SPIRITUAL LETTERS

Introduction by Sebastian Moore OSB

'*Spiritual Letters* was probably the single most influential book for me in my twenties, and still is.'

Archbishop Rowan Williams, *The Tablet*

ABBOT CHAPMAN

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Spiritual Letters

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John Chapman

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INTRODUCTION

Abbot Chapman had a way of praying that is wordless, and even thoughtless, a formless movement of desire. It took him twenty-five years to find a spiritual director who recognized it. At the same time, he found it in many ordinary people, to whom he wrote about it. The desire for God, which we all have whether we know it or not, is something one can experience and "exercise", either briefly or over a time set apart; and since God is "incomprehensible", this desire is a desire for nothing in particular, that can guide prayer and life alike. People who had this "propensity", as Father Baker calls it, and found no recognition of it in spiritual books, found it at last in Chapman, and "came alive".

The spiritual experts, however, were of a different mind. When the *Letters* were published, posthumously, they provoked a storm of protest in the pages of the *Tablet*, one writer finding in them all the sixty-eight "propositions" condemned by Rome as "Quietist". The controversy illustrates a fact that we still have not come to terms with: that intimacy between the finite and the infinite has a language of its own that will appear outrageous to minds that have been schooled to believe that the infinite can only be known indirectly. How odd of God to create a knowing being who would only know him through books and teachers!

And there is nothing esoteric about the language of direct access to the unknown. Nothing could be less esoteric than that of Chapman. "An act of attention to God is an act of inattention to everything else" (p. 112) or "attention to nothing in particular (which is God of course)", or the description of contemplative prayer as "an idiotic state" (p. 119). And people who have been there know it at once. Evelyn Underhill, whose study of mystical prayer is classic, says of the *Letters*, "Its writer knew more about prayer really than anyone else I've ever met; and I think most of these letters are quite splendid. He was such

a darling too – so utterly natural and free of all pious jargon and nonsense." (*The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, p. 245) Sarah Coakley, in her recently published *Powers and Submissions: spirituality, philosophy and gender*, discusses in Chapter two Abbot Chapman's "democratisation" of contemplative prayer, as not just for an elite. Of course that is what the experts didn't like about him, that he had a language for prayer independent of theirs. He once said to E. I. Watkin, "My friends call me a Buddhist!" At the deepest level, he was anticipating the Christian-Buddhist dialogue by half a century.

Indeed, that wherein Chapman towers above spiritual writers in the main is precisely his non-dependence on pious language to "tell it like it is." He is thoroughly empirical: as a young American woman said to me of the *Letters*, "At last, a technology for prayer!" An example of his unusual exactitude of description – always the mark of real greatness – is the way he describes the confused beginning of contemplative prayer. Unlike the standard version of this development, to the effect that the person is now being called to leave thinking for "loving", Chapman says, "The reason why meditation is impossible is that, when one takes to prayer, the intellect is occupied in doing something else; viz, contemplating." (p. 57). "Meditation" here, and throughout Chapman, has nothing to do with meditation as spoken of today, for instance Transcendental Meditation, or Zen. It simply means pious thinking to stir up "affections". And although the experts were clear that this was the way "beginners" had to operate, Chapman was always bumping into people who couldn't do it, but could easily recognize in themselves the kind of praying he lived by.

As a guide to praying, the Letters are superb. As a guide to living, too, Chapman is decades ahead of his time in teaching that God's will is found in everything, even in one's feelings, however disreputable. "When we realise that God is not only in every external event, but in every internal event – I mean in every involuntary feeling we have – we realise that, at every moment of our life, we are in touch with God, and His hand is

on us; we have only to be carried in His arms. Our one care must be not to jump out of them, and try to walk alone." (p. 176) I once told a person making a retreat with me that I sometimes "opened" bizarre sexual fantasies to Jesus, and when we said goodbye she told me, "that is a thing that I shall never forget."

It might be a good idea to jump in at the deep end and start with his note on contemplative prayer which he circulated in the form of a leaflet because he was always being asked for it. It is printed on p. 287. And while I am about it, I would advise caution on the letters to a Jesuit scholastic. The theology is very dated.

As of course are the *Letters*. They assume a way of "being church" that we are still learning to outgrow, with the generous assistance of the great documents of the Second Vatican Council. A Jewish philosophy teacher whom I introduced to the Letters was relieved to "meet my soul in print for the first time", though she found it hard to take the statement that "the non-Catholic does not see the miraculous in History – e.g. the dispersion and persecution of the Jews." (p. 196) To describe as a miracle perceived only by Catholics what is arguably the nearest the church has come to disqualifying herself in history, is chutzpah of a terrifying kind, reminiscent of the origianl example: a man who has killed his parents, claiming clemency as an orphan! We Christians have killed our Jewish parent, on a massive scale, throughout history. Chapman's bloomers are as big as his insights, but they do not occur in the area of prayer, where the worst damage is done. The virtual disappearance of teaching on contemplative prayer from the training of priests in the centuries following the scare over "Quietism", which Bossuet with the aid of Louis XIV (and Madame de Maintenon) persuaded Rome to condemn, has surely been a background factor to the present moral crisis in the priesthood. In this connection, David Torkington quotes Aquinas as saying that man cannot live without pleasure, and observes that to train men to celibacy and deny them access to pleasure in God is asking for trouble of the worst kind.

The datedness of the Letters only serves, of course, to emphasize by contrast their timeless witness to what is timeless and desperately needs to be recovered in this strange and confusing time.

Sebastian Moore OSB

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A MEMOIR OF ABBOT CHAPMAN

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A MEMOIR OF ABBOT CHAPMAN

BY

DOM ROGER HUDLESTON, O.S.B.

I

HENRY PALMER CHAPMAN, in religion Dom John, O.S.B., was the son of the Ven. F. R. Chapman, Archdeacon of Sudbury and Canon of Ely, and his wife, Mary Frances Bedford. He was born at Ashfield, Suffolk, on April 25, 1865, being the youngest of the family and the only boy. Put to join the lessons given to his sisters, while still almost a baby, he at once gave proof of exceptional intelligence and an astonishing memory; growing up practically bilingual, for he could not remember a time when he did not speak French almost as easily as English. As a child his delicacy of constitution occasioned anxiety, but in spite of this he was sent for a time to Dr. Hawtrey's famous Preparatory School, where he carried off practically every prize!

His father had intended that, on leaving Hawtrey's, the boy should go to Eton, but his health forbade this. Instead he remained at home from the age of fourteen, working with tutors for a few hours every day, and filling in the rest of his time by omnivorous reading, in which Art history and criticism, Architecture, Literature, and Poetry figured largely; varied by occasional dashes into Egyptology, Hebrew, Music and Sketching, with many hours of novel-reading, English, French, German, and Italian. It was, as he himself described it, "a curious

preparation for life", and it left its mark upon him to the end, thanks to his amazing memory. But he lost the one great advantage of a public-school education; viz. that process of erosion, whereby the too protuberant features of a boy's character are ground down by rubbing shoulders with some hundreds of other boys. Had he gone through the mill at Eton, Dom John would probably have emerged no less brilliant or original, but more tolerant of stupidity, more patient with those who could not keep pace with his rapidity of thought and argument, and without the tendency to overstress some notes of his personality, which jarred at times, and led some to judge him unfairly. His health improved steadily during this period, however, and, while never a strong man, he developed a physique which was equal to the exacting demands he made upon it by his life of unceasing work as monk and student.

At Michaelmas 1883 he entered at Christ Church, Oxford, but did not go into residence until the following January. A photograph taken at this date shows him as a decidedly handsome young man, with a heavy dark moustache, who evidently took considerable pains over his toilet; a conclusion borne out by a contemporary, who writes of him:—

> One remembers him endowed with social gifts which made him acceptable and welcome among men of quite different types. Highly strung, vivacious, overflowing with humour, brilliant in conversation, he was never the creature of moods; his self-control and his will being even then far more disciplined than we thought. There was much about him in his Oxford days which would have made those whose knowledge of him was only superficial smile at the thought of his ever becoming a monk. Extremely well dressed, because it never occurred to him that you could get your clothes from

any but one particular London tailor, or your boots from anyone but Peal, or wear any coat in winter except a fur one. It never occurred to him that you could play on anything but a grand piano; so a grand piano was in his rooms and in his lodgings.

That he did a considerable amount of work during his years at Oxford is proved by the fact of his taking a first in Greats; though he personally declared his success to be "more due to cleverness in essay-writing and a very quick concentration of thought, added to a real love of philosophy, than to any accurate stores of learning".

After taking his degree, in the summer of 1887, he stayed up at Oxford for another year reading Theology, in which he took a third. But the year was an important once, since in it he decided finally to take Orders in the Church of England.

Archdeacon Chapman's father had been a partner in the firm of Herries, Farquhar and Chapman, Bankers, of St. James's Street, and the original plan for Dom John had been that, on going down from Oxford, he should obtain a post in the Treasury Office, which his family influence would secure for him, or possibly a berth in the Diplomatic Service. But in 1885 the death of his mother —to whom he had been devotedly attached—turned his thoughts in more serious directions; and the influence of some Oxford friends, notably that of his tutor (the late R. L. Ottley, subsequently Regius Professor of Pastoral Theology at Oxford), had decided him.

In July 1888 he went to Cuddesdon, the Theological College near Oxford, of which Ottley was now Vice-Principal—a fact which no doubt influenced his choice—and remained there a year. He already possessed a knowledge of Catholic Theology far beyond that of the average Church of England clergyman; for, in a letter

of this date, he mentions "St. Thomas, Scotus, St. Bonaventure, Vasquez, Soto, Suarez", among the authors he has "read and analysed". The chief effect of his time at Cuddesdon, therefore, was on the spiritual side, and he began there that inner life, with its habits of prayer and regularity, which, humanly speaking, led him to the cloister, and made him essentially a contemplative, despite his diverse interests and varied activities.

In June 1889, having accepted the offer of a curacy at the parish of St. Pancras, London, he was ordained deacon at St. Paul's by Bishop Temple, and entered at once on his duties, under the Rev. H. L. Paget (subsequently Bishop of Chester), who was then Vicar of St. Pancras. Despite some misgivings as to his fitness for parish work, his strong sense of duty made him throw all his energies into it; but it proved disappointing and distasteful. The parish contained a large proportion of mean streets; the houses being let out in tenements, whose occupants changed too often to permit any real influence being brought to bear upon them. "I found the smells and the filth of the overcrowded houses appalling," he wrote; and, like many over-sensitive men, he worried constantly about the conditions under which his people lived, forgetting that they were so accustomed thereto as to be almost unconscious of what, to him, were so many petty horrors.

More serious grounds for worry were not long in appearing, for Dom John, whose reading had embraced many works of history as well as of theology, found himself involved in ever deepening difficulties as to the position of the Church of England, and the validity of High Church pretensions; of which his keenly logical mind and robust common sense—while they made it easy for him to grasp and accept the entire system of Catholic theology—became increasingly suspicious. As a preliminary to ordination he had, of course, to swear to the

XXXIX Articles, but he disliked doing so intensely, writing a day or two later: "I confess that I have still qualms of conscience, and that never in my life have I committed any action which made me feel so uncomfortable."

He seems to have been assured that work in a parish would allay his doubts by creating new interests. But long before the year he had to serve as a deacon was completed, he had become too uncertain of his position to proceed to priest's orders, and he felt obliged to tell his vicar that he thought he ought not to continue working at St. Pancras. On the latter's suggestion he spent a short holiday at Oxford; but long hours of study at the Bodleian and the Pusey House, aided by conferences with Dr. Gore and the learned Canon Bright of Christ Church, both of whom were old friends of his, brought no restoration of confidence in the Anglican position, but rather confirmed the Catholic view. Then came Trinity Sunday with the reminder that he ought properly to have been ordained priest on that day, had not his difficulties made this impossible; and a little later he left the parish for good.

Just at this date it chanced that Archdeacon Chapman had taken a lease of Hengrave Hall, Suffolk, and there Dom John spent the next few months. The beautiful old Tudor house—the seat of the Gage family, which had always remained Catholic—contained a library of Catholic books as well as a private chapel; the tenants, however, being precluded from holding services in the latter. Long hours of reading in the one and of prayer in the other brought no final decision, and eventually Dom John decided to go and spend some time quite alone, in a place where he knew nobody, and so would be free from the silent influences of home and family, which held his heart too firmly to allow his brain fair play.

In November 1890, therefore, he betook himself to Dovercourt, near Harwich, a little seaside resort quite destitute of visitors so late in the season, and there, in complete solitude, the last round of his spiritual conflict was fought. In a letter written from there to one of his greatest friends and confidants, he wrote:

> "Please pray for me, as my difficulties are a real terror and agony. I am in a great strait. People talk lightly about 'secession' as the 'easy path'. If only they knew what it feels like! And I have known it for six months almost unbearably. So pray for me—not that my path may be made easy, but that it may be plain, and that I may have the grace to walk in it by the light of the Lord."

Ten days were passed at Dovercourt in a solitude and silence that were all but absolute; the sequel can be told in his own words:

> "He had completed an intellectual and spiritual self-examination, and he could see only one course open to him. He might go on for ever reading, without getting any clearer. He had long had no belief in the Church of England. On the other hand, he saw a Church, one, historical, uninterrupted in her succession, unfaltering in her witness to truth, the Mother of the martyrs and the saints, outnumbering still all the many sects which had gone out from her. There was only one road to certainty, to intellectual satisfaction. He felt no attraction, only fear at the darkness before him. He saw the pain to his father, the division from friends, the complete change like death that threatened him. But he determined to act calmly and coldly, according to the dictates of reason, and with the help that he could count upon from prayer.

" One day more was spent in writing a few letters, the chief of which was to his father. He said that he had decided to go to London, and ask for instruction at the Oratory. He knew no priest personally. He added a list of books he had read—to show, he said, that he could not possibly have neglected any serious argument on either side. Another day passed in an attempt at some spiritual exercise. Next day he went, at last, to London."

On December 7, 1890, he was reconciled to the Catholic Church at the Oratory, by Father Kenelm Digby Best, who remained always one of his greatest friends.

No one who has not actually gone through the experience, can appreciate fully the mental suffering involved in such a severance from all that has hitherto been nearest and dearest in life, or tell the veritable agony which it entails on the soul which thus leaves everything for conscience' sake. Beside the anxiety of a leap into the unknown, and those lingering fears of Catholicism as a system which a Protestant upbringing bites into the soul as acid bites an etching into the copper, there is the cruel pain of knowing that the action, which seems an overpowering duty to him who does it, must cause the keenest suffering and bitterest disappointment to those whom, most of all, he hates to wound; with the realization that what costs the convert so dear must seem, to those he leaves, a piece of wanton folly or infatuation, almost akin to madness.

Only too often the strain is so great that those relations of love and friendship, which promised to be eternal, snap beneath the severity of the test. It speaks eloquently for both sides when, as in Dom John's case, the old affectionate relations survive between the one who has " gone over to Rome " and so large a number of those

he leaves behind him when he comes to the parting of the ways.

Among the friends Dom John had made at Cuddesdon there were two—R. P. Camm and L. B. Lasseter—who, like himself, had caught "Roman fever" but had made their submission more speedily. To both of them he wrote, at once, the news of his reception, and both replied begging him to go and see them; Brother Bede Camm from the Abbey of Maredsous, where he was now a Benedictine Novice, Mr. Lasseter from Rome, where he was completing his studies for the priesthood.

Dom John accepted both invitations, going to Maredsous for Christmas, and staying nearly three weeks there before going on to Rome, which he reached about the middle of January 1891. Soon afterwards he writes to a friend in England:

> "You must pray for me, please, as I have a great deal to decide. I hope to know clearly what is God's will concerning me before I go back—whether I shall be a Benedictine or an Oratorian or what—or whether a Trappist, or a Jesuit, in or out of disguise! However, if I pray a great deal, I am quite sure God will lead me. I am intensely happy, as you may suppose."

Three months later the decision was made, and after assisting at Lasseter's ordination on Holy Saturday, he returned to England; spending a few days at Maredsous *en route*, before entering the Jesuit Noviciate at Manresa House, Roehampton, at the end of April 1891. Eight months there made it clear both to the Novice-Master and to himself that his vocation was not to the Society of Jesus. In December, therefore, he left Manresa, having first—on the advice of his Jesuit Directors—applied to

the Abbot of Maredsous for admission to the Noviciate there. His petition being granted, the second Noviciate proved successful, and he took his simple vows a year later, on March 25, 1893; was ordained priest by special dispensation at Whitsuntide 1895, and solemnly professed at Erdington in October of that year.

The Priory of St. Thomas of Canterbury, at Erdington, was a foundation made by Benedictine monks of the Congregation of Beuron in the year 1876, at what was then a little village four miles out of Birmingham; but in the nineteen years which had elapsed only a single English subject had joined the community before the arrival of Dom Bede Camm and Dom John Chapman in 1895. In August 1896 Erdington was raised to the rank of an Abbey, and Abbot de Hemptinne of Maredsous—whom Pope Leo XIII had now appointed Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order—endeavoured to secure the nomination of Dom John as its first Abbot, despite the very short time he had spent in the monastic state. The right of appointment, however, rested with Dom Placid Wolter, the Arch-abbot of Beuron, since Erdington had been founded by that Abbey; but the influence of Abbot de Hemptinne, who had formerly been Prior of Erdington and so possessed an intimate knowledge of the place and its needs, naturally carried great weight with him. For nearly three years the matter lay in abeyance, until at length Don Ansgar Höckelmann, a monk of Beuron who had lived for some time at Erdington, was appointed in July 1899. It was natural, no doubt, for a German Arch-abbot to appoint a German monk as Abbot of a monastery founded from Germany, with a community predominantly German; but in view of later developments the decision was unfortunate. The history both of Erdington and of Downside would have been different if the advice of Abbot de Hemptinne had been followed.

In his various offices—Sub-prior, Novice-Master and Prior—Dom John threw himself into the work of the place, striving especially to build up a community of English monks, who in time might replace those borrowed from various houses of the Beuron Congregation on the Continent. The time left free from conventual and official duties, he devoted to writing, and his numerous articles in the *Revue Bénédictine*, the *Journal of Theological Studies*, etc., dealing with knotty points of Patrology or early Church history, soon gained him a recognized position in the front rank of patristic scholars, both in England and abroad.

His reputation as an authority in such studies brought him a large correspondence, which made heavy inroads upon his time; for he never failed to reply to such letters, often writing at great length to correspondents unknown to him personally, who perhaps failed to realize the labour and research that were needed to answer their questions. He looked on such work as the way in which he could best serve the Catholic cause, and never grudged the time given to it, least of all when the appeal came from one in authority, as it did when Bishop Ilsley of Birmingham begged him to "write a popular pamphlet" in answer to Bishop Gore's book *The Roman Catholic Claims;* a cheap edition of which had been issued on the occasion of the latter's translation to the new Anglican See of Birmingham.

In this instance the labour was enormous, since it involved checking references by the hundred, examining passage after passage from the early Fathers, to see that the extracts were not used unfairly when divorced from their context, etc. The "popular pamphlet" thus grew into a highly technical work of some 80,000 words, the whole being completed in a bare three months! As a reply to Dr. Gore it was overwhelming, but the

publication had the unfortunate result of labelling Dom John as a controversialist in the eyes of the public, and it was a lifelong source of chagrin to him that his other far more important writings never corrected the impression thus established. He had hoped before his death to reissue a number of his most important articles, revised and corrected in the light of subsequent study, but apart from one volume, *Studies in the Early Papacy*, issued by Messrs. Sheed and Ward in 1928, nothing of the kind was achieved, and the vast extent of his learning can only be realized by those who will go to the labour of disinterring his work from the various learned periodicals wherein it lies entombed.

It was during the Erdington period, also, that he published his two most important books, viz. *John the Presbyter* and *Notes on the Early History of the Vulgate Gospels*, both issued by the Oxford Press in the year 1908. The former attacked, and one may say disposed of, the theory propounded by Professor Harnack and other critics, that the Fourth Gospel was written, not by the Apostle St. John, but by a certain "John the Presbyter" mentioned by Papias. It is a good example of his critical methods and especially of the use of sheer common sense in dealing with too ingenious theories, which was a feature of all his work. The latter book had an effect on his subsequent career, since it was primarily responsible for his being sent to Rome to work on the Commission for the Revision of the Vulgate, which occupied him for several years after the war.

Although he had lived in England since 1895, Dom John remained a monk of Maredsous, being only "lent" to Erdington by Abbot de Hemptinne. The latter had always cherished the idea of making another Foundation in England, if possible at Oxford, a scheme which had the enthusiastic support of Dom John. Nothing was

done, however, and the idea had almost faded, when in 1909 Abbot de Hemptinne was succeeded as Abbot of Maredsous by an Irishman, Dom Columba Marmion. The unusual circumstance of a British subject being Abbot of the Belgian monastery not unnaturally revived the hopes of the English monks at Erdington, and the project of a new Foundation was taken up with energy by Dom John and others. Abbot Marmion, always more enthusiastic than practical, gave it his blessing, and a devout English layman, who had a scheme for establishing a Catholic village as a " dormitory " for Catholics working in London, volunteered to supply a site if the new Abbey would plant itself at an appropriate locality. It must be owned that the Abbot of Erdington threw cold water on the scheme, but as the new monastery was to be an offshoot of Maredsous, he could do no more than indicate the objections to it; and these were thought to be counterbalanced by the support which it was felt could be relied upon from Abbot de Hemptinne, who was still Abbot Primate, though he had resigned his post as Superior of Maredsous.

For months letters passed between the various parties interested, and in 1911 Dom John and others inspected place after place, in search of a suitable property, with a house that could serve as a nucleus for the future Abbey. Eventually a place was actually chosen, near Dorking, the purchase price was agreed upon, the devout layman was ready to co-operate, and it only remained to secure official approval by the General Chapter of the Beuron Congregation, which discussed the proposal early in the year 1912. What precisely were the reasons governing its decision was not divulged, though it can hardly have ignored the danger to Erdington of a rival Beuronese monastery established in a position so far superior to that which had now become a suburb of Birmingham. But the result

was an absolute veto of the scheme by authority, and a few weeks later Dom John was recalled to Maredsous by Abbot Marmion; he had been at Erdington almost seventeen years, the last seven of them as Claustral Prior.

He now spent nine months or so at Maredsous, or in giving retreats to various convents, planning to do some important literary work in the immediate future; but Providence had other designs for him. In February 1913 he learned of his appointment to the Commission for the Revision of the Vulgate, with the corollary that he would henceforth reside in Rome for the greater part of the year. But almost at once came the conversion of the Caldey Benedictines, and he was ordered instead to go to Caldey, as Superior, for a year at least; while Abbot Carlyle was doing his Noviciate at Maredsous. The appointment was one of no little difficulty and required all the tact and consideration Dom John possessed; since it laid on him the whole responsibility of forming the Anglican community into a Catholic one, and of substituting traditional Benedictine ideas and methods for those which had grown up and become habitual in the community during the years of its development in the Church of England. The number of *Pax* for January 1934 bears eloquent witness to his success in the duty imposed upon him, saying: "No one else could have discharged this very delicate task as he did."

His time at Caldey ended just as the world plunged into war in August 1914. There could be no question of a return to Maredsous, from which a number of the younger monks had fled to England, to be received for some months at Downside. There Dom John joined them, acting as their Professor of Theology until early in 1915, when they moved to Ireland and he was left free to take a commission as Chaplain to the Forces. He at once offered himself to the War Office, and after the

usual delays was gazetted Chaplain and instructed to proceed to Salisbury Plain to join the —th Brigade of "Kitchener's Army". The brigade in question had completed its training and was waiting for a supply of rifles and machine-guns to enable it to take the field. But the delay of a couple of months or so proved an advantage to Dom John, since it gave him time to learn the ways of the Army, and get accustomed to a Chaplain's work before going to France. At last the long-awaited rifles arrived, and later still the machine-guns. A course of musketry practice was hurried through, and at the end of July 1915 the brigade arrived in France.

Dom John was now past fifty years old, and had never been a robust man, but he went through with the job he had undertaken, sharing the dangers and hardships of life in the trenches with the 12th King's Liverpools, to which he was attached. The autumn of 1915 was wretchedly wet, and the mud and misery of trench life under the conditions then prevailing will never be forgotten by those who endured them; but in his letters he made light of the whole. In September he injured one of his knees, and this, though fortunately it did not prevent him from riding as he went about his work, made the difficulties greater than before. He carried on, however, until mid-November, when the M.O. ordered him to hospital, in the hope that a week or two of rest would cure the trouble. Instead of this, it was found necessary to invalid him home, and he remained in hospital until Christmas Eve. After a short leave he was stationed at Boyton Camp, Wilts, for several months, and then returned to France until, at the end of 1917, he was transferred to Switzerland, where a Chaplain with the gift of tongues was urgently needed for the camps of interned prisoners, who were drawn from various nations and languages. Here he remained until the Armistice.

On demobilization, in 1919, Dom John at last took up his residence in Rome, at San Calisto, and began to work on the Vulgate Commission under Cardinal Gasquet, who had secured his appointment thereto in 1913; devoting to this practically all his time and energy until the end of 1922. He was already a recognized authority on the subject, and the large collection of photographs, collations of MSS., etc., already in the hands of the Commission enabled him to bring his knowledge to a very high degree of perfection.

Although Cardinal Gasquet was President of the Commission for the Revision of the Vulgate, he left the decision on points of textual criticism to his two chief assistants, since he was not himself an expert on this highly technical subject. Unfortunately, these two authorities did not see eye to eye on a fundamental issue; viz. the best method to adopt in deciding upon the text, where the MSS. gave variant readings. In spite of prolonged discussion no agreement had been arrived at when, in the end of 1922, the newly elected Abbot of Downside, Dom Leander Ramsay, asked that Dom John might return to Downside—to which Abbey he had been affiliated in 1919—to take up the post of Claustral Prior. After some hesitation Cardinal Gasquet agreed to release him, and on Christmas Eve he was installed in his new office.

With the return to Downside in December 1922 Dom John's life enters upon its last phase. The post of Claustral Prior gave scope for the use of his learning, which ranged over an extraordinary variety of subjects, for he was always ready to help any who came to consult him, whether in theology, philosophy, classics, art or music. He would be found in the School at one time, giving a class in religious instruction to the senior boys, or playing for the youthful musicians a programme of Chopin—which he still executed

with great artistry, though perhaps a less skilful technique than in earlier years—at another time, in the monastery teaching scripture or theology or philosophy to the younger monks.

Despite all this, and the constant interruptions to which a prior is always subject, he found time to write a number of articles, many reviews of books, and in particular his last published volume, the brilliant, if sometimes too ingenious, study, *St. Benedict and the Sixth Century*, which appeared in 1929.

It did not take long for the resident *familia* at Downside to appreciate his greatness both of mind and heart, and he soon became the confidant and adviser of many in things spiritual and temporal alike. Consequently, when Abbot Ramsay died in March 1929, the community gave Dom John a supreme proof of their regard by choosing him for Abbot; a wonderful evidence of the position he had won among them since—almost a complete stranger—he had petitioned for affiliation to the Abbey, less than ten years before.

Plans for a permanent library and an additional wing to the monastery were the first things to occupy his mind. These he insisted on working out in detail himself, declaring—with characteristic exaggeration—that he had drawn many more plans in his life than any professional architect! But he allowed Sir Giles Scott a free hand in designing a new science block, which was added to the school within a year of his election; and the same artist was left untrammelled in designing the beautiful tomb over the grave of Cardinal Gasquet in the Abbey Church. The new choir-stalls, however, which are a replica of those at Chester, indicate Abbot Chapman's personal preference for purely imitative work—typical of the "Gothic Revival"—which he had acquired in his mid-Victorian youth, and retained, unaltered, to the end.

To supply the much-needed accommodation in the monastery, he had a wing of temporary cells erected on the west side of the cloister garth, and this—by the irony of fate—remains his sole addition to the monastery, since later developments led him to abandon the scheme he had elaborated so carefully for a library and permanent wing.

The plans for these had been approved and the site actually pegged out for digging the foundations when, in January 1932, he received private information that Milton Abbey, Dorset, was for sale. The news interested him enormously, since Milton was the only pre-Reformation Abbey not in ruins, which was in private hands and capable of reacquisition by the monks who had built it. Adjoining the beautiful Abbey Church was a great house, incorporating part of the former monastery, while, close at hand, was a Norman chapel, said to stand on the site of one built by Athelstane after the battle of Brunanburgh.

The offer had obvious attractions. First of all, it would secure the restoration of an ancient Benedictine Abbey to its original purpose; secondly, it would permit a "swarm" of monks being sent out as the nucleus of a new foundation which, in time, would become an independent monastery; thirdly, it would solve the much-discussed question of the Downside Junior School, by supplying new quarters for it, in a new environment, a point strongly recommended by modern educational opinion. Moreover, these three very desirable ends would be attained at smaller cost than the proposed additions at Downside.

There was, indeed, one obstacle to be surmounted; viz. the fact that a former owner had given the vicar and parishioners of Milton Abbas the right to hold services in the Abbey, with an option—which still had several years to run—of taking it over as their parish church.

But the vendor, it was stated, had arranged, at his own cost, to recompense the vicar and parishioners for the surrender of their rights, and his offer had been accepted by them. In his enthusiasm, Abbot Chapman made light of this difficulty, but from the first there were not wanting those who regarded it as insurmountable. In the end this view proved the right one. Downside withdrew from the field, and Milton Abbey passed into the ownership of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

The failure of his scheme was an acute disappointment to the Abbot, but he had become more convinced than ever that Downside ought to make a new foundation and move the Junior School to it; so the autumn and winter of 1932–33 saw him scouring the southern half of England in search of a property suited for this purpose. More than two hundred places were offered to him. Twenty-nine of these he inspected in person, and in two cases negotiations were carried almost to completion, only to break down when apparently on the eve of success. At length, in June 1933, his purpose was achieved by the purchase of the late Lord Cowdray's place at Worth, in Sussex.

Except for occasional attacks of asthma, Abbot Chapman kept his usual good health and tireless energy undiminished until the autumn of 1932, when he had an attack of influenza, insisted on getting up and resuming work before he should have done so, and caught a second bout of it. This pulled him down greatly, but he declined to abandon his house-hunting expeditions, though it was clear to those who accompanied him that the effort involved was becoming almost beyond his strength. Early in 1933 he made the long journey to Whitehaven, arrived there very unwell, and went to bed at once with a third attack of influenza, but again insisted on resuming work far too soon.

Though now obviously a sick man, he made light of his condition, only agreeing to go away for a fortnight on the Italian lakes with his sister and brother-in-law; and during this absence the negotiations for the purchase of Worth were completed. He returned for the Chapter meeting which approved the purchase and new foundation there, and at once set to work upon plans for adding a wing to the house. These he completed by the beginning of July, in spite of increasing weakness, but the effort was almost more than he could manage, and at last—when too late—he surrendered to the doctors, undergoing treatment for some weeks in a London nursing-home.

The next four months witnessed a steady decline in strength, as his illness gained upon him in spite of rest and change of scene. In October he returned to the same nursing-home for further treatment, but his strength was now unequal to the strain, and the doctors gave warning that the end was at hand. On November 6 he received the Last Sacraments while fully conscious, and sank quietly out of life twenty-four hours later. It was a strange feature of his illness that he had no pain at all throughout, only a steady increase of weakness until he died.

II

In the Preface to this volume reference has been made to Abbot Chapman's fame as a Retreat-giver, but for which it is probable that few of the letters here published would ever have been written, since many of his correspondents met him first in that capacity. His success in this sphere of work, however, was not due to oratorical skill or to charm of speech. Its source lay far deeper than such accidental features, though his remarkable clarity of exposition and originality of illustration certainly helped to hold the attention of his hearers.

I have mentioned how weak health caused the precocious boy, endowed by nature with exceptional intelligence, to be educated at home during the most impressionable years of his youth, and the long hours of solitary work and reading developed in him, at an exceptionally early age, the habit of thinking things out for himself. Consequently, when he went up to Oxford and studied philosophy for " Greats ", the need for a satisfying, logical theory of life, based upon first principles of unquestionable veracity, was felt by him with an urgency that is comparatively rare among Englishmen, who as a race are only too ready to let their mental processes remain arrested, and to be satisfied with a state of suspense which would be intolerable, say, to a Frenchman, with his characteristic clarity of mind and thought.

It was the failure to arrive at such a logical basis in regard to religion that led him out of Anglicanism into the Catholic Church. He had hoped that the lack of this, which had troubled him so much as an undergraduate,

would be satisfied during his years of training at Cuddesdon, but this was far from being the case. As he wrote during his last term there:—

"He was quite aware that he had not yet solved the problems which had placed themselves in his path. He had not even a working theory of the Church, and he felt very vague about a Rule of Faith. But he was not so much distressed as simply disappointed. He perceived that those around him had even less of foundation than he himself had, and he was in hopes that the question would gradually answer itself. Perhaps he had been premature and over-selfconfident in expecting to solve such fundamental difficulties at once.

"Yet it was a disappointment. The High Church views which he had embraced had seemed to take him by the hand and lead him into a pleasant garden of devotion, rich with the blossoms and fruit that ancient and mediæval sanctity had brought forth. Therein he had found satisfying and solid food for sanctification and had seemed to see vistas opening out before him of self-renouncing perfection and of union with God. He had confidently expected that the same school of teaching, which appeared to do so much for his soul, would equally convince his reason, and at once supply him with an intellectual explanation of life, and satisfy the yearnings of a rational nature for system, logic and consistency. At the least, he had supposed that he should find at Cuddesdon a body of teaching, distinct, certain, accepted and proved to the hilt, about the Rule of Faith, the nature of Authority and such matters. He had found in reality, not only that the students cared for none of these things—which was hardly surprising—but that their instructors had only tentative views to offer."

It was not only clear dogmatic teaching, to satisfy his intellect, that he wanted, a set of definite principles was equally necessary to discipline the soul, to rule the will, control the emotions and direct conduct; and he realised that without this his spiritual life could never achieve any real and permanent success. As he wrote a little later:—

> "Devotion, if it is to be reasonable, must be founded on what you believe, else it is only sentiment. When one has to teach and preach, one finds that one must have a stock of definite views—at least I have found it so. I know lots of men who talk any amount of vague piety, without knowing what they mean themselves, and certainly no one else knows. Not merely devotional feelings must be taken into account, but what can in practice be taught to others; and something more, Truth."

After his conversion he found what he needed in the study of Catholic theology, Dogmatic, Moral and Ascetic; the principles of which—he insisted—must be applied by the well-disposed soul in a business-like fashion, so as to avoid waste of time and energy. Further, each individual soul would require special attention and treatment, so that it might avoid practices which—however excellent in themselves, or however profitable they might be for others, or might have been for itself at an earlier period—were not only unprofitable for it here and now, but might perhaps be positively harmful. But how was the soul to decide such matters? The answer came quickly, once he was inside the fold of the Church, as he wrote some three months after his reception.

> "I am very happy to be able to begin again as a little child. One gradually gets to know how ignorant