

carriage or litter, heavily guarded and screened from view. But they managed to find Bernard in the woods, with the help of a guide, and there they remained. It would have been impossible for the three of them to start north right away, with Almanzor's soldiers combing the country for them.

Their apprehension in this matter was all too well founded. Not many days had passed before Bernard, who was out in search of good food, was discovered by a party of armed men led by Almanzor himself. Once again, Almanzor's rage nearly ended Bernard's life then and there, this time with a javelin. But the brother restrained himself, in order to drag Bernard back to the town and question him about the hiding place of Zaida and Zoraida, who had now taken the names of Mary and Grace. Refusing to tell anything of their whereabouts, Bernard contented himself with revealing the fact of their conversion to Christianity, and his ardent prayer that they might crown their faith with the sacrifice of themselves in martyrdom for the glory of Jesus Christ. It was evident that he had just such an ardent desire for himself: but it was not yet to be satisfied. Only when the two sisters were finally apprehended, did the savage elder brother try to terrify them by the barbarous death which he caused Bernard to suffer. For before their eyes, the monk was brutally killed by a soldier driving a spike into his forehead. Yet the courageous sisters were only animated by this spectacle to in a greater faith, and soon they, in their turn, followed their brother to heaven, ~~was~~ beheaded by the swords of Almanzor's soldiers.

1180 is the accepted date of their martyrdom. Their bodies were left to be devoured by wild beasts, but were charitably buried in secret, and lay hidden for several centuries. They were finally discovered by a miracle. There is nothing to warrant the assumption that Mary and Grace became Cistercian nuns.

The three were beatified "per modern favoris" in 1701 with the title of saint and although the date arbitrarily assigned to their martyrdom is August 23rd their feast is celebrated in the Cistercian Order on June 1. August 23rd is within the Octave of St Bernard.

June 7th

ST ROBERT OF NEWMINSTER, Abbot of Newminster, England.

One of the English Cistercian saints is the mysterious and attractive monk whose legend, handed down to us in Capgrave's sixteenth century collection, (1) is full of visions and miracles: but these are only the screen behind which historical facts show us the shadow of a great and holy monk. Fr. Dalgairns (2) fought shy of the miracles in writing his brief life of St Robert, and the story loses thereby. Legends may be legends: but their very existence is a fact, and a fact of no little importance and significance. Hence their historical value, although it may be oblique and indirect, is nevertheless not to be neglected.

It is a matter of fact, not of legend, that Robert was born in the Craven district of Yorkshire, was educated at Paris, and ordained to the priesthood, after which he became a Benedictine at the abbey of Whitby. Whether or not he was dissatisfied with the life there to such an extent that he left and migrated to St Mary's, York, is only a matter of conjecture. At any rate, when Richard, the prior of St Mary's and his twelve companions reacted against the Cluniac regime and asked permission to start a reform on the lines suggested by the newly arrived Cistercians of Rievaulx, Robert head of it and joined them, not, as Dalgairns thought, after they had settled at Fountains, but while they were still at York, in the shelter of Archbishop Thurstan's palace. (3)

He was, then, one of the group who travelled to Ripon for the Christmas feast of 1132, and who, on the day after, settled in the wild valley of the Skell, with no shelter but the forest trees, no bed but a pile of straw, no covering but his own monastic garments and a couple of blankets between him and the December night. He shared all the poverty and labor and hardship of the precarious new foundation; and those years of struggle were one of the hardest Cistercian novitiates in the history of this strict Order. Here indeed was a life of asceticism, when men had to keep the Rule of St Benedict to the letter, in all its detailed prescriptions, while living in a few huts in a northern forest-- huts so lowly that the poorest swineherd might have disdained them. Often starvation stared them in the face, and they had to content themselves with a meal of Forest leaves and herbs and roots boiled into some sort of a soup. But after four years the tide turned. Fountains became firmly established, and soon was able to make her first foundation.

Robert was chosen to lead the colony of monks to Morpeth in Northumberland. Their journey was in the winter: and they arrived at the castle of their protector and sponsor, Ralph de Merlay, about the feast of the Epiphany, 1138. It was probably there that the Bishop of Durham, (in whose diocese they were to settle) gave Robert his abbatial blessing. Then, in the spring, the new foundation was begun.

It was not as wild a site as that of the Mother-house. There were no rocks, no glen, no thick, wild forest, although the land was wooded. It was low, rolling country, watered by a meandering river, bordered with rich meadows-- a pleasant, peaceful and fertile place. The new monastery, "New Minster" had a name that was rather unusual for a Cistercian abbey. Minster simply meant monastery, and hosts of Benedictine abbeys and priories had compound names of which that word was one element. But the Cistercian fashion was always in favor of more graphic and more romantic names-- Valle Crucis, Beaulieu, Jervaulx, etc. Newminster was the only Cistercian abbey with such a compound for its name, in England.

Robert was a holy man, strict with himself, kind and merciful to others. He was learned and yet simple. He had written a commentary on the Psalms and a book of meditations-- and it is a misfortune that they no longer exist; but like a true Cistercian, he preferred the experiential knowledge of God, in prayer, to any learning that can be

gained from books.

He earnestly strove to dominate and mortify all the desires of his flesh, and made a point of never eating to satiety-- for though the food of a Cistercian monk is certainly simple enough, there is a big enough quantity for him to eat too much of it, if he is sufficiently diligent with his wooden spoon. In Lent, St Robert fasted all the time on bread and water. His fasts were made more of a penance by sickness; and once, in Paschal time he was too ill to eat anything from the common portions. One of his monks asked him if there were not something that he felt he could eat, and he replied, after some thought, that an oat-cake with a little butter on it made some appeal to his appetite. However, when the monk went to get this simple article of food, which even the poorest shepherd would scarcely have regarded as a delicacy, St Robert began to reproach himself for self-indulgence, and would not eat the cake when it was brought to him.

Once this holy abbot, in his simplicity, was in haste to return from a distant grange to the monastery for a big feast, and had climbed on the only available mount, which was an aged pack horse. He then pulled his hood over his eyes, and rode along, meditating and conversing with God as was his custom. Presently a nobleman of the region came along, and seeing the hooded figure in the shabby sowl, riding such a poor excuse for a horse, did not recognize the abbot; but stopping him, inquired, roughly, if the Lord Abbot of Newminster were at the Grange.

"He was there when I left," said St Robert meekly.

Then the noble gentleman took a closer look at the face in the shadows of the hood, and realizing that he was speaking to the saint, was covered with confusion.

Gentle and simple with others as he was strict with himself, St Robert had a deep and burning love for the souls of all those whom God had entrusted to his care, and he prayed for them with more fervor than most monks can muster for their own most urgent needs. Once, it is said, having prayed with tears, for a long time, in great love and faith, for all his sons, it was revealed to him that they would all be saved except two: and some days later two laybrothers left the monastery.

Like most Cistercian abbots, he could not confine his charity within the walls of his own enclosure. To him, as to so many other of his contemporary Cistercians, often fell the lot of a peacemaker. Once, for example, in Newcastle, he came upon a group of men in the street, gathered around an extremely active and malignant little individual who was evidently inciting them to some act of violence. St Robert walked into the middle of the crowd and scattered them to the four corners of the city and they confronted the agent provocateur, who, says the legend, began to grovel in the dust before him like a cringing animal.

"Who are you?" said the saint.

"You know who I am," said the evil character who was, according to the legend, a devil. Then he proceeded to admit that he had been stirring

up the enemies and rivals of a man who had just been married, to murder him at the wedding feast. Then the friends of the bridegroom would retaliate and there would probably be many lives lost. Having made this admission he vanished, leaving no trace except that a horse tethered nearby began to rear and kick in the wildest alarm.

Another incident in the life of the saint might have come from the pages of Caesar of Heisterbach. It is related that he looked up, one night in choir, and saw a devil peering through the door, in the form of a rough yokel, stretching out his neck, grinning fiercely and peering this way and that, being unable to come into the choir itself. St Robert began to pray with the greatest earnestness. The devil, finding nothing to interest him among the monks (it must have been an exceptionally tranquil monastery!) turned to the laybrothers and displayed, by his horrible laughter, his satisfaction at one who was ~~at~~ asleep, and gave ironical and clownish applause to another who was allowing his mind to follow distractions wherever they led him. But his greatest pleasure came when having turned to the consideration of the choir-novices, he found one who was turning over in his mind the project of leaving the monastery secretly that very night, and giving up his vocation without consulting anybody. St Robert saw the fiend reach out with a long pitchfork and neatly spear the "soul" of the novice and stuff it into a sack. Then he vanished. St Robert went to his cell right after the office and sent for the novice, but it was too late. Under cover of the half-light before dawn, he had scaled the wall and was gone. Shortly afterwards it was learned that he had joined a band of criminals, and later on he was caught and executed.

Many of the picturesque details of this story undoubtedly sprang from the imagination of the twelfth century biographer-- and though we have not compared Capgrave's version with the original, it is not difficult to believe that the sixteenth century compiler added a few touches of his own to the picture. But it would be foolish to suppose that the basis of the legend, and its main point, are even slightly improbable. The devil may not spear souls with a pitchfork, but that does not make him any the less real.

Another vision of St Robert's occurred while he was saying Mass. He suddenly beheld a ship, badly battered by a storm at sea, and on the point of sinking. Right after Mass, he called several monks and sent them down to the sea coast, several miles away, to a spot which he indicated to them, and there they found the bodies of ~~the~~ the drowned sailors washed up on shore, and gave them a Christian burial.

In 1147 or '48, we know that St Robert was in France, where he had a long consultation with St Bernard and Pope Bl. Eugene III. The reason for this journey was a slanderous accusation made against him because of the fact that he had undertaken the spiritual direction of a pious woman. It was much the same as the slander that had been levelled against St Jerome; and St Bernard, after interviewing the holy abbot, soon realized that God was allowing this trial for purification of his saintly soul.

During the year 1147 Newminster made two foundations, Salley in Lancashire and Roche in Yorkshire. In 1143, a first daughter house

had been founded as far south as Northamptonshire, at Pipewell.

Robert's confessor and director was a hermit, St Godric, and the latter foretold the death of his penitent, in 1159, and also was favored with a vision at the time of its occurrence: for he saw St Robert's soul travelling to heaven, like a globe of fire, escorted by angels, and rising between two walls of light. Many miracles followed, notably the cure of a boy mute from birth. The boy had been praying to St Thomas a Becket, and the great martyr appeared to him and told him to go on a pilgrimage to the tomb of the new saint, Robert of Newminster: he even provided him with enough money to make the journey.

St Robert was formally beatified according to the ancient code in 1584, and inscribed in the Martyrology.

June 12th

BL. ALEYDE DE SCHARBEEK, Nane of La Cambre, Belgium.

The life of Aleyde de Scharbeek, by a contemporary monk, is not only an objective study of a great mystic, but also, incidentally, a brief and concise treatise on Cistercian asceticism. The first chapter, dealing with her monastic virtues, is something that ought to be put in the hands of every monk and laybrother of our Order. It not only gives instances of her practice of these virtues, but sets down, with equal brevity and precision, a compendium of ascetic theory which is both interesting and practical. In it, for example, is exposed the characteristic Cistercian teaching on the fear of God as a principle of liberation from all our own imperfections and deficiencies, by giving us that true knowledge of ourselves that makes us turn away from self and desire God with all the ardor of our wills. It is in this sense that filial fear is the beginning of wisdom: and without it, love is impossible. In Aleyde, says the ancient writer, fear was the principle from which this love sprang, and then, in turn, it was through this love (not fear) that she mortified her senses and chastised her flesh. This is an interesting and subtle distinction, and one which is rather unusual, when love is viewed in this juxtaposition with fear.

Another interesting ascetical concept: the light of truth is conceived within her soul by fear, (humility) and by love, she seeks to give birth to the truth thus conceived. She shows forth in her works and actions the divine life conceived within her, and also gains possession of God Himself, by the merit of her works of love.(1)

Space does not permit us to delay longer on this topic: for there

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EDITED by MONK OF GETHSEMANI.

CISTERCIAN STUDIES

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Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani
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