

Five Limericks for Father Raymond¹

Languishing in St. Joseph's Infirmary²

By Thomas Merton

I know a young author named Ray
 Whom the editors edit away.
 One day he got cancer:
 But he knew the answer:
 "I'll get the thing edited, eh?"

There was a Cistercian called Raym-
 ond. An author of no little fame.
 He said: "Read these blue books,
 (My old and my new books)
 And ask yourself: "What's in a name?""*

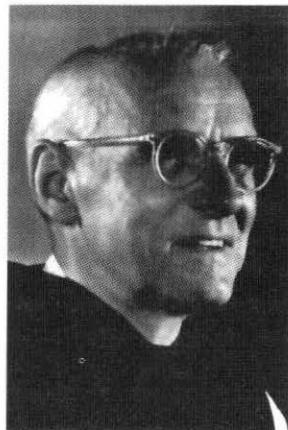
[*Ray-mund,—radius-mundus—World Radio—Oh, well, you figure it out.]

A wily old monk named Rasputin³
 Was forever and ever disputin'.
 Now without murmur, he
 's in the Infirmary
 Tied to a bed that he's mute in.

One of our authors (a Flanagan)
 Writes pamphlets on "doubling" and "standing in"
 For Jesus and Mary,⁴
 They're good, in fact very.
 He'll write us some more when he can again.

The life of a nurse at St Joe's
 Is easy, as nursing life goes.
 But now that they're nursing
 A crazy Cistercian
 How long they can last no one knows.⁵

by the POET LOUSEATE.⁶



RAYMOND FLANAGAN, OCSO

Notes

1. Fr. Raymond (Flanagan), OCSO (1903–1990), the other “Gethsemani author,” entered the monastery in 1936 after sixteen years as a Jesuit and wrote twenty-two books as a Trappist, beginning with the best-selling *The Man Who Got Even with God* (1941). For Thomas Merton’s sometimes prickly relationship with the more politically and theologically conservative Raymond, see Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton, 1984) 321, 511.
2. In his autobiography, *Forty Years Behind the Wall* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1979) 225 ff., Raymond writes of his surgery for colon cancer, which took place at St. Joseph’s Infirmary, on Eastern Parkway in Louisville, in early January 1949. This was the occasion for the writing of these poems, which have not previously been published. Two copies are extant in the Columbia University Merton file: what is apparently the original is cut in half horizontally and shows evidence of adhesive in the four corners; only the carbon, a full-size 8½ x 11 sheet, preserves the by-line at the end of the poems.
3. For Raymond’s self-selected nickname Rasputin, see *Forty Years* 209. Msgr. William Shannon reports that Merton also uses this nickname in most of his letters to Raymond: see the headnote to a selection of this correspondence in Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, 1994) 231.
4. See Raymond’s discussion of his pamphlets *The God-Man’s Double* and *Doubling for the Mother of God* in *Forty Years* 91, and the transcript of his first sermon as a Trappist, which was on this theme, 107 ff.; by his own count Raymond wrote twenty-three pamphlets along with his twenty-two full-length books (*Forty Years* 314).
5. For Raymond’s own affectionate reminiscences of his nurses at St. Joseph’s, see *Forty Years* 227–29, 243–45, 250–52.
6. According to Msgr. Shannon (*Witness to Freedom* 231), Merton usually signed his letters to Raymond “Lousi” (a transposition of his monastic name Louis)—here he transforms “Laureate” into a variant of this nickname.