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## The Dominican Contemplatives by a Dominican of Carisbrooke (with a preface by The Very Rev. Father Bede Jarrett, O.P)

A Dominican of Carisbrooke

The Very Reverend Father Bede Jarrett, O.P. (preface)

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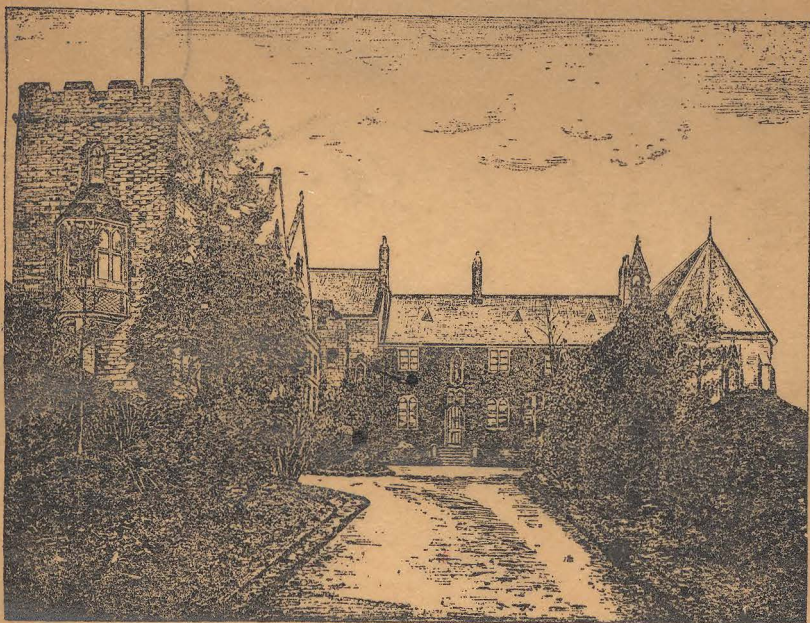
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# DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVES

BY

A DOMINICAN OF CARISBROOKE



BURNS AND OATES LTD.  
28 ORCHARD STREET  
LONDON W.

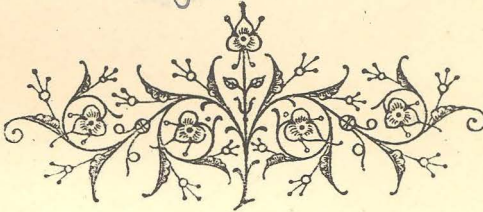
# DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVES

BY

A DOMINICAN OF CARISBROOKE

WITH A PREFACE BY

THE VERY REV. FATHER BEDE JARRETT, O. P.



BURNS AND OATES LTD.  
28 ORCHARD STREET  
LONDON W.



NIHIL OBSTAT : FR. L. HYACINTH KOOS, O. P.  
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IMPRIMATUR : FR. HUMBERT EVEREST, O. P., S. T. B.  
Prior Provincial of the English Province.

5 th December, 1915.

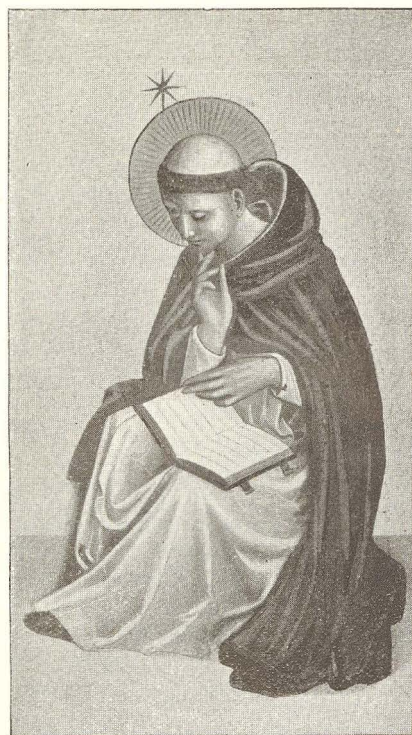
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IMPRIMATUR :

Insulis, XIV<sup>a</sup> die Julii 1919.

A. MARGERIN,  
Vic. gen.





ST. DOMINIC READING THE GOSPEL  
(Fra Angelico).

## PREFACE.

*Contemplation is for all, but the contemplative life is only for a few. Contemplation is in itself only one method of prayer, one way of getting into communication with God. Instead of talking volubly or agitating our souls, we turn simply to some truth about God, some fact in His divine or human life, some manifestation of Him in created or uncreated nature, and gaze steadily at it. It is a prayer of quiet in the sense that in our souls there is stillness, but not in the sense that in our souls there is idleness. In contemplation we are active with the finest principles of action, the head and heart : Faith and experience of God produce in us love, and love is no idle thing but the full and perfect thrill of life.*

*A contemplative life is, therefore, such a life as will give amplest opportunity for contemplation. All can contemplate : but to a few it is given to leave all else for it. For these the whole day must be so arranged, the whole manner of life, that those tasks only (except what is essential to human existence) will be incumbent which conduce to contemplation. But it is obvious that, even so, such a life can be set out in many fashions, according as each soul feels drawn to this view or that of the Truth and Beauty of God. To all it is God who gives the purpose to human life, but the roads towards Him are as innumerable as are human hearts. Hence the leaders of the Church have created religious orders which lead souls severally Godwards. Great figures loom out from history's pageant, figures so great that the height up the hill-side they have scaled does not diminish their*

*contemplative  
prayer  
action*



greatness. In the line of material vision, to mount upwards means to grow smaller to those watching. In the line of spiritual vision, to mount upwards means to be transfigured beyond human proportions against the skies of God. Of these leaders, not the greatest perhaps, but to us the most dear, is St Dominic. With his orderly scheme of Truth, achieved through freedom of mind and heart, he makes his appeal to certain souls. His way is not the popular way, for it implies much daring and many risks, since, if truth be the most fortifying of virtues, it is in many lives the most full of danger. To seek Truth is to court Calvary and its utter desolation of spirit. But the way set by St Dominic, the particular fashion of contemplative life that he instituted for women, is herein described by one of his followers. To contemplate Truth and to expound it by prayer, by the mystic vision, by a subtle, living influence vitalising the whole membership of Christ is, in the pages that follow, declared after the model of St Dominic. To this generation whose soul has been bruised by the turmoil of war and overmuch talk, this contemplative way of his will find one here and one there upon whom it will react by affinity. For these, as already for us, here will be found "the dear city of God, ,, small, compact, not overcrowded, but gay with the blessed familiarity of home."

BEDE JARRETT, O. P.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE.



THOSE best able to judge declare that the modern world is gradually changing its opinion with regard to the contemplative life ; men are coming to realize the power of thought and silence, and to understand how little mere activity counts. The generation now passing away had nothing but contempt for the silent life ; it was considered idle and useless, an absolute waste of powers which should have been devoted to the good of society.

Whatever may be the varying opinion of the world at large, the Catholic Church holds to-day, as she has always held, that the contemplative life is, in the words of Christ Himself " the best part ". She knows full well that the first and highest duty of a creature is the worship of the Creator, and for this reason she imposes the exercise of prayer on all her children. But this is not enough. With her perfect comprehension of what is befitting God's infinite majesty, the Church has organised a vast choir wherein the song of praise is continually chanted. In union with the Sacrifice of the Lamb which is offered from the rising of the sun even to the going down thereof, there mounts up to the throne of God the sweet incense of human prayer and praise, mingled with the myrrh of voluntary suffering. And the Church charges the contemplative Orders to watch that the incense and myrrh fail not.

The contemplative life is lived simply and solely for God. It is not embraced by way of preparation for active works, but for its own sake, and the reason is not

hard to find. The worship of God is sufficient to occupy all the energies of His creatures. What, after all, is the end for which we were created? " The Lord hath made all things for Himself "<sup>1</sup>. To know, love and serve God and thereby to glorify Him is the destiny of every human being both here and hereafter. On earth He is known by faith and His service takes many forms according to the vocation of the individual; in eternity we shall see Him face to face, and know even as we are known, whilst our only service will be that of praise and adoration. The office of contemplatives on earth is that of the blessed in heaven. So said St. Teresa when appearing after death to one of her nuns. The Vision is still veiled, but faith, that " face to face in the darkness, " supplies.

Our Lord Himself, when commending Mary's as the " best part " promised it should never be taken from her. The need for active work will pass away when the number of the elect shall be completed, but the work of the contemplative belongs to eternity as well as to time. " And round about the throne were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind..... And they rested not day and night saying : Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come. And when those living creatures gave glory and honour and benediction to Him that sitteth on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty ancients fell down before Him that sitteth on the throne and adored Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne saying : Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power. Because Thou has created all things; and for Thy will they were and have been created ".

No better image of the contemplative life could be

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1. Proverbs, 16, 4.

2. Apoc. 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11.



found. " Full of eyes before and behind, " those to whom this sublime vocation is given concentrate their faculties on God alone ; " they rest not day and night " in their constant endeavour to render themselves less unworthy of the work of praise ; " casting their crowns before the throne " they gladly offer all they have and all they are to the glory of Him " who liveth for ever and ever ; " and every cloistered convent in Christ's Church eloquently proclaims by the very fact of its existence that God is the Creator and Master for whose will all things were and have been created.

This then is the first and chief aspect of the contemplative life : those privileged to lead it are above all and before all devoted to God ; they endeavour to grow into close union with Him, and upon this union their usefulness in the Church depends.

The second great aim of the cloistered life is the work of intercession for the Church and for souls by prayer and constant self-immolation. All contemplatives are bound to this work, but it is more especially the work of Dominican contemplatives since it is the *raison d'être* of the Order of which they form part. " This is our life, and in truth is our glory : *Gloria nostra haec est.* We may glory in divine things, says our Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas... And what more divine than to be a victim with the great Victim of the World? What more divine than to work with the Son of God made Man, to ransom souls and to build up the heavenly Jerusalem <sup>3</sup> ? "

" Consider Our Lord's words. ' The harvest indeed is great but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send labourers into His harvest <sup>4</sup>. ' As the harvest is abundant and the labourers are too few, the natural conclusion at which

3. Père Garaud, O. P.

4. Luke, 10, 2.



we should arrive would be ; ‘ Hasten, therefore, to busy yourselves about the harvest. ’ But God’s conclusion is : ‘ *Pray, therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into His harvest.* ’ There is much work to be done, and for that reason there is much need of prayer. Our Lord... means prayer is to be a work of apostolic devotion, the first and foremost of such works... Prayer comes first and the labourers follow ; and they will not come at all if there has been no prayer<sup>5</sup>. ”

A hidden life of prayer has an extraordinary and far reaching influence. Father Faber says that a cloistered life may embrace the whole world if it be also a life of adoration. The glory of God and the interests of the Church require that contemplatives should be multiplied upon the earth. They are in Christ’s mystical Body what the heart is in the human organism, or to change the metaphor, what the fire is to a mighty ship.

St. Mary Magdalen, the model of contemplatives, is called by the Church the Apostle of the Apostles. Who loved Christ more than she, and who more ardently desired to see His Kingdom extended? Yet after the Resurrection she retired into a mountain cave and spent the rest of her days in prayer and penance. How much did Provence, nay, the whole Church, owe to this hidden and solitary life? ” Mary Magdalen, ” says St. John of the Cross, ” though her preaching was most edifying and might have been still more so afterwards, out of the great desire she had to please God and benefit the Church, hid herself in the desert thirty years, that she might surrender herself entirely to love ; for she considered that she would gain more in that way, because an instant of pure love is much more profitable and important to the Church<sup>6</sup>. ”

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5. The Contemplative Life, by a Carthusian Monk.

6. Spiritual Canticle, Intro. to Stanza 29.



St. Mary Magdalen's prayer no doubt belonged to the highest regions of the mystical life, wherein, as a rule, there is little place for actual petition. How then could such a prayer be of use to others? A soul prays more by what she is than by what she says, and the closer the union with God, the greater the power to help others, even though the wish to help be not actually expressed.

For the sake of ten just men God was willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrha<sup>7</sup>; they were not to be found and the guilty cities perished. He complained to Ezechiel that none remained in Israel to plead for the whole nation. " And I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge and stand in the gap before me in favour of the land, that I might not destroy it: and I found none. And I poured out my indignation upon them<sup>8</sup>. " Here again is the work of the Contemplative Orders; the Church means them to be the lightning conductors of the world. Of course sanctity of life can and does exist outside the cloister; but it is easy to see the immense advantages possessed by those who dwell apart with God, separated from earth and earthly cares.

In conclusion the following passage of a modern writer may be fitly quoted. After noting that the hidden life is a marked characteristic of the life of Christ upon earth, he goes on to say: " This silence is again markedly characteristic of a Divine Fact dwelling on earth. If the Church were but a human Society it would be inevitable that she should busy herself primarily with humanity, that her highest commendation would be given (as indeed it is given in all other forms of Christianity) to those who are most active in ministering to the needs of men, that her workers should be judged by their activities and their external effectiveness,

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7. Gen. 18, 32.

8. Ezech. 22, 30, 31.



and that silence and retirement should only be commended so far as they ministered to such effectiveness. But if the Church is a Divine Society, if she looks always with inner but wide-open eyes upon celestial things, if she has the secret of eternity and dwells always seeing Him who is invisible, if indeed with angels and archangels she looks upon the Face of the Most Holy — this silence and absorption are simply inevitable and vital to her very existence. Certainly the eye cannot say to the hand — " I have no need of thee ; " for the Divine Society has hands that must be work-worn as well as pierced ; but neither can the hand have the nerve to labour without the guidance and inspiration of the eye... If men were but units, each designed to be *separately* perfect, there might be some justice in the charge that the Contemplative ' wastes his life and powers ; ' but if the Church is an organic body, in which each cell lives vicariously for his neighbour (and, in fact, for the whole organism) it is perfectly reasonable that those cells should be differentiated and specialised. ' If the whole body were the hand, where were the seeing ? ' And this specialised hiddenness, characteristic of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, is characteristic also only of one Christian Society ; and is explicable only on the supposition that to her eyes this world is not all ; that human needs are not always the most imperative ; that she lives, in fact, in the strength of a vision which none but she can fully perceive<sup>9</sup>. "

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9. Mgr. Benson, *Christ in the Church*, pp. 63, 65.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRIT OF ST. DOMINIC.



ROBABLY no saint in the Church's calendar brings the work of apostolic labour for souls more vividly to our mind than does St. Dominic. He appears as the very personification of activity and zeal. He is the great preacher, the doctor of truth, the herald of the Gospel, the champion of the Church. Even his name has something stirring about it, suggestive of the clash of arms. For the good of souls God willed him to don spiritual armour, to wield the sword of His Word; but in other circumstances, it is easy to picture Dominic as a second Simon de Montfort, battling for the Lord right valiantly. He is a Knight by excellence, and it is quite impossible to imagine him anything else.

Yet this man was likewise a great contemplative. We may, without hesitation, assign to the founder of the Friars Preachers a place amongst those who have gone down deepest into the deep things of God and tasted the sweetness of continual and familiar intercourse with Him.

Attention has many times been called to St. Dominic's resemblance to Our Lord; nor was this physical alone: like Jesus he had his long years of silent, hidden preparation for a short period of apostolic ministry; like Him his nights were passed wholly in the "prayer of God."

Of St. Dominic's nine years as a Canon Regular of Osma Blessed Jordan of Saxony speaks as follows: "He, like a flourishing olive tree and growing cypress,



remained day and night in the Church, applying himself constantly to prayer and scarcely ever leaving the cloister for fear of shortening the time of contemplation. God had given him a deep sorrow for sinners, for the afflicted and the miserable, whose woes Dominic enshrined in his inner sanctuary of compassion, and the deep, loving sorrow he felt for them was so intense as to seek relief in tears. His almost constant habit was to pass the night in prayer and communion with God. "

Then came his comparatively short, but marvellously fruitful apostolic life. It could no longer be said that " he scarcely ever left the cloister for fear of shortening the time of contemplation, " for his days were devoted to bringing souls to God, by preaching, the ministry of the confessional and other works of zeal. He was to be found on the high roads of Europe, in the passes of the Alps and the Pyrenees, on the plains of Lombardy and Languedoc, in the streets of Rome, Bologna, Paris and many another great city. But however fatigued he might be at the end of a long day's journey, he would press forward hoping to reach some religious house in time to sing Matins, and in the Divine Office and prayer throughout the night at the altar's foot, he sought and found rest and refreshment.

A wonderful description of the blessed Father's vigils has been handed down to us by Thierry d'Apolda. It will be noted how he prayed with his whole being, with both body and soul, and how his prayer was inspired by the words of Holy Scripture. Sometimes he would bow down before the altar recalling the text of Holy Writ, " The prayer of the humble shall pierce the clouds <sup>1</sup>. " Or prostrate full length upon the ground he prayed thus: " God, be merciful to me a sinner <sup>2</sup>; " an ejaculation which appears to have been a great

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1. Eccl. 35, 21.

2. Luke, 18, 13.

*no artificial  
method of prayer*





# ADORATION OF THE MAGI

(FRA ANGELICO).

" Come, let us adore and fall down, let us weep before  
the Lord who made us " .



favourite with him. He taught this form of prostration to his sons saying<sup>3</sup>: " When the Magi entered Bethlehem and found the Child with Mary His Mother, falling down they adored Him. We also find the Man-God with Mary. " Come let us adore and fall down, let us weep before the Lord who made us<sup>4</sup>. " At other times he would stand erect and strike his shoulders with an iron chain, repeating the verse of Ps. 17. *Disciplina tua*, etc.

Another of his practices was to fix his eyes on the altar or the crucifix, at the same time making numerous genuflections. In this manner he frequently spent the whole period between Compline and Matins, his intention being to imitate the leper of the Gospel who adored our Lord saying: " Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean<sup>5</sup>. " Sometimes he suspended his genuflections and remained lost in silent contemplation whilst the tears coursed freely down his cheeks.

Again, he would stand before the altar with hands outstretched as though holding a book; or else he raised them, as the Priest does at Mass. Now and then he covered his eyes as if to meditate more profoundly; at certain moments he seemed to be listening to a mysterious voice. When petitioning some extraordinary favour from God he extended his arms in the form of a cross. In all these different attitudes he had the appearance of a prophet conversing with the Most High.

It will be seen from his prayer how great a love St. Dominic had for the Holy Scriptures; reading the inspired word of God with profound reverence and eager delight he passed from reading to prayer, and from prayer to the contemplation of divine truths.

Nor did his many, long and weary journeys interrupt his converse with God. He frequently begged his com-

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3. This full length prostration is still a common practice in the Order.

4. Ps. 94, 6.

5. Luke, 5, 12.



panions to go on before, or to remain at a little distance behind, reminding them of the words of Osee: " I will lead her (the soul) into the wilderness and there I will speak to her heart <sup>6</sup>. " Walking alone he meditated on different passages of Scripture, or else, when his heart overflowed with holy joy, he would break forth into sacred song; the *Veni Creator Spiritus* and *Ave Maris Stella* being most often on his lips.

During the process of canonization one of the witnesses declared that he had never known any man so devoted to prayer as blessed Dominic. Indeed, he was so convinced of the necessity of continual prayer that he commanded his sons to speak either to God or of God; and how faithfully this injunction was carried out may be seen from the lives of the first Friars <sup>7</sup>.

As to penance, we are told that St. Dominic scourged himself thrice nightly to blood with an iron chain; but apart from such practices his life was an exceedingly penitential one. He kept the fasts and perpetual abstinence with the utmost rigour; he had no cell of his own; the little sleep he allowed himself he took on the pavement of the Church; his journeys were always made on foot and his labours were incessant. Small wonder that even his vigorous constitution rapidly gave way under such severe discipline.

St. Dominic's whole life is a demonstration of this truth: prayer and penance are indispensable to the apostle; the greater his labours the greater the necessity for him to be steeped in the interior spirit, for unless he possess God he cannot give Him to others. A modern Dominican has well said: " A soul filled to overflowing with God is like a furnace glowing with heat and flame. All who approach it become conscious of dazzling brightness and cheering warmth <sup>8</sup>. "

6. Osee, 2, 14.

7. See *Vitæ Fratrum*.

8. Père Didon, O. P.



The Order of Preachers is the great creation of Dominic's sanctity ; and its genius necessarily reflects the spirit and the life of its founder ; it might even be described as himself still living, praying and working in the world. St. Dominic was both a great contemplative and a great apostle : contemplation and apostolic action are the two fundamental principles of his Order, closely entwined and dependent on each other.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF PROUILLE.



NOTHING could have appeared more hopeless than the condition of Languedoc in the year 1203. The whole country was a prey to the most violent religious dissensions, for the old Manichean heresy had revived under a different name, and was spreading its subtle poison throughout all ranks of society. The Count of Toulouse was an obstinate heretic; most of the great barons favoured the sectarian errors, and worse than all, the bishops evinced lamentable apathy in the performance of their pastoral office; some of them even — as the bishops of Auch and Toulouse — were stained with open crime. The clergy had forfeited public esteem, and the remaining Catholics, few in number, were utterly disheartened by the calamities that had befallen them. In fact the very existence of the Church in Languedoc was threatened; but "two passing Christians sufficed to change all." What Popes and Councils had been powerless to effect either by promises or threats, God accomplished by means of His chosen instrument.

This is not the place to detail the circumstances which led St Dominic into France, our object being to sketch the history of the foundation of his cloistered daughters, and to show the position assigned to them in the Order by its holy Founder.

The fact that Dominic began his great work by instituting his nuns is another proof of the peculiar genius of the Order. It may be objected that he could



hardly have done anything else, seeing the means were, so to speak, thrust upon him. True; but thrust upon him by God, whose finger is clearly seen guiding and ordering every circumstance of the Saint's destiny.

He soon perceived that the destitution of many noble Catholic families rendered them an easy prey to the heretics. Unable to maintain and educate their daughters in a manner befitting their condition, their parents abandoned them to the Albigenses who undertook to provide for them. Anyone who knows the enthusiasm with which women throw themselves into a cause they believe to be good, will see the advantages heresy reaped.

Stephen de Bourbon relates how at the time St. Dominic was preaching at Fanjeaux, nine noble ladies came and begged his help. The blessed Father convinced them of their errors and converted them to the Catholic faith. By degrees other spiritual daughters gathered round the Saint and he began to think of building a monastery for them.

On the eve of St. Mary Magdalen's feast 1206, he sought out a solitary spot wherein to commune alone with God in prayer. His mind was occupied with the projected foundation, and he desired to know where it was to be situated. Providence led him to an eminence overlooking the plain of Fanjeaux, and as his eyes turned towards the shrine of Our Lady of Prouille, he perceived a globe of fire descend from heaven and rest upon the Church. Three times, on three successive nights, the same phenomenon occurred, and Dominic understood that his Order was to be planted and grow up in the shadow of Mary's Sanctuary.

With the consent and assistance of Fulk, Bishop of Toulouse, a convent was erected by the side of the Church of Prouille; and on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, 1206, St. Dominic gave the religious habit to his first daughters. From that time forward Prouille

became his home; thence he went forth to evangelize the surrounding country; thither he returned to take his rest.

It has been said that St. Dominic's intention in founding his nuns was to provide a house of education for children. Père Danzas emphatically refutes this statement. He asserts that in the course of his researches into the early history of the Sisters, he never lighted upon any document which could lead him to infer that they undertook the work of education. True, children were sometimes brought up in Dominican as in other cloisters; but they were regarded as aspirants to the religious life.

A passage of the primitive Constitutions may be quoted to prove that St. Dominic's intention in admitting children to the cloister was to prepare them to take the habit and make profession in due course. " It is not our custom to receive girls under the age of eleven. Nevertheless, if any be received under that age, either to avoid grave scandal, or for some spiritual advantage, they shall live apart (i. e., from the Community) and be carefully formed to habits of piety and good behaviour until their fourteenth year. "

It is quite evident that St. Dominic is speaking of girls to be received as Sisters when he says: " It is not our custom to receive girls under the age of eleven, " since immediately afterwards reference is made to younger children who may be admitted for serious reasons, and remain in the cloister until their fourteenth year, at which age no doubt they had to make a definite choice, either to return to the world or to join the Community.

Another recommendation of the Blessed Father, which follows the passage given above, confirms the opinion that the young girls mentioned were really regarded as postulants. " As to the sick, the aged and the young girls, they shall not be obliged to observe the rule of



fasting or abstinence." Thus the young girls admitted into the monastery are placed in the same category as the sick and the aged Sisters, who require a legitimate dispensation from the ordinary law of fasting and abstinence. Had they been simply boarders in a convent school there was no necessity to speak of dispensation from the rule of the Order<sup>1</sup>. "

That, later on, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries many Convents undertook the education of young girls, cannot be denied, since we find the General Chapters legislating for the matter. But from the strict rules laid down it may be inferred that education was rather tolerated than encouraged. Again, the Community, *as a body*, had nothing to do with the boarders. They were under the care of two Sisters specially deputed to the work.

Prouille, as is evident from the many documents still preserved in its archives, had later a small convent school. The style of education however differed widely, not only from that of our modern establishments, but even from that of other religious institutions of the period. It may be well to quote an ordination made in 1727 by a Visitor appointed by the General, Father Thomas Rippoll: " It is most important to watch over the education of the young pensioners of the Monastery of Prouille, to train them in virtue and piety, and to foster any signs of vocation to the religious state. For this end the Council shall appoint a Mistress and a Sub-Mistress of Pensioners to watch over their conduct. " That the Noviciate of Prouille was recruited chiefly from the school is certain, and doubtless this was the case in other Dominican houses.

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1. This opinion is also held by the Sisters of Prouille. The archivist of the Monastery, who has numberless primitive documents under her care, has most kindly given the writer the fullest information on the subject. She says : « De toute évidence, il résulte que les petites écoles de nos monastères Dominicains furent des pépinières de vocations. »

From the foregoing it appears that the education of girls was not St. Dominic's primary object in founding his nuns<sup>2</sup>. He intended them before all things to practise prayer and penance and thus help on the apostolic work of the Friars.

We have already noted how wonderfully contemplation and action were blended in the holy Patriarch's life, and how deeply his personality stamped itself upon his Order. The cradle of the Order of Preachers was a house of prayer, as if God designed to show the source whence preaching derives its chief strength. Dominic the preacher institutes first a house of prayer which was to become the foundation of the work of universal preaching.

" Prayer, " says Père Danzas, " is the source of action, contemplation of the apostolate. By a mysterious coincidence the Sisters preceded the Brethren. For nine years these firstborn of the Dominican family offered their prayers, not only for the personal labours of their Father, but for the projects conceived by his apostolic heart. They must have implored for him who had begotten them, that other posterity seen in a more or less distant future. Prouille is a source; and such for all time was the Second Order to be. Whilst maturing the plan of a society devoted to the salvation of souls, Dominic's thoughts turned to the women he had snatched from heresy and led into the fold of the Church. The means appeared with the end, and Sisters truly Preacheresses, that is to say having a definite place in his apostolic work, were ready at hand. "

The Friar-Priest, obliged by his vocation to go forth into the world and rescue souls, is often deprived of the shelter of his convent and the strength afforded

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2. At the same time it must not be supposed that the work of education is contrary to the Rule. Even in our own day convents of strict regular observance have schools. However, in most cases, discipline has to be relaxed in houses of education.



by the observances of regular life. In order to preserve that fulness of the interior spirit without which no lasting good can be effected he has need of assistance. For it is not easy to maintain the balance between the contemplative and active life. At times even men of prayer feel weighed down by their many cares, and cry out for help. Listen to B. Jordan of Saxony... a saint and an apostle: " I pray but rarely ; " he writes to B. Diana, Prioress of St. Agnes, Bologna. " You must exhort your Sisters to supply for my deficiencies." And again: " Exhort the Sisters to beseech Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to lend my voice the power of His, that I may honour Him and bring forth fruit. "

St. Dominic knew full well the difficulties his sons would encounter: he therefore provided the needful remedies long before they entered upon their laborious career. Before organising his army he built his arsenal.

" At the feet of Our Lady of Prouille he pondered over the conditions of the work measuring its difficulties, viz: the weakness of human nature and the obstacles the world was sure to place in the way. In view of this he too could say to himself: ' It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself. ' Thus he seemed to see two branches from the same tree, two choirs that chaunted in harmony, two works that were really one, sisters in purity, brides by a fruitful marriage. It was apostolic activity based on contemplation, and contemplation based on activity. The Sisters asked from the Friars that *their name should be invoked upon them*. They wished to live under the same discipline, to spend themselves with one heart for the same end and in the same cause. But in their turn the apostles had their own spiritual demands to make on contemplation; souls to work their miracles, strength to persevere in so formidable an undertaking. The Friar-Preacher requires from the hands of the *valiant woman* that *double garment* which she is accustomed

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to weave for *those of her household*: an inner and outer garment according to the saying of B. Albert: 'The first makes a man righteous and unspotted in God's sight; the second secures for him the gifts requisite for dealing with the world: wisdom to confound error and drive back heresy, and patience in the midst of trials'.<sup>3</sup>''

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3. Danzas, *Etudes* T. 4.





## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RULE.



ST. Dominic, it will be remembered, was a Canon Regular of St. Augustine; it was, therefore, only natural that he should give his nuns the Rule which he himself professed. The Rule of St. Augustine is, then, the basis and foundation of Dominican legislation; but to it St. Dominic added certain Constitutions adapted to the special end he had in view.

The text of the primitive Constitutions appears in a Bull of Gregory IX, 1236, under the name of the *Constitutions of St. Sixtus*. They were drawn up shortly after the foundation of the celebrated convent of St. Sixtus in Rome, the second house of nuns founded by St. Dominic. These Constitutions were those in force at Prouille; of this there can be no doubt; for although the Saint himself trained the Community of St. Sixtus in all the duties of the Dominican life, he sent for Sisters from Prouille to assist him in the work.

When Gregory IX refers to the Rule of the Preacheresses he styles it that of *St. Sixtus* from the name of the Roman convent. Such, thenceforward, became its official title; so that when the Sisters of Prouille, or of any other convent had to treat with Rome, they described themselves as living under the Rule of St. Sixtus<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Fr. Thomas Esser, O. P., remarks that the nuns of the Order were often styled *Canonesses following the Rule of St. Augustine*; this somewhat vague term was soon discarded and *Sisters* or *Dames Preacheresses* substituted. They were also known as *Sisters of the Order of Preachers*, *Sisters living under the direction of the Preachers*. Whence came the name of *Sisters of the Second Order* is unknown; it was probably borrowed from other Orders. (*Les Dominicaines de Ratisbonne*. Année. Dom. Nov. 1888).



The primitive Constitutions " are a precious relic of St. Dominic, his own words. In these short pages, he himself teaches and directs his daughters and communicates his spirit to them. As we read we can almost fancy we are in the Chapter Room of St. Sixtus. The Sisters are seated on one side of the grille; on the other is the blessed Father surrounded by the Brethren. He is speaking with that powerful, thrilling voice; he tells them all his projects, his desires for their perfection; he explains the plan of the regular life he has conceived for his family — for he is founding a family, — and his wish is that peace and charity should reign amongst all its members<sup>2</sup>. "

The Constitutions of St. Sixtus bear the impress of St. Dominic's wonderful power of organisation; they show his wisdom and foresight, likewise his austerity, tempered as it always was by prudent moderation. In a few words the holy legislator notes all the essential points of the Rule: fidelity to the vows and regular discipline, the strict enclosure, prayer and the Divine Office, perpetual abstinence<sup>3</sup>, seven months uninterrupted fast, continual silence, hardness of bed, midnight rising, manual labour, the correction of faults against the Rule, and compassionate charity towards the sick. He also prescribes the manner of electing a Prioress and of instituting the officials of the house.

Humbert de Romans, the fifth Master General, completed the Constitutions by additional chapters on the rules regarding the Divine Office, the noviciate, religious profession, etc: Later, the Sovereign Pontiffs, and successive General Chapters, made still further additions or modifications as need arose; for a religious Order is a living body, and, as such, is capable of development and growth.

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2. Mortier, *Histoire des Maîtres Généraux*, T. 1.

3. Except in case of sickness.

The life of the first Sisters was regulated — as it is now — by the Divine Office. At midnight they rose, and standing before the altar of Our Lady erected in the dormitory, recited her Office<sup>4</sup>. Then descending to the choir they chanted Matins and Lauds of the day, according to the rite of the Order and with the external ceremonies prescribed by the Constitutions. After Matins some time was spent in mental prayer; many of the Sisters even passing the rest of the night before the Blessed Sacrament. This practice was so common that it might be regarded as the general rule.

At day-break the Office was resumed. Then followed the Conventual Mass, which was invariably sung.

Prayer and work divided the day. " Since idleness is an enemy of the soul, nourishing and engendering vice, let no Sister be idle. Therefore care must be taken that all be employed in some useful work for the common good, as may be appointed them, except during the times of prayer<sup>5</sup>. "

St. Dominic had specially recommended his daughters to busy themselves with spinning, and this injunction of the blessed Father was faithfully observed, as the Chronicle of Prouille proves. But they likewise employed their work-hours in embroidering church vestments and in transcribing and illuminating choir books.

Every day the Sisters devoted some time to the practice of the ecclesiastical chant, under the direction of the Chantress, whose duty was to provide for the perfect execution of the Divine Office.

Besides manual labour St. Dominic prescribed study, although it would be difficult to say precisely in what such study consisted. One thing is certain: the Sisters were, in general, well versed in Latin, since nearly all

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4. On account of the numerous feasts which have been introduced into our calendar, Our Lady's Office is only recited publicly seven or eight times a year. But it is said daily by all the Novices.

5. *Constit.* Chap. 28.



the early Chronicles are written in that language. So too are B. Jordan's letters to B. Diana and the Sisters of Bologna. Yet another proof is to be found in the instructions of Herman von Minden, a German Provincial, who devoted himself in a special manner to the service of the Sisters. He orders that the Rule of St. Augustine shall sometimes be read in the vernacular, for the benefit of the Lay Sisters and the less learned.

Another branch of study was the Holy Scripture. Numbers of Sisters had quite a remarkable knowledge of the inspired Word of God. Nor is this surprising. " Concentrating their thoughts and desires in an ardent and continual aspiration towards the Supreme Ideal, the Sovereign Good, they sought God with holy eagerness, not only in contemplation but in the sacred Books. Daughters of the Order of Truth, how should they not have tasted the delights of the Holy Scripture, that supersubstantial food, that heavenly manna which nourishes contemplative souls and contributes to their spiritual growth? "

Penance was the leading principle of the Sisters daily life. The Constitutions enjoined perpetual abstinence, fasting on all Fridays of the year, and every day from September 14th until Easter. The food consisted of fish, vegetables, eggs and milk; but the two last mentioned articles of diet were prohibited during Advent and Lent. There was besides the broken sleep, the use of woollen material, and though the fact is nowhere recorded, it is quite probable that the constant chafing of the rough serge tunics sometimes irritated the Sisters as it did the Brethren.

Compline, the night prayer of the Church, and a chant in honour of Mary, the *Salve Regina*, ended the day; and after another period of mental prayer the Sisters retired to the dormitory.

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6. *Histoire du Monastère de Prouille*, Chap. 4.

Such, briefly, was the rule of life given by St. Dominic to his nuns. The night belonged to prayer; the day, although sanctified by the different hours of the Divine Office, was more especially devoted to the duties of the common life, manual labour and study. First contemplation, then action; but as we shall see the strict law of silence made uninterrupted communion with God a possibility.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE RULE. (*Continued.*)

**T**HE Sisters lived in the strictest enclosure, the walls surrounding their convents being so high that the official charters frequently termed them *enwalled* or *inclusae*<sup>1</sup>. St. Dominic desired his daughters to be entirely dead to the world, and as a sign of this total separation he erected iron grilles in the Church and guest room<sup>2</sup>. The rules safeguarding the enclosure were of great severity : no professed religious could leave her convent without permission from the Sovereign Pontiff; no Sister might converse at the grille without a companion; entrance into the enclosure was prohibited to all persons, excepting Cardinals, Bishops, Kings and Queens. Once a year the Master-General, the Provincial, or their Vicars were allowed to enter for the Canonical Visitation. The confessor and doctor might also enter in cases of necessity.

B. Humbert speaks with evident satisfaction of the enclosure of the nuns of the Order. He says: " There

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1. In his numerous letters addressed to the Preacheresses in Germany Innocent IV, alluding to their rigorous enclosure, represents them as sheltered behind the walls of a citadel. Hugh of St. Cher employs the same comparison.

2. The grille erected by St. Dominic at St. Sixtus in Rome, is still to be seen in the Convent of SS. Dominic & Sixtus in the same city, whither the Sisters were transferred by St. Pius V. Above the grille is the following inscription: —

Dominicus crates has Xysti fixit in aede  
Virginibus sacris providus ipse pater,  
Illas huc gratae secum duxere puellae  
Servandae ut servant pignora sacra Patris. MDCLV.



are some religious who wander about the world, which is a source of many inconveniences; but the Sisters of the Order live in the strictest enclosure. There are others who do not leave their monasteries, but who admit persons from without; our Sisters admit none but Bishops, Kings and Queens. "

Yet behind their grilles Dominic's daughters were not, as might be supposed, unwilling prisoners weighed down by heavy chains. On the contrary, they regarded themselves as truly free in their hidden retreat, free from all earthly cares, free from all that might hinder their ascent Godwards, and experiencing in their holy vocation joys unknown and undreamed of by the world.

Silence was another observance strictly enjoined by Dominican laws. At certain times and in certain places all conversation was entirely prohibited. " Silence is most rigorous from the signal which ends Compline until after Prime, and in summer... from the signal made after dinner until after None. In the said time it is not permitted to anyone to speak except in case of the greatest necessity <sup>3</sup>. " " The Sisters shall observe silence in the choir, the cloister, the dormitory and the refectory. In other places, with special leave, they may speak in such a manner and at such times as may be permitted them <sup>4</sup>. "

Silence, as the Constitutions say, is one of the most essential points of religious observance, and those who habitually fail in it should undergo the penalty of the grave fault.

The mention of punishment naturally leads up to the Chapter of faults. The Dominican Constitutions do not bind under sin but under penalty; in other words, to perform the penance imposed for transgression. However, " if any Sister refuses to perform the penance

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3. *Constit.* Chap. 13, Par. 234. The Sisters may rest during the hour of profound silence after dinner.

4. *Constit.* Chap. 13, Par. 224.

imposed for the fault committed she will not be free from sin <sup>5</sup> ".

The Chapter of faults, then, is a gathering of the Community under the presidency of the Prioress, in which each member accuses herself, or may be accused by others, of external breaches of Rule. The acknowledgement is public, the correction public, and if need be the penance is public. Everything is perfectly straightforward and clear as befits the Order of Truth. Those who have committed faults confess them openly, or they may receive a charitable reminder from their companions. Every one hears and every one appreciates both the accuser and the accused.

" The Sisters will take the greatest care possible to maintain in their vigour all the rules concerning the Chapter of faults. This exercise is one of the most useful, because it is one of the more mortifying to corrupt nature, so that we see the Chapter of faults soon become less frequent and more imperfect when religious observance begins to relax <sup>6</sup>. "

We have given the substance of the Rule as observed by the nuns in the time of St. Dominic. Does it agree with modern observance? The difference is very slight as will be seen.

The first point regards mental prayer. Formerly the time prescribed for this exercise was after Compline and after Matins, but the General Chapter of 1868 granted permission to choose any other hours more convenient to the Community. Usually the morning mental prayer precedes or follows Prime, and the evening exercise is made before collation.

The rule of silence has been somewhat relaxed by the introduction of daily recreations; apart from these two hours silence is observed in accordance with primitive usage.

5. *Consist.* Chap. 31, Par. 548.

6. *Consist.* Chap. 31, Par. 548.



The annual retreat and the retreats preceding the clothing and profession of novices are also later additions. For the rest primitive and modern observance agree. The midnight Office, the perpetual abstinence, the seven months fast, the strict enclosure are in full vigour to-day as in the middle ages.

A few words must be said here regarding the government of the Sisters. Of St. Dominic's intention there can be no doubt. He meant his nuns to be incorporated in the Order, and subject to the Master General. His own devoted care for their temporal and spiritual welfare is unrivalled in the history of religious Founders. But most probably the Saint had no idea of the extraordinary rapidity with which the Sisters were to spread throughout Europe. Ere the thirteenth century had run its course there were over 250 monasteries in existence. Of these 130 belonged to Italy, 45 to France, 50 to Spain, 15 to Portugal and 40 to Germany; Russia, Denmark and Switzerland also had their cloisters of Preacheresses.

According to the custom established by St. Dominic at Prouille the Friars were not only to guide the Sisters in the spiritual life, but also to regulate their temporal affairs. The generosity of the princes and people endowed the nuns with property of all description<sup>7</sup> which required careful administration. In each convent of Sisters there were to be six professed Brethren, three or four of them priests, well versed in the spiritual life and capable and prudent in the management of business — a combination none too easy to find.

Seeing that so many distinguished religious were entirely occupied with the nuns, an extreme party arose as early as 1226, which demanded the Sisters' exclusion from the jurisdiction of the Order. It is possible to

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7. St. Dominic, lover of poverty as he was, did not require his daughters to depend for their support on alms collected day by day. They were always allowed to possess property in common, even at the time this was forbidden to the Brethren.

appreciate to the full the Sisters desire to remain under the Order, and at the same time to recognise that the Brethren had just cause for protest<sup>8</sup>. Taking the Province of Germany alone, the unfortunate Provincial had to provide at least 120 Fathers — all picked men — and the same number of Laybrothers to manage his 40 convents of nuns.

In 1252 Innocent IV exempted the Friars from the government of the Sisters, the monasteries of Prouille and St. Sixtus alone remaining subject to the Order. But fifteen years later, moved by the repeated petitions of the nuns, Clement IV restored the primitive legislation.

At the present day very many convents are under the jurisdiction of the Bishops; for example all those in America, France and Switzerland, though they often have Dominican Confessors.

The Convents under the Order depend upon the Master General and the respective Provincials; both General and Provincial can, if they wish, institute a Vicar over the Nuns. The immediate government of a Convent belongs to the Prioress who is elected by the Community and confirmed by the General or Provincial. The Prioress remains in office for three years and cannot be re-elected without dispensation from the Holy See. To assist her in regulating more important affairs there is the Council, formed of a few prudent Sisters. In some particular cases the Prioress is required to consult the Conventual Chapter, which is composed of all the Choir Sisters who have been professed four years. No novice can be received to clothing and profession without the consent of Council and Chapter.

Such is the outline of the Dominican scheme of government to which the Friars and Sisters are alike subject.

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8. Sometimes, however, it must be admitted that the Brethren were inexcusable, as in the case of St. Agnes of Bologna.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE INTERIOR SPIRIT.

**T**HERE are many things to be considered in the religious life, and hitherto our attention has been confined to regular observance which chiefly regards the exterior. It is, so to say, the body; but unless quickened and vivified by the interior spirit it is merely a dead body.

B. Albert the Great divides the spiritual life into three stages: *depuratio*, penance and mortification; *in se collectio*, silence and recollection; *elevatio*, prayer and contemplation.

*Depuratio.* The soul must first be purified, and according to St. Thomas this is the work of penance, which has for its object the destruction of sin. Man, deformed by sin, needs to be reformed by penance, that he may be transformed into God. All, even the most innocent, suffer from the sad effects of original sin; as the Catechism expresses it: "Our natural inclinations are prone to evil from our very childhood, and if not corrected by self-denial will most certainly carry us to hell."

The Dominican Rule makes ample provision for this necessary self-denial; but penance is interior as well as exterior, and although corporal mortification is a distinctive trait of the Order's spirituality, it must not be understood to exclude that which is interior. The penitential exercises of a religious differ widely from those of a Hindu fakir or a Chinese bonze. Bodily penance purifies the soul, but only in proportion to the accompanying contrition and humility. "A contrite



and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise<sup>1</sup>, " says the Psalmist.

1) Religious, then, practise penance in order to wage war against their sins and imperfections, and so prepare the way for union with God. But the exercises of bodily mortification may, and sometimes do, become impossible. Even so this essential duty of penance still holds good; it differs in kind, not in degree.

2) As to the motives for penance; besides the one already mentioned, namely, to atone for personal sins and to overcome the flesh, there are two others. First, to make reparation for the sins of the world, to impetrate conversion of sinners, or to obtain relief for the souls in Purgatory. From the apostolic spirit of the Order of Preachers we should naturally expect to find its members frequently offering their penances for these intentions. Such, in fact, was the practice of St. Dominic, and in all ages his children have been his faithful imitators.

3) There is, however, a still higher motive for crucifying the flesh: to participate, in some small degree, in the sufferings of Christ. Apart from all else penance is an imperious necessity of love. " That I may know Him, the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death<sup>2</sup>. " This sublime cry of the Apostle will ever find an echo in some souls. It explains those austerities of the Saints, which are incomprehensible to lesser love, for " the love of sacrifice is a plant that blossoms only in the sun of Divine Love<sup>3</sup>. "

*In se collectio.* Silence and solitude are imposed by the Constitutions in order to assist the soul to become interiorly recollected; for to ascend to God we must enter into ourselves. The silence of the lips would be of little use were the mind occupied with vain and idle

1. Ps. 50, 19.

2. Philipp 3, 10.

3. Monseigneur Gay.

thoughts. B. Albert advises religious to imitate the example of mountaineers. He says: " If thy desires turn aside after the objects which pass below, thou wilt lose thyself in byways and countless distractions; thy mind will become dissipated and drawn in all directions by its desires. Thy progress will be uncertain, thou wilt not reach thy goal, nor find rest after thy labours. If, on the other hand, the heart and mind, led on by love and desire, withdraw from the distractions of this world, and little by little abandon baser things to become recollected in the one, true and unchangeable Good, to dwell there held fast by the bonds of love, then wilt thou grow strong, and thy recollection will deepen, the higher thou risest on the wings of knowledge and desire. They who have attained to this dwell as by habit in the Sovereign Good, and become at last inseparable from it<sup>4</sup>. "

The Chronicle of Unterlinden<sup>5</sup>, commending the silence of one of the Sisters, says: " As much as was possible to human frailty, she not only abstained from all forbidden conversation, but even from that permitted. " Recollection is the fruit of silence, so the Chronicle continues: " This blessed Sister, by the help of grace, had gained such complete mastery over all her senses, that during the whole course of her life she never wilfully indulged in idle thoughts. "

This same Chronicle attributes the peace and harmony which reigned amongst the Sisters to their perfect observance of the rule of silence. " Their thoughts, " we read, " were entirely fixed on Him [ God ], and their hearts burned with the most ardent charity. Dwelling continually in the presence of Our Lord, their smallest actions acquired priceless value through their union with those of Christ. Silence was admirably

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4. On Union with God. Chap. 7.

5. This convent at Colmar, Alsace, was one of the most remarkable of the many fervent houses of Preacheresses.



observed in the monastery, for all regarded it as one of the foundations of the religious life, being ever mindful of the anathema of Holy Scripture against sins of the tongue. "

To give two examples of the self-restraint practised by the Sisters of Unterlinden in regard to silence : it happened that one of their number was seized with a fainting fit, and although her companions charitably hastened to her assistance to administer the necessary remedies, not a single word was spoken. On another occasion a fire broke out in some buildings adjoining the Monastery. The whole Community hurried to draw water and take precautions for the safety of their own dwelling ; but unbroken silence prevailed, in spite of the very natural anxiety. On the other hand, the Chronicler is careful to record that the Sisters' love of silence was not detrimental to fraternal charity. The sick in the infirmary received frequent visits from the rest of the Community, who consoled and encouraged them in every possible manner.

Nor was Unterlinden the only Convent where silence was held in such high honour. The chronicles of different houses and at different periods bear witness to the fidelity with which it was observed. It is not uncommon to read of Sisters who were never known to transgress this rule.

A maxim of Sr. Jane of St. Thomas, a nun of Toulouse<sup>6</sup> is very striking. She says : " We should be as careful of our words as misers are of their money ; they are always afraid of giving away too much, and never part with more than is necessary. "

It follows as a matter of course that those who love silence will also seek solitude, not for itself but as a means to recollection. In solitude God speaks to the

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6. The Convent of St. Catherine, Toulouse, was one of the chief centres of observance in the 17th century. Thence sprang many new foundations, and houses already existing were restored to primitive fervour.

heart, and the soul learns how to converse with Him. As an old Dominican writer observes, it is the privilege of the contemplative to listen to the voice of God, and it can only be heard in profound silence. " It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God <sup>7</sup>. " He adds: " The Son is the Word, the Eternal Utterance of the Father ; that He may deign to manifest Himself the soul must lend ear. " St. John of the Cross probably had these words of William Perault in his mind when he wrote: " The Father uttered one Word: that Word is His Son; and He utters Him for ever in everlasting silence, and the soul to hear It must be silent <sup>8</sup>.

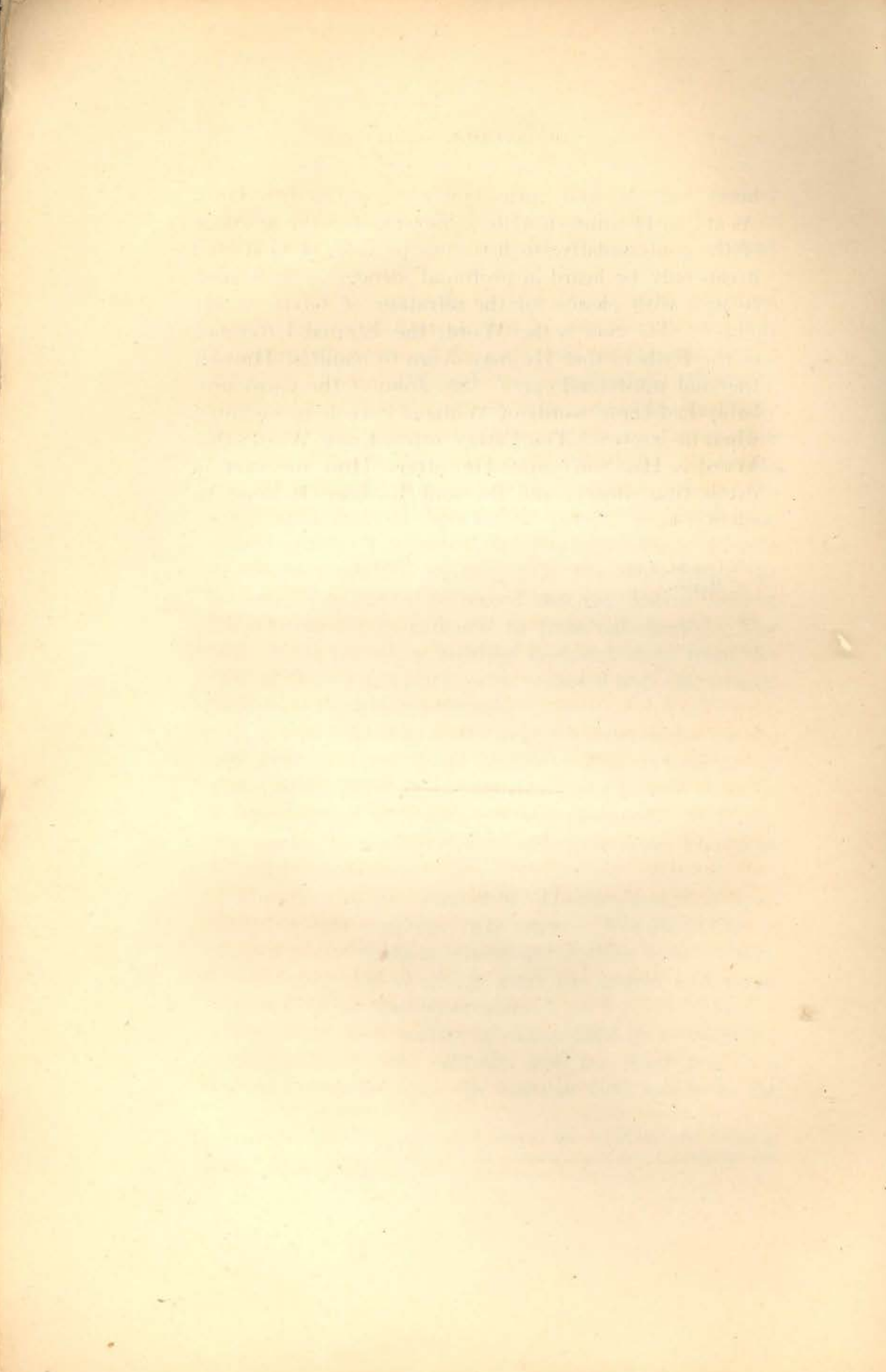
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7. Lament. 3, 26.

8. Maxims.


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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE INTERIOR SPIRIT (*continued*) PRAYER.

LEVATIO. Prayer and contemplation: here is the third stage indicated by B. Albert. Through the purification of penance, the restraint of silence and recollection, the soul acquires marvellous freedom and becomes capable of rising to the contemplation of things divine.

Two ways of prayer are open to the Dominican: the Divine Office and silent interior converse with God. The Divine Office holds the first place amongst the duties of a cloistered religious; for, as the word "religious" implies, she is bound to God, and her greatest and highest privilege is to worship Him with a living prayer, which shall include both soul and body. Now the Office perfectly fulfils this obligation. The body does homage to its Creator by the prostrations, genuflexions and other external ceremonies prescribed by the Constitutions; the voice sounds forth His praise, and uplifted on the wings of the Sacred Canticles the soul contemplates His infinite perfections. The Office is, as it were, an earthly representation of the worship of heaven, as St. John pictures it in the Apocalypse. "Holy, Holy, Holy," sing the Angels and Saints as they prostrate before the throne of Him that liveth for ever and ever; and their eternal Sanctus finds an echo here below in the choirs of men and women who are privileged to spend day and night in the worship and praise of the hidden God of the Eucharist.

Every emotion of the human heart finds expression in the Divine Office. It is suited to all; to beginners



in the spiritual life, to proficients and to the perfect. Rightly used, it is sufficient to lead the soul to contemplation, and for this reason the founders of the old Religious Orders imposed no other form of prayer upon their subjects. St. Dominic's love for the Divine Office is well known. He even assisted at Matins when actually dying, in spite of the remonstrances of the Brethren. And his devotion to the liturgical prayer of the Church has always remained a characteristic of his Order.

" I have never experienced the least weariness in singing the praises of God, " said a nun of Unterlinden at the close of a long life, and her words might be repeated by every Dominican worthy of the name.

Of course it is not to be supposed that there has never been any diminution of fervour during the long course of seven centuries; but on the whole, in every age, the Sisters have shown great zeal for the fitting celebration of the Office<sup>1</sup>. The spirit in which they performed this sacred duty is exemplified by a practice of Sr. Mary of Jesus, a nun of Seville, who, on entering the choir, united her adoration with that of the Angels, repeating the words of the Apocalypse<sup>2</sup>, " Benediction and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving... be unto our God for ever. " " The first of all duties is to give glory to God; never allow the birds to forestall you in singing His praises, " was a maxim of the Venerable Frances Dorothy.

It is not unusual to read of Sisters continuing to say the Office until the day of their death<sup>3</sup>, and the fervour of others was rewarded by their death occurring in

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1. It is one of the glories of the monastery of Estavayer-le-lac, Switzerland, that since its foundation in 1316 the public celebration of the Divine Office has never been omitted. Even during the plague in 1565, when the Community was reduced to the number of three, these true Dominicans continued to keep choir both by day and by night.

2. Apoc. VII, 12.

3. Examples of this kind have occurred in the writer's own Community.

choir; as for example, M. Mary Sanguin (+ 1598) of the royal monastery of Poissy, who died during Matins after having sung the response of St. Michael's Office, *In conspectu Angelorum*.

With regard to mental prayer it is quite certain that it was practised from the very beginning of the Order. Humbert de Romans, the fifth Master General, says that after Compline the Brethren are allowed the time required to recite the Seven Penitential Psalms and the Litany of the Saints<sup>4</sup>. He does not oblige them to the recitation of these prayers, because he speaks of interior or secret prayer; it is merely a mediaeval way of reckoning time.

Again in his exhortations to the Novices he recommends them to spend all their free time in meditation. Although he lays down no method of prayer — "methods" in the modern sense belong to a later period — he teaches that holy affections should follow meditation, — joy or sorrow, hope or fear, thanksgiving, admiration, etc., according to the disposition of the soul and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In his Commentary of the Rule of St. Augustine, Humbert returns to the subject of interior prayer and demonstrates that its practice is a manifest sign of holiness and that in all ages it has been familiar to the servants of God. Again in a circular letter addressed to the whole Order he says: "Devote the night to silence and prayer." Such in fact was the custom of the Friars, as may be seen from that delightful monument of primitive days, *The Lives of the Brethren*.

That the Sisters were not less fervent than their Brethren is clearly shown by the ancient chronicles of different monasteries. The time allowed for private prayer, however, seems to have varied considerably. "An hour after Compline and the same period after

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4. About a quarter of an hour.



Matins ", say the primitive Constitutions, but this must be regarded as a minimum<sup>5</sup>. The Chronicle of Unterlinden tells us that after Matins the Sisters were allowed to remain in choir for the space required to recite the psalter — which could not have been less than three hours. Yet this did not satisfy the devotion of the greater number. They were more eager for prayer than for necessary sleep. Some passed in contemplation the interval between Compline and Matins, others again remained in choir from Matins until Prime. For the space of forty years, Bertha von Rouffach, a nun of Unterlinden, never retired to rest after the midnight Office, no matter how fatigued or suffering she might be.

It may be said that all this fervour belonged to the early days of the Order, but such is not the case. To give a few examples chosen at random: Mary of Quiros, a nun of Avila († 1500), was accustomed to spend sixteen hours a day in spiritual exercises. In the history of the monastery of Estavayer, we read of Sisters — contemporaries of Mary of Quiros — who slept but a few hours each night in order to have more time for prayer. The Venerable Agnes of Jesus of Langeac (1602-1634) hardly took any rest at all, so constant and so fervent was her prayer. The Venerable Frances Dorothy († 1623) foundress of the monastery of Seville, required all her Community to devote two hours every night to mental prayer. She herself prolonged her vigils with extraordinary fervour. For nearly thirty years M. Dominic Clare of Limpertsberg slept but one hour each night († 1895). The Lay Sisters, too, in spite of the hard manual labour of the day, would deprive themselves of much needed rest in order to commune with God.

Sister Martha Beraud (1589-1673) Lay Sister of

5. « Post Completorium et Nocturnos ; horam habebunt Sorores, quæ orationi, contemplationi, ac devotioni possint vacare, sic tamen ne aliqua, tardius intrans dormitorium, ceteras inquietet. »

St. Praxedes, Avignon, remained in choir every night from ten o'clock till two; at four she began her day's work. This was her usual practice for more than forty years.

As to the monastery of Prouille, the cradle of the Order, prolonged nocturnal vigils were the rule from the time of its foundation until its destruction during the Revolution of 1793. Since the restoration of the monastery in 1880 the old custom has been revived. The Directory says: "Nocturnal prayer, a practice of the ancient monastery of Prouille, and the great attraction of interior souls, is allowed to those Sisters whose health permits them to prolong their holy vigils without imprudence."

And now a question arises. What particular form of mental prayer has been adopted by the Order? B. Jordan of Saxony, St. Dominic's immediate successor as Master General, was once consulted on this point, and his answer admirably expresses the Dominican spirit and practice. "Neglect nothing which may lead to devotion. The best method is the one which suits you best."

However, the study of the lives of the Sisters reveals above all the liturgical spirit. Seeing the high honour in which the Divine Office is held, it follows, as a consequence, that it must influence the whole interior life in a very marked manner. Hippolyta of Jesus († 1634) of the convent of the Angels, Barcelona, may be taken as a type. Her contemplative soul especially loved to dwell on the mystery of the Adorable Trinity; and the hymn of the Office, beginning, *O Trinitas laudabilis et Unitas mirabilis*, was the constant theme of her meditation; she ever found therein fresh food for mind and heart. Another favourite Office was that of St. Martin, which attracted her on account of its many aspirations and desires for heaven. With the antiphon of St. Laurence: *Mea nox obscurum non habet*, etc.,



she repelled the assaults of evil spirits. In every circumstance of her daily life the words of the Divine Office were on her lips; she was, so to say, saturated with it. Even more, she had the grace of inspiring others with her own enthusiastic devotion. We are told how on one feast of St. Agnes of Montepulciano, Hippolyta was leaving the choir with another Sister, and unable to control the transport of holy joy that filled her soul, she cried out: " O Sister, what fair and fragrant flowers bloom in the heavenly gardens; blessed are they who contemplate their beauty and enjoy their perfume. " Her fervour communicated itself to her companion, and both began to praise God, singing aloud: "*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.* "

The Dominican, then, is guided in her private communion with God by the form of prayer prescribed by the Church for her public worship. The life of Christ, the great mysteries of faith, are brought successively before her mind as the liturgical year runs its course; the divinely inspired words of Scripture are constantly and almost without effort upon her lips and in her heart. " She has no fancy devotions, no complicated ideas which attract only by their ingenious novelty. Like a true Dominican, she goes straight with the instinct of the race of souls to which she belongs — to what is most simple and fundamental, to that which being the most elementary is at the same time the highest and most doctrinal <sup>6</sup>. "

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6. M. C. de Ganay. *Les Bienheureuses Dominicaines, La B. Marguerite de Hongrie.*



ST. DOMINIC AND THE CRUCIFIXION  
(Fra Angelico).



## CHAPTER VIII.

### DEVOTION TO THE PASSION.



ALTHOUGH the great Dominican devotions to the Blessed Sacrament<sup>1</sup>, the Holy Name, our Lady and the dead are to be found vigourously flourishing in the purely contemplative branch of the Order, it is not intended to detail the Sisters' practice of them. There is another devotion, so characteristic of the Order that it is astonishing to find it so little noticed, namely, devotion to the Sufferings of Christ.

This apparent neglect may arise from devotion to the Passion being considered as included in the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and in one sense this is true. As St. Thomas puts it in his antiphon *O Sacrum Convivium*, the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacrifice of the Mass, remind us of our Lord's Passion. Yet the two devotions are distinct, and produce distinct spiritual effects. The interior life of a soul dominated by the thought of the mystical sufferings, and profound silence of the God-Man in the Eucharist, is something quite different from that of one constantly absorbed in the awful drama of Calvary.

Blessed Margaret of Hungary and Blessed Imelda Lambertini bear this out. The former undoubtedly had a great love for the most Blessed Sacrament, but her life was so marked by devotion to Christ crucified that all else was lost to sight. Imelda, on the other

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1. It may be mentioned that some Convents have adopted the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, notably the American houses. Daily Adoration is also observed at the Convent of Carisbrooke.

hand, was entirely absorbed by the Eucharist, though it is impossible to suppose that the crucifix said nothing to her loving heart. The sanctity of both was thoroughly Dominican; both had acquired the spirit of their Father in an eminent degree, and for that very reason the sanctity of each was entirely different. There is room for every variety of flower in Dominic's enclosed garden.

Those familiar with Fra Angelico's Passion pictures will remember how the artist-friar delights to introduce his Father Dominic into the different scenes. Sometimes the Saint is standing near the Cross contemplating the great tragedy, or he is seated, with downcast eyes, absorbed in meditation; again he bends forward to watch the holy women shrouding the Body of the Crucified. But perhaps the truest and most beautiful of Angelico's inspirations is the picture of Dominic kneeling, his hands clasping the foot of the Cross, whilst the Precious Blood streams through them to the thirsty ground below. That picture is a revelation of Dominic's character.

Unlike his brother saint and fellow labourer Francis, Dominic was not to bear visibly the marks of Christ Crucified, but many of his Children have received the stigmata.

Out of three hundred and twenty-one cases mentioned by Dr. Imbert-Goubert in his work *La Stigmatisation*, one hundred and nine are Dominicans, that is to say, more than one-third. As in every age the Order has poured forth the blood of its martyrs, so it has always possessed, in one of its branches, a living Crucifix.

It is not possible to discuss here the supernatural phenomenon of the Stigmata, but it may be observed that the outward marks are designed to express the already existing conformity to Christ Crucified.



The first known case of Stigmatisation among the Sisters is that of Helen of Hungary<sup>2</sup>, of the Monastery of Vesprim (+ 1270). The marked feature of her spiritual life was tender devotion to Our Lord's Passion, and with this same devotion she inspired her novice, B. Margaret of Hungary. Helen received the first wound in the right hand on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, but we are not told the year. On the following festival of SS. Peter and Paul, the left hand was wounded in the same manner. Although Helen received the five Stigmata, there is no record of the time at which the wounds were impressed upon her feet and side. One remarkable circumstance of this case is that the Stigmata resembled golden circles, and from the wounds in the hands fragrant flowers frequently sprang forth. After Helen's death the Stigmata healed, leaving only scars; but on the occasion of the translation of her incorrupt body seventeen years later, the wound of the side opened afresh.

Mechtilde von Stans, of the convent of Toss, Switzerland, who lived in the latter half of the 12th century, visibly bore the marks of Christ's wounds in her body. She also experienced the sufferings of the Passion.

Grunberga von Kastelberg and Agnes von Nordera of the Convent of Adelhausen, Fribourg, were privileged to bear the impress of Christ Crucified. Agnes, however, did not receive the wound of the side. These two Sisters were contemporaries and lived towards the end of the 13th century.

Margaret Ebner of the monastery of Maria Medingen, Bavaria (1294-1351) received the Stigmata during the Lent of 1339. This heavenly favour was apparently invisible to all but herself.

Columba Trocazani of the convent of St. Lazarus,

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2. Although not formally beatified, Helen was given the title of Blessed immediately after her death.

Milan (+ 1517), whilst praying before a Crucifix had a vision of our Lord, who impressed the five Stigmata upon her flesh. After this favour, she could not look at a crucifix without fainting. On one occasion, whilst contemplating the scourging, she was rapt in ecstasy; her hands and feet were suddenly tightly bound, and she appeared to be experiencing acute suffering. She retained the marks of the bonds for the rest of her life, and they gave her continual pain, which increased on Fridays.

Venerable Frances Dorothy, foundress of the monastery of Our Lady, Seville (+ 1623), received the Stigmata whilst watching before the Blessed Sacrament one Maundy Thursday night. They remained visible all her life.

Anne de Vargas, a nun of the monastery of Valladolid, who lived in the 16th century, received a similar grace to that granted to St. Catherine of Siena. Our Lord appeared to her hanging on the Cross, and from His Five Wounds issued five rays of light which pierced Anne's side, hands and feet. Father Alphonsus de Hontiveros, who was twice Provincial of Spain, is the authority for this statement.

Delicia di Giovanni, a nun of the monastery of St. Catherine, Palermo (1560-1642) received the Stigmata at intervals extending over a period of five years. In the sixth year she experienced the pain of the scourging and crowning with thorns.

Louise Bourgeat (1594-1631) of the monastery of St. Catherine, Puy, had the five Stigmata, but they were invisible. The Sisters who attended her in her many illnesses observed that her feet were always fixed one on the other. Every effort to separate them proved fruitless.

Philippa of St. Thomas, of the convent of Santarem was found after her death with the marks of the Stigmata on her body and of the crown of thorns on her head.



Her case is mentioned in the Acts of the General Chapter of 1670.

Perhaps, however, the most remarkable of all is the case of the Venerable Agnes of Jesus of Langeac (1602-1634). The Stigmata first appeared on her hands in the form of red crosses. Much afflicted she besought our Lord to remove all external marks, and He partially granted her request; the wounds of the hands became invisible, but those of the feet and side remained open. Shortly after this, in presence of her Confessor and the whole Community, Mother Agnes endured the tortures of the crucifixion, and actually appeared to die a violent death. She also received the crown of thorns, and the blood frequently soaked through her forehead cloth and kerchief.

The Venerable Catherine Paluzzi, foundress of the convent of Morlupo († 1645), received the marks of the five wounds and had two deep incisions in her heart.

Columba Schonat (1730-1787), Lay Sister of the convent of the Holy Sepulchre, Bamberg, first experienced the sufferings of the Stigmata in October 1763. On December 9th of the same year, she underwent a mystical crucifixion and the wounds became visible. In this case, as in many others, the Stigmata exhaled an exquisite perfume, which filled those who observed it with great spiritual fervour.

Maria Josepha Kümi, of the convent of Wesen, Switzerland († 1817), received the Stigmata from the hands of our Lord Himself in February 1806. Her heart was pierced in the form of a Cross.

The last known case in the Order is that of Mother Dominic Clare of the Cross, foundress of the convent of Limpertsberg, Luxembourg. For the space of twenty-eight years she had frequent ecstasies of the Passion and after her death in 1893 the Stigmata appeared shining and transparent.

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tisation<sup>1</sup>, there are, however, many other Sisters who have participated in our Lord's Passion in different ways.

Theresa of the Cross, lay-Sister of the convent of Liege († 1674), was often seen suspended in the air in the attitude of crucifixion; she also suffered the torture of the scourging. Her extraordinary states brought a shameful persecution upon her. Driven from convent to convent, she was finally forced to seek shelter with her brother, who treated her with the utmost cruelty. After twenty years her Sisters discovered the truth, and she was allowed to return to the Convent.

Hippolyta of Jesus and others received the crown of thorns. Mary Villana, Martina of the Angels and Prudenza Rasconi had the wound in the side; Blanche Guzman, the wounds in the feet. Others again endured the pains of the scourging and the interior anguish of Gethsemane.

Space does not admit of further examples; but enough has been said to prove the statement made at the beginning of the chapter.

Besides the highly favoured ones, there have been Sisters whose constant contemplation of the Passion led them to seek pain as eagerly as the votaries of the world seek ease and pleasure. Witness Hedwige von Laufenburg of Unterlinden, who cut a cross on her breast that she might ever bear upon her body a reminder of Christ's sufferings. When the wound healed, she renewed it. Margaret of Hungary too, that flower of Calvary, during the whole course of her short life crucified her innocent body with indescribable penances. The celebrated Juliana Morell, through loving contemplation of Christ Crucified, acquired a burning thirst for suffering. God sent her such violent and continual

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1. Other Sisters might be added to these, but the writer has been unable to ascertain whether they belonged to the Second or Third Order.

pain that she was sometimes deprived of her senses. Yet she never grew weary of suffering, so intensely did she desire to be made conformable to the image of her beloved Saviour.

In truth, the Sisters have been faithful to the advice of Albert the Great. " Fix thy gaze upon thy wounded Jesus ", he says, " and on Him alone. Strive with all thy powers unwearyingly, to reach God through Himself, that is through God made man; that thou mayest attain to the knowledge of His Divinity through the wounds of His Humanity. "

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## CHAPTER IX.

### SOME CHARACTERISTICS.



VERY Order has its own characteristics; these go to form that which is in itself indescribable, namely, its spirit.

The first distinctive mark of a Dominican is a zeal for souls. St. Dominic breathed into his first daughters the ardour of his own apostolic zeal; so much so that by common consent they were called *Sisters Preacheresses*. To labour by prayer and penance for the salvation of souls, the end for which the Order was instituted, has always been, and is regarded by the Sisters, as a primary duty.

Anna von Wineck of Unterlinden was so devoured by true Dominican zeal, that every Good Friday she would go in spirit to the foot of the Cross and offer all her prayers and penances to her Crucified Lord, imploring Him to dispose of them for the needs of souls.

Another Sister of the same monastery, when at the point of death, told her Prioress that God had never refused to grant any of her petitions. How a Dominican would make use of such a privilege is not difficult to guess.

Yet another Unterlinden nun, Herburge von Herkenheim, obtained by her prayers the raising of the siege of Colmar. "I would give the last drop of my blood that one soul might love God more," said Mary Benigna Pepe. And Mother Catherine Columb, foundress of the monastery of Puy, often declared her willingness to lay down her life for the salvation of a single soul. Her special devotion was to pray for



preachers and whenever the death of an eloquent orator occurred, she deplored it as a personal misfortune. " Missionaries and doctors, " she would say, " are like brilliant and burning torches, enlightening the faithful and kindling in their hearts the fire of divine love. Why cannot I imitate them? " Mary Villani, foundress of a Convent in Naples, was remarkable for her love of souls. No suffering daunted her when there was question of the conversion of a sinner. Our Lord once said to her : " Since thou art my faithful Spouse, thou shalt share the anguish I endured for the salvation of sinners. " To excite her to greater compassion He showed her the miserable condition of a sin-stained soul and at the appalling sight she exclaimed : " Ah, my Jesus, send me all the sufferings of death and hell, only let me contribute to the salvation of those souls who abuse the Precious Blood Thou didst shed on the Cross. "

The conversion of M. Olier, founder of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, was the work of a humble Dominican nun, the Venerable Agnes of Jesus. She had no personal acquaintance with him, but at Our Lord's express command offered tears, prayers and penances for the space of three years, to obtain the graces necessary for his mission in the Church. Her whole life — a short one, for she died at thirty-two — was a martyrdom. Yet when our Lord made known to her how efficacious her sufferings were for the conversion of sinners she replied, " Since I am suffering for sinners, I feel full of courage. "

It would require a volume to mention the many Sisters, who following the example set by our Father Dominic, were accustomed to scourge themselves to blood for the conversion of sinners. This practice was one of the commonest forms of penance. These brief remarks may be fittingly closed by a quotation from the directory of a modern foundation, the convent of Limpertsberg, Luxembourg. " Detached from all

that is earthly by penance; united with the divine realities by prayer, the Sisters will live far from men and near to God; near to God for the salvation of men who live far from Him. "

A bright, happy spirit is another Dominican characteristic. Many of the Saints of the Order have evinced a keen sense of humour; witness B. Jordan of whom so many delightfully witty sayings are recorded, and B. Humbert whose writings abound with humorous examples.

" What astonishes me is that you should be so light-hearted and happy, leading such a hard life behind these grilles, " said a man of the world quite recently to a Dominican nun. Yet there is nothing astonishing in it. Given a true vocation, the cloistered life is an ideally happy one, and we have it on the authority of Fr. Faber that a mortified life is a happy life. " If the Saints were such gay sprites, and monks and nuns such unaccountably cheerful creatures, it is simply because their bodies, like St. Paul's, are chastised and kept under with an unflinching sharpness and a vigorous discretion. He that would be joyous must first be mortified and he that is mortified is already joyous with a joy that is of pure celestial birth<sup>1</sup>. "

The chronicles of the Sisters tell of a Lay-Sister whose austerities were prodigious; yet they were performed with the greatest joy. So much so that the Prioress appointed her Infirmarian, that the sight of her bright and happy face might encourage and console the sick. Mary of Jesus, foundress of the convent of Toulouse, was remarkable for the joyous serenity of her countenance which nothing could disturb or sadden. Mother Dominic Clare of Limpertsberg insisted on her nuns performing their supplementary penances in a joyful spirit. Sister Barbara of St. Dominic, a nun

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1. " The Blessed Sacrament. "



of the monastery of the Mother of God, Seville, who died in the odour of sanctity in 1872, was so gay that her Superiors always sought her society at recreation, when the trials of office weighed upon them more heavily than usual.

This same holy joy reigns supreme even at the hour of death. We are told of Sisters laughing out of sheer happiness when warned of their approaching end. Some died singing the *Te Deum*; others the *Magnificat*. A member of the writer's own Community, whose happy death occurred in 1913, after a long and tedious malady borne with characteristic Dominican cheerfulness, manifested the utmost joy at the approach of death; she used to say: "I am afraid I am too happy."

Simplicity is likewise a marked feature in the Dominican character. "Truth" is the motto of the Order, and truth is one and simple. The Constitutions, the code of law upon which the religious is formed, are remarkably simple and straightforward. There is no vestige of poetry, hardly even of piety about them; they are perfectly easy to understand, in fact it would be difficult to misunderstand them. Perhaps their clearness has a great deal to do with the fact that there has never been a division in the Order.

The simplicity of Dominican prayer has been touched upon in passing, but some mention must be made of the Rosary that "Gospel of the simple," which as the Constitutions say, "our holy Father, St. Dominic, has left us as a precious heritage." The Rosary, an essentially Dominican form of prayer, is simplicity itself. But what theologian has ever fathomed the profound mysteries it offers to our contemplation? In things spiritual, the simple is always the sublime; God Himself is the one simple Being, and it is a well attested fact in the interior life that the higher the soul ascends, the closer its union with God, the greater its simplicity.

" It is always the temptation of a strong man to take matters into his own hands, but it is the besetting virtue of a wise man to encourage individuality <sup>2</sup> ". These words, spoken of St. Dominic, will serve to bring forward the respect for individuals which reigns in the Order. When Père Lacordaire was asked why he elected to become a Dominican rather than anything else, he replied: " St. Dominic binds the body, but he leaves the mind free. " A mere superficial glance at the Constitutions is sufficient to show how wide a scope is given to the individual ; there is a breadth and freedom about them which makes it possible for widely different characters to retain their personality, and yet be thorough and loyal Dominicans. The Saints of the Order demonstrate this fact in a striking manner. The Dominican stamp is unmistakeable ; but it serves to accentuate rather than to conceal individuality.

Yet this by no means implies the absence of obedience ; on the contrary, respect for authority is perhaps more necessary for a Dominican than for a religious of any other Order. It has been well said that " in other Orders what matters most is the character of the men who command, for the Order is like clay in their hands. With the children of Dominic what matters most is the character of the freemen who obey ; for such as they are, such will be the leaders of their choice, and such will be their Order which their freedom moulds for good or ill <sup>3</sup>. "

It follows as a consequence that whatever talents or natural gifts a Dominican possesses are cultivated and turned to account. Thus we find amongst the Sisters writers of no small merit. The list is headed by Blessed Cecilia, the biographer of St. Dominic. The early Chroniclers follow, amongst whom Elizabeth Staeglin, B. Henry Suso's disciple, deserves special mention.

2. Fr. Vincent Mc Nabb, O. P.

3. Fr. Vincent Mc Nabb, O. P.



Mary Villani of Naples wrote books in Latin and Italian, and Echard gives her a place amongst the writers of the Order. Space forbids a complete list of her writings, but we may mention three Commentaries on the Gospels, and two on the Cantic of Canticles.

Hippolyta of Jesus' works, which fill fifteen folio volumes, were published by her nephew, John Thomas Rocaberti, fifty-eighth Master General.

An unusually learned Sister was Juliana Morell, of the convent of St. Praxedes, Avignon (1594-1653). At the age of seven she wrote Latin with perfect ease, and by her twelfth year was proficient in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldaic, Italian, French, Spanish, the humanities, logic and ethics. From the age of twelve to fourteen she studied physics, metaphysics and jurisprudence, and publicly defended several theses with the utmost brilliancy. Besides this she evinced a talent for music, and could play the lute, the spinet and the organ. When Juliana was fifteen she renounced the world for the cloister, and there she acquired a virtue which far surpassed her learning. Some of her spiritual writings have been re-published by Père M. J. Rousset, O. P. Reference must also be made to Margaret of the Virgin of the monastery of St. Thomas, Paris (1613-1633?), who, according to Echard, was called the Christian Sappho of her age.

Painting, which may be called the hereditary art of the Order has always been cultivated by the Sisters. Even in the very earliest days of its foundation the illumination of manuscripts occupied a considerable portion of the time allotted for work.

Plautilla Nelli, of the convent of St. Catherine, Florence, a disciple of Savonarola, was an artist of no small merit. Her best pictures are an Adoration of the Magi, a Descent from the Cross and a Last Supper; the latter, painted for the refectory of her own convent, is now in Sta. Maria Novella. Under Sr. Plautilla's

direction many members of her Community cultivated the fine arts. Her best pupils were Sister Prudenza Cambi, Sister Agatha Trabellesi, Sister Maria Ruggieri and a Sister Veronica; " all of whom, " says Razzi, " laudably occupy themselves with painting on canvas or panel. " There were others who modelled in clay; amongst these Razzi mentions Sister Dionisia Niccolini and Sister Angelica Razzi, his sister, as specially proficient.

The two convents of San Domenico and San Giorgio, Lucca, also sheltered gifted artists. To the former belonged Aurelia Fiorentini, and to the latter Brigid Franciotti and Bernadina Ruschi. The necrology of San Giorgio speaks of Sister Bernadina as follows: " She painted many images on walls and on canvas, the altar-piece of the Church and the Crucifixes (on canvas) in the cells. In her our convent has suffered a great loss. "

Marchesi concludes his account of the women painters of the Order by the following words: " We might add many more, but these names are enough to reflect credit on our Order. The little we have said will prove that our Dominican nuns, in spite of many obstacles, have inherited all the taste bequeathed to the Institute by Angelico and Bartolommeo. "

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CHRIST'S APPARITION TO MAGDALENE

(Fra Angelico).



## CHAPTER X.

### A SAINT AND SOME BEATAE.



WE have seen in the foregoing chapters the principles on which the Dominican life is founded and some of the special characteristics of the Order. Let us go on to show how these principles have been crystallised, as it were, into living examples, by giving a short account of some of the Dominican nuns who have received the honours of canonization and beatification.

#### ST. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO. 1268-1317.

The first place belongs to St. Agnes of Montepulciano, the only canonized saint amongst Dominic's cloistered daughters.

Born in 1268 of devout Christian parents, she showed from her earliest years a marvellous aptitude for prayer. At the age of nine she obtained permission to enter an austere Augustinian Community in her native town, and rapidly ascended to the heights of the spiritual life. Like many of the great mystics Agnes possessed no small capacity for practical affairs, and when only fourteen became Procuratrix of her monastery. Although not yet clothed with St. Dominic's habit she was already filled with his spirit, and combined the contemplative and active life in a manner characteristically Dominican. She often received great supernatural favours whilst engaged in manual work. One day, our Lady, to whom she had an intense devotion, appeared

to her and gave her three stones with the injunction to build a Church and convent.

At the age of sixteen Agnes found herself Abbess of a new foundation at Procena. Her sanctity, which God was pleased to manifest by striking supernatural occurrences, attracted many young girls to her convent. Flowers of rare beauty and fragrance sprang up around her as she prayed, and a mysterious manna, white as snow, each particle forming a cross, fell upon her and covered the ground.

St. Agnes' love of the Blessed Sacrament and her devotion to the Passion are unequalled in the Dominican annals; so too, her zeal for souls, whilst her penances seem almost incredible.

She was thirty-five when God made known to her in a mysterious vision the crowning work of her life, namely the foundation of a convent of Preacheresses in her native town. The fervour of this new Dominican Community of Sta. Maria Novella is thus described by the Chronicler: " Total detachment from all earthly ties and the love of mortification reigned supreme in the monastery. The cells were scantily furnished, cold and comfortless; the best part of the food was given to the poor. The least appearance of luxury was carefully excluded and even in the necessities of life the Sisters desired to experience the hardships of poverty. Austerity and patience seemed to be their favourite portion. "

As Prioress Agnes strove to lead her daughters in the way of perfection both by word and example. Although gentle and loving in her dealings with them, she was exact even to severity in maintaining the observances of the Order.

During the last eleven years of her life (the years she spent as a Dominican), miracles and supernatural favours became of almost daily occurrence, and with them came an increase of bodily suffering. As a true Spouse of



the Crucified, Agnes welcomed pain, and when her sufferings became agony, she praised God and begged Him to accept them in atonement for her sins and the sins of others.

Like her Father St. Dominic she promised to help her desolate children after her departure for heaven, and with the words: " I go to Him who is my only hope, " she peacefully expired. It was April 20th, 1317.

In Agnes we find many points of resemblance with St. Dominic. She first lived under the rule of St. Augustine and did not find her final vocation until shortly before her death. She possessed that wonderful serenity which so characterized her blessed Father, so that merely to look at her restored peace to troubled souls. Like him she had a special power over evil spirits ; at her prayer, as at his, God deigned to send food by the hand of angels ; she had his zeal for souls, his spirit of penance and prayer, and his supernatural tenderness for his spiritual children. Like him she ended her work for God in the prime of life, worn out by labour and penance, and consumed by a burning thirst to drink of the torrent of living waters.

#### BB. DIANA, CECILIA AND AMY. XIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.

Unlike her glorious sister St. Agnes, B. Diana's early life in no way foreshadowed her future sanctity. The only daughter of a rich and noble Bolognese family, she was the darling of her father and brothers, who found delight in gratifying her slightest wishes. Little more than a child when her mother died, masculine influence predominated in Diana's education and left its stamp upon her character. Yet she was, nevertheless, a true woman with feminine weaknesses, chief among which was a love of dress and a desire to attract and please. She possessed great personal beauty, and

added to this exceptional gifts of mind and heart, ready wit and brilliant conversational powers.

The world smiled upon Diana and she enjoyed all it offered to her ; but the coming of the Friars to Bologna changed the whole course of her life. Drawn to God by one of B. Reginald's sermons, she placed herself under his direction and followed his advice in all things. Such a character as hers could not be satisfied with an ordinary degree of perfection ; the need for the highest took possession of her, and she determined to consecrate herself to God in the new Order.

The Brethren, however, had no suitable convent and church. Thanks to Diana's influence with her family this was obtained in 1219. Shortly afterwards she made a vow of virginity in the hands of St. Dominic, with a further vow to enter religion as soon as it became possible. She then begged St. Dominic to found in Bologna a convent of Sisters, and the holy Father's decision shows clearly the importance he attached to his daughters' work in the Order. He ordered the Brethren to begin building for the Sisters even at the risk of leaving their own convent unfinished.

Difficulties of all kinds arose. Diana's family refused the necessary funds and the Bishops objected to the site chosen. Firm in her resolution to become a religious, Diana took refuge in the convent of Ronzano. Dragged out of the convent by her father and brothers, with such violence as to fracture one of her ribs, she was kept a prisoner for more than a year. At the end of that time she once more escaped ; and seeing her determination, her family left her unmolested.

In the meanwhile St. Dominic had died, and his successor in the government of the Order, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, took up Diana's cause. The monastery of St. Agnes soon became an accomplished fact, and Diana with four companions received the Dominican habit. To train them in the details of the religious life



Jordan obtained four Sisters from the convent of St. Sixtus in Rome, and amongst these were BB. Cecilia and Amy.

Blessed Diana lived thirteen years after the foundation of St. Agnes. Her great love of the Order and its observances is the special characteristic of her sanctity. This was fostered by the letters of B. Jordan, who kept up an assiduous correspondence with her during the whole time he governed the Order. He exhorts her to charity and great zeal for souls, especially to prayer for the preaching of the Brethren and their various apostolic labours.

Blessed Cecilia belonged to a noble Roman family, and received the habit from St. Dominic at the age of seventeen. To her pen we owe the beautiful account of the Blessed Father, so living in its touching simplicity. St. Dominic had a special affection for B. Cecilia, and confided many spiritual secrets to her. This one fact speaks volumes for her sanctity.

Nothing is known of Blessed Amy; but her memory has always been associated with BB. Diana and Cecilia.

#### BLESSED MARGARET OF HUNGARY. 1242-1270.

Margaret was the daughter of Bela IV, King of Hungary. Shortly before her birth the Tartars invaded the kingdom of her father, slaughtering the population without distinction of age or sex, and leaving ruin and desolation wherever they passed. Bela and his wife made a vow to consecrate to God, in the Order of St. Dominic, the child about to be born to them, if their lives and kingdom were spared, and shortly afterwards the Tartars suddenly retired.

At the age of three Margaret was placed in the convent of Vesprim, near Buda, and a year later received the religious habit. As the child grew up she showed a remarkable love of prayer and mortification. One

day she asked a Sister what the cross meant. After hearing the explanation of the mystery of the Redemption, a thirst for suffering and humiliation took possession of her childish heart, and thenceforward her life became one of extraordinary austerity.

At twelve years of age Margaret made her profession in the hands of Humbert de Romans, Master General of the Order; two years previously she had left the convent of Vesprim for a new monastery built by her father on an island in the Danube. Although the daughter of a king, she considered herself, and wished her Sisters to consider her, as the last and least in the convent. She undertook all the lowliest offices, washing and scrubbing, carrying wood, skinning fish and drawing water from the well. Above all she tended the sick with tender care, undertaking for them the most trying and repulsive offices. In her desire for mortification she even departed from personal cleanliness, and in this matter she is almost unique amongst Dominican saints; but it must be remembered that she was called by God to expiate the excessive luxury and pagan love of refinement then prevalent in Hungary.

Like many another Saint of high degree Margaret had to face troublesome offers of marriage. The king of Bohemia, who had come with her parents to the convent, was so infatuated by her charm and beauty that he proposed petitioning the Pope to dispense with her religious vows. Unfortunately for Margaret, her father, Bela, desired this marriage for political reasons and urged her to accept the royal suitor. But the Bride of Christ was inexorable; on no pretext whatever would she consent to an earthly union, and in the end her firmness and courage prevailed.

" Love God, despise thyself, despise and judge no one. " This maxim had been given to Margaret by her Provincial, and it fitly sums up her whole life. Her love of God and of Christ Crucified led her to self-



contempt, or to what is even more perfect, to utter self-forgetfulness. Selfishness is the death of fraternal charity, and as it found no place in Margaret's heart, her love for others was generous and devoted.

At the age of twenty-eight, worn out by labour and austerity, she gave up her pure soul to God on January 18th, 1270. Her last words were those of Jesus on the Cross: "*In manus Tuas commendo spiritum meum.*"

BLESSED IMELDA LAMBERTINI. 1322-1333.

Blessed Imelda was the only child of rich and noble parents at Bologna. From her earliest childhood our Lord drew her to Himself alone. When nine years old she was clothed in the habit of St. Dominic at the convent of Val di Pietra, and her angelic disposition endeared her to all her Sisters. She fulfilled all the prescriptions of the rule, rising at midnight for Matins, and observing the fasts and abstinence like the older Sisters, and she rejoiced especially in singing the Psalms of the Divine Office. At Holy Mass her whole soul was rapt in God, but day by day she longed more to receive Him in Holy Communion. Why was He denied to her when He had commanded little children to come to Him? When the Sisters went up to the grille to communicate, Imelda prostrated on the ground, begging with tears for the joy which alone she desired. Who can fathom the grief of a child? It seems strange to us in these days that Imelda's tears and prayers were disregarded, but so it was. On Ascension day 1333, an answer came from Jesus Himself. Mass was over, and most of the Sisters had left the Choir. Imelda prayed on, when suddenly a shining Host was seen in the air over her head, hovering on wings of love; she gazed at It with clasped hands, her whole soul concentrated into intense longing. Then the Priest was called, and putting on his vestments, received the Sacred Host

on the paten, and communicated the dear little Novice. What a rapture of joy filled her heart! Her thanksgiving was very long, so long that the Nuns went to rouse her. For the first time in her short life she did not obey. They raised her up, but Imelda was dead. Her heart had broken from sheer joy. Jesus at His first embrace took her pure soul away with Him.

Blessed Imelda is the Patroness of First Communicants. Her relics are preserved in the Church of St. Sigismund at Bologna.

BLESSED CLARA GAMBACORTA. 1362-1449.

Clara was the daughter of Peter Gambacorta, Governor of Pisa. She aspired to union with our Lord alone, but her father had betrothed her at a very early age to a rich and noble youth of Pisa, and she was married to him when only twelve. The three years of her married life were spent in works of mercy; she prayed much and fasted often, for she did not give up hope for the future. At every elevation of the Sacred Host at Mass, she took off her wedding ring and offered herself to our Lord to be His alone.

When she was fifteen her husband died, and Clara made up her mind not to be forced into a second marriage. She was encouraged in this resolution by St. Catherine of Siena, who came to Pisa at this time. Through one of the servants, Clara, or Tora as she was called in the world, arranged to go to the Poor Clares, and was received and clothed by them. Peter Gambacorta was in despair when this news reached him, but her brothers arrived with an armed retinue, and after battering the door, threatened to set fire to the convent unless their sister was restored to them. The nuns, thoroughly frightened, dropped Tora over the wall and she was taken home in triumph; so ended her first attempt. She was kept a close prisoner in one room for five months; she had



no bed, and sometimes they forgot to bring her food for three days at a time. It is only fair to say that her mother was ill and could not attend to her. Tora bore this treatment with great sweetness, spent the long lonely hours in prayer, and delighted in the privations. When her mother recovered she pleaded Tora's cause, and she was allowed to enter the Dominican convent of the Holy Cross. Here she lived for four years, after which her father built her a convent to which she removed in 1382, taking with her four nuns from Holy Cross, including B. Mary Mancini.

Blessed Clara then obtained authority to begin the full observance of the Dominican rule, including the common life and strict enclosure. She loved to do the meanest work and to have the commonest things, and was full of charity for the poor and suffering.

In 1387 her father and brothers were cruelly and treacherously murdered by Appiano who had been their friend, and who now assumed the government of the city. And when he in his turn was deposed and murdered, Clara showed a wonderful spirit of forgiveness in giving shelter to his wife and children.

Blessed Clara lived thirty-seven years in this monastery of St. Dominic, and worked many miracles after her death.

BLESSED MARY MANCINI. † 1431.

Catherine Mancini was one whose vocation to the cloistered life came, not in early life, but step by step. She lived first in the world as a wife and mother for some years, in troubled times, when the city of Pisa was torn by factions. Having lost her father early, she was brought up by a pious mother, and trained in solid virtue. As a child and all through life, she often saw and conversed with her Guardian Angel. Married at twelve, she became a widow at sixteen, and by the

wish of her mother and brother she accepted a second husband with whom she lived happily for eight years, and by whom she had five children. He encouraged and aided her in works of charity, and even allowed her to bring several orphans and sick persons to live in their house. At the age of twenty-five she was again left a widow, when she entered the Third Order of St. Dominic and began to live by rule. She was most assiduous in manual work and in all the duties of her household, combining with these many good works and much prayer and mortification. Above all she loved to nurse the sick and suffering, and on one occasion a young man was found at her door covered with sores, to whom she showed every kindness in her power. On his departure he blessed her in the name of the B. Trinity, and her Angel gave her to understand that it was our Lord Himself.

In 1375 St. Catherine of Siena came to Pisa, and a lasting friendship sprang up between these two holy souls.

But soon Catherine Mancini felt called by God to the stricter life of the cloister, and she entered the convent of Holy Cross, taking the name of Mary. This convent was very much relaxed. B. Mary together with B. Clara Gambacorta strove to re-introduce the common life and other neglected points of rule, and by their gentleness and tact they in some measure succeeded.

It was then that Peter Gambacorta built the monastery of St. Dominic; and B. Clara, accompanied by B. Mary Mancini and five others, began there to practice the strict rule of the Second Order. After B. Clara's death, the government of the Community devolved on her friend. The account of her later life has not been preserved : she died in 1431.



## BLESSED MARGARET OF SAVOY. 1382-1464.

Blessed Margaret was married at the age of thirteen, in spite of her ardent desires for the religious life. She was encouraged in the path of holiness by the counsels of St. Vincent Ferrer, and on the death of her husband she became a Tertiary of the Dominican Order, and refused to consider any proposals for a second marriage.

She had a great love for the poor, and spent much of her time in ministering to them, nursing the sick and dressing their wounds with the tenderest care. But, longing for a life of greater seclusion, she founded a convent of the Second Order at Albi, and then entered on a life filled with the most extraordinary graces and corresponding trials. In her love of poverty she delighted to have all that was poorest and most common in the house for her use, and desired to be considered the lowest and the least. Our Lord appeared to her and offered her three darts from which to choose, calumny, sickness and persecution. In her heroic generosity she took all three and suffered accordingly; but, on the other hand, God was generous in rewarding her. She was often rapt in ecstasy, and her prayers and tears were answered in a marvellous way. Self-effacement was the great feature of her life; she sought always the most perfect way, giving herself to each duty as it came, and leaving self altogether out of the question. At her death angelic music was heard, and many miracles were wrought through her intercession.

## BLESSED JANE OF PORTUGAL. 1452-1490.

Blessed Jane was another whose heart was all aflame with the love of Jesus Crucified and with an ardent desire to share His sufferings. She cared nothing for earthly joys; the daughter of a King, she despised worldly rank

and riches, and desired only the humble, hidden life of the cloister. Her lot was a hard one; she was destined time after time to see her desires nearing their fulfilment, and again and again to suffer disappointment; but through all her trials she maintained a patience and serenity which could only belong to a soul truly fixed on God, and regarding all events as the expression of His Holy Will.

After she had with great difficulty obtained her father's consent to her becoming a religious, her brother's fierce opposition delayed her project. The King and his son went to fight the Moors; and Jane was appointed Regent of the kingdom, for though only nineteen, she was endowed with wisdom and a dignity of presence beyond her years. On their victorious return she claimed the fulfilment of her father's promise, and was allowed to go to the Dominican convent of Aveiro, where she was clothed in the habit. But her brother once more interfered, and she was forced to re-assume secular attire, and sign a declaration that she would never make her religious profession. Nevertheless she continued to live in the convent, practising severe penance which she offered for the conversion of sinners and of the Moors, and spending the money given her by her father entirely on the poor and on the Church.

On the appearance of the plague at Aveiro she was once more dragged out of her retirement and brought back to the Court, but after a time she was allowed to return, and remained at Aveiro till her death in 1490.

In an earlier chapter the Church was compared to a ship, and the contemplative Orders to the furnace which supplies motive power to the great vessel. The following words of St. Catherine of Siena will serve as a fitting conclusion to these pages. The Saint is speaking in the person of the Eternal Father. "If you look at the ship of your Father Dominic, My beloved son, you will see with what perfect order he governed it, desiring that his



children should devote themselves solely to My honour and the salvation of souls, by the light of science... He took on him the office of My Son, the Only Begotten Word. He was indeed a shining light whom I gave to the world through the hands of Mary, whom I placed in the mystical body of the Church to root out heresy... On what table did he and his sons feed by the light of science? At the table of the Cross, where, full of holy desires, they fed on souls in My honour. For Dominic desired that his sons should attend to no other end than this, to seek the praise and glory of My Name by the salvation of souls..... He made it (his Order) a royal Order, wherein none were bound under mortal sin..... for enlightened by the true Light, he willed not the death of the sinner, but that all should be converted and live. Therefore is his Order large and joyous, and odoriferous as a delightful garden <sup>1</sup>. "

" This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent ". To contemplate the Truth, to show forth the Truth, is the lifework of every Dominican whether cloistered or uncloistered. But the Order is " large and joyous ", mindful of the mysterious guidance of the Spirit of Truth, and His manifold workings in souls. Truth is light, and Truth is love, for in the Trinity, He Who is the Spirit of Truth is also the Spirit of Love.

As the Dominican contemplative reflects upon her God-given vocation, there rise spontaneously to her lips the inspired words of the Psalmist : " The lines are fallen unto me in goodly places ; for my inheritance is goodly to me <sup>2</sup>. "

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1. Dialogue. Chap. 158.

2. Ps. XV, 5.





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