. It was not an ideal situation, and in time Brother Peter asked to be released

from his obligations as rasophore monk so as to consider marriage as a preliminary to Priesthood. I allowed him to leave though not convinced that he had no vocation to the Monastic life, and in due course he married a Russian girl in the emigration in Paris, was ordained priest in the Russian jurisdiction under Constantinople and was appointed chaplain to the Orphanage of Slavonic children at Montgèron. We remained friends and in close touch, and the money Peter gave, he generously allowed me to keep.

In September 1965 Dr. Margaret Tribe, who had for a long time been unsettled in the Anglican Church, decided to ask admission into the Orthodox Church. This was done in our chapel at 21, Springfield Road by Bishop Alexis (van der Mensbrugge), and she was afterwards clothed in the habit of a rasophore nun of the idiorhythmic form, her house at Baldslow becoming her hermitage.

(In Orthodox Monasticism there are no 'Orders' as in the West but there are two kinds of monks or nuns — the Coenobitic who belong to a community rules over by an Abbot and the Idiorhythmic who are professed to live a monastic life in the world attached to a Monastery or Monastic Spiritual father with their own rule of life. The nearest concept of this latter form in the West is the Oblate).

On November 21st, 1965 Bishop Anthony (Bloom), by this time Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate in Western Europe, came to receive Dr. Tribe's vows. This was a big step to take but done entirely voluntarily and with benefit to her soul. She used to come regularly on Saturdays from Baldslow to St. Elias Hermitage, for the Vigil Service on Saturday Evening, and, staying the night there, would leave after the Liturgy on Sunday morning. She greatly helped in financial matters and of course learnt to act as choir in the services, saying the offices on her own during the week in her Hermitage of St. John the Divine.

I must now turn to recording my visit to Bulgaria at the end of 1964 since what I saw there made a profound impression upon me. In Archimandrite Sergius (Yaziadeev) I had long had a friend by letter, and I had also met his aged mother when she came to stay at her married daughter's house in Draveil near Paris. I obtained a visa successfully, set out in December 1964 by train, travelling via Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia to Sofia, 2nd class all the way, a journey which took two days and two nights. I arrived in Sofia in the evening and I remember the intense cold and mistiness of that arrival. However my welcome was warm as I was Père Serge's guest in his home. He was attached to the Russian Church of St. Nicholas in Sofia, and was a Lecturer in New Testament at the Orthodox Academy in Sofia.

Through Fr. Sergius I met a wide variety of people and gained an insight into the difficulties of life under a Communist regime. Each day we would go to a Church for services and there was usually a meeting with somebody. Patriarch Kyril was then the supreme hierarch of Bulgaria, a learned man who spoke eight languages fluently and had written a standard history of the Bulgarian Church. I was privileged to minister in several Churches including the great Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, as well as the older and smaller one of St. Nedelia. I also paid a visit to the Academy at Sofia, to the Seminary and Monastery at Cherepush, where the kindly personality of the Principal, Bishop Tikhon made a deep impression on me.

For the vigil service of Christmas (old style calendar), Frs. Sergius, Seraphim and I went to the monastery of women at Kniazevo, where the singing and ceremonies were carried out in their fullness with great beauty and dignity. Afterwards we had a lunch in silence with the nuns (a rare privilege) and we were shown their various workrooms where they made icons and church vesture and vestments. This Monastery was very well run and had a wonderful spirit of devotion and faith in it,

though it was frequently the object of Communist attack and threatened with closure. The ruling spirit was that of the Founder and Higoumena, Mother Seraphima, previously Princess Lieven, who started the community in a flat in Sofia with the minimum of resources.

On Christmas Eve and Christmas day itself I assisted at St. Alexander Nevsky, a large church, a crowded congregation and superb choir. The singing in Bulgaria is partly in the Greek and partly in the Slavonic traditions, mainly in harmony in the big Churches, but the language of the services, as in Russia and until quite recently in Serbia, is Slavonic. All sermons are preached in Bulgarian, but when I spoke I did so in French, which was better known than English in those parts.

During my sojourn in Bulgaria, I obtained visas to cross the Danube into Roumania, and here I found the same warm welcome, being lodged in the Patriarchal Palace in Bucharest. Never was there such a marked contrast between two contiguous countries as between Roumania and Bulgaria, the former being a Western people on whom the Communist yoke seemed less heavy, and the latter a Slav people where Russian and Communist influence was very evident and grievous.

In Roumania I celebrated daily in different Churches, and as this Church observes the new style Kalendar, I celebrated Christmas and New Year before doing the same again later on my return to Sofia. The Patriarch, Justinian, was a man of iron will and determination. Not so erudite as Kyril of Bulgaria, he spoke only his native tongue, so I had to have my interpreter at hand. I came away laden with gifts for the Church which I still use with grateful remembrance of this visit. How kind the Roumanians are, what culture is theirs, and how well-attended are all their churches! I visited one large monastery where there were several monks, and realized that despite the Communist yoke there was no lack of vocations here to the monastic life or

to the priesthood. On New Year's Day the Patriarch, assisted by his senior clergy, celebrated a magnificent liturgy in the Patriarchal Cathedral in Parliament Square in Bucharest. In the evening there was a reception for all the clergy of the city (over 100), in the Patriarchal Palace. This consisted of food and drink, songs, speeches, and I was asked to speak about Orthodoxy in the West, a speech which was received with interest. It was with a real desire to return and stay longer that I left Bucharest for Sofia to complete my stay with Fr. Sergius.

As Bulgaria in those days observed the Old Style calendar, I again celebrated the feast of Christmas on January 7th. On the eve of this feast the special services of the Orthodox church consist of the Royal Hours (the 1st, 3rd, 6th and 9th Hours read solemnly, with incense, an epistle, and Gospel) Vespers, and Liturgy of St. Basil. For these services I was invited together with Fr. Sergius and Fr. Seraphim to the Convent at Kniazzevo, as I have already recorded. This was a wonderful preparation for the feast itself which I celebrated in St. Nicholas Russian Church, and St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. With these lovely memories my sojourn in Bulgaria drew to a close, and within a few days, I returned by train, breaking my journey for a week in Belgrade. Here again I was most hospitably received and stayed as guest in the Patriarchal Palace, celebrating daily in the Church within the Patriarchate, and on Sunday in the presence of the Patriarch in the Cathedral opposite the Palace.

Yugoslavia seemed to me to have a less rigorous form of Communism than that of Russia or Bulgaria, and in many ways seemed more like a Western country than the other Balkan States. I visited several churches and monasteries in the few days at my disposal and found a flourishing religious life wherever I travelled. But in all these countries the natives were very guarded in their comments, since atheism is a reality there, and the secret police no figment of the imagination. Soon I boarded

the train at Belgrade for Paris via Venice, Milan, and Basle, and what a glorious journey it was since everywhere was robed in its Winter beauty!

After a few days in Paris with Père Denis I returned to England, since by this time I had obtained a part-time teaching post in a small Preparatory School near Hastings to eke out the weekly budget. However, I had by this time become known to the Greek community in those parts, most of whom were engaged in restaurants and cafes. After our move to 21, Springfield Road, where we had a reasonably sized chapel they came with some degree of regularity and gave so generously in money and kind that I was able to keep the house going and maintain the normal monastic round there. Yet one was always conscious that it was a house in a street and that it could never become the nucleus of a religious community, so I was always on the look-out for suitable property in the country.



At 21 Springfield Road – Nicholas Paul (now Fr. Isaiah of Mt Athos), Fr. Barnabas, and Fr. Varsanuphios.

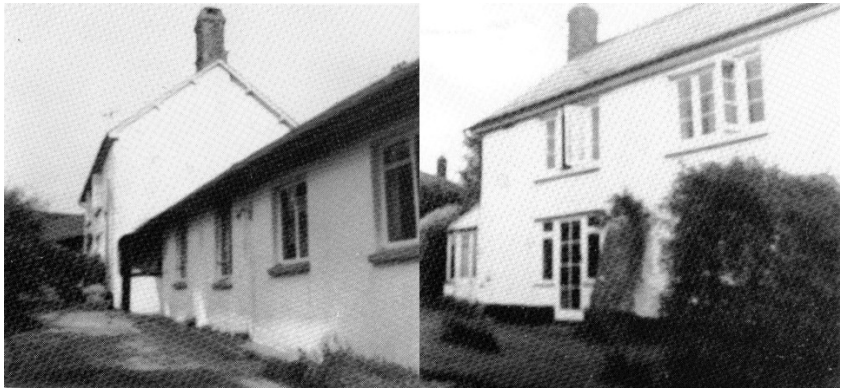
By this time I had made the acquaintance of a young married man, a convert to Orthodoxy from Tiverton, who studied theology under me by correspondence and occasionally visited the St. Leonard's Hermitage. With his help I resolved to look for something in Devonshire, and after one or two visits I found a semi-restored farmhouse and buildings in the village of Willand, near Cullompton. After some deliberation Mother Mary and I, together with Frank Ingram and Alexis Frank, who were then living with me, resolved to make this move, having received Archbishop Anthony (Bloom)'s blessing for the transfer. We left St. Leonard's on July 3 1st, 1967, saying the morning office in St. Leonard's, the little Hours en route, and the Evening office on our arrival there.



Fr Barnabas and Mother Mary at Willand

What a task lay ahead of us there! The large garden and orchard had been neglected for some time, a shed was improvised as a chapel and plans had to be approved to convert the barn into a church and the rest of the farm buildings into four cells, with two lavatories and a bathroom. All this was paid for by Mother Mary, and she had one of the cells to live in and another as a kitchen.

I cannot say looking back from this vantage point (1985) that life was easy in those days. On the contrary I found that I had made many rods for my back.



(Right) Apple Barton farmhouse as bought in 1967.

(Left) After conversion showing church and new cells in foreground.

Mother Mary had always been a feminist and opposed to male domination. Frank Ingram did not like the country, and was attracted by the externals of the faith but often declared that his belief was superficial. Alexis Frank was a lovable but unpredictable Russian. He had suffered much in life and, after wounds in the Second World War when he lost his right eye, had developed epilepsy and loved intoxicants too much. He was at

the same time a devout Orthodox believer and proud of his father the celebrated philosopher Simeon Frank. All three people were strong personalities and not easy to weld into one family. However the monastic round was instituted and the services soon began to draw many people. In a comparatively short time there was a congregation at the Sunday Liturgy, and I was asked to various places, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Non-Conformist to give sermons or talks. In this way the little monastery began to take root.

The registers of the Monastery and the Chronicle which I kept up regularly from 1967-1973 reveal a period of intense activity, the garden was brought into cultivation, the divine office was said daily with dignity and devotion, and though the small community had a bizarre appearance it soon became respected in the region and even affectionately regarded by the villagers.

The building up of a religious community of Orthodox proved to be no less difficult than that of Monastic brotherhood. A succession of men came, stayed some months, learnt the Byzantine offices, and then for one reason or another left. I felt that I was trying to make bricks without straw since, in most cases, the material I had to work on was not suitable for the purpose. I admit also that I made many mistakes, my chief mistake being to receive a person too quickly into the Orthodox Church and to clothe them in the habit soon afterwards; I now realize that for such serious steps as these a period of maturation is essential, and that having been received into Orthodoxy they should be given time to live as laymen before committing themselves to the Monastic State. In the case of some I was pleased when they asked to be released from their status as novices, but in some cases I was sorry to see them go. I was anxious to have novices so that the work could be done ade-

quately and also to ensure the continuity of the Monastery. At the same time I wondered if my own vocation were not rather to be that of a solitary, as I was, in fact, often happier alone than with others.

I remain convinced of the value of the Monastic Life in the Church, and realized that St. Elias Monastery supplied a need, since people came there from far and wide and found healing and peace in the seclusion, silence and order that prevailed there. I was anxious to keep the balance between order and informality, and somehow this seems to have been achieved. I believe it is the peculiar ethos of the Byzantine Rite which produces this quality in Orthodox Monasteries. Byzantine services are complicated, ornate, even pompous, but have their familiar and homely side as when people cross to light candles at the most solemn moments and children behave with complete nonchalance showing how at home they all are. This spirit communicates itself to a Monastic house, so there is a happy blend of the formal and informal there, yet without losing the character of a religious house. In Western Monasteries and Convents (at least until quite recently) there was always a great rigidity. Silences were divided into Solemn, when no word could be spoken, and Simple, when necessary directions might be given, but no conversation entered into. Again the enclosure was rigidly guarded, and in convents there were several with grilles separating the nuns from seculars. These developments have no parallel in the Eastern Churches, neither do we divide our houses into contemplative and active, any more than we have a multiplicity of Orders. All Orthodox monks and nuns belong to the great fraternity of monastics basing their life on the monastic and ascetical writings of the early Fathers of the Desert, and all wear the same habit, which is more or less that described by Cassian in his Conferences and Institutes.

All monks and nuns are, by virtue of their calling, set apart for the work of Prayer, the Opus Dei, the Work of God. But no Orthodox monk or nun would claim to be contemplative: the most they would say is that they hoped their prayer would develop into Contemplation through the leading of God's Holy Spirit.



Interior of the new monastery church at St. Elias at Wil-liand, (a) Holy Doors closed, and (b) Holy Doors open.

Prayer is as much a mystery as any of the Seven Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church, and there is a discipline to undergo before one can acquire it. It is intimately allied with a disci-

plined and ordered life, with spiritual reading, with a sacramental life, and is nourished on a personal level by the official prayer of the Church, known as the Liturgical office. It was always my intention to make the recitation of the Divine Office, — Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline, the framework around which the daily life of the Monastery would revolve, and this was achieved in the six years I spent in Willand. The rest of the prayer life of the monk was left to him, and though we sometimes said the Jesus Prayer in common this never replaced the Divine Office. However, the Byzantine office postulates a choir in order to be done effectively, and this is where the strain comes in when we were just two people.

Another difficulty I found in these six years in Devon was that a parish grew up around the Monastery, and this necessitated much shepherding as many lived long distances from Willand. On Sundays the 10.30 a.m. Liturgy was well attended and usually creditably sung, and at great feasts large crowds would attend and there was a meal afterwards in the Monastery. These were happy occasions and one looks back upon them with a sense of nostalgia; it was that “first fine careless rapture” which it is so difficult afterwards to recapture.

During these intensely busy years I had always in mind the desire to return to Wales sometime, and when I had a car at my disposal I would make the journey into Wales and look up some property that was for sale. Somehow I never found the right place, or if I did the price was beyond my reach.

In November 1972 a young man of Welsh origin, though not Welsh speaking, came to try his vocation to the Monastic life. He had wandered far in Eastern religions in his search for Truth having left his Methodist background a long way behind. This should of itself have given me pause, but I instructed him daily and intensively and received him into Orthodoxy and the

Monastic Life early in 1973 as Brother Philip. He showed great aptitude for prayer and was musical, and for a time the little Monastery seemed alive again. Like me he was anxious to develop the monastic life in Wales, and in March we motored in Central Wales until we came upon a farm-house for sale in Montgomeryshire. It was in a panoramic setting, Plynlimon being ahead and hills on every side, inaccessible, solitary, silent, it seemed the place indicated. I must say I had reserves concerning it, but Brother Philip was enthusiastic, and in the Auction Sale on April 28th he bid up to £11,000 and it became ours. The high price paid, £2,000 higher than I had hinted at, alarmed me greatly, but the die had been cast and negotiations with an Orthodox family were started with a view to their continuing the religious side of Willand, and a price was agreed for the transfer of the property.

I am in large measure to blame for the events which now transpired, mainly because I did not pay heed to my solicitor's sound advice. But on July 4th, 1973 I left Willand for the remote idealistic property at Tylwch near Llanidloes, travelling with Brother Philip in his mini-moke together with Brother Sergius, our furniture following in a van behind us. This strange combination of old and new was intriguing and a film was made of this journey by Harlech Television showing our departure from Willand and our arrival in Tylwch. I had left a well appointed and even beautiful property in Devonshire and had come to a much abandoned house and grounds in mid-Wales, but we all set to with a good heart, and in a short time we had set up a church in one of the barns and even put the bells up on the branches of a tree nearby.

The round of liturgical prayer was continued without a break, but because of the publicity of our move many people came to visit us here and some of these have remained friends and benefactors ever since. The site with its panoramic views

was ideal to contemplation and prayer, and in retrospect I cannot say that this relatively brief sojourn at Tylwch was a spiritual loss because many lessons were learnt by all of us there during that time.

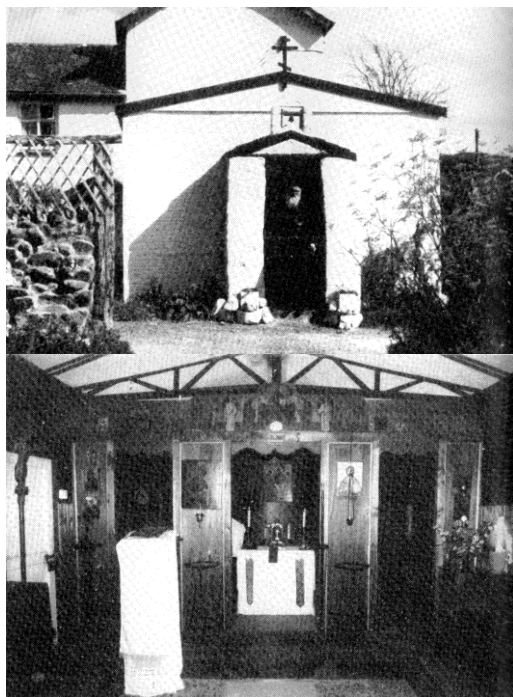
Alas! It soon became evident that the financial side was in danger, and I was obliged to consider re-selling Tylwch. This was arranged without publicity by a very sympathetic land-agent who found a buyer who gave me what I had paid for the property. Thus I was able to liquidate all my debts and release Brother Philip and Brother Sergius from their obligations as rasophore monks. The former had already indicated that he would not, in any case, be able to continue to live monastically there.

The day fixed for the closure of this house was November 7th, 1973, and it is a day I shall never forget. We had been preparing for this for some days beforehand, packing books, household goods, etc., putting all the church things apart, and then on the 7th Brother Philip took everything down the very steep hill, on which Mynachdy Sant Elias stood, in a borrowed Landrover. This involved several journeys, as the nearest point at which a furniture van could reach us was more than a mile away. However everybody worked with a will and finally the house was empty and after the last office was said Brothers Philip and Sergius appeared in civilian clothes. How different they seemed after all these arduous months in the religious habit and now back in the world. It was a sad sight to me, but one had to go through it and we left in the jeep down the steep hill, Br. Philip driving me first to the rented cottage a few miles away at New Chapel which I was to occupy from November 7th until May 24th, 1974. The two brothers then went on to the farm to return the jeep and regain the mini-moke in which they departed from Tylwch.

Being alone and, temporarily at least, not responsible for novices or parishioners, gave me an opportunity to reflect on many things. It is easier to take services when there is a congregation to minister to, but to carry on saying the Divine Office daily with the accustomed ritual and ceremonial of the Church eventually brings its own reward. I passed through periods of trial and doubt, and the temptation came occasionally to give up this way of life and seek a remunerative post. Yet despite the siren voices if one remains steadfast one has a feeling that this trial is for one's good, and that if one perseveres one will emerge the stronger for the encounter. In solitude one meets one's self and sees the ramifications of one's own being: one also meets God and feels the awfulness of His Presence: but one also meets the evil one, and he can in solitude stir up the worst side of one's nature to raise its ugly head again. This is where the value of asceticism is appreciated and the need of a strict time-table, since, if one gives way to oneself in little things, finally the whole structure begins to crumble, one's vision becomes dim and finally passes away, and "where there is no vision the people perish" as Proverbs rightly affirms.

The solicitor's persistent efforts on our behalf in regard to the Willand property produced a result which enabled me to look around for suitable property once again. Eventually I found a house in the hamlet of New Mills between Newtown and Llanfair Caereinion which was sufficiently large to accommodate others, but not too large to become a burden if I were once again alone. All the legal formalities were completed by May 24th, and on that day I moved from New Chapel to New Mills to clean the house in readiness for our furniture which was to come out of store some days later. It was a lovely evening in May when Roger (an Orthodox Schoolmaster and a Welshman) and I surveyed the scene; the orchard was all in blossom and flowers in bloom in the neglected garden. We began straight away that

evening with the recital of Vespers and Compline, and as I had the bare necessities of Orthodox Worship, we were able to have the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. When our furniture was in place it looked like home again, and it seemed as if the “winter of one’s discontent were passed.” We were most kindly received by everybody, the local clergy were well disposed, and visits began to be paid by individuals and groups. The house claims no more than to be an Orthodox Presence in Wales. It has the blessing of the Greek Archbishop — Athenagoras and his successor Methodios, and is duly credited as a monastic house in the kalendar of the Greek Archdiocese.



***The exterior and interior of St Elias
Monastery Church, New Mills.***

Life goes on in New Mills as it has done in all the places I have lived in since I was received into Orthodoxy. Each day begins with Matins, is punctuated at regular intervals by the hours of Prayer and concludes with Vespers and Compline. In between there is a variety of tasks, housework, cooking, gardening, replying to letters, receiving visitors, or visiting other places either to preach, celebrate, or lecture. I can never complain of boredom since I have always more than enough to occupy my time.

I have had several people alongside me in these past twenty years or so. Mother Mary in extreme old age had to go to a Nursing Home where she died on April 11th, 1975, and her body was brought to Manafon Churchyard to be buried. On her grave is a beautiful Orthodox Cross in oak with the words: "The Nun Mary: Memory Eternal" carved on it. Alexis Frank who lived with me in St. Leonard's and Willand died suddenly when on a visit to his brother in Munich at the age of 57 on January 9th, 1969. He was buried near his father in a cemetery in London and I took part in the Funeral service. Frank Ingram, who was with me on and off for 12 years, died suddenly at Talgarth Hospital on October 6th, 1978 at the age of 51, and was buried there after a full Orthodox service. Brother Philip, after much pondering and reading a further degree in theology at Aberystwyth, found a niche as a clergyman in the Church in Wales and became in due course a Vicar in Holyhead. Brother Sergius had to return to take care of his ailing mother in 1973, but writes and keeps up his religious observances. Roger Davies was clothed as an idiorhythmic novice-monk here on September 17th, 1976 but left for Metropolitan Anthony's diocese, finally setting up a clergy house and Church in Blaenau Ffestiniog, as Father Deiniol, while still continuing his work as teacher of religion at his school in Harlech. Others have come here and have not

stayed the pace, though all have learnt the Orthodox way of prayer from the constant reading of the divine offices in church.

I always hope that a man will turn up and so ensure the continuance of the Orthodox Presence, but monks are born not made, and if the calling is not from God no perseverance is possible. Indeed misery can accrue to both the unhappy aspirant and his fellow monks if the call is not genuine. In today's world a man needs heroic courage to embark on a monastic vocation, especially in an embryonic community in Orthodoxy where the material side is less secure than in Western monasteries. I myself have now reached an age when it is not so easy to teach others — one lacks the patience and perseverance to put up with people as the years pass and all one wants is peace and solitude.

Yet the growth of Orthodox groups, parishes, and communities, cries out for such centres as St. Elias, New Mills tries to be. Many men and women want to learn how to recite the Orthodox offices so as to be able to help in their respective parishes or deepen their lives. Orthodoxy in Britain is not static. On the contrary it is constantly receiving converts, largely from Roman or Anglican sources, but also from previous agnostics who searched and found what they sought in the Eastern Church. There is much work to be done in this field and to this end I accept invitations to give talks on radio or television in Welsh or English. All this is a clearing of the ground so that the sower may later sow good seed, but it needs great faith and patience when one sees but little sign of one's harvest.

In order to do this work I have recently had two men of my congregation ordained to Holy Orders. Alban Barter, a lawyer living at Ruthin, was made Deacon by Bishop Irenaeus at Birmingham on Sunday, June 24th, 1984, and Paul Sant, a University student from Herefordshire, was raised to the Minor Orders of Reader and Sub-deacon. The future is in their hands. If they are faithful and diligent they will help to make Orthodoxy

known and thus several groups can be formed in various parts of this country.

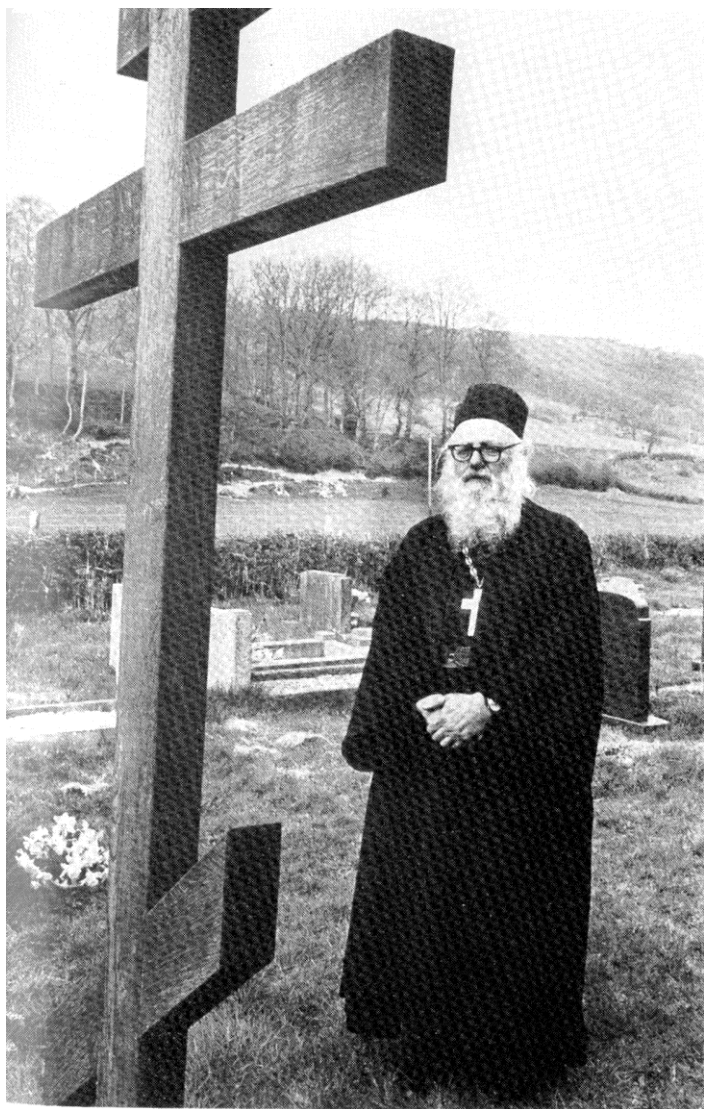
At present Orthodoxy is mainly represented by the Greek, Russian and Serbian jurisdictions, but in many cases in their churches there are converts from non-Greek or Slav backgrounds. When the number of Orthodox believers increases to a sizeable group then there will be the possibility of forming an autonomous (i.e. semi-independent) Church under the wing of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and in that event the different jurisdictions would be merged in an Orthodox Church of Great Britain. However let no one imagine that this day is at hand. There is much missionary work to be done first which can be trying and painful being full of obstacles and setbacks. Those who are converted must remain faithful holding on to the Vision of an indigenous Orthodox Church realizing that as Acts puts it: "it is through much tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom of God."



***Fr. Barnabas and Fr. Deacon
Nicanor, Paschal Night, 1970.***



A Parish group at Willand, 1971.



*At the grave of Mother Mary
in Manafon churchyard, 1977.*

11

Some Spiritual Encounters

In the setting up of a Monastery or Hermitage two opposed spiritual powers are set in motion — the heavenly and the diabolic — and the battle-ground in which these two forces exercise their combat is the heart of the hermit and the very place in which the spiritual life is passed. The Russians have a word for it — *podvig* — and this struggle is referred to over and over again in the pages of the spiritual writings such as the *Philokalia*. Like all monastic houses St. Elias has drawn many visitors and guests as the visitors' book will show. Some stayed on — most in a positive way, but some in order to undermine one's ideals and eventually to destroy the project. In time I learnt to exercise a greater degree of prudence as to whom I could accept as guests, but for some time I was greatly troubled by evil influences inside and outside the monastery.

I had always believed in maintaining contact with Christians of other denominations, and became part of the Clergy and Ministers Fraternal and the Clerical Society of the Exeter Diocese, which met at regular intervals to read the New Testament in Greek. In both of these groups I met men of the highest integrity and some of great spiritual depth. Since then several have passed 'within the Veil' but others have kept in contact with me. I was asked to preach sermons in various churches and in one case went every Lent to Lapford near Crediton to preach a Lenten course during the six years I spent in Willand. The Vicar there was a devout man named Norman Adcock whose wife was an Austrian. They were most hospitable and kept in

close touch with us during these years. He died suddenly a few years later and his widow returned to her aged mother in Austria since they had no children. The church at Lapford was a model of what an Anglo-Catholic parish could be, though Norman was troubled about the Catholic side of Anglicanism. The local Roman Catholic priest at Tiverton, Fr. Michael Reid, also proved to be a kind and helpful friend, remaining loyal to the unfolding Rome of Vatican II and therefore joining in, as far as possible, non-Roman Catholic religious activities. Since I have returned to Wales, I have not met a Clergy and Ministers Fraternal, and have never been asked to any Clergy Chapter meetings.

I often visited two convents of nuns in those days in Willand and prayed with them at their offices. The one was the Redemptoristine Convent at Chudleigh, where my young friend of Buckley days was now a nun of some years standing; the other was the Franciscan Sisters of Jesus and Mary who had a lovely house and garden at Posbury near Crediton, and a truly Franciscan welcome to everybody. Alas! Neither of these two convents has been able to attract novices, but they go on their way with faith and joy and spread peace from their respective sanctuaries.

One result of my six years sojourn in Willand was the ordination to the diaconate of three excellent men, Nicanor, Peter, and John, the later proceeding later to the priesthood and the setting up of a parish in his village of Combe Martin, drawing many people into Orthodoxy. His first Church was set up by us both in his house, but this was later enlarged and he has opened two more churches in places further afield. It was a joy to celebrate his ten years as priest on St. Thomas Sunday (Easter I) in 1984, and to see how things had grown under his patient and kindly shepherding.

As in Willand many visit St. Elias in New Mills, some drawn by its Orthodox character, some by its monastic way of life, and some because of insecurity and in search of an answer to life's problems. I cannot claim any charisma in solving people's difficulties except that I am prepared to listen, and the very chance to speak can sometimes have a healing effect. Two such persons came from the Christian Brothers' College, Hopwood Hall, a training college for teachers near Manchester. I met them first at a Conference on Spirituality organised by Fr. Conrad Pepler, at Hawkesyard, of which he was then in charge.

Brother Terence came to see me many times, so great was his interest on Orthodox angles on spirituality. Alas! He was struck by a fatal malady and died in the prime of life, mourned by a large circle of friends and former pupils. Donald McChesney was lecturer in English at Hopwood Hall and specialised in the writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins S.J. He was married with four children and a convert to Rome from Presbyterianism. He came to St. Elias many times and loved to read the offices whenever he came. In this way he gained a deep insight into Orthodox spirituality. He would also go to Buddhist centres but I warned him of the danger of this. There were many unhappy strands in his life and a crisis was reached in 1975. He telephoned to ask if he could come but alas! I had to go away and on returning his wife telephoned to say he had taken his own life. He had a brilliant analytical mind, but failed to find peace of soul though he sought it all the time. His death was a grievous blow and he has never been forgotten here in our prayers.

Alan Jones, a Baptist by upbringing, came here every term during his three years as an undergraduate at Aberystwyth University. He had become a Roman Catholic before this and looked forward to entering a contemplative order of monks, either the Cistercians or Carthusians. He was twenty-one when he took his degree and put his intentions into practice. He could

not be received by the Charterhouse in Sussex because he had not been a Catholic long enough, but he found admission in the Trappist Order at La Trappe itself. Here his original Carthusian longings came to the surface, and with his Superiors consent he moved to the Carthusian Monastery at Sélignac in central France. This took place in 1979, since when, apart from a postcard, I have no news of him apart from the occasional card from his pop-singer brother Hugh Jones. My memories of Alan, now frère David, are among the happiest of my *souvenirs du passé*. He used to stay for a few days, join in all the offices, help in the house and garden. When we talked he was amusing, full of life, and outgoing. If he is finally professed in the Carthusian order his lively personality cannot radiate among people, though it will certainly shine in God's presence. I admire his total launching into the deep of God's Mystery and love, and wished there were many more like him in Wales. Our people may not be aware of his existence, but for me he is one of our glories, and a sign that we can still produce such types as we did in the golden age of the Celtic Church, whose memorials abound in stone throughout the land.

I must add in conclusion, that if I helped these and others in any way, I also gained greatly from my contact with them. I can honestly say that the positive contacts one has made through St. Elias monastery have outweighed the negative ones, though these latter, when they occurred, brought great grief and sadness. One was consoled in the contemplation of Christ's Passion and reading the lives of the Saints, in short, seeing one's own cross in the light of Christ's, and seeing Christ's Cross in the light of His Resurrection.



Gardening at New Mills, 1983.

Postscript

I have now reached the ripe age of 69 and am within one year of man's allotted span of life on earth. Many of my contemporaries have died before reaching this age and I often apostrophize myself saying: "Why cumbereth it the ground?" since I seem to fulfil no great task, and none of my plans have begun to show signs of life. I have had people here as novices and living alongside me, but all have eventually taken their leave. Roger was clothed as an idiorhythmic novice-monk continuing his job as schoolmaster, and lived according to a Rule of prayer in the chapel-house and chapel which he had bought in Gwynfryn near Llanbedr. But being drawn more to the Slav presentation of Orthodoxy than the Greek, he was transferred to the Russian jurisdiction, and eventually professed as an idiorhythmic Monk, and ordained deacon and priest, as Father Deiniol, by Metropolitan Anthony of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1979.

At present I hold the fort here alone and I cannot say the going is easy. Byzantine services postulate a celebrant and a Reader to answer him. When there is no reader the priest has to do the whole office himself, and this means a constant coming and going between the altar and the reading desk. When one is alone this is not so difficult but when there are people present it makes it hard if not impossible to present the Byzantine way of Prayer as it should be. I am always fearful lest I present Orthodoxy unworthily, giving a false impression of its dignity and beauty, and always warn my many visitors here of the stringency forced on me by virtue of not having a Reader or choir.

My lot is very much that of the Baptist and Forerunner, John, who described himself as a "Voice crying in the Wilder-

ness”, since, as far as Orthodoxy is concerned, Wales is a wilderness. I am saddened at the gap between the very fully developed Tradition of Orthodoxy, and the prevalent Protestantism of contemporary Wales. At one time there was life in the Non-conformist bodies, and chapels were erected in every village and town, and one sees them tucked up in the folds of mountains and hills where seemingly there are no houses anywhere.

Now that age is over, and the chapels are being sold at high prices to be converted into second houses for wealthy English people. The Anglican Church is beset by problems of money and manpower to such an extent that it is forced to group parishes in undue numbers under one Vicar, putting on his shoulders a burden very heavy to be borne, and causing discouragement and disillusionment to both priest and people. The Roman Catholic Church in Wales made great progress before the War when distinguished converts joined its ranks, but since then it seemed to be in pre-Vatican II days. Our twin evils in Wales are materialism and a weariness in well-doing. The light seems to have been extinguished, the ideal displaced, and in its stead we have not atheism but a fatal agnosticism which leads finally to the waste land, the burial ground of all our hopes.

In this situation — and I do not think my diagnosis unduly pessimistic — can Orthodoxy help? It can do so if it remains true to itself, but if it waters down its claims to be the one true Church of Christ and engages in damaging ecumenical activities, it will never appeal. But if it remains intransigent then it must be content to wait a very long time for converts in the West. I believe it has a message to give, and I came to this conclusion many years ago, when I wrote the following about Mystery: “Protestants say there is no mystery; Roman Catholics explain all mysteries; Orthodoxy says all is Mystery.”

We are long past the age when scientists were dogmatic in their materialism and claimed to have all the answers. The vastness of the cosmos has revealed the littleness of man's knowledge and the existence of mystery at the heart of things. Orthodoxy has never claimed to give final answers to all life's problems. It believes in the apophatic approach, that is, the negative way to reach Truth, and refuses to go beyond the terms of reference laid down by Christ Himself and enshrined in the Gospels. The West has sought a quick and ready answer to all its problems, the Catholic West defining the Pope as infallible in faith and morals, and the Protestant West seeing the Bible as the final court of appeal. Vatican II has changed the face of Catholicism especially in regard to Papal prerogatives by emphasizing the role of the episcopate and even of the laity. The Bible has been under attack by theological scientists (I cannot call them theologians) for over a century, and can no longer be regarded as an oracle of truth except by fundamentalists. Orthodoxy does not care for the word infallible (it sounds too triumphalist) but claims that decisions regarding the faith revealed by Christ made by the Seven Oecumenical Councils when the Church was indeed one both East and West, are indefectible, and cannot but lead to the Truth. It does not claim to have a ready-made easy-answering seat of Authority comparable to the Delphic Oracle, other than the Church in its fullness, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All answers are false. This restraint itself is an answer, and perhaps the answer which we need, but it is not easily discernible by today's laity. It has to be lived rather than talked about, to be prayed rather than preached, to be listened to rather than dialogued over, and none of these processes commend themselves to modern man.

In the solitude that is mine in the desert of today, people may well ask if one is the prey of self-questioning, doubt or even despair. The answer is that in order to achieve maturity one has

to pass through these stages and maybe remain in that state for a considerable length of time. The Fathers of the Desert were well acquainted with the demon known as the noon-day devil, and St. John Cassian refers to this painful process of growth as *acedia*. A later and Western mystic, St. John of the Cross, refers to two stages in darkness: dark night of the senses and dark night of the soul. He knew all this from experience as did the Desert Fathers, and like them gives indications as to how to surmount these trials — holding on like grim death to one's vocation and ideals, working and behaving as if all were perfectly normal and the sun shining in all its strength. Newman with his characteristic felicity of expression refers to this in his immortal poem "Lead, Kindly Light". It is then a mistake to imagine a hermit's life as one long peaceful progress in the full glare of the inextinguishable light. It is truer to reality to see it as an encounter with the forces of evil both within and outside oneself, faith alone enabling one to keep going at times, especially faith in the certainty of the Resurrection after passing through Gethsemane the Garden of Sorrows, and Calvary the hill of sacrifice. One is also enabled to go on struggling because of one's belief in the Communion of Saints. In all Orthodox services there is always direct invocation of the Holy Mother of God, the Angels, and the Saints — all of these God's athletes who achieved the crown of victory after carrying for a long time, and in a severe form, the cross of suffering. The veil between us and the other world becomes increasingly thinner with the daily recital of the monastic offices, so that their help is sometimes palpable. Their icons brood over the Church and the hermitage just as their presences impregnate the atmosphere around us. This you may well call Orthodox hypnotism if you will, but I have never denied that there is such a thing as Orthodox Hypnosis. Its effect is positive and though it may produce a form of quietism in the soul, is not this better than an activism always

ready to judge, condemn, criticize, which has characterized several Christian Confessions in the past? It is a case of *per ardua ad astra*, and more than that — *per tenebras ad lumen*, through the darkness to the light, and that Light, the Uncreated Light of Tabor which receives its radiation from God the Holy Trinity.



Photo by Lewis Thomas.

Post-Postscript

When Father Barnabas moved from New Chapel to New Mills in 1974, he said to his nephew, Christopher Schenk, ‘My next move will be to New Jerusalem!’ So it was to prove. He was still based at Mynachdy Sant Elias, New Mills when he died suddenly, returning from a speaking engagement close to his birth place of Pennal, on the 14th March 1996.

He was buried in Manafon, near New Mills, beside the grave of Mother Mary. At his funeral, attended by a large congregation of Orthodox believers and sympathisers from all over Wales and further afield, as well as by several members of his extended family, his nephew said the following words:

“Everyone here today feels a sense of loss that Father Barnabas is no longer among us: some of us have also lost our Uncle Ian or our cousin. My boyhood memories are of the Reverend Ian Hamilton Burton, minor canon of St Asaph, an Anglo-Catholic clergyman who wore a cassock and a biretta and instructed me in the art of thurification in the garden of his house, a short walk from the Cathedral. But although he was an Anglican priest at that time, and had earlier for a short period been a Roman Catholic layman, there was a sense in which, spiritually, he had always been Orthodox.

“My mother remembered that when she was a young girl and her brother Ian was in his teens, he paid her a penny for assisting at the services he conducted in a chapel he had made out of a back shed. And just as he had earned that penny by working as a gardener, so he continued to make chapels out of sheds and to create and maintain gardens wherever he lived.

“He was born on September the third in Pennal, one of a remarkable family of five children. He was acutely aware that

he was the last of his generation left alive. His eldest sister Jane died in infancy. Another sister, Nancy the headmistress of Darowen, and his only brother, Wyn a librarian in Ruthin, died tragically in their forties. My own mother, Wenna, who had returned to live in Pennal after retiring from a nursery headship in Cambridge, died suddenly from a heart attack in her sixties. When, in his eighty-first year, the call came to join his brother and his sisters he was fully ready to do so.

“His family meant a lot to him. In his later years he would frequently come to stay with one or other of his relations, arriving at short notice, en route for some other destination. Despite all his protestations that he was not going to be any trouble, for the duration of his visit his family was entirely at his service. It was pointless to tell him that you had a job to do: he believed that all our contracts contained a clause stipulating that the Church comes first. He would often have an old acquaintance that he wanted to see, who lived close by – within fifty miles – and he would always know some wonderful short cut that made the journey entertaining, but much longer than it would have been by the main roads. On these visits he got to know his ten great-nephews and nieces, appointing them ‘Guardians of the Holy Stick’ so that they too could be charmed into waiting upon him at all times.

“At family gatherings there would always come a point when he would take command of the piano and the very reverend bearded archimandrite would play his way with panache through an amazing repertoire that included popular songs of the forties and fifties. Which brings me back to the minor canon of St Asaph Cathedral. Family legend has it that one Sunday evening, when he was playing the organ at Evensong, the voluntary at the end of the service was ‘Red sails in the sunset’. If the story is true it epitomises the sense of fun that was always with him, even on solemn occasions.

“So on this most solemn of occasions, we his family – both his physical family and his spiritual family – remember a deeply religious man, and we also remember that sense of fun that helped him to puncture pomposity wherever he found it.”

CHRISTOPHER SCHENK
Eynsham, England
2010.