

Rotha Mary Clay, The Medieval Hospitals of England. Methuen & Co. London, 1909.

Public Domain text transcribed and prepared "as is" for HTML and PDF by Richenda Fairhurst, historyfish.net. March 2008. No commercial permissions granted. *Text may contain errors.* (Report errors to oscar@historyfish.net)  
Higher resolution images available on Historyfish.net

## CHAPTER XI

### CARE OF THE SOUL

*“The brothers and sisters must pray continually, or be engaged in work, that the devil may not find them with nothing to do.”*

(Statues of St. Mary’s, Chichester.)

The daily life in a hospital was essentially a religious life. From warden to pauper, all were expected to pay strict attention to the faith and give themselves to devotion. The brethren and sisters serving God” were fully occupied with prayer and work. “A representation of a mediæval hospital shows the double hall, the priest is administering the last rites of the Church to one patient, the sisters are sewing up the body of another just dead, mass is being sung at the altar, a visitor is kneeling in prayer.”<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The Services

The offices consisted of mass and the canonical hours. All who could rise attended the chapel on bended knees, the bedridden worshipping simultaneously. Even sick people could join in the intercessions ; thus the master of St. John Baptist’s, Bath, agreed that the name of a late canon of Wells should be daily recited before the brethren, sisters and poor in the infirmary (1259).

(a) *The Staff*.—In regular hospitals helpers were directed to keep the canonical hours unless reasonably hindered,

--158--



ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL, CHICHESTER

[Illustration: Plate XVIII St. Mary's Chichester.]

--page not numbered--

--blank page, not numbered--

each being expected to pray according to his powers and education. The lettered repeated the *Hours* and *Psalter* of the Blessed Virgin, *Placebo* and *Dirige*, penitential psalms and litany. Those who did not know the offices said *Paternoster*, *Ave Maria*, *Gloria Patri*, and *Credo*. The brethren rose early for Mattins ; after prime and tierce, mass was celebrated ; sext and none followed. They then gave themselves to household duties, until the day closed with vespers and compline. Attendance at the night offices sometimes caused them to fall sick with the cold, on which account the brethren of St. John's, Bridgewater, asked the bishop for relief (1526). Accordingly they were allowed to hold their first service at 5 a.m. in summer and 6 a.m. in winter provided that they first rang a bell to waken travelers, workmen and others, that they might attend mass and ask God's blessing before going about their work. <sup>2</sup>

(b) *Lepers*.—When a leper was solemnly set apart, he was counseled to say devoutly every day *Paternoster*, *Ave Maria*, *Credo in Deum*, *Credo in Spiritum* ; he was to say often *Benedicite* and protect himself with the sign of the Cross. In most leper-houses inmates were required to hear mass daily and keep the canonical hours. At Dover, they were instructed not only to say their two hundred *Paternosters*, and *Aves* by day, but as many at night ; one brother roused the slumbering by ringing the dormitory bell, and the prayers were repeated sitting erect in bed. At St. James', Chichester, a similar custom was confirmed in

1408 ; the first hour after midnight, the brethren (unless too feeble) had to rise together from their cubicles and say the night office. The prayers included not only

--159--

the Creed, Lord's Prayer and Salutation, but intercessions for the Catholic Church, king and queen and benefactors ; if omitted, they must be said next day. Bishop Stratford of London, in compiling regulations for Ilford (1346) writes :—

“We also command, that the lepers omit not attendance at their church . . . unless prevented by grievous bodily infirmity : they are to preserve silence there, and hear mattins and mass throughout, if they are able ; and whilst there, to be intent on prayer and devotion, as far as their infirmity permits them.”

At Sherburn those unfit to leave their beds were to raise themselves at the sound of the bell and join in worship. Or in extreme weakness, to lie still and pray.

(c) Almsmen.—Inmates of almshouses were frequently under a solemn vow regarding religious exercise. By the oath upon admission to St. Bartholomew's, Sandwich, (Pl. XIX) each individual bound himself to

“be obedient w<sup>t</sup> hooly deuocyon praying for the founder of this place . . . and in especial I shall be at the bedys [bedes] (sic) in the churche, and at matynys, and ate messe, and euensong and complyne, as the custome of maner is and usage—so help me God, and all holy dome, and all seints of heuen.”

The offices were sometimes grouped into morning and evening worship. Potyn directed that his almsmen at Rochester should say at a certain hour morning and evening “our ladie sawter.” As this Psalter of the Blessed Virgin was the standard form of worship for the unlettered, a knowledge of it was required before admission to a hospital. At Heytesbury, the examination was conducted after entrance :—“and if he cannot perfitely, we wull that he be charged to cunne [learn] (sic) sey

--160--



ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL, SANDWICH  
 (a) CHAPEL. (b) GATEWAY

[Illustration: Plate XIX St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Sandwich.]

y<sup>e</sup> said Sawter, his Pater Noster, Ave and Credo, as well as he canne." The keeper was to teach the ignorant, and if he were still found defective in repetition, penance was prescribed until his knowledge were amended.

"We wull also that euerich of y<sup>e</sup> poremen other tymes of y<sup>e</sup> day when they may beste entende and have feyser, sey for y<sup>e</sup> state and all y<sup>e</sup> sowlis abovesaide, iij sawters of y<sup>e</sup> most glorious Virgyne Mary. Every sawter iii times, 50 aues, with xv paternosters & iii credes . . . And furthermore, that thei say euery day onys our Lady Sawter for all Christen soulis."

After supper when the household attended chapel, all that could joined in De Profundis “with y<sup>e</sup> versicles and orisons accustomed to be said for dede men.” At the close a bedeman said openly in English the bidding prayer.

The almsmen of Ewelme after a private prayer by their bedside, attended mattins and prime soon after 6 a.m., went at 9 a.m. to mass, at 2 p.m. to bedes [probably a service where the penitent prayed for and on behalf of others], at 3 p.m. to evensong and compline. About 6 o’clock the final bidding prayer was said around the founder’s tombs :—

“God have mercy of the sowle of the noble prince Kyng Harry the Sext and of the sowles of my lord William sum tyme Duke of Suffolke, and my lady Alice Duchesse of Suffolke his wyfe, oure fyrst fownders, and of theyr fadyr and modyr sowles & all cristen sowles.”

The ministry of intercession was fostered in hospital chapels. A collect, breathing humble and trustful petitions, was drawn up by Wynard, Recorder of Exeter, who built God’s House in that city :—

“O Lord Jesu Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy upon Thy servant William founder of this place, as Thou wilt and as Thou knowest best ; bestow upon him strong hope,”

--161--

right faith and unshadowed love, and grant him a good end, which is a gift above all others. Amen.”

The bidding prayer directed for the use of almsmen at Lichfield included petitions for the founder and for the royal family :—

“O God, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, pourest the gifts of charity into the hearts of the faithful, grant to Thy servant William the bishop, our founder, and grant to Thy servants and to Thy handmaids, for whom we implore Thy clemency, health of mind and of body ; that they may love Thee with all their strength, and with all joyfulness perform such thing as please Thee, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

The pious custom of remembering benefactors is continued at Lambourn. The little almshouse was founded in 1501 by John Isbury, who is buried in the adjoining church. Every morning at 8, the senior almsman repeats the prayer for the soul of the founder, after which the pensioners attend mattins. The vicar recently recovered a part of the original prayer (in brass) from off the tomb.

## 2. The Chapel

The life of the community centred in the chapel. Of the chaplains at St. John's, Chester, two served in the church and "the third in the chapel before the poor and feeble sustained in the said hospital." There were three chapels in St. Leonard's, York (Pl. XXV), including "St. Katherine in the sick hospital" and "St. Michael in the infirmary." Henry III was present at the dedication of the Maison Dieu, Dover,<sup>3</sup> and again long afterwards when an altar was consecrated to St. Edmund by Richard

--162--

of Chichester. Every hospital had one or more altars. Portable super-altars were occasionally kept, there being probably used with the infirmary did not adjoin the chapel.

In order to gain an idea of the external side of worship, some account of the accessories of a chapel, such as lights, decoration and ornaments, must be given. Lights were kept burning day and night before the altar. For this purpose oil lamps with rush wicks, and wax tapers were required. The two Sandwich hospitals obtained their supply of tapers thus. When the mayor and townsmen came in procession to St. Bartholomew's on the patronal festival, many bore wax lights which they left in the chapel for use during the year. St. John's hospital, not being equally favoured, arranged otherwise, for the inmates agreed that if any one reviled another with vicious language, brawling in ungodly fashion, he would pay four lb. of wax to the light of the church. The altar expenses at Holy Trinity, Bristol, included payments for standards, candlesticks and lamps. The wax-maker received 5s. 19d. for ten lb. of new wax for the Sepulchre light, and 8½d. for a "wachyng tapir for the Sepulcre" (1512.)<sup>4</sup>

The chapel was adorned with paintings and carvings. The figure of St. Giles now preserved in Lincoln Cathedral was brought there from the hospital of that name. When St. Mary Magdalene's chapel, Durham, was being rebuilt, the sum of 15s. 1d. was paid for painting an image of the patron-saint. Alabaster heads of the Baptist were kept at St. John's, Exeter, and Ewelme. The inventory and valuation of Holy Trinity, Beverley,

--163--

enable one to picture the appearance of the sanctuary. The ornaments included an alabaster representation of the Trinity with painted wooden tabernacle, a well-carved and gilded image of the Blessed Virgin and Child (worth 40s.) with sundry small pictures and crucifixes.

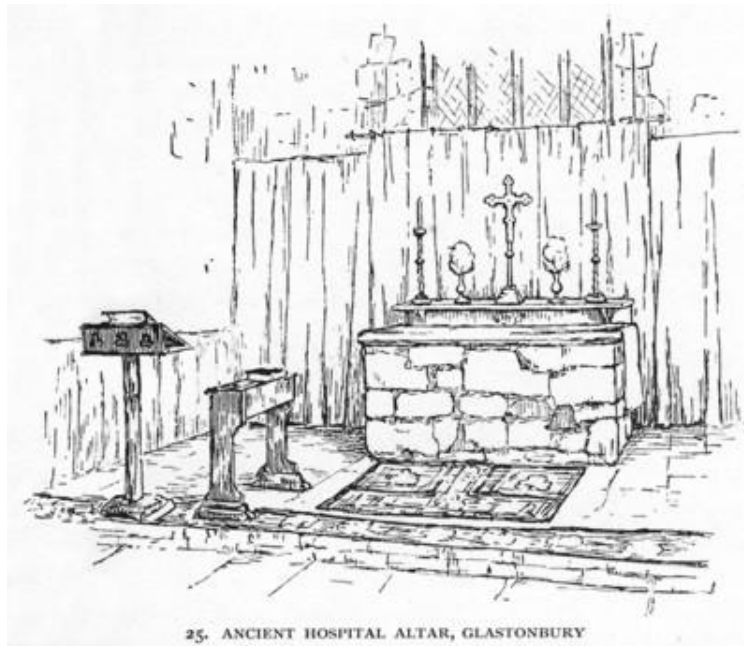
Books, plate and vestments were frequently the gift of benefactors by will. The founder bequeathed to St. Giles', Norwich, "the gilt cup which was the blessed Saint Edmund's" (i.e. probably the Archbishop's) ; he left a Bible to the hospital and a missal to the master. Office-books were costly, the manual and missal at Holy Trinity, Beverley, being valued at £4 each. A master of Sherburn bequeathed to that house a richly illuminated New Testament (*Argenteus Textus*),

besides cloths of gold and brocade. John of Gaunt gave to his Leicester foundation "his red garment of velvet embroidered with gold suns." When festal services were held at St. Mary's, Newcastle (Pl. XXVII), three gold chalices were seen upon the altar, whilst the celebrant wore one of the beautifully-embroidered garments of the hospital, which included one wrought with peacocks, another bordered with roses, and "one entire vestment of bloody velvet, woven about with a golden fringe."

Many valuables fell a prey to dishonest wardens. Frequent allusions are made to defects in the books, jewels, etc., of hospital chapels and of their being withdrawn, put into pledge, or sold. The treasures had often dwindled considerably before the final pillage, which partly accounts for entries in Chantry Surveys, etc., "plate and ornaments none." But as late as the sixth year of Edward VI, some traces remained of ornate services. St. John's,

--164--

Canterbury, possessed ecclesiastical robes of black velvet, red velvet and white fustian, and a cope of Bruges satin. Some of these were removed, but amongst articles left for the ministration of divine service were "one cope of blewe saten of bridgs, one cope of whytt fustyan."



[Illustration: Ancient Hospital Altar, Glastonbury.]

The fittings of such chapels have seldom survived, but original altar-stones remain in two hospitals at Ripon, as well as at Stamford and Greatham ; the ancient slab found in the floor at Trinity Hospital, Salisbury, has this year been restored to its place. The altar (Fig. 25) in the women's almshouse at Glastonbury (Fig. 23) has a recess in the masonry under the south end of the altar-slab. At

--165--

Chichester and Stamford sedilia and stalls with misericords may be seen. Wall-paintings at Wimborne, and fragments of ancient glass at St. Cross ; St. Mark's, Bristol ; St. Mary Magdalene's, Bath, ; Trinity, Salisbury, ; Sherborne ; and Stamford.

~Footnotes

1. Besant, London, Med. Ecc., p. 256.
2. W. Hunt, Diocean History, pp. 158-9.
3. Charter Roll 16 Hen. III, m. 19.
4. MS. in Municipal Charities Office.

-end chapter eleven-