

perspective before he begins the ascent. I assume that no generous minded person ever drives or rides a mule. St. Benedict doubtless went afoot and something of the pilgrim spirit will stir the most modern man whom curiosity leads to the old monastic retreat. He will forget, or he ought to forget, the corruption of the later middle ages and of the renaissance: and remembering the vigour of monasticism in its prime he will feel bound to follow St. Benedict and walk. A serpentine road, better than any street in Montreal, leads by easy grades to the summit, but this is a recent work. The old road was similar to that which shook Horace up so on his famous trip to Brindisi. It serves now for a footpath and leads through thickets where, in the February of my visit, wood anemones and white hepaticas prophesied of spring. The Benedictines always built their monasteries on hills just as the Cistercians always built theirs in river valleys. Had not the views from Monte Cassino been what they are the tradition might have become different. For nearly half the year the surrounding Apennines are snow-clad. The Mount stands exactly in the angle of two valleys and commands a never-failing contrast between the unredeemable savagery of rocky peaks and the fertility of smooth, irrigated corn fields. St. Benedict could hardly have found in all Europe, "from Byzantium to Spain," a spot better suited to his purpose. The mystic may in a few instances be oblivious to his surroundings, but in so far the success of the contemplative life depends on a suitable location, Monte Cassino leaves nothing to be desired.

Visitors are excluded from the convent between 12 and 3.30. Let us pretend that we reach the gate at 3.15 and while awaiting admission run over in fancy what St. Benedict did for the world.

On the front of the church of St. John Lateran at Rome is carved the inscription, "*Omnium urbis et orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput.*" Monte Cassino is the St. John Lateran of Latin monasticism. St. Benedict himself was born about 480.

He belonged to an old Umbrian family and was educated at Rome. Legend has entwined itself about his life and we are often at a loss to distinguish truth from fiction. At any rate Benedict was so shocked by the profligacy of "Babylon" that he fled from it to the upper waters of the Anio in the Sabine mountains. At Subiaco he found a vacant cave and made it his home. Here he began to practise the austerities of an ascetic Christianity. One would not like to vouch for the stories spread by later Benedictines of the jealousy of other hermits in the region and of their attempts to poison and lead astray the saintly noble. For thirty years Benedict remained at Subiaco which, under his influence, became a focus of religious ardour and effort. He was fifty years old when he turned his face southwards and began the real work of his life. The paganism of Campania was slow to die and a temple of Apollon at Cassino was still frequented and revered in the second quarter of the sixth century. Benedict by his preaching overthrew this last outpost of the old gods and erected on its site two chapels, one to St. John Baptist, the other to St. Martin of Tours. He then withdrew to the summit of Monte Cassino and planned the organisation of a great religious brotherhood.

I should probably obscure the position of St. Benedict as a distinct pioneer of civilisation if I went into a minute examination of the rules of his order. It will be enough to touch upon two or three of its outstanding features. Let it not be supposed, for instance, that Benedict invented ascetic habits or the celibate ideal of life. These far antedate Christianity and had already been carried in the east to excessive lengths. The monks of the Thebaid and the pillar saints lived for themselves alone and made no effort to save the wicked world from whose allurements they fled to the desert. The essence of Benedictine monasticism is its practical nature, its implied censure of Levantine devotees. I suppose very few of us believe in the warfare between spirit and matter, and its corollary that material pleasures are in themselves evil. Manicheism under-