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REVIEW.

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER.

(From the Catholic Standard.)

(CONTINUED.)

"The only consolation for the holy abbot, was the chanting of the Divine Office. When entering the church for evening song, he was observed by a brother to press his fingers forcibly upon the latch of the door, as if he wished to leave the impression of a seal. The brother venturing to ask what this meant, the holy father answered: 'The thoughts with which I am occupied during the day, in the management of the monastery, I leave here; and bid them remain until I call for them to-morrow morning after Prime.'

"However the abbot might manage to drive away distressing thoughts during the quiet hours of the night, while the monks were chanting the office in the church, yet they recurred with tenfold force during the day, when all the cares of the house came upon him, and his spiritual children were dying about him. At times his faith all but failed him; it crossed his mind that the monks who scoffed at Cîteaux might after all be right. The Cistercian manner of life might be displeasing to God; and the frequent deaths of the brethren, and the barrenness of the monastery, might be a punishment for their presumption in attempting to go beyond what God allowed.....He might, therefore, have been leading his poor brethren into the wilderness, and have made them there perish with hunger, and their blood would be required at his hands. These melancholy thoughts tormented him, and at last they broke out into words, when, with the whole convent, he was summoned to attend the death-bed of another brother. All the brethren wondered, as he spoke the words, at the calm faith with which he pronounced them, notwithstanding the deep anxiety which they displayed. Thus, then, in the presence of all, he addressed the dying man:

"Thou seest, dearest brother, in what great weariness and failing of heart we are, for we have done our best to enter upon the straight and narrow way, which our most Blessed Father, Benedict, has proposed in his rule, and yet we are not well assured whether this our way of life is pleasing to God; especially since by all the monks of our neighborhood we have long been looked upon as devisers of novelty, and as men who kindle scandal and chism. But more than all, I have a most piercing grief which cuts me through to the heart like a spear, and that is, the fewness of our members; for one by one, and day after day, death comes in and hurries us away.....Wherefore, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of thine obedience, I command thee, at whatever time, and in whatever way the grace of our Lord may determine, that thou return to us, and give us information touching this our state, as far as His mercy will allow." He spoke these words with a quiet confidence which looked beyond the grave, so that he appalled the brethren; but the dying monk, with a bright smile lighting upon his features, said: "I will cheerfully do what you command, if by the help of your prayers I am so permitted." The result of this strange dialogue, held on the confines of life and death, was not long in appearing. The brother died, and a few days after he had passed away, the abbot was in the fields working with his brethren. At the usual time he gave the signal for rest, and they laid aside their labor for a while. He himself withdrew a little, and with his head buried in his cowl sat down to pray. As he was in this position, lo! the departed monk appeared before him, surrounded by a blaze of glory, rather buoyed up in the air than standing on the ground. Stephen asked if it were well with him. He answered: "Well, good father abbot, I now bring you the information which you desired; and I am happy to say that your life and conversation is pleasing to God. He will send you a numerous offspring; who, like bees swarming, will fly away and spread themselves through many parts of the world." At this joyful intelligence St. Stephen sat wrapt in admiration, until the brother recalled his attention by asking for his benediction. "What," exclaimed the abbot, "do you who have passed from corruption to incorruption—from darkness to light—from death to life—ask a benediction from me, who am still lying under these miseries?" But the brother still persisted; "for the Lord," he said, "hath given to you the power of blessing; He hath placed you on a pinnacle of dignity and spiritual rule. By your healthful doctrine I have escaped the stains of the world." It befits me, therefore, to receive your blessing." St. Stephen, though filled with confusion, dared not refuse, and the happy soul received his benediction and immediately disappeared, leaving the holy abbot in a transport of wonder and gratitude. But soon the gracious promises of the Most High

to those who put their trust in Him, were to be gloriously verified to good St. Stephen. He had sown in tears; he was to reap in joy. A short period after this vision, while he and his monks were pouring out their hearts in warm prayer to God to fulfill His promise.

A band of thirty persons, under the guidance of a young man, were slowly traversing the forest and directing their steps to the abbey gate. The bell of the porter announced the arrival of strangers. Thirty persons entered, prostrated themselves at the feet of Stephen, and begged to be admitted into the number of his novices. "There were amongst them men of middle age, who had shone in the councils of princes, and who had hitherto worn nothing less than the furred mantle or the steel hauberk, which they now came to exchange for the poor cowl of St. Benedict; but the greater part were young men of noble features and deportment, and well might they, for they were of the noblest houses in Burgundy. The whole troop was led by one young man of about 23 years of age, and of exceeding beauty. He was rather tall in stature; his neck was long and delicate, and his whole frame very thin, like that of a man in weak health! His hair was of a light color, and his complexion was fair; but with all its paleness, there was a virgin bloom spread over the thin skin of his cheek; an angelic purity, and a dove-like simplicity shone forth in his eyes, which showed at once the serene chasteness of his soul. This young man was he who was afterwards St. Bernard, and who now came to be the disciple of St. Stephen, bringing with him four brothers and a number of young noblemen, to fill the empty cells of the novices of Cîteaux." [Cistercian Saints, Chap. xiii.]

All immediately commenced their noviceship but two—the sweet and amiable nephew of Bernard,—Robert, who was yet too young; and another, who terrified by the austerity of life which he beheld at Cîteaux, returned to the world. "Now, it may be asked that Stephen has housed his thirty novices, what has he or any one else gained by it? what equivalent is gained for all these domestic ties rudely rent, for all these bleeding hearts torn asunder, and carrying their wounds unhealed, into the cloister? would not rustics suit Stephen's purpose as well, if he would cultivate a marsh in an old wood, without desolating the hearths of the noblest houses in Burgundy? Human feeling revolts when high nobles with their steel helmets, shining hauberks, and painted surcoats, are levelled with the commonest tillers of the soil.....There are here no painted windows and golden candlesticks, with chasubles of white and gold to help out the illusion; feelings, imagination, all are shocked alike, and every faculty of the natural man is jarred at once at the thought. Such words might have been spoken even in Stephen's time, but 'wisdom is justified of her children.' One word suffices to silence these murmurs—*Ecce Homo*, Behold the Man. The wonders of the incarnation are an answer to all cavils. Why, it may as well be asked, did our blessed Lord choose to be a poor man instead of being clothed in purple and fine linen? why was his mother a poor virgin? why was he born in a stable, and laid in a manger? why was that mother's soul pierced with agony at the sufferings of her Divine Son? why, when one drop of His precious blood would have healed the whole creation, did He pour it all out for us? in a word, why, when he might have died (if it be not wrong to say so) what the world calls a glorious death, did He choose out the most shameful, besides heaping to Himself every form of insult, and pain of body and soul? He did all this to show us that suffering was now to be the natural state of the new man, just as pleasure is the natural state of the old. Suffering and humiliation are the proper weapons of the Christian, precisely in the same way. But independence, unbounded dominion and power are the instruments of the greatness of the world..... Let it be also remembered that persons leave their parents for causes which do not involve religion at all, as to follow some profession in a distant quarter of the globe, or to marry; and we may surely excuse St. Bernard and his brothers for conduct which was so amply justified by the event. One word more; every one will allow, that he who is continually meditating on heaven and heavenly things, and ever has his conversation in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, is more perfect than he who always thinks on worldly affairs. Let no one say that this perfection is ideal, for it is a mere fact that it has been attained. Stephen, and Bernard, and ten thousand other saints have won this perfection. They knew that blessing: 'Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children, or lands for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred-fold, now in this time, and in the world to come, eternal life.....Let any one read St. Bernard's sermons on the Song of Solomon, and he will not doubt that monks have joys of their own,

which none but those who have felt them can comprehend.' [Cist. Saints, Chap. xiii.]

St. Stephen's love of poverty became now conspicuous, and the object of admiration since God had blessed him with such a disciple as St. Bernard, and clothed so many noblemen in the coarse garb of Cîteaux. That which a short time previously had excited the carcase of neighboring monasteries, now produced a movement which vibrated through Christendom, and opposed a powerful barrier to the encroachments of luxury, and the degeneracy of the age.

St. Bernard was one of the most eminent of the contemplative school. He never once lost sight of the presence of God. He spent hours and hours in prayer daily to God; and yet he found time, amidst all his prayer and recollection, his frequent journeys, his innumerable correspondence, and other multifarious occupations to found, during his life, a hundred and sixty monasteries, to collect funds for their erection, and to maintain a most vigilant, fatherly superintendence over this host of affiliations. It was a miracle. There is nothing like it, we believe, in the whole annals of the Church. And all this immense, supernatural toil gone through by a poor weak crazy body, reduced to skin and bone by the severest macerations of the flesh! It was the heroism of mortification and toil. It is not stated whether St. Bernard closed the eyes of his dear friend St. Stephen, but we cannot resist giving the magnificent account of the death scene of that fine old Saxon Saint. It is taken from the old chronicle, "The Exordium."

"As the time approached when the old man lying on his bed, was, after his labors were over, to be brought into the joy of the Lord, and from the lowest room of poverty, which he had chosen in the world, according to the counsel of our Saviour, was about to mount up to the banquet of the Father of the family on high; there met together, besides others, certain brethren, abbots of his order, to accompany, by their most dutiful services and prayers, their faithful friend and most lowly father, thus on his way to his home. And when he was in his last agony and was near his death, the brethren began to talk together and call him blessed; being a man of such merit, they said that he could go securely to God, who had in his time brought so much fruit to the Church of God. He heard this, and gathering together his breath as he could, said, with a half-reproachful voice, 'What is it you are saying? Verily, I say to you, I am going to God as trembling and anxious as if I had never done any good. For if there has been any good in me, and if any fruit has come forth through my littleness, it was through the help of the grace of God, and I fear and tremble much, lest perchance I have kept that grace less worthily and less humbly than I ought. Beneath this shield of the perfect lowliness which sounded on his lips, and grew deep in his heart, he put off the old man, and putting aside in his might, all the most wicked darts of the enemy, fiery and sulphurous though they were, he passed with ease the airy regions of storms, and mounted up and was crowned at the gate of Paradise.'

Come with us, dear reader, and spend a day at Cîteaux. Let us visit in dear St. Bernard's days, while yet a simple monk under the fatherly rule of good St. Stephen. We will use an angel's privilege, and steal first with noiseless footfall into their humble dormitory, and gaze with hushed breath on that singular monastic scene before us, lest we awaken any of the good religious. They have well earned their deep repose.

"Suppose the monks all lying on their beds of straw, ranged in order along the dormitory, the abbot in the midst. Each of them lay full dressed, with his cowl drawn over his head, with cuculla and tunic, and even with stockings on his feet. His scapular alone was dispensed with. Doubtless no one complained of heat, for the bed-clothes were scanty, consisting of a rough woollen cloth between their limbs and the straw mattress, and a sort of woollen rug over them. The long dormitory had no fire, and currents of air had full room to play under the unceiled-roof, left in the native rudeness of its beams. A lamp lighted up the apartment, and burned all night long. At the proper hour the clock awoke the sacristan, who slept, not in the dormitory, but near the church. He was the time-keeper of the whole community, and regulated the clock, which seems to have been something of an alarm, for he used to set it at the right hour over night. His was an important charge, for he had to calculate the time, and if he was more wakeful than usual, or if his clock went wrong, the whole convent was robbed of a part of its scanty rest, and the last lesson had to be lengthened, that the hour of lauds might come right again. The hour of rising was two o'clock, during the ferial days of the week; one o'clock on Sundays and Feasts of the second rank; and twelve

o'clock on Feasts of the first class. The sacristan, as soon as he was up, trimmed the church lamp, and that of the dormitory, and rang the great bell; in a moment the whole of this little world was alive; the sole things which a minute ago looked as if they were watching, were the two solitary lamps burning; all night long, one in the dormitory, the other in the church, as if they were ready trimmed with oil for the coming of the Lord; but now every eye is awake, and every hand is making the sign of the cross.—Most men find it hard to leave even a bed of straw, and the seven hours in winter, and six in summer, were but just enough for bodies wearied out with hard work, and always hungering; doubtless the poor novice often stretched himself, before the tones of the bell which had broken his slumbers fully roused him to consciousness, but starting from bed, and putting himself at once into the presence of his Lord, was but the work of a moment for the older monk. One by one, those white figures glided along noiselessly through the cloister, keeping modestly close to the walls, and leaving the middle space free, where none but the abbot walked. Their cowls were drawn over their heads, which were slightly bent down; their eyes were fixed on the ground, and their hands hung down motionless by their sides, wrapt in the sleeves of the cuculla. The old Cistercian church was remarkable for its arrangement. It was intended for monks alone; few entered it but those guests who happened to come to the abbey, and they were not always allowed to be present. It was divided into four parts; at the upper end was the high altar, standing apart from the wall; the sole object which Cistercian simplicity allowed upon it was a crucifix of painted wood; and over it was suspended a pix, in which the Holy Sacrament was reserved, with great honor, in a linen cloth, with a lamp burning before it day and night. The Blessed Sacrament is now preserved in a tabernacle, which remains permanently upon the altar, according to the present rites and customs of the Universal Church. The part in front of this most sacred place was called the presbytery, and there the priest, deacon, and sub-deacon, sat on chairs placed for them when the holy sacrifice was to be celebrated. Next came the choir itself, where the brethren sat in simple stalls, ranged on each side of the church. In front of the stalls of the monks were the novices, kneeling on the pavement, and sitting on low seats. The stall of the abbot was on the right hand, in the lower part of the choir, and the prior's place was on the opposite side. Beyond this was the retro-chorus, which was not the lady-chapel, but was at the other end of the church nearest the nave, and was the place marked for those in weak health, but still well enough to leave the infirmary. Last of all came the nave, which was smaller than the rest of the church, unlike the long and stately naves of our cathedral churches. Into this church, called by the modest name of oratory, the first Fathers of Cîteaux entered nightly to sing the praises of God, and to pray for the world, which was lying asleep beyond the borders of their forest. It had many separate entrances, by which different portions of the convent flocked in with a quick step, to rouse themselves from sleep; but all in perfect silence. Each brother as he came in threw back his cowl, and bowed to each altar as he passed, and then to the high altar. They then (except on Sundays and Feast days) knelt in their stalls, with their hands clasped upon their breasts and their feet close together, and said the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. In this position they remained until the commencement of the *Deus in adjutorium*, when they rose and remained standing during the rest of the service, except where it was otherwise especially marked.—Matins lasted for about two hours, during which they chanted psalms, interspersed with anthems. The time for Matins and Lauds varies according to the nature of the Office, a Festival or Ferial-day. The night Office, including meditation and the Matins and Lauds of the Little-office of the Blessed Virgin, occupies on Feasts of the first rank, four hours, from twelve o'clock till four o'clock in the morning; on Sundays and Feasts of the second rank, three hours, from one o'clock to the same hour as above; on other days, from two hours to two hours and a-half. The glimmering light of the lamp was not intended to do more than pierce through the gloom of the church, for the greater part of the service was recited by heart, and a candle was placed just in that part where the lesson was to be read; if it were not that their lips moved, they might have been taken for so many white statues, for their arms were placed motionless upon their bosoms, in the form of a cross, and every movement was regulated so as to be as tranquil as possible. The sweet chanting of the early Cistercians struck some of their contemporaries, as something supernatural. 'With such solemnity and devotion do they celebrate the Divine Office,' says Stephen of Tournay, 'that you might fancy that angels' voices were heard in their concert;