ST. BERNARD AND HIS APPROACHING CENTENARY.

I.

IN the year of grace 1091, was born in the village of Fontaines, near Dijon, in Burgundy, a man who filled the first half of the twelfth century, up to his death in 1153, with the marvellous activity of a life all devoted to God, to the heroic pursuit of sanctity, to bringing about unity in the Church torn with schism, to effecting peace and concord between Christian princes, to the arduous labor of combating heresies within the bosom of Christendom, and to the still more difficult task of checking the progress of the Mohammedan power.

Appointed abbot in his twenty-fifth year, creating a great monastic establishment in the very bosom of the most frightful wilderness in his native land, and making it a nursery of such austerity and holiness, that its heavenly fragrance filled the whole earth, and induced all Christian peoples to possess one or more of its blessed offshoots, we find Bernard of Clairvaux even at twenty-five, and ever afterward until his dying day, so worn by his unappeasable thirst for penitential mortification, that people wondered how he lived at all. But the great and perpetual miracle was, that this feeble-bodied, emaciated monk was sustained by a spirit which enabled him to attempt and to achieve works so mighty and so various for the welfare of the Holy See and the universal Church, for the peace of Christendom and the revival of supernatural life in the cloister, among the clergy and throughout the population of Continental Europe—that nothing like the godlike deeds of this great saint has been recorded in the annals of the first twelve centuries since the Christian Era.

Nothing like his career, in very truth, can be found in the eight centuries which have elapsed since his great figure disappeared from the scene of his unparalleled influence and miracle-working power. The ten or twelve years which fill up, in the middle of the sixteenth century, the astonishing career of St. Francis Xavier's conquests and miracles, may alone furnish a point of comparison with the gigantic race which St. Bernard ran in the twelfth. These two, like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominick in the thirteenth, were glorious instances of the way which the Spirit of God, ever immanent in the Church, selects and governs His own instruments for the mighty purposes required by the special need of souls and the pressing dangers of Christian society at successive periods.

But to St. Bernard belongs the singular destiny, in the divine counsels, of having been all through his public life the poorest and most mortified of monks; the father of a numerous progeny of men resembling himself in self-sacrificing fervor and sancity of life, the chosen counselor of popes, emperors, kings, and princes; the arbiter in every international quarrel in his time; the man at whose voice inveterate schisms where healed, and the Roman Pontiffs secured in the allegiance of all nations; the divinely eloquent man whose words could arrest and quench the spread of the most baneful heresies, as the descending rain from the heavens extinguishes the fires on our western plains, or stops short the devastating conflagrations in our forests; whose sole appearance, even where the people understood not his language, could arouse all classes to enthusiasm, to repentance, to godliness of life, to heroic deeds and sacrifices—so potent, so irresistible was the divine virtue which went forth from that feeble body, from the very hem of the poor white Cistercian robes; so electric the fire which shot from those mild blue eyes and that pallid face all illumined by a light from heaven; so instantaneous was the effect of his words, even when addressing in his own native idiom, the citizens of Pisa, or Genoa, or Milan, the Germans of Strasburg, or Mayence, or Frankfort. It was the miracle wrought by the Holy Ghost when Peter addressed on the Day of Pentecost the multitudes assembled in Jerusalem from all lands in the Roman Empire. The Galilean fisherman spoke in his provincial dialect, but every listener among the thousands present understood him. Even so was Bernard understood when summoned from his cell at Clairvaux and what seemed his death-bed, to every realm or city in Christendom where triumphant schism, or some mighty local scandal, or spreading heresy, or the necessity of firing princes and peoples with ardor to save Palestine and the tomb of Christ from the Moslem, demanded the spell of his presence, his voice, his sanctity, and the never failing miracles which marked his passage.

What is there in the history of Christian Europe to be compared to this man, whose figure towers above prelates, princes, sovereigns, pontiffs and peoples, all of whom look up to the white robed, gentle and humble monk, as to one in whom dwelt, spoke and wrought the Spirit of Christ?

And now that the eighth centenary of St. Bernard's birth is near at hand in 1891, let us gladden the hearts of American readers by briefly recounting the phases of his most wonderful existence.

II.

Under God, whose providence directs the life of every man destined to fulfil a great and salutary mission, it is to the mother

of St. Bernard, the Blessed Alèthe de Montbard, that our Saint owed the early training which made him prize the heroism of sanctity above that of arms, which was the profession of his noble father, Tescelin-le-Rous (the red-haired), of his two elder brothers, Guy and Gerard, and of two of his younger brothers, Andrew and Bartholomew.

Tescelin was a scion of the Counts of Chatillon-sur-Seine, "an ancient knightly stock," says one of the Saint's biographers, "on which no stain of low extraction or *mésalliance* had ever fallen in its various branches from time immemorial." His wife, Alèthe de Montbard, was of a no less illustrious descent, the Counts de Montbard being nearly connected with the sovereign house of Burgundy. In their court, Count Tescelin held a high rank, and was distinguished by his wit, his brilliant valor and his wisdom in council.

Let us say it at once; not the least extraordinary circumstance in the life of St. Bernard is the fact that, after losing his saintly mother in his early youth, he won to the life of the cloister, and to the heroic pursuit of self-sacrifice and Christian perfection, not only his four brothers and his only sister, Humbeline, but his father, Tescelin, on whom the popular veneration, with the acquiescence of the Church, conferred, as it did on Alèthe and their daughter Humbeline, the title of "Blessed." We shall see in the course of our narrative what were the virtues and qualities of Bernard's five brothers, every one of whom, in due course of time, was led, by the fascination of Bernard's example and exhortations, to become his companion or disciple; Tescelin, at length, following his sons, and walking in their footsteps, and under Bernard's guidance, up the narrow way first trodden by Christ.

Such were the men who founded Clairvaux and who reposed in its lowly cemetery, mixing their dust with more than one generation of saints, when the great revolution of 1789–93 came to destroy the holy and beautiful places of France, and to cast out from their tombs the relics of God's saints.

The centenary of 1891, however, will find what remains of the Monastery of Clairvaux transformed into a prison for criminals, and a house of detention for political prisoners.[1] God is patient, because He is eternal, and will restore, in His own good time, Clairvaux to the Church of France, and will bless the surrounding vale with a spiritual springtide as fair in its promise as that which gladdened the souls of Tescelin and his children.

A glance now at the castle of Fontaines-lez-Dijon, the ancient

[1] The young Duke of Orleans, our readers will remember, was for some time imprisoned there, and he showed a Christian spirit worthy of a son of St. Louis, and a chivalrous courage and firmness befitting this sainted Crusader.

manor-house of Tescelin, and the birth-place of that Bernard, whose glorious name and surpassing merits are going to be celebrated in the Old World and the New during the whole of the next year.

For it is to Fontaines in particular that the Catholics of France and the surrounding countries are already preparing to go in pilgrimage a twelvemonth hence, during the month of August especially. Nor, we make no rash prediction in saying it, will travellers of Irish descent, from whatever land they come to France next year, fail to visit, not only Clairvaux, hallowed as the spot where their own St. Malachy died in the arms of the great abbot, his twin soul, where Bernard breathed his last, clad with the poor tunic of Malachy, and where both reposed in death, side by side, during so many ages, but Fontaines, where France in her present bitter trial is reviving in men's minds the memory of the sainted dead, and enkindling in the hearts of the rising generations the faith and piety which shall one day emulate the godlike deeds of eight hundred years ago.

"About a mile and a half to the northwest of Dijon," says the historian of St. Bernard,[1] "a traveller coming to the city from Langres beholds in the midst of a plain covered with fruitful grape-vines as with a rich carpet, rising up from this wealth of vegetation, the slender and graceful form of the hill which bears the ancient vilage of Fontaines. Along the slopes of this hill the houses cling, row above row, to the irregularities of the surface, while here and there trees and shrubbery diversify the prospect and lend to the whole both beauty and picturesqueness. Further up, the old parish church lifts its spire above the village; and higher still, on the very summit of the hill, shines forth, as a diadem, a structure of imposing dimensions, the architectural lines of which are those of a feudal castle. Under the modern additions made to these walls, as a jewel within a splendid casket, is the room in which St. Bernard was born."

One of the buttresses of the summit, on the southern side, plunges into a pond, which is formed by a spring of living water. This gave its name to the village of *Fontaines*.

From the esplanade in front of the parish church extends, on every side, one of the most magnificent prospects in France, in all Europe, indeed. A vine-carpeted plain spreads out like a sea to the Jura and the Alps, the snowy summits of which are illumined by the first rays of the morning sun and the last splendors of evening. Dijon, with its antique towers and its steeples, seems, in the early dawn or the late twilight, like a fleet at anchor in that sea at the very foot of the hill.[2]

[1] Chevallier, i, p. 2. [2] *Le Sanctuaire de Saint Bernard à Fontaine-lès-Dijon.*

At some distance from the church are grouped various buildings and remains of buildings of apparently different styles and ages. One would think, and think rightly, that the group formed, all in one, a fortress, a chapel, and a monastery, for there is the ancient feudal castle of Tescelin, with what time and the vandalism of the Revolution left standing of the seventeenth century[1] church of Reformed Cistercians (*Feuillants*) with their monastery, under the immediate protection of Louis XIII. The chamber in which St. Bernard was born had been converted into a chapel and become a place of pious pilgrimage before the foundation of the monastery. Thither St. Francis of Sales, and his heroic disciple, St. Francis de Chantal, loved to come and pray and refresh their souls.

The protection and generous patronage bestowed on Fontaines, its church and monastery, by Louis XIII., and his son and successor, were not withdrawn in the succeeding reigns. But the favor with which the establishment was treated was anything but a recommendation to the Jacobins of 1793. The monks were expelled, the church with the chapel of St. Bernard was stripped of every valuable they possessed, the monastery was torn down, the tower of the old feudal castle was half levelled, but the solid mediæval mason-work would only yield to powder, and the revolutionists had none to spend on the work of demolition.

A blacksmith put up a forge in one part of the church, the other was changed into a stable; and thus it fared with the buildings, till, in 1821, a pious lawyer of Dijon purchased the property, and covered in the church to save it from further ruin.

In 1840, the Abbé Renault, Vicar-General of the diocese, obtained possession of the buildings, and then began the period of restoration. Bishop after bishop helped on the blessed work. At present the establishment is the abode of a zealous body of diocesan missionaries, among whom is numbered Mgr. Henry Leneuf, formerly Vicar-General of New Orleans, and well known in New York.

The castle of the knightly Tescelin has been repaired and enlarged; the blessed room in which Alèthe de Montbard gave birth to her privileged babe has been purified, hallowed anew, and adorned as beseems so precious a sanctuary, while the monastery church of the Feuillants is arising, like the Phœnix from the cinders and ashes left behind by the Revolution, more beautiful and more stately than before.

The heart of Catholic Burgundy and that of all Catholic France, exhaustless in its charities, will not cease to pour out their trea-

[1] The *Feuillants*, or Reformed Cistercians, built a monastery at Fontaines in 1617. On January 6, 1619, the corner-stone of the monastery church was blessed with extraordinary solemnity.

sures until the native home of the greatest saint, and the most extraordinary man, ever born within her borders, shall be made worthy of his incomparable fame and of their undying gratitude.

Such, then, is the spot, in the very heart of the fairest portion of the kingdom of St. Louis, which is sure to be the chief centre of attraction all through next year's centennial solemnities.

Of the Cathedral of Troyes, which possesses in a magnificent monstrance the heads of St. Bernard and our own St. Malachy, and of the parish church of Ville-sous-La Ferté, which contains, enclosed in a modern shrine still more magnificent, the blended and well authenticated remains of the two sainted friends, we shall speak further on.

Let us now give our whole thought to the chief phases of the marvellous career filled by the first Abbot of Clairvaux.

III.

The blessed Alèthe superintended herself the education of her favorite son until he was between eight and nine years old. Then she placed him with the canons of St. Vorles at Chatillon, her husband's native city. The school directed by these canons then enjoyed a great reputation, and they were themselves widely famed not only for the learning, but for the edifying regularity of their lives. Chatillon was near enough to Fontaines to permit Alèthe to spend a great part of her time at her husband's castle in the former, and thus to watch over the progress made by her boy in knowledge as well as in virtue.

And, sooth to say, this twofold progress was extraordinary. The difficulties which delayed the intellectual advancement of learners of his age did not exist for Bernard. He soon mastered the Latin tongue, and delighted in reading the masterpieces bequeathed to us by the great writers of Rome, his teachers taking care meanwhile to keep away from him such works and such passages as might sully the mind and heart of one whose purity of soul had been so well guarded by his holy mother.

The piety of the boy was also a bright example for his schoolmates. It is related of him about this time, by his earliest biographers, that while watching in the canon's choir, on Christmas eve, for the solemn midnight Mass, Bernard was overcome with sleep and favored with a vision in which he beheld the Mother of God and her newly-born babe. This filled him with such love for both that he was regarded through all succeeding ages as the type of devotion to the Incarnate God and His Virgin Mother.

From this early age also dates the love of the Saint for the sacred Scriptures, the very soul of which is Christ, promised in Eden and given to us in Bethlehem.

About the age of eighteen the young scholar returned to Fontaines to fulfil all the dearest hopes of his fond mother. She had long set her heart on seeing him devoted exclusively to the Divine service—on seeing him, indeed, a true follower of Christ in the arduous paths of self-sacrifice and crucifixion. Her own life, in so far as her duties as the mother of a large family and the mistress of a noble and numerous household permitted, was, in truth, one of perpetual abnegation. Inside her home she was worshipped by her husband, children and servants, and outside all regarded her as the mirror of all Christian virtues.

She did not, however, long enjoy the companionship of her best-beloved child. She suddenly sickened, and, forewarned of her approaching end, she summoned all her dear ones around her. It was at the very time when she was wont to celebrate with great solemnity the feast of St. Ambrosinian, August 31st, the patron of the manorial chapel, and to it were invited all the clergy of the surrounding country. The Lady Alèthe, though aware of her impending death, would have no change made in the festivities or in the hospitalities which accompanied them. She rejoiced rather that so many of God's priests were providentially assembled beneath her roof to help her with their prayers as she was passing out of this world.

So when the feast was over, at her bidding her guests, with her family and household, assembled around her deathbed. Tescelin, at the first warning given of her mortal danger by the wife who was the light of his life, would not believe that death was so near. Nor could her children, as she addressed to them her last motherly advice and bade them join in the prayers for the dying, bring themselves to think that she was about to be taken from them. Nevertheless, the last Sacraments were administered, the sublime prayers for the soul departing were recited by the assembled priests, while Tescelin and his children wept in consternation, grief and bewilderment. She, meanwhile, divinely informed of the nearness of her last moment, retained the fulness of her self-possession. Her right hand was raised in the act of forming the sign of the cross over her weeping dear ones, when the heroic spirit passed away. Hand and arm retained their posture in death, as a sign that all was supernatural in the light which had been given to Alèthe and in the prophetic announcement of her sudden but most saintly end.

This loss deeply affected Bernard. His two oldest brothers, Guy and Gerard, had embraced the military career, on which their father's valor and virtues shed so glorious a lustre; two of his younger brothers, Andrew and Bartholomew, were already candidates for knighthood. Nivard, the sixth and youngest of Tesce-

lin's sons, was but a child. Bernard, whose careful literary training and cultivated tastes disposed him to the pursuit of the highest knowledge and whom the examples and exhortations of his saintly mother inclined powerfully to renounce the world, was, after the death of Alèthe, like one suddenly forsaken by his guide, in a strange country and uncertain which road to choose among those opening out before him.

There were those among his friends who advised him to go to the most famous universities and there complete the circle of various knowledge he had acquired and contend for the palm of eminence in sacred and profane science. But others warned him that in the great European schools there were fearful dangers for such as he, reared in all innocence and the practice of all goodness beneath the watchful eyes of a mother like Alèthe de Montbard. Tescelin and his sons would fain have fired his soul with the military ardor and the noble ambition which filled their own. Guy was most happily married, and in his oldest brother Bernard thus beheld the Christian soldier and the Christian husband and father crowned in early youth with worldly honor and domestic bliss, while looking forward to a career of the loftiest distinction.

And so there arose before the young noble's eyes visions which dazzled, fascinated and shut out from view the arid heights among which lay the paths leading to self-renouncement and sanctity.

It is on record that one day while thus pursued by dreams of wedded bliss like that of his brother Guy, Bernard suddenly left the castle, and, coming to the half-frozen pond half way down the Hill of Fontaines, plunged into it and there remained till he had completely recovered the mastery over his senses and restored to his soul the peace it had lost.

This first effort toward victory over self was only the first step on that road which was to lead by degrees the youth of twenty to embrace what was most heroic in monastic life—the practice of perpetual self-crucifixion.

He only reached by degrees, by most painful and heroic efforts, the determination to do what the grace of God solicited him continually to do—to take up his cross and tread closely and unfalteringly in the footsteps of the MASTER.

He was impelled by a secret inspiration to visit the crypt of the Church of St. Benignus, in Dijon, where his beloved mother was buried. With his head laid on the tombstone which covers her remains, the young man wept and prayed, beseeching her help before God and beseeching God's light and guidance in the dreadful perplexities which troubled his soul. As the tears fell and the fervent prayers ascended, a voice seemed to come forth from the tomb warning him away from the world and its seductions.

At once he makes up his mind to choose "the better part." A few days after this visit to his mother's grave, Bernard is bidden to the fortress of Grancey, where his father and brothers, under the command of the Duke of Burgundy, are engaged in the operations of a siege. On his way, the youth enters a chapel by the roadside and kneels before a crucifix, beseeching from Christ enthroned on high, light and strength to follow Him. As he looks upon the image of the God of Calvary, the words uttered to the crowds in Galilee come to the suppliant's mind with overwhelming force: "Come to Me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up My yoke upon you and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is sweet and My burden light."[1]

From that hour Bernard took the cross and the Crucified to his heart. Never thereafter, until his dying day, did he seek his pleasure or his joy in anything else than the bitter-sweet of total crucifixion.

And what a spectacle to the Christendom of the twelfth century was the life which the blessed son of Alèthe thenceforward led! And with what wondrous power the Crucified invested this passionate lover of His cross!

It was to his mother's own brother that Bernard first addressed himself to win a first companion in the heroic spiritual warfare which he contemplated. This was Gauldry de Montbard, Lord of Touillon, a man still in the prime of life, wealthy, happily married, widely honored for his chivalrous character, and the austere purity of his private conduct. The nephew at first only consulted his favorite uncle on the determination to which he had come. But the eloquence of this youth of twenty, describing his own interior struggle and unearthly ambition which had lately taken possession of his soul, touched Gauldry deeply.

With all its feudal vices and social shortcomings, the twelfth century, like the eleventh, was an age of deep faith, when men had the courage of acting up to their convictions, and dared to realize in their own lives, at the cost of every sacrifice, the ideals of spiritual perfection revealed to them.

Gauldry felt himself irresistibly called to follow his young nephew and disclosed his purpose to his wife. It was the age, also, when wives armed their husbands for the crusades, and thus gave to the soldiers of Christ a double share of heroism. So the Lady of Touillon bade her husband go forth to the new crusade which Bernard was about to begin within the sacred recesses of the cloister itself.

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[1] St. Matthew, xi., 30.

Bartholomew, who came in the order of age, second after Bernard, and whom their mother had impregnated with her own spirit of heavenly generosity, was the first of Tescelin's household to yield to the eloquence of the future Abbot of Clairvaux. Andrew, who was next in years to Bernard himself, and who had received the honor of knighthood, opposed a stout resistance to all the arguments of the latter. Not till Alèthe had appeared to him in a vision did the young knight, "from being a candidate for worldly fame, become a soldier of Christ."[1]

By something which much resembles a miracle, the two oldest brothers, Guy and Gerard, were won over. Guy, like his uncle Gauldry, was married and the father of two children. Everything which could fill the heart of man, in the present and in the prospects of a most brilliant future, induced the proud young noble to close his ears to his brother's arguments. Still Guy and his wife yielded to what must have been the call of God, he renouncing home and family to join his brothers, and she betaking herself with her young children to a convent. The eminent virtues which afterward distinguished both, proved that the hand of God had wrought the mighty change in their lives. Gerard, destined to be at Clairvaux his brother's most trusted counsellor and helpmate, was not so easily won as Guy, although Gerard was not bound by matrimonial ties and the claims of parental duty. It was only when stricken down in battle, by what seemed a mortal wound, that Gerard, lying at death's door, saw the vanity of all earthly glory and ambition, and vowed, if he lived, to join Bernard and his associates.

Humbeline and little Nivard were alone left to the widowed Tescelin in the Castle of Fontaines, which Alèthe and her seven children had filled, like a deep cup overflowing, with a happiness all the more intoxicating, that it had in it a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

He had not himself yet reached the age of fifty when this double bereavement fell upon his heart and his home. It will give us some idea of the magnanimity of the man, who, like his wife, deserved the title of blessed, that he at once yielded to Bernard's solicitation, and allowed him and his brothers, with their uncle Gauldry, to take possession of the ancestral halls at Chatillon, and there, undisturbed, give themselves up to the ascetic exercises which were the prelude of a monastic life.

Other chosen souls from their kinsfolk, their friends and acquaintances among the neighboring gentry, joined them in quick

[1] Guillaume de Saint Thierry, *Vita S. Bern. Et de Tirone Saeculi Factus est Miles Christi*, c. 3, n. 10.

succession, among these new recruits being Milo de Montbard, another brother of the Blessed Alèthe.

When the recluses at Chatillon had thus numbered thirty, Bernard, instead of founding with them a new monastic order, resolved to join the monks of Citeaux, a reformed branch of the Benedictines of France, founded not many years before by St. Robert of Molesmes, who was a blood relation both of Tescelin and Alèthe. The forest of Citeaux, in which Robert had planted the monastery, giving its name to the Cistercian reform, was plainly visible from the Castle of Fontaines.

In the early springtide of 1113, when Bernard was only in his 22d year, he quitted Chatillon with his companions, and came to pay a farewell visit to Tescelin at Fontaines.

Then was enacted a memorable scene. The widowed and noble soldier, in whose heart the love of earthly glory and the hallowed home-affections struggled with a secret yearning for the supernatural heroism practiced by his sons, received them and their associates with a stately courtesy. Were these pale-faced and poorly clad wayfarers the brilliant knights who so lately had stood by his side in the Court of Burgundy, or who had shared with him the perils of the foremost front of battle?

And were they to leave him and his home forever on the morrow? So if joy were mixed with his greeting of them, and with their conversation at table and throughout the evening, the parting on the morrow was unspeakably sad.

As they stood near the door of their paternal castle, Bernard was the first to kneel at his father's feet and to ask for a blessing on them all. The stout heart of the warrior was too full. He spoke no word. But while the tears coursed down his cheeks—an unwonted thing—he pressed to his heart in succession his sons, his brothers, and the remainder of the devoted band.

Humbeline clung to Bernard. She had been the confidant of his earliest struggles and temptations. But she was too young or too thoughtless to set a just value on the sacrifice he was then making. The little Nivard was clasped in Guy's strong arms. "My little brother," said the latter, "we are leaving you this castle and all our father's estates and honors. This is a great fortune for you." "Yes," answered the boy, "but they say that you are choosing Heaven where our mother is, and leaving me but earth. It is not a fair exchange."[1]

Tescelin amid the mist which dimmed his eyes saw the noble band of thirty—his own dearest on earth among them—turning their backs on Fontaines, descending the hill, and taking the road

[1] Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, *Vita S. Bern.*, c. iii., n. 17.

which led to Citeaux. His little son and daughter clung, sobbing, to him, while he, in this great bereavement, half envied his sons and kinsmen who had chosen the better way. Did the great heart of the widowed husband and father then feel, in this parting, the first promptings of the grace which later drew him also to cast his lot with Bernard and his companions? We may well believe that he did.

IV.

Citeaux and its saintly abbot were then in a desperate plight. A fearful epidemic was raging in the monastery, and had carried off more than one-half of the monks. Besides, the outside world which had loudly censured the extreme austerity of St. Stephen and his religious family, had little or no sympathy to bestow on their sufferings. And, moreover, Providence permitted that, for a considerable lapse of time, no novices presented themselves to recruit this first Cistercian community wasted by the preternatural rigor of their lives and decimated by a cruel epidemic.

Something like despair or at least discouragement, hung over St. Stephen and his monastery, when the Abbot was suddenly called to meet the thirty strangers knocking for admission at his gates. Stephen, during the bitter days which he had passed of late, had been favored with a vision in which he beheld one of the most exemplary of the monks cut off by the prevailing distemper.

"Father, put away all fear from your mind," the dead monk had said. "The life you lead here is pleasing to God. You who now weep over the few children left you, shall hear with your own ears these words of benediction: 'Our abode is too narrow for its inmates. Build for us a more spacious dwelling able to contain our increasing multitude.' Lo! novices are coming to you, and among their numerous bands are men of birth and genius. They will make of your monastery a hive sending forth its swarms on every side."[1]

For an entire twelve-month Bernard and his companions wore the secular dress they had brought with them to Citeaux. St. Stephen deemed that interval short enough to try their generosity in submitting to the life of crucifixion the rule required. But the austerities of Citeaux did not satisfy the soul of Bernard and his followers in their hunger and thirst for self-immolation.

Stephen Harding who united in his own person all the heroic and saint-like qualities to be found in the ancient monasteries of Great Britain and Ireland, was struck with wonder at seeing the progress in sanctity of Bernard and his brethren. Bernard, in particular, ran like a giant in the path of spiritual perfection.

[1] Chevallier, *Hist. de St. Bernard*, i, 54.

"Come to the cloister," says his historian, "to offer himself to God as a whole burnt-offering, he never made any reserve in his sacrifice of self, being ever impatient to advance higher, ever more and more given to complete the work begun, and forgetful of the road over which he had travelled to reach higher summits and wider horizons."[1]

Then, his bodily strength wasted by the penitential rigors which the young man of twenty-two practiced with such unearthly fervor, began for Bernard the bodily weakness which was to last as long as his life, filling all who saw him with wonder that he could work or live at all. "His stomach refused all food; his intense bodily pains made sleep impossible; the habit of standing erect or kneeling so long in prayer, had fearfully swollen the lower limbs. The folly of the cross (the passion for bodily austerities) had imprinted, here and there on the flesh of the novice, stigmata which became great wounds."[2]

His sole ambition is to make himself worthy of Christ crucified; and to deserve a closer personal union with the Lord of his love, he was constantly asking himself, when bodily strength gave way, or lassitude stole over his spirit: *Bernarde, ad quid venisti?* "Bernard, what brought thee here?"

In the impossibility of joining his brother-monks in the field-labor and other manual occupations, which filled so much of the time of the Cistercian recluses, he was allowed to devote himself to the study and meditation of the Scriptures. He so penetrated himself with the divine spirit they breathe and with the very diction of the sacred penman, that his beautiful style is made up of the Scriptural language. So that his perfect knowledge of the Revealed Writings, his intense love of the Word Incarnate and his Virgin-Mother, as well as his extraordinary gift of eloquence, have, in this unique diction of his, a ready and most effective instrument of instruction and persuasion.

In 1114 Bernard and his companions were admitted to make their solemn monastic vows. Perhaps it was about this time that the saint was ordained priest. Certain it is that in the beginning of 1115 the fame of Citeaux, thanks to the attention concentrated on it by the sons of Tescelin, their kinsfolk and friends, had drawn such numbers of the nobly-born and the generous of soul to the monastery, that the bees in the hive had perforce to swarm. The first swarm settled in the forest of Bragne, on the river Grosne, and was called La Ferté (*Firmitas*), because the wonderful increase at Citeaux was a confirmation of the reforms begun there and a promise of perpetuity. A second swarm settled between the

[1] *Ibidem.*, pp. 60-61.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Seine and the Loire, under the leadership of Hugh de Macon, the schoolmate and beloved friend of Bernard. They founded the Monastery of Pontigny, so well known in English and mediæval history.

The third swarm, guided by Bernard himself, settled far to the north of Fontaines and Citeaux, on the left bank of the Aube, in a central position between Langres, Troyes and Chatillon. It was a densely wooded valley, walled in all round by lofty and precipitous mountains. The people far and near called it the Vail of Absinth (or Bitterness), "less on account of the bitter herbs that grew there, than because of the bitter sufferings and cries of the wretched travellers there surprised by bandits."[1]

The valley was a gift of Hugh, Count of Champagne. It was soon to be called *Clairvalleé, or Clairvaux*, "The Vale of Brightness," because of the physical transformation wrought by Bernard and his monks, and especially by the splendor shed on the whole country by the extraordinary sanctity of their lives.

It was, then, a wild forest wilderness to which Bernard was sent to found an offshoot of Citeaux. Building or habitation of any kind there was none. With him came to the Valley of Absinth, his uncle Gauldry, his four brothers, Guy, Gerard, Andrew and Bartholomew; his relatives, Godefry de la Roche, Robert and Ebold.

The new abbot's first care, on arriving in the valley, and after selecting the site for the monastery, is to mark out the cemetery, the site for the chapel and that of their dwelling. A shed or tent covered with branches shelters the newcomers from the inclemency of the weather, while they fell the forest trees and build as they may the walls of oratory and convent. They have no fear of the wild beasts that infest the surrounding mountains, nor of the wilder men who have hitherto made of this solitude a place of dread.

The historian does not say how the new community found means of subsisting while they cleared away the forest, reared the monastic structures and prepared the first fields for culture. But from the first day and night spent there by them, the echoes of the enclosing hills and the depths of the gloomy forest wilderness resounded to the voice of Psalmody. The Spirit of God was exorcising from the place the spirit of evil which had so long dwelt there.

The first winter spent there was appalling. The monks were compelled to seek among the nearest hamlets wherewith to keep off starvation. More than once they were left without the bare

[1] Guillaume de Thierry, *Life of St. Bernard*, c. 5, n. 25.

necessaries of life. Their sole clothing was a tunic of coarse white cloth with a cowl of the same color and material. The common dormitory was only covered over with rushes, through which the rain poured.

One day Gerard complained bitterly that they were come to the direst extremity. Bernard endeavored to calm his just apprehensions, and then went straight to the chapel to pray. While the abbot was still pleading at the mercy-seat, Gerard, who had charge of the temporalities of the monastery, was summoned to the gate, and there received an abundant alms which relieved their present need.

But it needed more than bread, or wine, or the warmth and creature-comforts of a home in the inhospitable wilderness to sustain these nobly-born recluses amid such desperate trials and privations. But the sublime spirit of self-sacrifice which animated Bernard, his examples more eloquent than his words, and his words glowing with the spirit of heavenly persuasion—all this, as every morning rose to try the perseverance of his companions, and as evening came only to bring fresh trials, made the young abbot of twenty-five like the Angel of God in the eyes of his brethren, treading before them the dizziest heights and beckoning them, with words of fire, to follow to where Christ awaited them.

In the midst of this suffering Bernard was careful not to let a day pass without feeding his dear companions with the word of God. Not satisfied with the sublime instruction contained in the Psalms and Scripture-lessons of the Divine Office which they chanted together with the most edifying regularity and fervor at the prescribed hours of both day and night, the Abbot of Clairvaux made it a sacred duty to give, every evening, one of those beautiful and soul-stirring homilies—a few only, comparatively, of which have been preserved to us. These were intended for the benefit of all, but more especially for that of the lay-brothers, who might not be able to read, and who had not had the advantage of any kind of literary culture. It was impossible to sit long at the feet of Bernard of Clairvaux and to listen to his sermons on the Feasts of the Church and his commentaries on the Books of Scripture, without being flooded with intellectual light and impelled upward to the highest sanctity. He was, most truly, the lamp of the sanctuary lighting up and warming all its recesses.

This marvellous eloquence of word and example was soon echoed beyond the limits of the valley. The illustrious scholar and prelate, William de Champeaux, Bishop of Châlons, heard of it, was drawn to Clairvaux, and there everything he beheld filled him with astonishment and admiration. But the wonder which most struck him was the young abbot, who, scarcely entered on

the springtide of manhood, was adorned with the learning, the wisdom and the virtues of a ripe old age—a saintly youth, who, in a wasted frame and with health seemingly ruined, displayed an energy all divine.

William de Champeaux at once conceived for Bernard a veneration and a friendship which only grew with each succeeding year. He prevailed on him to come to Châlons and preach in the cathedral there. The young abbot did not feel himself at liberty to refuse. The bishop's anticipations were more than fulfilled. The very sight of Bernard in the streets, his very appearance in the pulpit above the heads of the great audience, moved men's souls to their depths, even before the preacher had uttered a single word. It has been one of the mighty phenomena, accounting for the conversion of the pagan world to Christianity, that there is in the very presence of God's saints a spell so potent that it moves the masses with a resistless power. A virtue went forth from Christ which healed the sick and converted sinners, reaching, in its Divine energy, the very seat of physical and moral disease in body and soul. Peter, the chief of the Apostles, the leader of the sacred band entrusted with continuing Christ's mission, was, like his fellow-Apostles, clothed with that same virtue from on high. A word from his lips--the spellword "Jesus of Nazareth"—instantly cured the cripple at the beautiful gate of the Temple. The very touch of his garments, like those of the Master, had healing power. Nay, as in the miracles performed by Christ, so in those wrought by His Apostles and Disciples, the healing of the spirit, the entire change of the sinful heart, accompanied the healing of the body. More wonderful even than the spoken word or the touch of hand or garment were the miracles performed by St. Peter in Jerusalem, where they brought from all sides the sick and the afflicted, that the shadow of the Apostle might fall on them as he passed and restore them to perfect health.

St. Bernard, when he exercised his first Apostleship at Châlons-sur-Marne, was only at the beginning of a career filled year after year with prodigies wrought by the Spirit of God through this chosen instrument of His.

The popular multitude was moved by the eloquence of his evident holiness of life much more than by his words of electric fire, to give up their evil habits and thoroughly change their lives. To the extraordinary change wrought among the people corresponded that which took place among the ranks of the clergy, among the young nobility and the most distinguished professors and students in the surrounding university schools.

Clairvaux was too narrow to contain the numbers of recruits

who followed Bernard as he bade farewell to Châlons and its grateful bishop.

It was only the beginning of that apostleship which was soon to embrace the entire field of the Church.

But the saintly abbot, on his return to his monastery, instead of repairing his strength after the uncommon fatigues of his mission, was bent only on increasing the excessive austerities suspended somewhat during his labors in Châlons. His friend, the bishop, hearing that the abbot was lying at death's door, hastened to save a life so precious. For a brief space the sick man was forced to change his manner of living, and relieved from the government of his monastery. Only for a brief time, however; for the monks of Clairvaux yearned for the meek and gentle presence of their abbot, and could not be reconciled to a further privation of his inspired teaching and his heroic examples. So Bernard was once more left free to tread as closely as he wished in the footsteps of the Master up the road to Calvary.

In 1117 Bernard had the supreme consolation of welcoming successively to Clairvaux his young brother Nivard, and his father, Tescelin. The latter, who had just given his daughter Humbeline in marriage to the noble Guy de Marey, could not resist the prayers of Nivard, who asked to join his brothers in the Bitter Vale. Then Bernard went to his beloved parent, left all alone in the Castle of Fontaines, and prevailed on him also to give up the world for the cloister. Thus the six brothers were unspeakably comforted by having their father among them. And Tescelin soon proved that he was as generous in following his Crucified Lord as he had been in serving his royal master, the Duke of Burgundy. No one in all the great community now assembled at Clairvaux outstripped Tescelin in all the virtues which make monastic life the glory of the Church and the admiration of heaven itself.

We men of the nineteenth century look back with a half-incredulous, half-yearning wonder at this great home of sanctity in the blooming and blissful solitude of Clairvaux and feel ourselves fascinated by the spectacle of that multitude of white-robed monks, the great majority of whom are the noblest in the land, by birth and culture, and at whose head stand the gray-haired Tescelin and his six sons.

But the twelfth century was an age of feudal violence, pride, and corruption, which sorely needed in the cloister and in the Church the supernatural examples of Christian meekness, humility, poverty, and self-sacrifice, to bring back over men's lives the reign of God and His Christ.

Most blessed, in every sense of the word, was this Tescelin, the parent of an offspring as heroic as the Machabees, and destined to

restore the Kingdom of God throughout Christendom, to purify the Temple, to restore sacrifice in the Holy of Holies, and to drive the enemies of Christ beyond the boundaries of every European country save Spain.

Now admire how one poor monk, bearing in his person and his life the image of Christ crowned with thorns and crucified, can lift up the world around him, the peoples of an entire continent, to a higher spiritual life, to a knowledge and an imitation of the divine ideals which are the light and the life of a truly Christian society.

V.

No one who reads the life of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and who is also well acquainted with the history of mediæval Christendom, but must know that the chief evils which were the bane of the religious and civil societies of these ages, were caused by the dominating and irresistible power of feudalism. Every one of the barbarian tribes which from the north of Europe or from Asia, conquered successively the provinces of the Roman Empire, imposed on the populations subject to them a well-ordered and uniform system of slavery or of serfdom. There were, at the origin, but two castes in each of the conquered countries—the warrior or free caste, and the serfs or slaves. The military caste elected the king, and he, once freely chosen, was the lord paramount of the entire territory won by himself and his followers. Under him the chief nobles and warriors of various degrees, held their *feuds* or landed possessions together with the serfs who cultivated the soil.

It took a long time to bring the conquerors—from the third and fourth centuries of our era—within the influence of the Church, which, even at this early period, had widely disseminated her belief, her morality, her lofty spirit of the equality and liberty of all Christian men as children of God. In the British Islands, as well as in the countries of Continental Europe, history attests how ruthlessly the barbarian invaders enforced their rule after having swept away the popular and religious institutions created by the Church before their coming.

Just in proportion as the civilizing and refining action of the Church was felt by converting, winning over, and enlightening these rude warriors, was the feudal pride toned down, the feudal yoke lightened for the oppressed, and the Christian notions of equality and liberty substituted for that monstrous hierarchy of tyranny and servitude—FEUDALISM.

This system was firmly established in the France of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to which St. Bernard belongs. Long before then the German emperors who succeeded Charlemagne, and the kings who ruled all Catholic Europe, claimed the right to nominate

to church dignities, because bishops owed the temporalities of their sees to royal gift, and were, as vassals of the suzerain bound to do him homage for the lands possessed by their church, and to receive at his hands the investiture of the fiefs thus held. The great nobles who built churches, founded rich chapters, endowed monasteries, or gave their lands for any ecclesiastical establishment, maintained their claims to nominate to the benefices thus created, and this claim became hereditary.

Thus it happened at the time when St. Bernard was born, and when he began to exercise on the public affairs of Christendom the unprecedented influence we are about to sketch, that there was not one great position or office in the Church of Christ which the reigning sovereigns of Europe and the great feudal families, did not endeavor by main and might to obtain for scions of their own, or for their own favorites and instruments.

The German emperors, who swore at their coronation to protect the Popes in the free and untrammelled exercise of their supreme pastoral authority, claimed, and were long allowed, a vote in the election to the vacant papal chair. When, at a later period, the right of electing the pope was restricted to the college of cardinals, then every crowned head or petty sovereign in Christendom sought to have as many cardinals as possible in the conclave.

We have said above, how sovereigns claimed, as an inherent right, to nominate to all ecclesiastical dignities and benefices. Bismarck claimed it for Prussia, and one of the hard conditions imposed on Leo XIII., by the then all powerful Chancellor, in exchange for a relaxation of the May Laws, was to give the government the right to veto the nomination of parish priests. This right with regard to all dignities and benefices is, and always has been, claimed in Italy by the usurping and persecuting Piedmontese government.

It is still exercised by the radical revolutionary government at present omnipotent in France. Nay, the British government has never ceased to claim it even in Ireland, and, as we know, until within the present pontificate, has managed in a great measure to exercise it.

Even in monasteries founded in the most frightful solitudes by St. Benedict, or by his glorious son, St. Bernard, the very wilderness which was abandoned to them by some great feudal lord, was, when generations of monks had made it as fertile and lovely as the garden of God, claimed as a feudal possession with the right of feudal patronage.

We are witnessing the growth of Clairvaux, and the transformation wrought in the Valley of Absinth by the toil of the heroic men who had followed Bernard thither. But long before Bernard's

time, Columbanus and his Irish monks had effected a like transformation in other portions of what is now France; they had been protected and favored awhile by kings and queens, and then, when the courageous old patriarch dared to lift his voice and rebuke royal cruelty and immorality, he and his were cast forth and driven from kingdom to kingdom till they settled in peace near the summit of the Ligurian Alps above the territory of Genoa.

Far otherwise fared it with one of the great Benedictine monasteries which had come after Columbanus. Cluny had been founded by a saint—Saint Mayeul. Its first and second generation of monks had also made of Cluny a spiritual paradise, and a garden of delight to the eye. It had sent its offshoots all over the land, till the abbot of Cluny came to be called "the Abbot of Abbots." The house itself grew, favored by the kings and their feudal nobles, till the monastery surpassed in size and splendor the palaces of sovereigns, and the church was, without comparison, the largest and most magnificent temple in Europe.

But with all these honors and this greatness, the spirit of feudalism entered into it, settled in it, and wrapped it round and round as with a double shroud, which shut out from the living corpse the vital air and heavenly light in which St Benedict and his companions were wont to revel.

The Abbot of Cluny became a great feudal lord, and then, Christ crucified and His spirit departed from this abode of worldly wealth and pride.

The reaction against this open departure from the heroic life of early monasticism, sent St. Robert of Molesenes and St. Stephen Harding to found Citeaux, and St. Bernard and his brothers to plant the Cross in the Vale of Bitterness.

The Cistercians, the better to distinguish themselves from the degenerate monks of Cluny, had adopted a white vesture, while the latter continued to wear the black robes of the Benedictines.

In 1125, William, Abbot of St. Thierry,[1] a monastery of the Cluny observance, prevailed on the Abbot of Clairvaux to write a defence of the Cistercian Reform against the slanderous rumors set on foot against it by the Cluny people. The decadence of the religious spirit in this great monastery and its dependencies was easily accounted for. "In 1109, on the death of St. Hugh, Abbot of Cluny, his pastoral staff passed into the hands of Pons de Melgueil, whose habits of worldly pomp and extravagance soon undermined the traditions of humility, laboriousness, and austerity which had been the life of the past monastic generations. Pons was deposed in 1122 by Pope Calistus II. (who was himself a

[1] This William of St. Thierry has left us one of the most authentic biographies of St. Bernard.

monk of Cluny), because Pons had, all of a sudden, left his monastery, and was leading a vagabond life in the world. Thirteen years of this bad man's baneful rule, had sufficed to relax all the springs of religious discipline, and to pave the way for a still greater moral ruin.

"Peter the Venerable, called to succeed Pons in 1122, had restored all the traditions of regularity and piety, which had raised Cluny to such a height of moral grandeur."[1]

It takes but a comparatively short time to make a breach in a dam, which for ages has kept in check the devastating course of a mountain torrent, while it will require long and combined efforts to repair the ruin in face of the raging, headlong flood. Peter the Venerable did much by his energetic rule and saintly examples to stop the downward course of religious life in his monastery. But the teaching and example of St. Bernard and his companions did far more. The ruin, however, was too deep and wide-spread to admit of any save a temporary restoration.

The "Apology" of St. Bernard appeared. It was a noble defence of the rule of St. Benedict. It reproved indignantly the rash spiritual pride and uncharitableness of such of the Cistercians as ventured to censure openly the faults of the Clunyites. More efficacious than all were the eloquent pictures the "Apology" drew of monastic life as contemplated and practised by St. Benedict, by the early Egyptian solitaries, and by the first generations of Benedictines, as contrasted with the splendor and luxuriousness of Cluny under such men as Pons de Melgueil.

In the mirror thus held up to them by one whose life was so Christ-like in every respect, the degenerate monks beheld with anger their own too-faithful portraiture. All were not angry, however; for all had not fallen away in idea or practice from the saintliness of their profession. If the stern denunciations of the Abbot of Clairvaux somewhat pained Peter the Venerable and the Benedictines who stood by him in his efforts to restore to their houses the beauty of holiness, the "Apology" greatly strengthened their hands in the work of restoration.

But others, besides monks, read the "Apology," and beheld in its pages not only the mirror of a true monastic life, but that of all the high and divine virtues which should adorn the secular clergy as well. There were great and salutary changes thus wrought among the most eminent ecclesiastics in France. The celebrated Suger, Abbot of St. Denis, near Paris, and the counsellor most trusted by the King of France, read the "Apology," and was so impressed by its inspired eloquence that he totally changed

[1] Chevallier, *Hist. de S. Bernard*, i., p. 143 and following.

the course of his life. He, too, like so many others, had allowed the spirit of feudalism to possess him and regulate his public and private conduct. Enjoying the rank and state of prime minister, Suger's household in the abbey was modeled on that of the king and his great vassals. The abbey was filled with armed retainers, crowds of nobles, and little room was left for the solitude, the privacy, the prayerful austerities of the cloister. Suger was wont to ride to the court of the king, arrayed in splendid ecclesiastical vesture, and surrounded by a numerous retinue of lords and armed knights. This, he thought, was only due to his rank and station.

After reading the "Apology," the Abbot of St. Denis, though retaining his position in the royal councils, became quite another man. He set to his monks the example of austerity of life, of scrupulous regularity in all things, and was thus enabled to bring them back to the full observance of monastic discipline. The armed retainers disappeared from the monastery, and with them the crowds of nobles and wordlings, the sumptuous entertainments, and the costly extravagance of worldly vesture and pomp.

The change had an extraordinary effect on other ecclesiastical dignitaries. More than one bishop read the glowing pages which had converted the Chancellor Suger, and followed his example.

And thus the movement of reform, extending itself beyond the walls of the cloister, reached the court itself, and the palaces of archbishops and bishops, the residences of rich beneficed clergymen, and spread downwards to all the ranks of the priesthood.

Kings, courtiers, prelates, councils, the popes themselves, and every great interest which drew the attention or stirred the heart of Christendom, demanded, thenceforward, from 1123 till 1153, that Bernard of Clairvaux should be the foremost personage on every great occasion, in every mighty difficulty or danger.

And the marvel is that this great man, whose wisdom, voice, and resistless influence controlled the policy of States and the deliberations of the most solemn ecclesiastical councils during all these years, was the same unchanged and unchangeable poor monk whom we have left in Clairvaux. Sick unto death apparently, so humble that he deemed himself always the greatest of sinners, so mortified in every sense that he never lifted his eyes to the low ceiling of his own poor cell, or knew not when they brought him a white horse, magnificently comparisoned, to enable him to reach the mountain solitudes of La Grande Chartreuse. Nothing could divert the eyes of his soul from the contemplation of that Divine Master and Model who ever hung before him on the cross.

Where is there in all history such an example of the way in which the cross, expressed in the life of one man, can lift a century and the civilized world up to God?