

120// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. BERNARD, THE MELLIFLUOUS DOCTOR

St. Bernard was born in Burgundy in the castle of Fontaine of noble lineage and much religious. Whose father hight Celestin, and was a noble knight in the world and much religious to God. And his mother was named Aleth. She had seven children, six males and one female. The men children she nourished all for to be monks, and the daughter for to be a nun. And anon, as she had a child she offered it to God with her own hands. She would refuse strange breasts, for like as she fed them with her motherly milk, so fed she them with nature of goodness. And as long as they grew and were under her hand she nourished them more for desert than for the court. For she fed them with more common and grosser meats, like as she would have sent them right forth into desert.

Bernard is said of ber, that is, a pit or well, and nardus, which, as the gloss saith upon Cantica, is an humble herb and of hot nature and well smelling. He was hot inburning love, humble in conversation, a well in flowing doctrine, a pit in deepness of science, and well smelling in sweetness of fame. His life hath written Abbot William of St. Theodoric, and the fellow of St. Bernard, and Hernaldus the abbot of Bonevalle.

THE BIRTH OF ST. BERNARD

And as she bare the third son, which was Bernard, in her belly, she saw in her sleep a dream which was a demonstrance of things to come. Her seemed that she had in her belly a whelp, all white and red upon the back, barking in her belly. And when she had told her dream to a holy man, he answered to her, prophesying: Thou art mother of a right noble whelp, which shall be a warden of the house of God, and shall give great barkings against the enemies. For he shall be a noble preacher, and shall guerish much people by the grace of his tongue.

HIS CHILDHOOD

And as Bernard was yet a little child he was sick of the headache, and there came a woman to him for to charm him, and thereby to assuage the grievous ache of his head, but he put her from him, crying by right great indignation, and the mercy of God failed not to his infancy in good love, for he arose and felt that he was delivered hereof.

In the blessed night of the nativity of our Lord, when the child Bernard abode in the church the office of matins, and coveted to know what hour Jesu Christ was born, the child Jesus appeared to him as he had been born again out of his mother's belly, wherefore, as long as he lived, he supposed that hour to be the hour of the nativity of our Lord. And ever after as long as he lived was given to him in that hour more perfect wit, and speech more abundant in such things as appertain to the sacrament.

And after that he made a noble work, among all his other works, of the laud and praising of God and his blessed mother. In the which work he expounded the lesson evangelic, how the angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary.

And when the ancient enemy saw the purpose of the child full of health he bent against him many gins of temptation. And on a time when he had holden his eyes and fixed them upon a woman, he had anon shame in himself and was a cruel venger of himself. For he leapt anon into a pond full of water, and frozen, and was therein so long that almost he was frozen. And by the grace of God he was cooled from the heat of carnal concupiscence.

HIS YOUTH

Tempted by a Naked Maid

About that time, by the instigation of the devil, a maid laid her in his bed by him all naked there where he slept, and when he felt her, he let her lie in that side of the bed she had taken, and turned him to that other side and slept. And she tarried a space of time, and felt him and kittled him, and would have drawn him to her intent. And at the last, when she felt him immoveable, though she were unshamefaced, yet she was ashamed, and all confused, arose and went her way.

Tempted by a Hostess

Another time as he was harboured in the house of a lady, she considered the beauty of this young man and was greatly achauuffed and strongly desired his company. And then she ordained a bed out from the others. And in the night she arose without shame and came secretly to him. And when he felt her he cried: Thieves! thieves!

And she fled, and lighted a candle herself and sought the thief, and none was found, and then each man went to his bed again.

But this unhappy woman rested not, but arose again and went to the bed of Bernard, as she did tofore, and he cried: Thieves! thieves!

And the thief was sought but was not found, ne published of him that knew her well. And yet was she chased the third time, and then with great pain she ceased what for dread and despair.

And on the morn as they went by the way, his fellows reprovod him of that he had so dreamed of thieves, and enquired of him what it was. And he answered: Verily, I have suffered this night the assailings of a thief, for mine hostess enforced to take away from me treasure not recoverable.

BERNARD AND HIS BROTHERS JOIN THE CISTERCIANS

And then he bethought himself that it was not sure thing to dwell with the serpent, and thought for to flee it. And then he ordained him to enter into the order of Cistercians. And

when his brethren knew it they would have taken him from that purpose, and our Lord gave to him so great grace that they might not turn him from his conversion, but he brought all his brethren and many others to religion.

Nevertheless, Gerard, his brother, a noble knight, supposed always that they were vain words and refused always his monestements and teachings. And then Bernard, burning in the faith and in the spirit of brotherly love of charity, said: My brother, I know well that one sharp travail shall give understanding to thine ears. And after that he put his finger on his side, and said to him: One day shall come, and that soon, that a spear shall pierce thy side, and shall make way to thine heart, for to take the counsel that thou now refusest.

And a short time after Gerard was taken of his enemies, and was hurt on the side in the place where his brother had set his finger, and was put in prison fast bounden. And then came to him Bernard, and they would not suffer him to speak to him. And he cried on high: Gerard, brother, know thou that we shall go shortly and enter into the monastery.

And that same night the bonds of Gerard brake and fell off, and the door opened by himself, and he fled out, and said to his brother that he had changed his purpose and would be a monk.

And this was in the year of the incarnation of our Lord eleven hundred and twelve, in the fifteenth year of the order of Citeaux. The servant of God, Bernard, at the age of twenty-two years entered into the order of Citeaux with more than thirty fellows. And as Bernard issued with his brethren out of his father's house, Guy, that was the eldest, saw Nivard, his younger brother, which was a little child and played with the children, and said to him: Nivard, brother, all the possession of our heritage shall appertain to thee.

And the child answered not as a child, and said: Ye shall then have heaven, and leave to me only the earth, this part is not evenly ne righteously divided. And after, the child abode a little while with his father, but afterward he followed his brethren.

In All Things Occupied In God

When the servant of God, Bernard, was entered in to the order, he was so esprised and in all things occupied in God that he used no bodily wits. He had been a year in the cell of novices, and yet he wist not whether there were any windows in the house or no, and oft-times he had entered and gone out of the church whereas in the head were three windows, and he supposed there had been but one. And the abbot of Citeaux sent of his brethren for to edify the house of Clerevaux, and made Bernard there abbot, which was there long in great poverty, which oft made his pottage with leaves of holm.

SAYINGS OF ST. BERNARD

On Sleep

And the servant of God waked over man's power, and said that he lost no time but when he slept, and said that the comparison of sleep and of death were like semblable, so they that sleep be like as death were with men, and like as dead men be seen sleeping to God.

On Nourishment

He was unnethe drawn to any meat for delight of appetite, but only for dread of failing, and he went to take his meat like as he should have gone to a torment. And he was always accustomed, when he had eaten, to weet [consider] if he had eaten too much or more than he was accustomed, and if he had so done he would punish himself so that he refrained his mouth, that he lost a great part of the savour and tasting of his meat. For sometimes he drank oil when it was given him by error instead of drink. He said that the water was good alone and refreshed him well, and he perceived not that he drank oil, but when his lips were anointed some told him thereof. And some time and other while he ate the fat of raw flesh instead of butter.

On Reading Scripture

He said that all that he had learned of holy scripture he had learned it in woods, in fields, most by meditation and praying, and confessed that he had none other masters but oaks and holm-trees, this confessed he among his friends. At the last he confessed that sometime, when he was in meditation or praying, him thought that all holy scriptures appeared to him expounded. On a time, as he rehearseth in Canticis, that he would put among the words such as the Holy Ghost counselled him, and whiles he made that treatise he would think, of good courage, what he should do when that were made. And then a voice came to him, saying: Till thou hast accomplished this work thou shalt do none other.

On Clothing

He had never pleasure in clothing; he said that filths were in demonstrance of negligence, and outrageous clothing was folly, a man but glorifying himself in respect of outward vain glory. He had in his heart always this proverb, and oft said it: Who doth that no other man doth, all men wonder on him. He ware many years the hair, and as long as he might hide it he ware it. And when he saw that it was known, he left it anon and took him to common vesture.

On Laughing

He laughed never but if he made greater force to laugh than to refrain him.

On Patience

He was wont to say that the manner of patience was in three manners, of injuries of words, of damage of things, and of misdoing of the body.

On Blasphemy

On a time he wrote a letter to a bishop, friendly, and admonished him amiably, and he was much wroth, and wrote to him a letter saying thus at the beginning: Greeting to thee that hast the spirit of blasphemy. To whom he answered: I suppose not to have the spirit of blasphemy, ne have said evil to any man, but only to the prince the devil.

On Riches

An abbot sent to him six hundred marks of silver for to make a convent, but all the money was robbed by thieves by the way. And when St. Bernard heard thereof he said none other thing but: Blessed be God that hath spared me from this charge.

ANECDOTES

The Canon Regular

A canon regular came to him and prayed him much that he Bernard would receive him to be a monk, and he would not accord it to him, but counselled him to return to his church. He said to him: Why hast thou so much in thy books praised perfection if thou wilt not show it, and deliver it to him that coveteth it? If I had thy books I would all torend them.

And Bernard said to him: Thou hast not read in any of them but that thou mightest be perfect in thy cloister; I praise in all my books the correction of manners and not the mutation of places.

And the canon being all araged leapt to him and smote him on the cheek, that it was red and swollen. And they that were by arose against this cursed man for to have smitten this cursed man, but Bernard came between, crying and conjuring by the name of Jesu Christ that they should not touch him, ne do him none harm.

Advice to Novices

He had a custom to say to the novices that would enter into religion: Leave there without your body, ye that will enter into religion, leave the body without that ye have taken from the world, and join you to them that be here within, let the spirit enter only, for the flesh profiteth no thing.

St. Bernard's Sister Enters the Religious Life

St. Bernard's father went into the monastery and dwelled there a certain time, and after died in good age. The sister was married in to the world, and on a time she arrayed and appalled her in riches and delights of the world, and went into the monastery for to visit her brethren in a proud estate and great apparel. And he dreaded her as she had been the devil, or his net for to take souls, ne would not go out for to see her.

And when she saw that none of her brethren came against her, one of her brethren, that was porter, said to her that she was a foul ordure stinking, wrapped in gay array. And then she melted all in tears, and said: If I be a sinner, God died for sinners, and because I am a sinful woman I come to ask counsel of them that be good. If my brother despise my flesh, he that is servant of God ought not to despise my soul; let my brother come, and what he shall command me I shall do.

And she held that promise. And he came with his brethren, and because she might not depart from her husband, he taught her to despise the glory of the world, and showed to her how she should ensue the steps of her mother. And then when she came home again she was so sore changed, that in the middle of the world she led the life of a hermit, and all estranged from the world.

In the end she vanquished her husband by prayers, and was assoilled by the bishop of her vow and entered into a monastery.

St. Bernard Has a Vision of Judgment

On a time St. Bernard was sore sick, so that him seemed he should give up his spirit, and was at his end as him seemed in a trance, and him thought that he was tofore God in judgment and there was the devil on that other side, which put on him many accusations and reproaches, and when he had all said, Bernard said without fear, dread, or wrath: I confess me that I am not worthy to have the kingdom of heaven by mine own merits, but our Lord which holdeth me by double right as his heritage and by the merits of his passion. By that one he is content, and that other he giveth to me, by which gift I ought not to be confounded, but it appertaineth to me by right.

And thus he was confused and the vision failed, and the man of God came to himself and destrained his body by so great travail of fastings and wakings, that he languished in continual malady, that he might not follow the convent but with pain.

His Brethren Pray Him out of Illness

On a time he was so grievously sick that all the brethren prayed for him, so that he felt him a little alleged and eased of his pain. Then he did do assemble all his brethren, and said: Wherefore hold ye so wretched a man? Ye be stronger and have vanquished, I pray you, spare me and let me go.

Many Cities Want Him for Their Bishop

This holy man was elect of many cities for to be a bishop, specially of the city of Milan, and refused it not follily, ne granted thereto, but said to them that required that he was not his own, but deputed to other. And by the counsel of this holy man, the brethren so provided by the authority of the pope, that none might take him from them which was their joy to have him.

The Costly Saddle

On a time when he visited the order of Charterhouse, and when the brethren were well edified by him, one thing there was that moved a little the prior of the place, and that was, the saddle that St. Bernard rode on was over precious and showed little poverty of the brethren, and the prior told it to one of the brethren. And the brother said it to St. Bernard, and he marvelled and asked what saddle it was, and sent for it. For he wist not what saddle it was, how well he had ridden upon it from Clerevaux to the Charterhouse.

He went all a long day by the lake of Lausanne and saw not the lake ne took heed of it, and at even as his fellows spake of that lake, he demanded where was that lake. And when they heard that, they marvelled strongly, for certainly the humbleness of his heart vanquished in him the height of name. For the world could never enhance him so high, but be alone humbled himself the more; he was reputed sovereign of all, and he accounted himself least and most low.

His Humility

And at the last he confessed that when he was among his sovereign honours and favours of the people, him seemed that there was another man changed in him, or as he had been in a dream. And there where he was among the most simple brethren he used most amiable humility, there he joyed, there found he himself, and that he was returned in to his own person. He was always found tofore the hours, or reading, or writing, or in meditation, or in edifying his brethren by word.

A Temptation to Pride

On a time as he preached to the people, and that they all understood devoutly his words, such a temptation arose in his heart: Verily, now preachest thou well, now art thou well heard of the people, and art reputed wise of them all.

And the holy man feeling him to be put in this temptation, rested and tarried a while, and thought whether he might say more or make an end. And anon he was comforted by divine aid, and answered softly to him that tempted him: I neither began by thee, ne shall I end by thee; and so performed surely all his sermon.

The Monk Who Wanted to Return to the World

A monk that had been a ribald in the world and a player, tempted by a wicked spirit, would return again to the world. And as St. Bernard retained him, he demanded him whereof he should live. And he answered to him that he could well play at the dice, and should well live thereby.

And St. Bernard said to him: If I deliver to thee any good, wilt thou come again every year that I may part half gain with thee?

And he had great joy thereof, and promised him so to do. And then St. Bernard said that there should be delivered to him twenty shillings, and he went withal. And this holy man did this

for to draw him again to the religion, as he did after. And he went forth, and lost all, and came again all confused tofore the gate. And when St. Bernard knew him there, he went to him joyously and opened his lap for to part the gain.

And he said: Father, I have won nothing, but have lost your chattel; receive me, if it please you, to be your chattel. And St. Bernard answered to him sweetly: If it be so, it is better that I receive thee, than lose both thee and that other.

Stability in Prayer

On a time St. Bernard rode upon an horse by the way, and met a villein by the way, which said to him that he had not his heart firm and stable in praying. And the villein or uplandish man had great despite thereof, and said that he had his heart firm and stable in all his prayers. And St. Bernard, which would vanquish him and shew his folly, said to him: Depart a little from me, and begin thy paternoster in the best entent thou canst. And if thou canst finish it without thinking on any other thing, without doubt I shall give to thee the horse that I am on. And thou shalt promise to me by thy faith that if thou think on any other thing thou shalt not hide it from me.

And the man was glad and reputed the horse his, and granted it him, and went apart and began his paternoster. And he had not said the half when he remembered if he should have the saddle withal. And therewith he returned to St. Bernard and said that he had thought in praying, and after that he had no more will to advance him.

Writing in the Rain

There was monk of his named brother Robert, nigh to himself as to the world, had been deceived in his childhood by the enticement of some persons, and was sent to the abbey of Cluny, and the honourable man left him awhile there. And he would call him again by letters; and as he indited the letter by clear day, and another monk wrote it, a rain came suddenly upon them. And he that wrote would have hid the parchment from the rain, and St. Bernard said: This work is the work of God, write on hardily and doubt thee nothing. And then he wrote the letter in the midst of the rain without being wet, and yet it rained all about them; for the virtue of charity took away the moisture of the rain from them.

Flies in the Church

A great multitude of flies had taken a church that he had do make, so that they did much harm to all them that came thither. And he said: I curse and excommunicate them, and on the morn they were found all dead.

He Casts Out a Devil

He was on a time sent from the pope to Milan for to reconcile the church, and when he had so done and was returned, a man of Milan brought to him his wife which was demoniac. And anon the devil began to missay him through the mouth of the wretched woman, and said: Thou eater of porret, ween [expect] thou to take me out of mine house? Nay, thou shalt not!

And the holy man, St. Bernard, sent him to St. Syrus in his church, and the said St. Syrus gave the honour to his host and healed her not, and thus was she brought again to St. Bernard. And then the devil began to cry, and said: Neither Syrus ne Bernard shall put me out.

And St. Bernard said: Syrus ne Bernard shall not put thee out, but our Lord shall put thee out.

And as soon as he made his prayer the wicked spirit said: Ha ! ha! how gladly would I issue from hence, for I am here tormented grievously. But I may not, for the great Lord wills it not.

And the holy man said: Who is that Lord? and he said, Jesus of Nazareth.

And St. Bernard said: Sawest thou him ever?

And he answered: Yea.

St. Bernard said: Where sawest thou him?

And he said: In his glory.

And St. Bernard asked him: And wert thou in glory?

And he said: Yea.

How wentest thou from thence?

And he said: With Lucifer many of us fell. All these he said by the mouth of the woman, that every man heard.

Then said to him the holy man: Wouldst not thou go again into that glory?

And he said, mowing marvellously: It is too late.

Then the holy man prayed, and the wicked spirit issued out of that woman, but when the man of God was departed thence, the wicked spirit entered again.

And her husband came after the holy man and told him what was happed. And he made to bind a writing about her neck containing these words: I command thee in the name of our Lord Jesu Christ that thou be not so hardy to touch more this woman, and he durst never after touch her.

Another Woman is Exorcised

There was a piteous woman in Guienne, which was vexed with a devil that dwelled in her and vexed her marvellously six years during, in using her to his lechery. And the holy man, St.

Bernard, came in to the parts. And the devil menaced her, if she went to him that it should not profit her. And if she went, he that was her love should be to her a cruel persecutor. But she went surely to the holy man, and told to him, weeping strongly, what she suffered.

And he said: Take this staff which is mine, and lay it in thy bed, and if he may do anything let him do it.

And she did so and laid it in her bed. And he came anon, but he durst not go to his work accustomed, ne presumed to approach her bed, but he threatened her right eagerly that, when he was gone, he would avenge him right cruelly on her. And when she had said this to Bernard, he assembled the people that every each should hold a candle burning in his hand, and came to this devil, and with all them that were there he cursed him and excommunicated him, and defended that never after he should so do to her ne to none other. And thus was she all delivered of that illusion.

The Duke of Guienne

And when on a time as this holy man went as a legate in to that province for to reconcile the duke of Guienne to the church, and he refused to be reconciled in all manners, the holy man went to the altar for to sing mass, and the duke abode without the church as excommunicate. And when he had said *Pax domini*, he laid the body of our Lord upon the paten, and bare it without the church, and went out with a face flaming and burning, and assailed the duke by fearful words, saying: We have prayed thee and thou hast despised us, lo! here is the son of the Virgin which is come to thee, which is Lord of the church whom thou persecutest. This is thy judge, in the name of whom all knees bow, in the hands of whom thy soul shall come. Despise him not as thou hast his servants, resist him if thou mayst.

Then anon the duke waxed all stiff and was impotent in all his members, and then he fell down at his feet. And the holy man put his foot at him, and commanded him to arise and to hear the sentence of God. He then trembling arose, and accomplished anon that the holy man commanded.

A Messenger is Taken into the Religious Life

On a time as this holy St. Bernard entered into Almaine [Germany] for to appease a great discord, there was an archbishop that sent an honorable clerk against him. And when the clerk said to him that he had been sent from his master against him, the holy man answered to him and said: Another lord hath sent thee.

And he marvelled and said that he was sent of none other, but of his lord the archbishop.

And St. Bernard said: Son, thou art deceived. Our Lord Jesu Christ, which hath sent thee, is a greater master.

And when the clerk understood him he said: Sire, weenest thou that I will be a monk? Nay, I thought it never, ne it came never in my heart.

Yet after in the same voyage he forsook the world and received the habit of this holy man, St. Bernard.

A Knight Enters the Order

He took also on a time into the order a noble knight, and when he had followed St. Bernard a little time he began to be grievously tempted, and when a brother saw him so heavy, he inquired the cause of his heaviness. And he answered him: I wot well that I shall never be glad.

And the brother told it to St. Bernard, and he prayed to God much ententively for him, and anon that brother that was so pensive and so heavy, seemed more joyous than the other, and more glad than he had been tofore heavy. And the brother blamed him because he had said that he should never be joyous.

And he answered and said: I wot well I said I should never be glad, but I say now that I never shall be sorrowful.

The Death of St. Malachi

When St. Malachi, bishop of Ireland, of whom he wrote the life, full of virtues, passed out of this world out of his monastery blessedly to our Lord Jesu Christ, and St. Bernard offered to God for him sacrifice of health, he saw the glory of him by revelation of our Lord, and by the inspiration of God he changed the form of prayer after the communion, saying thus with joyous voice: God, that hast accompanied St. Malachi by his merits with thy saints, we pray thee to give to us that we that make the feast of his precious death, may follow the examples of his life.

And when the chanter heard him, he said to him, and showed that he erred. And he said: I err not, but I know well what I say, and then went to the body and kissed his feet.

Numerous Knights Enter the Order

And in a time that the Lent approached he was visited of divers knights. And he prayed them that at the least in these holy days they should abstain them from their vanities, their jollities, and doing outrages, and they in no wise would agree thereto. And then he bade make ready wine, and said to them: Drink ye the health of your souls.

And when they had drunk the wine they were suddenly changed and went to their houses, and they that had denied to do a little time, they gave to God after, all the time of their life, and led a right holy life.

HIS DEATH AND LEGACY

At the last the holy St. Bernard, approaching to the death, said blessedly to his brethren: I require and command you to keep three things, the which I remember to have kept to my power as long as I have been in this present life. I have not willed to slander any person, and if any have fallen I have hid it as much as I might. I have ever trusted less mine own wit than any

others. If I were hurt, I never required vengeance of the hurter. I leave to you charity, humility, and patience.

And after that he had done many miracles, and had made one hundred and seventy-one monasteries, and had ordained many books and treatises, he accomplished the days of his life the sixty-third year of his age, in the year of our Lord eleven hundred and fifty six. He slept in our Lord among the hands of his sons, and his glory showed his departing hence to much people.

He appeared to an abbot in a monastery and admonished him that he should follow him, and he so did. And then St. Bernard said: We be come to the mount of Lebanon, thou shalt abide here, and I shall ascend up on high.

And he asked him wherefore he would go up, and he said: For to learn, I will go up.

And he being greatly admarvelled, said: What wilt thou learn, father, of whom we believe that there is none to thee like, ne holden so wise in science as thou art?

And he said: Here is no science, ne here is no knowledge of truth, but there above is plenty of science, and on high is the very knowledge of truth. And with that word he vanished away. And then that abbot marked that day, and found that St. Bernard was then passed to our Lord, which showed for him many miracles and innumerable. To whom be given laud and praising everlasting. Amen.

The [iconography of Saint Bernard](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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