



GLIMPSES of "OLD ST ROSE"

## ST. ROSE'S PRIORY

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T. ROSE OF LIMA, as every American knows, was the first flower of sanctity in the Americas, the first saint from the western hemisphere to be raised to the altar by the Church. It was under the patronage of this first canonized Dominican in the new world, that old St. Rose's in Kentucky was dedicated. No Order can boast saints more devoted to the cause of Christ and of the Church, more eager in the salvation of souls, more fervent in love to the Eucharistic Christ, or more mortified of life, than the Order of Preachers. How fitting then it was that the pioneer Dominicans of the United States should consecrate their first home in the virgin wilderness of Kentucky, to God under the patronage of this virgin saint of our Order, who, two hundred years before, had won her crown in the South American city.

St. Dominic's sons do not set up their cloisters far from the cities and inhabited places—a Dominican's work carries him constantly among the men and women of the world, and the first thought must be to establish his house where it can be of greatest service to souls. In Kentucky, at the time Fr. Fenwick and his little band came into this newly opened country, many Catholic families had settled in and around the Cartwright Creek valley in Washington County, and so, two miles from Springfield, in the very heart of the settlement, these men who had left the quiet contemplative atmosphere of their old world convents, purchased ground and built a church and priory. They were poor men, having, after the apostolic fashion, neither purse nor scrip, and they built principally by the labor of their own hands, aided from time to time by the people of the neighborhood.

Spiritually as well as materially, they built wisely and well, and one would not be far from right in saying that this historic old priory-church, set back in the hills of Kentucky, has been the most prolific nursery of Catholicism west of the Alleghanies. Forth from St. Rose's fared the intrepid missionaries of the early days, apostles of Ohio, of Kentucky, and of Tennessee, the

men who carried the gospel and the comfort of the Catholic faith to north and west and south. Here were nurtured with the wholesome milk of Dominican teaching men who afterwards became bishops of the pioneer Church of western America, who governed great dioceses and metropolitan sees ably and well, whose names will never be forgotten among the peoples they served, whose memory is in benediction. Many others too have gone from St. Rose's to work that did not, perhaps, carry them into such exalted places, but that was indispensable to the Church and to the State. She counts among her children archbishops and bishops, and a great band of saintly and zealous priest, religious and secular, as well as numerous laymen who have left their impress upon the history of the United States and of the world.

It is in such a place and among such traditions that all Dominicans receive their introduction into the religious life, for St. Rose's is the novitiate house of the Order in this country. It is a venerable place, filled with memories and reminders of those who have gone before, from the lofty church to the modest cells, and it cannot but inspire the novice and urge him to emulation of his predecessors in this way of life.

So much for the past and its memories. Today, coming along the white dusty road from Springfield, one tops a slight rise, and there, stretching far before him, is the famed old Cartwright Creek valley spreading away to the east, the winding creek edged with sycamores and bordered by tobacco fields. On either side rise the Kentucky hills, reaching off in the blue haze of the distance. In the spring and early summer how they flame with the scarlet Judas tree and are mottled with white dogwood! The creek will be, perhaps, in flood, roaring and tumbling down its stony bed and bursting out into the adjoining lowlands. A half mile down the valley, placed on a slight eminence, the tower and spires of St. Rose's rise from the trees. We dip down into the valley, across the bridge, and up a lane between rows of locust trees.

The church is a handsome gothic structure, not the one built by Fr. Fenwick and his brethren, but a later edifice, erected during the priorate of Fr. Matthew O'Brien of holy memory, and with its gray stone walls and dominating tower forms such a picture as one would expect in an English countryside rather than in America. It has recently been renovated and redecorated by Frs. Mackin and Wilburn, and at present is one of the most

beautiful churches in Kentucky. Under the shadow of its walls is the little community graveyard, where

"Side by side, in rows and rows, as they were wont to stand in choral stalls  
and pray  
With solemn chant, so now they voiceless lie and wait the judgment  
trumpet's summoning cry."<sup>1</sup>

the beloved dead of St. Rose's sleep.

Inside the church one finds a well lighted nave, aisled by pillars supporting a groined ceiling. The altar is high, set well back in the chancel, and has a reredos inclosing images of Dominican saints. The whole is characterized by the artistic simplicity that is so becoming the house of God. Nothing here is frivolously ornate, nothing affected; the ensemble bespeaks simple souls striving to honor God to the best of their ability, their work hallowed and made beautiful by their pure intention. Long ago the chancel became too small to house the monastic choir, so the Office is now chanted from the pews in the front of the church. It is there the choral liturgy is carried out and the "rolling thunder of the divine praises" goes swelling heavenward. Morning, noon, and night, the Hours are said, with an energy that never flags, year after year, in the cold of winter and the heat of summer, carrying on the seven hundred year old tradition of the Order. "Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare,"—To praise, to bless, to preach, is the great precept, the great work which the Order of Preachers has to fulfill, and so, here in this old monastic church, whose walls have echoed to the sound of so many voices raised in that selfsame service, the youngest sons of the Order are initiated into the beauties of the Dominican liturgy.

Behind the church is the priory—a large four-storied building, fronting to the west, and at the north overlooking the garden and orchards, and two miles away, old St. Catherine's in the Vale and the new St. Catherine's on the Hill, the oldest community of Dominican Sisters in the country, founded under the guidance of the Fathers from St. Rose's. On the north and south sides of the priory are two fine colonial porches, three stories in height, shady retreats where the community recreation can be taken on hot summer afternoons and evenings. If we step through the door into the lower cloister, we are carried at once into the silence and prayerful atmosphere of the monastic house. The high ceilings, the white walls, the few but artistic and religious paintings, and that never failing pride of religious

institutions, the well polished floors, breathe a calmness and a serenity that is found nowhere but in a cloister. On this first floor is the refectory—a long room with the tables ranged round the walls, following the order of the refectory in Bologna where the great Patriarch himself, St. Dominic, took his frugal meals. There is a sliding window at one end through which the food is passed and is then distributed by the waiters to the brethren. The youngest are always served first, an order observed in Dominican houses ever since in that same Bologna, angels came to feed St. Dominic and his sons, who had just given their last loaf to the poor, but whose faith in the Lord was so great that it brought them in to sit at the empty tables. As they sat there in prayer, lo! two young men of angelic countenance entered, bearing bread which they distributed to all, from the youngest to the Saint himself. At the head of the room, immediately above the prior's place is hung a crucifix, a reminder to the brethren that the taking of food is here not a bodily affair alone but a religious ceremony as well. In the center of the room is a reading desk, from which is read some spiritual book calculated to impress upon the minds of the listeners those great spiritual truths that are to form the basis of their life's work. In profound silence they eat and listen—"that," says the Rule, "while the body takes its food, the soul may not hunger for the word of life." On this floor, too, is the infirmary, where the sick are kept under the watchful care of the brother infirmarian, and just across the corridor is the parlor where guests are received.

The three upper floors contain the class rooms, recreation rooms, and the private cells of the community. These cells are plain—they may contain, according to the Rule, a crucifix and an image of the Blessed Virgin, with a desk, chair and bed. Here it is that the brethren spend the time which is not occupied with community exercises. The cell is a place of silence, of prayer and contemplation, and study. Here are none of the noisy "good times" of the college dormitory—the religious life is too serious a business for that and the religious may not fritter away his time in idleness. All recreation is taken in the common room provided for that purpose. Here we find a piano, a victrola, and a well stocked library. It is always a happy place, filled during recreation time with laughter and wholesome fun. When the allotted hour has been ended, the entire novitiate goes

for a long walk over the hills, to play a game of ball, or to some manual labor sufficient to keep the body fit. There is a fine ball diamond, a tennis court, and a handball alley to fill in the time given to outdoor exercise.

St. Rose's possesses a large farm of eight hundred acres and a fine dairy herd of Holstein cows. The dairy and barns are modern and well kept, and a small crew of farm laborers are given employment here. The grounds immediately surrounding the priory and church are kept in order by the members of the community, who take great pride in keeping them at their best. On Sundays and holydays the whole neighborhood come "en masse" to church, and the roads are crowded with automobiles, horses and buggies, and travellers on foot. For a time there is a great bustle and a good natured confusion as friend meets friend and neighbor chats with neighbor. Those who live at a great distance often bring their dinner, and picnic on the grass, waiting for the evening compline service. In a few hours they are all gone, and once more its wonted peace descends upon St. Rose's.

It is to such a home, finding already the hundredfold, that the aspirants to the Dominican Order come. Here, before the high altar, they lay aside the garments and the customs of the world and are clothed anew in the white of St. Dominic, taking to themselves the new ideals and habits of the hidden life. In the priory they find a home for that which they have left, friends and brethren, fathers in God who care for their spiritual and bodily welfare. Here they try their vocation to the Master's work, and, found worthy, are admitted to the vows that bind them fast to Christ.

What impresses one most in this quiet old house is the unvarying regularity with which life proceeds within its four walls, and that yet does not degenerate into monotony. Days, weeks, months, and years roll by and are unnoticed in their passing, leaving scarcely a mark upon the place. Year after year the tobacco on the hillsides has browned and ripened—year after year the locust trees grown white in the beauty of the spring—quietly the creek in the valley has run down its winding channel, or tumultuously now rushed under the lashing of the storms. One after one her sons have gone forth from St. Rose's to battle in their holy cause, returning in the evening of life to rest in her shadow, or borne home from the full flush of life upon their

shields to rest within her sacred soil, yet during her hundred and twenty years she has gone on undisturbed.

Quietly, unostentatiously, has the life of this wonderful old institution run its course. None of the glory and pomp of our great universities and colleges attend it—no great orators yearly proclaim its praise and the valiant work it is doing—but there in the quiet of the Kentucky hills its unstilled voice of prayer ascends to God—its unceasing tribute of love and labor in His service is paid, and from its walls come men whose devotion to God and country is unsurpassed. Wherever in these United States the white habit of St. Dominic brings peace and comfort to saints and sinners, in the church, in the class room, in the walks of public life, and even in the far off coasts of China—there is felt the influence of this grand old builder of souls. St. Rose of Lima was the first flower of sanctity in the New World—how happy it is that this first of all Dominican homes of sanctity in America is called St. Rose.

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<sup>1</sup>Fr. Alb. Reinhart, O. P.

