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SAINT HILDEGARD.

On the left bank of the Nahe, to which access is attained by crossing the bridge of Drusus, the traveller will discover the Rupertsberg. Here, says the legend, the pious Rupert, whose benevolence, probity and fear of God were unequalled, erected a church, with the aid of his mother the Countess Bertha.

This edifice served him as his last resting place, when at the early age of twenty years he was called by God's grace from this world. The mountain which took its name from him, lay waste and barren for many years, after the country had been ravaged and

depopulated by the rapacious Norman invaders.

It was in the year 1089 that a pious and noble pair, Hildebert and Matilda von Bokelheim, who inhabited the castle of Sponheim not far distant from Kreuznach, were blessed by the birth of a daughter, to whom they gave the name of Hildegard. Their neighbour Count Meinhard von Sponheim also had a child born to him, about the same period, who was christened Hiltrude. The maidens grew up together and were play mates in their childhood and novices in the same benedictine convent of Dissibodenberg, the Abbess of which, named Jutta, was a sister of the latter Count. The two maidens knew nothing more of the world, than their paternal castles and the silent walls of the convent, it therefore, cost them neither struggle nor self denial to follow the example of the devout Jutta and in their tender youth to take the veil.

Here Hildegard resided for many years, secluded from all the vanities of life and exclusively devoted to the service of God and to works of benevolence. Her education, as was the case with most of her sex at that period, had been extremely limited, so that even the art of writing was unknown to her, she neither knew nor cared to know what was passing beyond the limits of her cell, or those of her garden and chapel; whence she beheld, without envy, the picturesque valley and woody hills. At the same time her young mind was far from being inactive. Whether it was that her ardent imagination found nourishment

in contemplation, or that the Lord was willing to make her an instrument of warning and conversion, in those times of commotion and distress, it appears that the powers of the seers of the old testament, were revived in her. Many months had not elapsed ere she gave vent to those spiritual emanations, with which her soul was inspired and of which she gave divers proofs to her religious companions.

At first she had not ventured to reveal, what was passing within her mind. Although alarmed by the repeated appearances of supernatural forms and visions and by voices which seemed to speak within her bosom, she nevertheless strove with maidenly reserve and timidity to repress her emotions. But the spirit within her overpowered her weak efforts. The feverish state in which she existed impaired her strength and her susceptibility for all external impressions increased to a dangerous pitch. At length, she sank down upon her couch utterly oppressed and through long nights of anguish moistened it with burning tears. Being unable to resist the impulses of her soul, she soon disclosed the state of her mind to her father confessor. After that she felt as it were relieved of a heavy burthen ; her malady decreased and her strength gradually returned. During her convalescence, she communicated to those around her some of the visions which had been revealed to her and which related to the most important affairs of church and state both present and future. The report of these occurrences soon spread abroad. The predictions of

the nun, of whom no one had ever heard before and who had never crossed the threshold of the secluded convent, created every where the greatest astonishment, and the more so when her pious life became known. But even at that time those were not wanting who ridiculed her and her prophecies and declared the whole, to be nothing but dreams and the production of an over excited imagination.

In the mean while the Abbess Jutta died and Hildegard was chosen in her stead. The number of novices who desired to reside at Dissibodenberg, in order to be near her, increased so much that room was soon wanting for the reception of all those who requested admission. Hildegard came therefore to the determination of building a new and extensive convent. Whilst she was considering what situation she should choose for the accomplishment of her design, God inspired her with the idea of selecting the Rupertsberg, near Bingen.

Therefore, in the year of our redemption 1148, she erected upon that spot a magnificent nunnery which was expeditiously raised by the assistance of her relations and the surrounding neighbourhood. Thither she betook herself with several other virgins who had consecrated themselves to the Lord.

The spirit which filled her bosom continued to hold communion with her and to show her in a mystic mirror, what earthly eyes were unable to discern. Thus she became acquainted with those dissensions which arose between the Pope and the Emperor,

dissentions which brought the roman Empire to the brink of ruin. She prophesied how power and honour would be diminished, how obedience and fidelity would be undermined and how piety and humility would disappear. She foretold that the Emperors would be more solicitous for their own advantage than for that of the people, wherefore the latter would turn away from and desert them. Discord she said would ensue and peace and prosperity be destroyed; morality would perish in the general devastation, whereby the church and faith would also suffer and the whole land would be enveloped in chaotic mourning. In short, the whole sad history of the House of Hohenstaufen presented itself to Hildegard's prophetic mind, in lines of fire.

Although schisms and unholy contests soon enfeebled the power of the church they did not prevent the idea of a new Crusade from developing itself throughout Christendom, for the purpose of assisting the harassed warriors that were then in the Holy land. Many indeed took part in this expedition, in hopes of abstracting themselves from the calamities of the times. It was in consequence of this that Pope Eugene the third, held an ecclesiastical council in the ancient city of Treves in the year 1148.

Thither Hildegarde was accompanied by her instructor Bernhard, Abbot of Clairvaux, who already possessed the reputation of that sanctity so universally awarded him. For the world could not produce a more animated champion of the church,

nor a more zealous defender of the doctrines of Christ ; his principles and conduct were no less pure than his word , so that his opinions were considered decisive in the most important church affairs. Thus , having reached the Rhineland, he presided this solemn assembly, at which many pious and learned men were present.

It was here that the predictions of the Abbess of Rupertsberg, became the subject of discussion. Her writings, which she had dictated to some of her sisterhood, were examined. Delegates were dispatched to the convent that they might convince themselves of their truth on the spot. The result of these inquiries was her unanimous recognition as a prophetess. The Pope, induced by the exhortations of Bernhard, wrote her an affectionate letter, in which he expressed his highest admiration of the agency, by which God manifested new miracles in those days and how he had so poured forth his spirit upon her, that she was enabled to see, comprehend and make known the most hidden mysteries. He then gave her his benediction and exhorted her to preserve the grace that was vouchsafed to her, by a life of humility; for said he, “ the Lord is averse to the proud, but gracious to the humble. ” He then enjoined her to continue to reside with her sisters, according to the laws of St Benedict.

Soon after this the Abbot of Clairvaux repaired in person to the Rupertsberg. From him Hildegard received a book of prayer, a knife and a ring with this

inscription : "*Ich leide gern,*" (I suffer willingly). Joyfully, did she follow the instructions of the holy man. Quitting her quiet cloister, she went about preaching before the people in the cities of the Rhine, in churches and in public places, warning them and exhorting them to join the expedition to Jerusalem. Thus she proceeded to Alsace, France and even across the Alps. She who had hitherto been as a child which has never quitted its parents abode, felt sufficient courage, to go forth as a stimulator to repentance and pious works among strange nations.

Need it be said that Hildegard's fame increased daily even after her return to her solitary cell ; that thousands of the powerful as well as the lowly sought her assistance and counsel and that her words and doctrines were attended to in affairs of the highest importance ? It was on the Rupertsberg, that she long continued to govern the community intrusted to her care and to instruct them in leading a holy course of life. She also caused to be inscribed in a book her visions and revelations, her instructions as to the path of salvation, and her discourses on a life of merit and pious works, as well as her hymns and homilies. She likewise addressed epistles to Frederic Barbarossa, to Pope Eugene and to several Archbishops, Prelates and communities. And there preserving her pure and filial fear of God she lived and laboured to a good old age, beloved as a mother, obeyed as an instructress and revered as a saint.

The 17th september 1179 was the day on which

this holy woman, so beloved of God, was called from this life. Thousands and thousands flocked to see the corpse, ere it was laid to rest in the chapel of the convent. After that edifice with many others was reduced to ruins in the 50 year's war *, the earthly remains of Hildegard were conveyed to the convent of Eibingen, where, by the influence of the Elector of Mayence, the benedictine sisters of the Rupertsberg found an asylum.

* It was burned by the Swedes in 1652.