

Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux

Doctor Of The Church. A.D. 1153

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SAINT BERNARD was the third son of Tescelin Sorrel, a Burgundian noble, and Aleth, who was daughter of Bernard, lord of Montbard. He was born in 1090 at Fontaines, a castle near Dijon and a lordship belonging to his father. His parents were persons of virtuous life and his mother, not content to offer him to God as soon as he was born, as she did all her seven children, consecrated him to His service in the Church, as Anne (Hannah) did Samuel, and from that day considered him as not belonging to her but to God; and she took a special care of his education, in hopes that he would one day be worthy to stand at the altar. Indeed, she brought up all her children with the greatest care and never trusted them to nurses. Their names were Blessed Guy, Blessed (now Saint) Gerard, Saint Bernard, Blessed Humbeline, Andrew, Bartholomew, and Blessed Nivard. They were all well educated and learned Latin and verse-making before the sons were applied to military exercise and feats of arms; but Bernard was sent to Chatillon on the Seine, to pursue a complete course of studies in a college of secular canons. He even then loved to be alone, largely at first because of shyness; his progress in learning was far greater than could be expected from one of his age; and he was soon alert to listen to what God by His holy inspirations spoke to his heart.

One Christmas-eve, while waiting with his mother to set out for Matins, he fell asleep and seemed to see the infant Jesus newly born in the stable at Bethlehem; from that day he ever had a most tender devotion towards that great mystery of love and mercy, and in speaking of it always seemed to surpass himself in the sweetness of his words. He began the study of theology and of the Holy Scriptures at Chatillon, and was nineteen years old when he returned finally to his home, having been thirteen years at the school. In that same year his mother died. Her charities and attendance in the hospitals, her devotion and all her other virtues, had gained her the reputation of a saint. Bernard was greatly attached to Aleth and her loss was a heavy blow; he was in danger of becoming morbidly despondent till he was rallied out of his brooding and inertia by his lively sister Humbeline.

Bernard was now his own master, and made his appearance in the world with all the advantages and talents which can make it attractive to a young man, or which could make him loved by it. His personal attractiveness and wit, his affability and sweetness of temper, endeared him to everybody; but in these very advantages lay his chief danger, and for a time there was serious risk of his becoming lukewarm and indifferent. His keen sensibility and personal beauty laid him open to strong temptations against chastity; once an impudent woman forced herself on him; but he drove her from his room by waking the house with a cry of "Thieves!" By these and other temptations of the world Bernard was made to think of forsaking it and the pursuit of letters, which greatly attracted him, and of going to Citeaux, where only a few years before Saints Robert, Alberic and

Stephen Harding had established the first monastery of that strict interpretation of the Benedictine rule, called after it "Cistercian."

He wavered for some time in his mind, and one day going to see his brothers, who were then with the Duke of Burgundy at the siege of the castle of Grancey, in great anxiety he went into a church by the road and prayed that God would direct him to discover and follow His holy will. He arose steadily fixed in the resolution of following the severe Cistercian life. His friends endeavored to dissuade him from it; but Gaudry, lord of Touillon, his uncle, who had gained great reputation by his valor in the wars, although a man with a wife and family, came to the same resolution.

Bartholomew and Andrew, two younger brothers of Bernard, also declared that they would come too. Guy, the eldest brother, was also appealed to. He had obligations, which seemed to fix him in the world, for he, too, was married, and had two daughters; but his wife Elizabeth eventually consented and herself became a nun at Jully. Gerard, the second brother, was not to be so easily won, being a soldier of reputation and full of his profession, but he was soon after wounded in his side by a lance and taken prisoner, and during his convalescence God called him, and he, too, went to join his brothers. Hugh of Macon (who afterward founded the monastery of Pontigny, and died Bishop of Auxerre), an intimate friend of Saint Bernard, wept bitterly at the thought of separation, but by two interviews was induced to become his companion. Nor were these the only ones who, with apparently no previous thought of the religious life, suddenly decided to leave the world for the austere life of Citeaux.

Bernard induced in all thirty-one men to follow him – he who himself had been uncertain of his call only a few weeks before. It is a happening unparalleled in Christian history. Bernard's eloquent appeals were irresistible; mothers hid their sons, wives their husbands, lest they came under the sway of that compelling voice and look. They all assembled in a house at Chatillon, preparing to consecrate themselves to God, and on the day appointed for their meeting Bernard and his brothers went to Fontaines to take farewell of their father and beg his blessing. They left Nivard, the youngest brother, to be a comfort to him in his old age. Going out they saw him at play with other children, and Guy said to him, "Adieu, my little Nivard! You will have all our estates and lands to yourself." The boy answered, "What! You then take Heaven, and leave me only the earth. The division is too unequal." They went away; but soon after Nivard followed them, so that of the whole family there only remained in the world the old father and his daughter, Blessed Humbeline.

After they had stayed six months at Chatillon, to settle their affairs, they all departed for Citeaux, which had been founded fifteen years and was at that time governed by Saint Stephen. The company arrived there about Easter in 1112 and begged to be admitted to join the monks. Saint Stephen, who had not had a novice for several years, received them with open arms. Saint Bernard was then twenty-two years old. He entered this house with the desire to die to the remembrance of men, to live hidden, and be forgotten, that he might be occupied only with God. To guard against sloth he repeated often to himself the saying of the great Saint Arsenius (the Great), "What have you come here for?" and practiced what he afterwards used to say to postulants who presented themselves to his monastery at Clairvaux: "If you desire to live in this house, you must leave your body; only spirits can enter here"; that is, persons who live according to the Spirit. So rigidly did he guard his eyes that it is said that after a year's novitiate he did not know whether the top of his cell was vaulted or covered with a ceiling, nor whether the church had more than one window.

After his novitiate, he made his profession into the hands of Saint Stephen with all his companions except one, and continued his exemplary cloistered life. Not being able to reap corn so as to keep up

with the rest, his superior ordered him other work; but he begged of God that he might be enabled to use a hook properly, and soon equaled the best hands. At his work, his soul was continually occupied in God, and he used afterwards to say that he never had any other master in his studies of the Holy Scriptures but the oaks and beeches of the forest, for that spiritual learning of which he became so great a doctor was a gift of the Holy Ghost, obtained by purity of heart, meditation, and prayer. The peace of his soul shone through his countenance, in which the charm of heavenly grace captivated and surprised those that beheld at first only a face that was emaciated, pale, and wan. He suffered all his life from stomach troubles, without ever speaking of them or using any indulgence, unless compelled by those who took notice of them. He used to say, "Our fathers built their monasteries in damp, unwholesome places so that the monks might have the uncertainty of life more dearly and clearly before their eyes."

But these monasteries built in uncultivated deserts or swampy lands were, by the monks' industry, drained of their morasses and converted into gardens and meadows. Saint Bernard was a great lover of poverty in his habit, cell, and all other things, but called dirtiness a mark of laziness or of affectation. He seemed to have lost all taste for food, and often took one for another when offered him by mistake, so that he once drank oil instead of water.

The number of monks being grown too great at Citeaux, Saint Stephen founded in 1113 the monastery of La Ferte, in Burgundy, and in 1114 that of Pontigny in Champagne. Hugh, Count of Troyes, offered ground on his estates, whereon to found a third monastery; and the abbot, seeing the great progress which Bernard had made and his extraordinary abilities, gave him a cross, appointed him abbot, and ordered him to go with twelve monks, among whom were his brothers, to found a new house in the diocese of Langres in Champagne. They walked in procession, singing psalms, with their new abbot at their head, and settled in a place called the Valley of Wormwood, surrounded by a forest, which had often been a retreat for robbers. These thirteen monks grubbed up a sufficient area and, with the assistance of the bishop and the people of the country, built themselves a house.

This young colony had much to suffer and was often relieved in some need in a sudden and unexpected manner; and these effects of providence Saint Bernard made use of to excite confidence in God. These fervent monks, animated by the example of their abbot, lived through a period of extreme and grinding hardship. The land was poor and their bread was usually made of coarse barley; and boiled beech leaves were sometimes served up instead of vegetables. Bernard at first was so severe in his discipline, coming down upon the smallest distractions and least transgressions of his brethren, whether in confession or in chapter, that although his monks behaved with the utmost humility and obedience they began to be discouraged, which made the abbot sensible of his fault. He condemned himself for it to a long silence. At length, being admonished by a vision, he resumed his preaching with extraordinary fruit, and provided that meals should be more regular, though the food was still of the coarsest, as William of Saint-Thierry relates. The reputation of the house, and of the sanctity of the abbot, in a short time became so great that the number of monks in it amounted to one hundred and thirty; the name of the valley had now been changed to Clairvaux, because it was situated right in the eye of the sun.

Saint Bernard was attacked by a serious illness so that his life was almost despaired of about the end of the year 1118. His great admirer, the learned and good Bishop of Chalons, William of Champeaux, went to the chapter of the order then held at Citeaux and obtained authority to govern him as his immediate superior for one year. With this commission, he hastened to Clairvaux, and

lodged the abbot in a little house outside the enclosure, with orders that he should not observe even the rule of the monastery and that he should be entirely freed from all care of the affairs of his community. Here the saint lived under the direction of a physician from whose hands he received treatment, which was calculated to kill him even quicker than his disease, but he carried it out without complaint and after a year returned in better health to his monastery. His aged father Tescelin and the young Nivard had followed him there in 1117, and received the habit at his hands.

The four first daughters of Citeaux, namely La Ferte, Pontigny, Clairvaux, and Morimond, became each a mother-house to many others, and Clairvaux had the most numerous offspring. Saint Bernard founded, among many others, in 1117 the abbey of Trois Fontaines, in the diocese of Chalons, that of Fontenay, in the diocese of Autun, Rievaulx and Fountains in England, and that of Foigny, in the diocese of Laon. The last was in 1121 and in the same year he wrought his first miracle, restoring, while he sang Mass, his power of speech to a certain lord, his relation, called Josbert de la Ferte, that he might confess his sins before he died, three days after, having made restitution for numerous acts of injustice. When the saint had confidently promised this restoration of Josbert, his uncle Gaudry and his brother reproved him for his imprudence, but Bernard repeated the assurance in stronger terms; the saints have a supernatural instinct when for the divine honor they undertake to work a miracle. The author of Saint Bernard's life adds an account of other sick persons cured instantaneously by the saint's making the sign of the cross upon them, attested by eye-witnesses of weight and unexceptionable veracity. We are also told that the church of Foigny was infested with flies till, by the saint's saying he "excommunicated" them, they all died. The malediction of the flies of Foigny became famous as a proverb in France.

In consideration of his ill health, the general chapter dispensed Bernard from work in the fields and ordered him to undertake extra preaching instead. This led to his writing, at the request of the Abbot of Fontenay, his treatise on the Degrees of Humility and Pride, which was the first of his published works (1121). It includes a study of character which, says the Abbe E Vacandard, "the most expert psychologist would not disavow." (Life of Saint Bernard, Paris, 1910.)

In 1122, he had to take a journey to Paris where, at the request of the bishop and archdeacon, he preached to the students who were candidates for holy orders, some of whom were so moved by his discourse that they accompanied him back to Clairvaux, and persevered there. Several German gentlemen who called to see the monastery were so strongly affected by all they saw that they agreed to return, hung up their swords, and took the habit. Their conversion was the more wonderful as till that day they had been interested chiefly in war, tilts and tournaments.

Humility made Bernard sincerely regard himself as unworthy and incapable of moving others; but charity opened his mouth, and he poured forth his thoughts with such eloquence, that, aided by God's grace, it brought about these and similar conversions.

He received into his monastery monks who came from other orders that were less austere, but declared that he was most willing to give leave to any of his own who should desire to pass to any other religious institute from the motive of seeking their greater perfection. Blessed Peter the Venerable, Arch-abbot of Cluny, having addressed an expostulation to Clairvaux, charging the Cistercians with hypocrisy and with vilifying the Cluniacs, Saint Bernard replied in an apologia, in which he refutes the charge of slander and makes serious adverse criticism of Cluniac life. Charity was admirably maintained on either side, and in the event, Peter and Suger, Abbot of Saint Denis, inaugurated a reform. During the year 1125, in which during a famine he had often exhausted the

provisions of his monastery to feed the poor, Bernard was once again brought to the very gates of death.

It happened in this illness that he once appeared to those about him as if he were actually dying, and he fell into a trance, in which he seemed to himself to see the Devil accusing him before the throne of God. To the charge, he made only this answer, "I confess myself unworthy of the glory of Heaven, and that I can never obtain it by my own merits. But my Lord Jesus possesses it upon a double title: that of inheritance, by being the only-begotten Son of His eternal Father; and that of purchase, He having bought it with His precious blood. This second title He has conferred on me, and by it I claim the reward of Heaven." The Devil was confounded and disappeared. Then Bernard saw himself waiting on the seacoast to board a vessel, but it stood out to sea and left him. Finally, Our Lady appeared and laid her hands on him, and when he awoke, his sickness had left him.

Saint Bernard's works sufficiently declare his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In one of his missions into Germany, being in the great church at Spire, it is said he spontaneously sang during a procession, "O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Maria," which words the Church added to the anthem "Salve Regina" (the word "virgo" before "Maria" is a later addition still). (Hail Holy Queen... O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.) The custom was introduced from this incident of singing that anthem every day with great solemnity in the cathedral of Spire.

Notwithstanding Saint Bernard's love of retirement, obedience and the Church's needs frequently drew him from his cell. Like several other great saints who have had in a supreme degree the gift of contemplation and wished only to live alone with God in the retirement of a monastery, he had, for years on end, to be about his Father's business in active and public, even political, affairs. In 1137, he wrote that his life was "over-run in all quarters with anxieties, suspicions, cares, and there is scarcely an hour that is left free from the crowd of discordant applicants, from the trouble and care of business. I have no power to stop their coming and cannot refuse to see them, and they do not leave me even the time to pray."

So great was the reputation of his learning and sanctity that princes desired to have their differences determined by him and bishops regarded his decisions with the greatest respect, referring to him the most important affairs of their churches. The popes looked upon his advice as the greatest support of the Holy See, and all people had a profound respect and veneration for his person and his opinion. It may be said of him that in his solitude he governed all the churches of the West. The first occasion, which called for his help outside, was a dissension between the Archbishop and citizens of Reims, whom the saint reconciled, confirming his words by the miraculous cure of a boy that was deaf, blind, and dumb. He opposed the election of unworthy persons to the episcopacy or other ecclesiastical dignities, which raised him many enemies, who spared him neither slanders nor abuse. Their common complaint was that a monk ought to confine himself to his cloister. To this, he answered that a monk was a soldier of Christ as much as other Christians, and ought to defend the truth and the honor of God's sanctuary.

By his example Henry, Archbishop of Sens, and Stephen, Bishop of Paris, renounced the court and their secular manner of living; and Suger, Abbot of Saint Denis, who was minister to King Louis (VI) 'the Fat' and for some time regent of the kingdom, and who lived in great state accordingly, laid aside his worldly habits, resigned all his posts, and shut himself up in Saint Denis, where he banished the court out of his abbey and reestablished regular discipline. He often reminded ecclesiastics of their strict obligation of giving whatever they enjoyed of church revenues, above a

necessary maintenance, to the poor. Thus, he wrote to the Dean of Languedoc: “You may imagine that what belongs to the Church belongs to you, while you officiate there. But you are mistaken: for though it be reasonable that one who serves the altar should live by the altar, yet it must not be to promote either his luxury or his pride. Whatever goes beyond bare nourishment and simple plain clothing is sacrilege and theft.”

Bernard had, much against his will, to assist at the synods of Troyes, Arras, Chalons, and others, in the course of which he encouraged and co-operated in the founding of the Knights Templar and concurred in the deposition of the Bishop of Verdun and the Abbot of Saint Sepulcher. The severity of these disciplinary measures was imputed entirely to Saint Bernard and drew upon him a rebuke from the Chancellor of the Roman Church; in reply, he amply justified the part he had taken, protested his unwillingness to be present at the councils, and asked that he should not be summoned again.

After the death of Pope Honorius II in 1130, Innocent II was chosen pope on the same day by the greater number of cardinals. But, at the same time, a faction attempted to invest with that supreme dignity Cardinal Peter de Leone, who took the name of Anacletus II. He had formerly been a monk of Cluny, was an ambitious worldly man, and so powerful that he got the strongholds of Rome into his hands. Innocent II was obliged to fly to Pisa. A council of French bishops was held at Etampes, twenty-five miles from Paris, to which Saint Bernard was invited. He strenuously maintained the justice of Innocent’s cause. He was recognized by the council, and soon after came into France, where he was splendidly received by King Louis the Fat. Saint Bernard waited on him, and accompanied him to Chartres, where he met Henry I, King of England, who was at first inclined to favor the antipope, but was persuaded by Saint Bernard to acknowledge Innocent. The saint followed the Pope into Germany, and was present at the conference, which he had with the Emperor Lothair III, who recognized the lawful pope on the condition of receiving the right of giving the investitures of bishoprics. Saint Bernard’s remonstrances overwhelmed Lothair and made him withdraw the condition, which Innocent had refused. (Lothair was the third Lothair to rule from Aachen, but is technically the second to be Emperor.)

His Holiness held a council at Reims in 1131, and went from Auxerre to visit Clairvaux, where he was received in procession, as in other places, but without any splendor: the monks were clad in coarse habits and before them was carried a homely wooden crucifix. The bread, which was served at table, was made of coarse flour that had never been sifted; the other food was vegetables and herbs, with one small fish for the Pope, of which a chronicler says the other guests had to be satisfied with admiring it from a distance. Nor was there any wine. Innocent insisted on keeping Bernard by his side and in the year following he attended the Pope into Italy, and reconciled to him Genoa and some other cities. He arrived with him at Rome, whence he not long after was sent into Germany as papal legate to make peace between the Emperor Lothair III and the two nephews, Frederick and Conrad, of Henry V, his predecessor. He marked every stage of his journey by supporting the cause of the true pope and by the conversion of sinners, among others, of Alois, Duchess of Lorraine, sister to the Emperor, who had for a long time dishonored her rank and religion by her scandalous behavior; having pacified the troubles of Germany he returned into Italy, being obliged by the Pope to assist at the council of Pisa in 1135, in which the schismatics were excommunicated.

Afterwards he went to Milan to reconcile that city to the Holy See. He wrought there many miracles, and wherever he came, he was received as a man sent from Heaven. He induced the

Milanese to renounce the schism and reconciled them with the Emperor, and the grateful citizens established at Chiaravalle the first Cistercian house in Italy. In November, he was allowed to return to Clairvaux, and among the postulants he took with him was a canon of Pisa, Peter Bernard, who was to become Pope (Blessed) Eugenius (or Eugene) III; for the present, he was put to stoke the fire in the monastery calefactory or heated sitting room.

In the previous year, Saint Bernard had been called into Aquitaine where William X, the powerful duke of that province, persecuted those that adhered to the true pope, and had on that account expelled the Bishops of Poitiers and Limoges. Gerard, Bishop of Angouleme, an abettor of the schism, encouraged him in these excesses. This William was a prince of immense wealth, gigantic stature and strength of body, and extraordinary abilities in worldly affairs, but he was in his youth impious, haughty, and impatient of the least control. He seemed not to be able to live out of war, and was openly living with his brother's wife. Saint Bernard was not afraid of this formidable person. The Duke listened to his arguments for a week, and was finally won over. But directly Bernard was gone, the Bishop of Angouleme undid his work. The saint, who had learned never to despair of the most obstinate sinner, redoubled his prayers and endeavors, till he had the comfort to see William begin to come again to the obedience of the rightful pope, but could not prevail upon him to restore the two bishops whom he had unjustly deprived of their sees.

At length he had recourse to more powerful arms. He went to say Mass, the duke and other schismatics staying at the door, as being excommunicated persons. After the giving of the kiss of peace before communion, the abbot put the Host upon the paten and, carrying it out, his eyes sparkling and his countenance all on fire, spoke to the Duke no longer as a suppliant but with a voice of authority: "Hitherto I have entreated you and prayed you, and you have despised me. Several servants of God have joined their entreaties with mine, and you have never regarded them. Now, therefore, the Son of the Virgin, the Lord and Head of that Church which you persecute, comes in person to see if you will repent. He is your judge, at whose name every knee bends, in Heaven, Earth, and Hell. Into His hands your obstinate soul will one day fall. Will you despise Him? Will you scorn Him as you have done His servants? Will you?"

The Duke, not being able to hear any more, fell down in fear. Saint Bernard lifted him up, and bade him salute the Bishop of Poitiers, who was present. The Duke was not able to speak, but went to the bishop, and kissed him, and afterwards led him by the hand to his cathedral-church, expressing by that action that he renounced the schism and restored the bishop to his see. After this, the saint returned to the altar and finished the sacrifice. A particular impulse of the Holy Ghost, the great authority of the saint, and the dignity with which he was enabled to perform so extraordinary an action, make it an object of admiration, though not of imitation. As for Duke William, it made so deep an impression upon his mind that his conversion was complete. He founded a Cistercian monastery and undertook a penitential pilgrimage to Compostella, on which he died.

Thus by the efforts of Saint Bernard was the schism extinguished in many places, but it was still protected by Roger, King of Sicily and Duke of Calabria. The Pope called the saint to Viterbo in 1137, and thence sent him to this prince. Bernard, in a public conference at Salerno, convicted Anacletus's partisans of schism, and brought over many persons of distinction to the union of the Church, including Cardinal Peter of Pisa; but Roger remained inflexible.

The death of the antipope in 1138 opened the way to the peace of the Church for, though the schismatics chose Gregory Conti, (who took the name Victor IV,) the activities of Bernard in Rome

so damaged his cause that he surrendered his pretensions to Innocent II. Hereupon Bernard asked the Pope for permission to return to his monastery, which he was at last permitted to do.

In 1139, Saint Bernard was elected to the archiepiscopal see of Reims; it was not the first time he had been called to the episcopacy – it was in fact the fifth – but he resolutely refused the dignity and his refusal was again respected; he was present at the tenth general council, Lateran II. All this time he had continued diligently to preach to his monks, notably those discourses on the Cantic of Canticles, and he now for the first time made the acquaintance of Saint Malachy (Maelmhaedhoc o’Morgair), who had recently retired from the see of Armagh; the ensuing friendship between the two lasted until Malachy’s death in Bernard’s arms nine years later. In 1140, he wrote his famous letter to the metropolitan chapter of Lyons protesting against their introduction of the feast of the Conception of our Lady, which was not known in the West until comparatively late. Bernard wrote in the belief that the canons wished to celebrate, not the infusion by God of the soul into the human embryo, but her “active conception,” that is, the generative act of her parents. From other passages in his writings, it may be gathered that Saint Bernard believed in the Immaculate (passive) Conception of our Lady, a doctrine, which in those days, was not yet defined by the Church to be of faith. Later in the same year, he preached for the first time in a public pulpit, primarily to the students of Paris. They are the two most powerful and trenchant of his discourses preserved to us, in which he says much of “things hellish and horrible”; they effected some good and a number of conversions among the students, who were at first superior to their fervent “evangelicalism.”

If Saint Bernard was the most eloquent and influential man of his age, the next was the brilliant and unhappy Peter Abelard, who was, moreover, of far wider learning. The two were bound to come into collision, for they represented two currents of thought which, not necessarily opposed, were not yet properly fused: on the one hand, the weight of traditional authority and “faith not as an opinion but a certitude”; on the other, the new rationalism and exaltation of human reason. In 1121, Abelard’s orthodoxy had come under suspicion and after a synod at Soissons, he had had to burn a book he had written containing certain opinions on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but about 1136, after a brief career as abbot of Saint Gildas de Rhuys, he returned to teach enthusiastic audiences in Paris. In 1139 William of Saint Thierry, a Cistercian of Signy, denounced some of Abelard’s teachings and writings, and informed Geoffrey, Bishop of Chartres, who was legate of the Holy See, and Saint Bernard, saying they were the only persons who could crush the mischief.

Saint Bernard had three private conferences with Abelard, at which he promised to abandon his dangerous doctrines, but he did not keep his promise, and Bernard attacked him publicly and before the authorities. Thereupon Abelard challenged him to substantiate his charges before an assembly of bishops, which would meet at Sens at the Pentecost of 1140. Bernard was unwilling to appear, telling the bishops it was their business, so that Abelard triumphed, and his friends said Bernard was afraid to encounter him face to face. The saint therefore was obliged to be present. But Abelard, who dreaded the eloquence of the abbot above all things, only presented himself at the council to hear the charges drawn up by Saint Bernard out of his own book read against him; he declined to give any answer, though he had liberty given him to do it, had very favorable judges, and was in a place where he had no reason to fear anything. Instead, he appealed to the Pope, and then withdrew from the synod with his party. The bishops condemned seventeen propositions extracted out of his works, and wrote to Pope Innocent II, who confirmed their sentence.

Stopping at Cluny on his way to Rome, Abelard heard of this confirmation and he was persuaded by the abbot, Peter the Venerable, to recall whatever he had written which gave offence, and to meet

Saint Bernard. He did so, and was reconciled to him. With the Pope's leave, he resolved to spend the remainder of his life at Cluny, being now really sorry for his pride and aberrations. Saint Bernard himself has since been grievously criticized for his unrelenting pursuit of Abelard: but he had detected in him vanity and arrogance masquerading as science, and rationalism masquerading as the use of reason, and his ability and learning made him the more dangerous. Saint Bernard wrote to the Pope: "Peter Abelard is trying to make void the merit of Christian faith, when he deems himself able by human reason to comprehend God entirely... the man is great in his own eyes."

Probably about the beginning of the year 1142, the first Cistercian foundation was made in Ireland, from Clairvaux, where Saint Malachy had put some young Irishmen with Saint Bernard to be trained. The abbey was called Mellifont, in county Louth, and within ten years of its foundation, six daughter-houses had been planted out.

At the same time Bernard was busied in the affair of the disputed succession to the see of York, set out in the account I have written of Saint William of York (June 8), in the course of which Pope Innocent II died. His third successor, within eighteen months, was the Cistercian abbot of Tre Fontane, that Peter Bernard of Pisa to whom reference has been made, who is known to history as Blessed Eugenius (Eugene) III. Saint Bernard wrote a charming letter of encouragement to his former subject, addressed: "To his most dearly loved father and master, Eugenius, by the grace of God Sovereign Pontiff, Bernard, styled Abbot of Clairvaux, presents his humble service." But Bernard was also rather frightened, for Eugenius was shy and retiring, not accustomed to public life, and he wrote also to the College of Cardinals, a letter beginning: "May God forgive you what you have done! You have put back among the living a man who was dead and buried. You have again surrounded with cares and crowds one who had fled from cares and crowds. You have made the last first, and behold! The last state of that man is more perilous than the first."

Later he wrote for Pope Eugenius' guidance the longest and most important of his treatises, *de Consideratione*, (On Consideration,) impressing upon him the various duties of his office, and strongly recommending to him always to reserve time for self-examination and daily contemplation, applying himself to this still more than to business. He proves to him that consideration serves to form and to employ in the heart, all virtues. He reminds the Pope that he is in danger of falling, by the multiplicity of affairs, into a forgetfulness of God and hardness of heart: the thought of which made the saint tremble for him, and tell him that his heart was already hardened and made insensible if he did not continually tremble for himself; for if the Pope falls, the whole Church of God is involved. The work has been most highly esteemed by popes and theologians ever since.

Bernard also relentlessly pursued Arnold of Brescia, "a man who neither eats nor drinks because, like the Devil, he thirsts only after the blood of souls. His conversation has nothing but sweetness, and his doctrine nothing but poison. He has the head of a dove, but the tail of a scorpion," whose heretical teaching and stirring up of the Roman populace caused the Pope for a time to flee from his city.

In the meantime, the Albigensian heresy and its social and moral implications had been making alarming progress in the south of France. Saint Bernard had already been called on to deal with a similar sect in Cologne and in 1145, the papal legate, Cardinal Alberic, asked him to go to Languedoc. Bernard was ill and weak and hardly able to make the journey, but he obeyed, preaching at Bergerac, Perigueux, Sarlat, and Cahors on the way. Geoffrey, who was for some time the saint's secretary, accompanied him, and relates many miracles to which he was an eyewitness.

He tells us that at Sarlat, in Perigord, Bernard, blessing with the sign of the cross some loaves of bread which were brought, said, "By this shall you know the truth of our doctrine, and the falsehood of that which is taught by the heretics, if such as are sick among you recover their health by eating of these loaves." The Bishop of Chartres, who stood near the saint, being fearful of the result, said, "That is, if they eat with a right faith, they shall be cured." But the abbot replied, "I say not so; but assuredly they that taste shall be cured, that you may know by this that we are sent by authority derived from God, and preach His truth." And a number of sick persons were cured by eating that bread.

When the saint lodged at Saint Saturnin's, a house of regular canons at Toulouse, one of the canons lay at the point of death, so weak that he could not rise from his bed; but by a visit and prayer of the saint he was restored to perfect health. "That instant," says Geoffrey, "he rose from his bed, and following after, overtook us and kissed the blessed man's feet with an eager devotion which can only be imagined by those who saw it." The bishop of the place, the legate, and the people went to the church, the man who had been sick leading the way, and gave thanks to God for His blessing. Bernard preached against the heresy throughout Languedoc; its supporters were stubborn and violent, especially at Toulouse and Albi, but in a very short time he had restored the country to Catholic orthodoxy and returned to Clairvaux. But he left too soon, the restoration was more apparent than real, and twenty-five years later Albigensianism had a stronger hold than ever. Then came Saint Dominic.

On Christmas Day, 1144, the Seljuk Turks had captured Edessa, centre of one of the four principalities of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, and immediate appeals for help were at once sent to Europe, for the whole position was in danger. King Louis VII 'the Young' announced his intention of leading an expedition to the East, and the Pope commissioned Saint Bernard to preach the holy war. He began at Vezelay on Palm Sunday 1146, when Queen Eleanor and many nobles were the first to take the cross, and were followed by such large numbers of people, moved by the monk's burning words, that the supply of cloth badges was exhausted and he had to tear strips off his habit to make others. When he had roused France, he wrote letters to the rulers and peoples of England, Italy, Sicily, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Moravia, Bohemia, and Bavaria, and then went in person into Germany.

First he had to deal with a half-crazy monk, called Rudolf (Radulphe), who in his name was inciting the people to massacre the Jews, and then made a triumphant journey through the Rhineland, confirming his appeals by an amazing succession of miracles, vouched for by his companions. The Emperor Conrad III received him with honor, took the cross from him at Spire, and set out on the crusade with an army in the May of 1147, followed by Louis of France. This, the second, crusade was a miserable failure; Conrad's forces were cut to pieces in Asia Minor and Louis did not get beyond laying siege to Damascus. Its ill success is chiefly ascribed to the treachery of the Greek Emperor, Manuel Comnenus, but was also in no small measure due to the crusaders themselves, of whom a great part were led by no other motive than the prospect of plunder, were lawless, and committed every kind of disorder in their march. To those who were led by motives of sincere penance and religion, these afflictions were trials for the exercise of their virtue, but the ascetical exercise was dearly bought.

This unfortunate expedition raised a great storm against Saint Bernard, because he had seemed to promise success. His answer was that he confided in the divine mercy for a blessing on an enterprise undertaken for the honor of the divine name; but that the sins of the army were the cause

of its misfortunes; further, who could judge the extent of its success or failure, and “how is it that the rashness of mortals dares reprove what they cannot understand?”

In 1151 Gunnar, King of Sardinia (Gonario II of Torres), made a visit to Clairvaux, and was so edified with what he saw practiced there that he returned the year following, and made his religious profession in that house, and the like was done by Prince Peter, brother to King Alfonso I of Portugal, and by Prince Henry, third son of King Louis VI. In 1147, Pope Eugenius visited Clairvaux, and afterwards assisted at the general chapter of the order held at Citeaux, at which the whole Benedictine congregation of Savigny, consisting of thirty or more monasteries, passed into that of Citeaux and, out of respect for Saint Bernard, became a filiation of Clairvaux. After the return of the crusaders Bernard, in concert with Abbot Suger, who had opposed the former venture, energetically started to organize another, and in 1150 Bernard himself was elected to lead the Christian army to victory; he wrote to the Pope, reproaching him for his lack of enthusiasm, and preparations went on apace. But at the beginning of the next year Suger died, and France being again on the brink of civil war the project was never put into execution.

Bernard urged the Emperor to proceed against Arnold of Brescia, who still held Rome against the Pope, but Conrad died suddenly in 1152 and Blessed Eugenius in 1153, and in the beginning of that year Saint Bernard too entered on his last illness. He had long dwelt in Heaven in desire, though this desire he by humility ascribed to weakness, not to charity. “The saints,” said he, “were moved to pray for death out of a desire of seeing Christ; but I am forced hence by scandals and evil. I confess myself overcome by the violence of the storm for want of courage.”

For a time he mended a little in the spring, and was called on for the last time to leave Clairvaux to succor his neighbor. The inhabitants of Metz having been attacked and defeated with great slaughter by the Duke of Lorraine, they were vehemently bent on revenge. To prevent the shedding of more blood the Archbishop of Trier went to Clairvaux, and earnestly implored Bernard to journey to Metz in order to reconcile the parties that were at variance. At this call of charity, he forgot his corporal infirmity and immediately made his way into Lorraine, where he prevailed on both sides to lay aside their arms and accept a treaty, which he drew up. When he was back at Clairvaux, his illness returned with more grievous symptoms; his stomach was scarcely able to bear the least nourishment, even taken in liquids, his arms and legs swelled as if he had dropsy, and he was hardly able to sleep for a few minutes at a time. When he received the last sacraments and his spiritual children assembled about him in tears, he comforted and encouraged them, saying that the unprofitable servant ought not to occupy a place uselessly, and that the barren tree ought to be rooted up.

His love for them inclined him to remain with them till they should be gathered with him to God; but his desire to enjoy Christ made him long for death. “I am straitened between two;” he cried, “and what to choose I know not. I leave it to the Lord; let Him decide.” And God took him to Himself, on August 20, 1153; he was sixty-three years old, had been abbot for thirty-eight, and sixty-eight monasteries had been founded directly from Clairvaux. He was canonized by Pope Alexander III in 1174, and in 1830 formally declared a Doctor of the Church: Doctor Mellifluus, the Honey-sweet Doctor, as he is now universally called.

Saint Bernard “carried the twelfth century on his shoulders, and he did not carry it without suffering”; he was during his life the oracle of the Church, the light of prelates, and the reformer of discipline; since his death he continues to comfort and instruct by his writings. The great French lay

scholar of the seventeenth century, Henri (Henry) Valois, did not hesitate to say they are the most useful for piety among all the works of the Fathers of the Church, though he is the youngest of them in time, and Sixtus of Siena, the converted Jew, said, "His discourse is everywhere sweet and ardent: it so delights and warms that from his tongue honey and milk seem to flow in his words, and a fire of burning love to break forth from his breast."

To Erasmus he was "cheerful, pleasant, and vehement in moving the passions," and in another place, "He is Christianly learned, holily eloquent, and devoutly cheerful and pleasing." From Pope Innocent II to Cardinal Manning, from Luther to Frederic Harrison, Catholics and Protestants of eminence have recognized the sanctity of Saint Bernard and the greatness of his writings, in which he is equally gentle and vigorous; his style is sublime, lively, and pleasant; his charity appears even in his reproaches and shows that he reproves to correct, never to insult. This gives such a force to his strongest invective that it gains the heart and instills both awe and love: the sinner whom he admonishes can only be angry with himself, not with the reprimand or its author. He had so meditated on the Holy Scriptures that in almost every sentence he borrows something from their language, and diffuses the marrow of the sacred text with which his own heart was filled. He was well read in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, especially Saints Ambrose and Augustine, and often takes his thoughts from their writings and by a new turn makes them his own.

Though he lived after Saint Anselm, the first of the scholastics, and though his contemporaries are ranked in that class, yet he treats theological subjects after the manner of the ancients. On this account, and for the great excellence of his writings, he is reckoned among the Fathers. And though he is the last among them in time, he is one of the greatest to those who desire to study and to improve their hearts in sincere religion. A perfect spirit of humility, devotion, and divine charity reigns throughout his writings and strongly affects his readers, for it is the language of his own heart, always glowing with love and penitence.
