

) 14 Their Caps

In
and whe
go out

Seven hundred years ago, and some four hundred years before St. Margaret Mary labored and prayed and suffered for the institution of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, St. Lutgarde of Aywieres had ~~been~~ entered upon the ~~way~~ mystical life with a vision of the pierced Heart of the Savior, and had cemented her ^{mystical} espousals with the Incarnate Word by an ~~exchange~~ exchange of hearts with Him. This alone would be enough to demand a biography of one who holds an important place in the history of Christian spirituality. But there are other facts besides which ^{make} ~~make~~ St. Lutgarde ~~an~~ worthy of the attention of the theologian, the Church historian, and ~~the~~ all religious souls. She was a contemporary of St. Francis, the first recorded stigmatic, and yet she too had received a mystical wound in her heart which historians

have not hesitated to class as a stigma. This places her among the very earliest Christian stigmatics. Yet although she stands on the threshold of a spirituality that is ~~more~~ distinctly "modern", St. Lutgarde's mysticism springs from the purest Benedictine sources. Her ~~contemplation~~ mystical contemplation, like that of St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde, is nourished almost entirely by the Liturgy. Above all, it centers upon the Sacrifice of Calvary and upon the Mass which continues that Sacrifice among us every day.

The charm of St. Lutgarde is heightened by a certain earthy simplicity which has been preserved for us unspoiled in the pages of her medieval biography. She was a great penitent, but she was anything but a fragile wraith of a person. Lutgarde, for all her ardent and ethereal mysticism, remained always a living human being of flesh and bone. When she was a young girl in the world she seems to have been remarkably attractive, and we can imagine her as something more than merely pretty. She must have had one of those marvelously proportioned Flemish faces, full of a mature and serious beauty, which we find in the paintings of the great Flemish masters of a ~~later~~ later day than hers. She must have looked like the "Virgins" of Van Eyck. In any case, her entrance into the mystical life was not without an element of excitement and romance. She was faced with a no mere abstract choice between ~~the love~~ of a Heavenly and an earthly lover: it was not the mere solution of a conflict of ideals which brought her eventually to the cloister. She was carried into the arms of Christ ~~in~~ in circumstances that shook her to the depths of her sensitive being.

1/2 The life of St. Lutgarde ~~is~~ introduces us to a mysticism that is definitely extraordinary. This is not the mysticism which some theologians claim to be a "normal" development of the Christian life of grace and the infused virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Here we are in the presence of visions, ecstasies, stigmata, prophecies, miracles.

St. Lutgarde was a "mystic" in the popular sense of that term, and her life was certainly colorful and extraordinary enough to ~~attract the~~ ~~attention of~~ make her popular with Catholics of our own time, too. Of course, medieval saints' lives abound in strange phenomena, and we are inclined to be a little suspicious of the facile ~~x~~ enthusiasm with which ^{of those days} so many pious writers ~~accepted~~ set down the deeds of their heroes as "miracles". But the biographer of St. Lutgarde, though occasionally suffering from the naïvete common in his ^{age} ~~time~~, is ~~more reliable~~ as reliable as any one in the thirteenth century.

Thomas of Cantimpré, the author of the Vita Lutgardis ~~(1)~~ was a

(1) Acta Sanctorum Bollandiae, June, ii, p. 187 ff.

Dominican friar and a theologian of some ability. He had studied at Cologne, under St. Albert the Great, as a classmate of St. Thomas Aquinas. He had also studied at Paris, ^{gaining a Doctor's Degree in Theology} and afterward taught theology and philosophy at Louvain. He was especially interested in mystical theology and in the direction of mystics. His writing springs from his practical experience and observation of souls in the great mystical ferment that swept the ~~North~~ Low Countries ~~during the whole of the High Middle Ages~~ in the thirteenth century. He wrote ~~kingdoms~~ of Bl. Christine, "the admirable" ¹ whose levitations make her a worthy competitor for the honor ^s of St. Joseph Cupertino, patron of airmen. He also wrote on Bl. Margaret of Ypres and Bl. Mary of Oignies, and capped it all with an allegory, the Bonum Universale de Apibus, in which he treats of moral and ascetic theology in a way that modern readers would find totally unpalatable.

His life of St. Lutgarde is a minor masterpiece. The Latin in which it is written is fresh and full of life and every page furnishes us with ~~vivid~~ vivid little details that stamp his whole record of the saint's life with authenticity. Thomas of Cantimpré was writing ~~objectively~~ an objective and lively ~~report of~~ the story of the life of one he ^{had known} ~~known~~ intimately

The Vita Lutgardis was popularized by the famous Carthusian Lawrence
fifteenth
Surius in the ~~seventeenth~~ century. In the seventeenth century it was
translated into Spanish and Italian. There has never been an English
translation of this life, nor any full-length book on St. Lutgarde in our
language. The seventh ~~century~~ centenary of the saint's death in 1246
brought forth several works in French and Flemish, but we did not have
access to these ~~xx~~ when the present volume was compiled. In any case,
Thomas of Cantimpre is the one authentic source for all "lives" of St. Lut-
garde. Many of the modern biographies simply paraphrase Thomas, adding
a veneer of pious reflections on the visions and miracles of the saint.

This book was undertaken in 1945, at the Abbey of Gethsemani, at the earnest wish of the late Abbot of that Cistercian community, Dom M. Frederic Dunne, of holy memory. Dom Frederic had great devotion to St. Lutgarde, whom he ~~in~~ resembled in his penitential ardor and in his ^{ardent} devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her life expresses many of the themes that were dearest to Dom Frederic's heart and which, indeed, must always be dear to the heart of every contemplative monk: the love of God, penance and reparation, intercession for souls. But it cannot be too much stressed that in St. Lutgarde, as in all the early Cistercians, ~~thisxxxxthis~~ the love that embraces penance and hardship for the sake of Christ is never merely ~~negative~~ negative, never descends to mere rigid formalism, never concentrates on mere exterior observance of fasts and other penitential rigors: The fire of love

that consumed the heart of St. Lutgarde was something ~~that~~ vital and positive ~~and~~ and its flames~~xxx~~ burned not only to destroy but to ~~xxxxxx~~ rejuvenate and ~~xxxxx~~ transform. It was this love that Christ came to cast upon the earth and which Dom Frederic did so much to enkindle in the Cistercian (Trappist) monasteries of America that came under his influence.

This book was written with no other purpose than to help American Catholics to love the Sacred Heart with something of that same purity, and simplicity, and ardor. ✓

Note:

8/9
*A pious pamphlet called ~~the~~ "The Heavenly Court" has been circulated in the United States in recent years. It ~~purport~~ sets forth a devotion which is supposed to have been originated by "the Holy Cistercian ⁿ Nun St. Lutgarde of Brabant." The only Cistercian nun called St. Lutgarde is the subject of the present volume. Her monastery, Aywières, was indeed situated in Brabant. But there is no record of her having originated the devotion called "The Heavenly Court." No doubt there has been some mistake. ~~The author of~~ The pamphlet called "The Heavenly ~~Court~~ Court" has nothing to do with St. Lutgarde of Aywières.