S. Francis of Paula

"All creatures obey those who serve God with a perfect heart."
—*S. Francis of Paula.*

AT the age of fifteen Francis left his poor home at Paula in Calabria, to live as a hermit in a cave by the sea coast. In time disciples gathered round him, and with them, in 1436, he founded the "Minims," so called to show that they were the least of the Monastic Orders. They observed a perpetual Lent, and never touched meat, fish, eggs or milk. Francis himself made the rock his bed; his best garment was a hair-shirt, and boiled herbs his only fare. As his body withered his faith grew powerful, and he "did all things in Him who strengthened him." He cured the sick, raised the dead, averted plagues, expelled evil spirits, and brought sinners to penance.

When the avaricious King Ferdinand of Naples offered him money for his convent, Francis told him to give it back to his oppressed subjects, and softened his heart by causing blood to flow from the ill-gotten coin. Louis XI of France, trembling at the approach of death, sent for the poor hermit to ward off the foe, whose advance neither his fortresses nor his guards could check. Francis went by the Pope's command and prepared the King for a holy death. The successors of Louis showered favors on the Saint, his Order spread throughout Europe, and his name was reverenced through the Christian world.

A famous preacher, instigated by a few misguided monks, set to work to preach against S. Francis and his miracles. The Saint took no notice of it, and the preacher, finding he made no way with his hearers, determined to see the poor hermit and confound him in person. The Saint received him kindly, and listened to a long exposition of his own frauds. He then quietly took some glowing embers from the fire, and, closing his hands upon them unhurt, said, "Come, F. Antony, warm yourself, for you are shivering for want of a little charity." F. Antony, falling at the Saint's feet, asked for pardon, and quitted him to become his panegyrist and attain himself to great perfection.

S. Francis died at the age of ninety-one, on Good Friday, 1507, with the crucifix in his hand, and the last words of Jesus on his lips, "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

Brother John of Oka

Let me introduce to you Brother John, monk, residence, Trappist Monastery, Oka; age, nine years. Nine years old, a monk and happy as the day is long. Nine years old with more grit, earnestness and strenuousness in his baby makeup than is usually found in lives of full-grown people! Nine years old, and possessed of sufficient knowledge of the world to detest it and of sufficient love of God to give up all in order to serve Him! Nine years old, at Oka, in the brown habit and cowl, serious, silent, meditating, doing penance and chopping wood; this is Brother John. And this, likewise, dear reader, is the Twentieth Century, and this is America. And if someone should happen in your hearing to remark that monasticism is a dead art, advise him as a friend to repeat it to himself very low, lest another with less manners should chance to overhear him and rudely giggle.

But where is Oka? It is a little Canadian settlement, founded by the Indians long years ago and renowned as a trading-place, situated on the Ottawa River near its confluence with the St Lawrence. A short distance off to the East, on the mountainside is the Trappist monastery—a large stone main-building, of severe aspect, with its numerous outhouses, shops, dairies, etc., nestling in a depression of the slope. Away from it on all sides stretch acres of finely cultivated land, orchards and vineyards. The monastery shelters some sixty monks, of the strictest order in the Church, all of whom are intensely interesting to the average outsider, and one is sure to monopolize the attention of the visitor from the start and give him food for reflection for many a long hour after his departure from Oka.

Men of the Trappist stamp never fail to make a deep and lasting impression on worldlings of whatever religious persuasion they may be. * * * ... at what other men live, struggle, ... and die for they spurn and deride; just what others hate and abhor, they embrace with open arms and die with it in their grasp, poverty, penance and prayer, silence, obedience and work. As far as they are concerned, peoples may rejoice in peace or slay each other with the sword; nations may rise or fall, the world may progress or retrograde, without this disturbing the even tenor of their lives. What they are concerned with is the saving of their immortal souls, that is the only thing that really does concern them. They are intensely earnest in this matter, they mean to succeed; and if they do not, then God help the rest of our frail clay.

Of course people read a great deal about monks in books, and nowadays in the newspapers, the which people have their own ideas about this peculiar race of beings; and these various ideas, if they could and would take some kind of form, would furnish a most valuable museum of curiosities, monstrosities, ridiculosities, etc. There are those who gravely whisper of secret plottings and dark conspiracies which they describe as a lurid background of voluptuousness and crime to name which would be sin. Others fear not, neither are they shocked, but they scorn with a deep, bitter, righteous scorn, the inhuman simplicity, the damnable ignorance and general worthlessness of these monks. If pity should happen to soften the heart, and the world is generous with its pity, then it is "such idiotic, natural-born fools, these monks! Such useless beings for God and man! Where are their brains and why do they exist?"

To the mind of him who knows the monks, the fear of the first is sad; the scorn of the others is sadder, but the pity of the last is saddest by a wide margin. It is so sad that if one has a well developed sense of propriety and honor, the mere mention of the word "pity" in relation to the monks is apt to make him exclaim: "It is indeed to laugh;" for if there is one article in the emporium of human things for which the monks have need, earthly or otherwise, it is that same pity. Pity is a sop to misfortune and misery; we do not pity those who are better off than we are. Therefore it is that the good monks, in spite of all their seriousness, when pity is offered them, can hardly refrain from breaking out in hoarse merriment. It is about the only joke they enjoy; in truth, it is a huge one.

But I am forgetting the boy — which goes to show how very interesting beings monks are. Let us remember he is nine. His usual companion, in whose company I found him, is Brother Clestin, a giddy young thing of seventy-five or thereabouts; and behind him Brother John walks with downcast eyes, solemn tread and serious mien. He never talks, he fasts and keeps vigil, he prays and chants and works — leads the life of a genuine monk, this marvellous youngster of another and better age. If he breaks the rule, which happens sometimes, he confesses his fault in the community hall before the Father-abbot and Brothers assembled, and accepts his penance with the philosophic humility of the most hardened, weather-beater anchoret.

When you meet him he will not look up, if he surmises you are staring at him, he will try to direct your vision to the patches on the back of his faded habit, if forced to face you, he will blush from ear to ear like a young culprit caught with his finger in the jam. He will answer you question with a "Yes" and "No," if the Abbot orders him to speak, but will give unmistakable signs of anxiety to be off and engaged in some profitable occupation than posing for the curiosity of visitors.

Is he happy? Well, with due consideration for the value of words, that is putting it very lightly. The fact is he simply revels in being a monk. This is his own element, he was made for it, and it for him, and he lives this life to his little heart's content.

His father brought him here over a year ago from Montreal because the lad, having heard of the place, by dint of tormenting had exacted a promise, and the promise had to be kept. Once there he hazarded the remark that it would be a good place to stay. He was diplomatic in his advances, first asked, then begged, pleaded, besought and finally insisted on staying. What would mamma say? Plenty of others at home, twelve or fourteen, to take up mamma's time, and what else does she want to know her boy is happy? What would the Abbot say? That would be ascertained by consulting him. And the Abbot examined this novel postulant. He acquainted himself with the particulars of the case, and as much to humor this extraordinary fancy that had taken possession of the boy as to give the case a test, consented to allow him to remain for a two-weeks' trial. Those two weeks were as good as a life-time. That was enough, and more than enough. Like the hero of Malikoff, he whispered in his own ears at night while going to bed "Here I am, here I stay," and he did. A week, a month passed and no sign of repentance on his part. Suggestions were evaded, proposals to return home were rejected. Then his attitude assumed a coaxing character not to be turned away. He would try to deserve the honor of remaining. And there he is yet, without a doubt to remain as long as Brother Clestin has been there, and that is a long time.

His father visits him from time to time. Brother John is glad to see him, asks for those at home, sends a kiss to mamma and the little ones, and like the true monk that he is, waives the permission to dine with his father and goes back to his tin plate and wooden spoon and sits with the Brothers in the refectory.

Yes he is happy, but it would serve no purpose to exaggerate and say his bliss is perfect. Perfection is mighty difficult to attain to in this world, especially when happiness is concerned, so Brother John has his crosses to bear, he has troubles of his own.

First, he is obliged by a rule made expressly for him, if you please, to lie abed an hour longer than the others when they arise to chant Matins at 2 in the morning. He may listen if he likes, but to get up and join in is forbidden, absolutely forbidden.

Another shocking piece of partiality to which he is subjected is to eat meat every morning at breakfast. Who ever heard of such a thing in a Trappist monastery as eating meat? The Father Abbot is said to be leagued with the evil one in an effort to spoil his vocation, to ruin his monastic prospects and deprive him of rights that are his by virtue of his calling. This humiliating condition of affairs probably accounts for his chubby face, his rosy cheeks, a countenance from which beams innocence and health.

But I come to greater things. Some people imagine that a vocation and virtue are all that is necessary to make a real, live monk. This is an egregious blunder. According to the standard of ancient and accepted traditions and the classical ideas of asceticism, the face has considerable to do with it as a condition "sine qua non," while the ornaments hereof, whiskers to wit, are the very essentials of success. Without the ascetic face and the long flowing beard, the Anthonys, the Basils, the Bernards, the ... unos, would never have reached the p... estals on which they receive univers... admiration and esteem; might a... well take off their heads as their be... ds.

Now Brother John knows this; and yet no amount of good-will can alter the healthy look of the face. It is neither pale nor drawn, nor pinched, nor emaciated; there are no lines that indicate long fasting and deep meditation; there is not that sweet sadness that look out of saints' eyes and speaks of interior struggles and rude self-denial. No, the only thing that his features suggest is sleep and beef. No wonder the holy men whose portraits around the whitewashed walls seem to look down in scorn and mockery on his pitiful efforts to imitate them. Perhaps, too, that is why he is so bashful when you eye him closely — he thinks you are laughing at a face so strangely out of place in a monastery.

And then imagine, if you can, a monk without a beard! The Church without a head, St. Peter without his keys, and a monk without whiskers, these are three impossible things, and were one of the three possible, the last would be the least. And yet, no, not a hair, not a suspicion of a hair, to adorn his chin, and no prospects of any for a long time to come. This is the very depth of his disgrace, and in his own eyes he seems hardly less brazen than would appear an Asiatic maiden in public without the traditional veil. How he envies his more fortunate brethren, especially Brother Celestin, who during the meditation hour can hide and lose themselves in these long, flowing, abundant meshes! Oh, for the wealth of a shaggy, bristling beard! Oh, for the oeard of a prophet, for the beard of Aaron! Oh, for such an inheritance of the Fathers of the desert! And the baby-faced cherubs that play around the throne of God look down and smile at Brother John's discomfiture and resolve to plead his cause and obtain for him the coveted prize.

These are Brother John's troubles—there are lesser ones in the world—and they constitute the burden of his penance.

Brother John, no doubt, will one day have a long, white beard like Brother Clestin's, he will, have wrinkles and furrows, and the flush of exuberant life will give place to a complexion more in keeping with his calling, when sleep-overs and meat will be things of the past. And these badges of his profession he will carry with legitimate pride. If he ever comes across a youngster who, like himself, begins life heavily handicapped, he will pity and console him. He may, who knows, be may become Father Abbot! And after long years of merit, when his time comes, his poor, worn-out body will be laid at rest in the little "Camposanto" alongside those who went before him in the same path of heroic sacrifice. But his soul will return to his God, Who has said: "If you will be perfect, take up the cross and follow Me." He had little to give, poor lad; but what he had he gave, his liberty and even his childhood joys. He followed the Lamb and was perfect. — Kerdac, in The Catholic Transcript.

A True Story

(By Eleanor O. Donnelly.)

It all began four years ago, when I was bell-boy at Eccleston Cedars. My grandfather Nightingale had been butler there for years. That's why they called me little Nightingale, for I was thirteen when Mr Eccleston hired me, and a good size for my age. The name stuck to me over after grandfather died the next year.

There was lots of help in the house then and my work was light enough. No one could be kinder to me than Miss Eccleston, master's orphan niece. After grandfather's death she used to send for me often and teach me to read and write. If I am about now to tell this story to you straight and clear, I owe it all to her. Master, too, was good and pleasant that first year. He doted on his niece, and as I was the grandson of her old nurse, he couldn't help seeing I was a bit of a pet with her. She was a very beautiful young lady, was Miss Rosabelle, and only a few years older than myself. She was fair and tall, with great blue eyes and masses of yellow hair. She wasn't a mite proud, for all her grand way of holding herself like a young queen.

Her uncle thought nothing was too good for her. He dressed her in the finest silks and velvets and just loaded her with diamonds. That first year she went out a great deal into company and entertained her friends and drove about the country in her pretty pony phaeton. Our house was large and handsome. It stood on a hill about thirty feet from the highway—in the suburbs of an old colonial city. We had lovely grounds, full of cedars, and English walnut trees. There were carriage houses and stables in the rear. Every Sunday my master and Miss Eccleston drove twice a day to the little Catholic church a mile off. I rode with the footman behind their carriage and often knelt with them both at the communion rail.

Regular as clockwork Mr Eccleston drove into the city every morning. He held some high position in the United States Mint. He had been there so long and was so much looked up to that they called him the "Father of the Mint." Late in the spring of my second year at the Cedars Miss Rosabelle was taken sick and the family doctor ordered her away to drink the waters at Saratoga Springs. My master engaged the rooms for her himself — going up in advance to the Grand Union to see that she got the finest accommodations in the house. He was for sending her off at last with no one but her French maid, Lucette. But Miss Eccleston wouldn't hear of it.

"I must have my little Nightingale, uncle," she said, with her own sweet laugh. "Lucette is well enough, but I can't miss my boy's music." (This was her little joke, for I couldn't turn a tune for my life.)

"Take your bird along and be happy, sweetheart," said the master, good-naturedly, and pleased enough was I to pack my bag that very day and start for Saratoga with Miss Rosabelle and her maid.

After a long, delightful month at the Grand Union we went up to Newport for the rest of the season. Here the salt air and the baths and the long drives on the cliff brought back the roses to my young lady's cheeks and made her eyes shine like stars. Master didn't come as often to her at Newport as he did at Saratoga. Didn't look like himself, either. Had a queer, absent way with him, and each time his large, square face seemed to grow yellower and more pinched. But he wouldn't hear of Miss Eccleston's going back home till September. Once, on a Sunday morning, when I was waiting orders in the hall, I heard her pleading with him to go to Mass with her at St. Mary's. And when he answered in a tender, troubled fashion, "Not to-day, Rosabelle, not to-day!" it came to me like a flash that he hadn't gone to church with her since we left the Cedars.

Her eyelids were red that evening when I carried in her tea, but she only smiled at me over her cup and asked if her uncle had gone away (as he had) on the late train to town. She might have said something more to me then if Lucette hadn't been in the way, but when I took her to vespers later I could hear her weeping softly as she bowed her beautiful head for the Benediction.

After a couple of weeks master came and fetched us all home again. On the road I overheard him telling my mistress that he had made some alterations at the Cedars during her absence. He muttered something about "dangers in country places from burglars and tramps."

She looked startled and anxious. But I'm sure, all the same, that she never suspected the changes we found that day in the dear old spot. The first strange sight was in front of the grounds, where we saw two five foot fences of close barbed wire just above the sidewalk. One was where the pavement began and the other right back of it. Next when the carriage rolled up the handsome drive it was stopped at the entrance to the grounds by a high iron gate, heavily padlocked. Another new thing was a smaller iron gate close to the carriage gate and giving on the path leading to the house. Master had to get out of the carriage and unlock these gates with a key from his pocket. He flushed a dark red, but he said nothing when Miss Eccleston cried out in dismay:

"O uncle, it looks like a prison!"

As soon as were in the hall he said slowly: "It's much safer this way, Rosabelle. We can't be too careful on these lonesome roads." Then seeing the wondering, frightened looks she cast upon the big new bolts and bars on the house door, he went on:

"As I told you on the cars, you must expect many changes here. They are necessary. Upstairs you will find that I have given you the whole second floor. I must have peace and quiet for some important studies, so I have moved up to your old rooms on the third story. Little Nightingale's room on that floor was needed, so (turning to me) "don't go upstairs now, you'll find your cot and the rest of your things in yonder little closet, next to Miss Eccleston's reception room."

It made my heart ache to see my young lady turn away with that troubled, terrified look on her sweet face. She never noticed master slinking away to the kitchens. Presently Lucette came tearing from that quarter in high dudgeon. She screamed out to her mistress that there were three fierce bulldogs in the grounds — but not a creature in the house — no housekeeper, no cook, no footman, no anything. Mr Eccleston had actually asked her — her (and she choked with indignant rage), Lucette Madeleine Angelique Eulalie Marie Decuet, to prepare supper for the family!

It was too true. Master had discharged all the servants while we were at Newport. He had been living alone for months at Eccleston Cedars, doing all his own cooking and housework.

"Betel!" cried Lucette in a frenzy, "the man must be mad!"

I began to think the same the next morning, when master sent the French girl away and told me I must do the cooking and waiting after this. He wanted no more thievish servants prying about and devouring him he said.

Strange and terrible was the life Miss Rosabelle and I lived together from that day. We were half starved, half frozen in the desolate house. Master went in and out as usual to the city, but he never crossed a church door after our return. He spent all his time when at home in the third floor room that had once been mine. He was fast locked up in it day and night. And such strange sounds as came from it! But for my dear young mistress I would have run away. I was terribly overworked, and many a time my heart stood still with fright when we heard those queer noises overhead. But I loved and pitied Miss Rosabelle too much to forsake her.

At last, one day early in December, I opened the hall door to a party of grand gentlemen. They were the directors of the Mint, and they asked to see Miss Eccleston alone.

She had just come in from Mass — it was a holy day — and she went to them in the reception parlor, without laying off her things. From the door of my little room I watched her go up to the youngest of the group and give him her hand. He took it with a gentle respect which even then seemed to me half-pitying, half-anxious. He had known and admired her for years. How lovely she looked in her furs and rich silks, the plumed hat shading her fair young face!

I closed the door upon them, and stole away to fetch master (who hadn't gone to town that day) his cup of hot coffee. When I ran up with his tray, bless my heart! if I didn't meet them—the directors and Miss Rosabelle and some strange men who had joined them—on the third floor, outside that dreadful closed room. It is all like a horrible dream to me now — the forcing of the locked door and the finding of master, white and scared, in an old rusty suit, bending over a blazing furnace in the middle of a lot of queer apparatus and bottles. He seemed to be melting something yellow and glittering in an iron pan. At first I thought he was making an omelet. But one of the directors cried out. "Why, Eccleston, you've got a regular chemist's shop here!" And another—one of Pinkerton's men — whispered behind his hand "Blast furnaces and crucibles and Bunsen burners, no less! Look you, gentlemen, this is where he melts the gold he has stolen from the vaults!"

Then Miss Rosabelle with a sharp cry dropped down among us all like one dead. I knew that she, too, had overheard that awful whisper.

* * * * * * *

They found the secret closets, with their closing panels, along the walls. They rooted out the iron boxes and safes, heaping with coin or filled to the top with bars and lumps of gold and silver — the wretched treasure for which my master had sold his God and brought ruin on his soul. He confessed all.

For months he had been stealing the gold from the Mint, but till then the officers had refused to believe it. They took him away from his home that day forever, and I never saw him again.

But I go often to the convent where my sweet Miss Rosabelle boards, and when she tells me of the wonders of God's mercy and of His patient love for sinners, I know by the look on her fair, quiet face that her uncle has repented in his prison cell—that he has found there (thanks be to the Lord!) the peace and pardon he rejected years ago at Eccleston Cedars.—Benziger's Magazine.

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