

BLESSED REGINALD, O. P.—SEVENTH CENTENARY

Some has compared the world of the twelfth century to an untrained, untaught child, just rising into manhood and ready to learn anything. It desired teachers, and, since these were not forthcoming, it made them for itself. One wild sect after another had risen, counting followers by thousands, with practically no other reason for success than the popularity of some leader. It was during that lamentable chaos that God raised up Dominic, the Spanish nobleman, destined to preach and teach the truth in a popular form. Among the enthusiastic and enterprising young men whom he gathered around him to realize his heart's desire was a young Frenchman named Reginald. The life of this young man as a disciple of Dominic was so brief that it is difficult to believe that one man could have accomplished so much in the short space of two years. Incidentally, the year 1920 marks the seventh centenary of the death of Reginald, and it may be said in passing that his life and labors cannot fail to be fascinating and instructive to all who are interested in the Order of Preachers.

The precise date of Reginald's birth is not known, but Dominican tradition places it in the year 1175. His birthplace was the little town of St. Giles, in France. After having received the ordinary educational training of the times, we first meet him in public life at the University of Paris, where he received the Doctorate in Canon Law in 1206. Afterwards he taught there for five years. His renown as professor spread rapidly throughout France, and the Regular Canons of St. Aignan of Orleans were not slow to choose him to fill the vacancy of dean of their church. Thus Reginald, young and enthusiastic, entered the ranks of ecclesiastical dignitaries.

The Canons of that particular church, St. Aignan's, were quite distinguished for their learning. They were under the special protection of the Holy See, and led a community life under the Rule of St. Augustine. The new dean was afforded ample opportunity to exercise his talent and his term as superior was remarkable for the peace and unity it brought to the Canons. Up to this time having led a cloistered life, Reginald was soon to join the active apostolate. Those being times of disorder and heresy, due to the Albigenses, the Canons were forced to actively assist the bishops in preserving their flocks from error. The

Collegiate of St. Aignan was charged with the care of a parish, and from that time Reginald was irresistibly attracted to this phase of ecclesiastical life. His ardent love for souls filled him with the desire to enter a religious Order consecrated to preaching, prayer and penance. But where was such an Order to be found? It did not yet exist in France.

Reginald's close friend, Manasses, Bishop of Orleans, asked him about that time to accompany him on a journey to the Holy Places and Palestine. Delighted with the opportunity to resign his benefice and devote himself with more liberty to the care of souls, Reginald accepted the invitation, and they set out immediately.

He was not long in the Eternal City when he made the acquaintance of a distinguished Cardinal, to whom he confided his desire to leave all things to become an apostle of Christ among the people. The Cardinal said in reply: "Behold, even now an Order has been instituted which has for its end the union of poverty with the office of preaching. The Master of this new Order is at this moment in the city preaching the word of God."

Straightway Reginald hastened to find Dominic, and was captivated by the preacher's discourse and the close resemblance of their early careers. Dominic had left the cloister of the Canons to preach as a poor friar. Such also was Reginald's burning desire. From that moment he resolved to enter Dominic's Order. The great Founder thanked God for having given him such a son, while Reginald was supremely grateful for having found such a father.

But adversity, the test of all saintly projects, failed not to try that of Reginald. He was stricken with a violent fever which very shortly brought him to death's door. Dominic grieved at the thought of losing prematurely this child of so many hopes, turned to prayer and besought Our Divine Lord and His Immaculate Mother, whom he had chosen as Protectress of his Order, not to take from him so suddenly this son, as yet hardly born. He implored that Reginald's life be prolonged, if but for a short time, since he felt that the new friar would one day be a vessel of election.

Meanwhile Reginald, awaiting death's advance, saw distinctly the Queen of Heaven appear before him, accompanied by two maidens of ravishing beauty. One of these, St. Cecilia, carried in her hands a vase of perfume; the other, St. Catherine,

Martyr, held a white vestment on her arm. Our Blessed Lady, approaching the dying man, said sweetly: "Ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it to thee." Reginald, astonished at such an august apparition, deliberated within himself. Then one of the maiden companions of the Mother of God suggested that he ask nothing, but leave himself entirely to the will of Mary. This he did. Then the Blessed Virgin, extending her hands, anointed with the oil carried by St. Cecilia, Reginald's eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, hands, reins and feet. Only the words relative to the unction of his reins and feet are known to us. While touching them she said: "Let thy reins be girt with the girdle of chastity, and thy feet be shod for the preaching of peace." Taking the vestment from St. Catherine, she showed it to Reginald, saying: "Behold the habit of thy Order." So speaking, she disappeared, and immediately the sick man felt himself completely cured. He later testified that never afterwards did he suffer from the sting of the flesh. In the meantime, Dominic, at prayer, had learned from God all that passed. The next day the two friars thanked God for the miraculous cure, while the doctors marvelled at such a sudden and unexpected return to health. Three days later the vision was repeated in the presence of Dominic and another friar, as if to show that the consecration given to Reginald was conferred on the whole Order.

Here, according to the general opinion of Dominican historians, among whom can be numbered Blesseds Jordan of Saxony and James of Voragine, also Fr. Bartholomew of Trent and the illustrious Bernard Guidonis, originated the Dominican habit as we have it today. Before the vision of Reginald, Dominic and his companions had worn the habit of the Canons Regular, which consisted of a white tunic, a rochet, or surplice, and a black cloak. The habit which the Blessed Virgin showed to Reginald contained a new, distinctive part, namely, the scapular. From then onward Dominic and his brethren adopted, as the essential part of their habit, that white scapular.

It was in consequence of that event that the early Fathers, to express in some way their gratitude, name Mary "the Blessed Vestuary of the Order." Naturally, the scapular was regarded as a special gift of Mary, and in course of time it was enriched by the Holy See with many spiritual favors. Hence, it is not to be wondered at that it has been worn with an ever-growing piety, not only by the three Conventual Orders of St. Dominic, but also

by secular Tertiaries, who are allowed to wear it in a restricted form. An indulgence of five years and five quarantines is granted to all the faithful who reverently kiss the blessed scapular of the Conventual members of the Orders of St. Dominic. Pius X, on Nov. 23, 1903, attached an indulgence of two hundred days to the Tertiaries' scapular. The beautiful form for its reception, which at once announces its heavenly origin and the reverence in which its wearers are accustomed to hold it, is as follows: "Receive the holy scapular of our Order, the most distinguished part of our Dominican habit, the maternal pledge from heaven of the special love of Mary for us."

Reginald, miraculously cured, was vested in the habit and made his profession to St. Dominic in the Convent of St. Sixtus in Rome. Without delay he was permitted to complete his journey to Jerusalem. In company with the Bishop of Orleans, he embarked for the Holy Land and there devoutly visited all the places of interest, ever mindful that he was the first of his Order to wear the white habit on that sacred soil. After a year's sojourn the two holy men return to Rome. The Bishop then left for his diocese and Reginald proceeded to the Dominican convent in the Eternal City.

There is a touching legend told of our friar's return from Palestine. He is said to have founded at that time in Sicily, near Syracuse, the Convent of Augusta. In the garden of that convent today can be seen the dried-up trunk of a tree, from which escapes the sweet odor of cypress. Tradition testifies that many cures have been effected by that sweet perfume. The tree in question is said to be none other than the staff given to Reginald by Dominic, which the former left fixed in the ground after his arrival in Sicily. The next day a tree covered with foliage sprang forth. On that ground the Convent of St. Dominic was founded, and even today the tree stump is held in veneration as "the wood of St. Dominic."

Dominic then named Reginald Vicar of the whole Order and assigned him to Bologna, where he arrived December 21, 1218. At that convent had been repeated, a short time before, the miracle of the angels supplying the community with bread, at the prayer of Dominic. Reginald, who added to a brilliant eloquence extraordinary powers of governing, infused a new spirit into the community, and it is said that in eight days he was master of the whole city. His preaching had such a remarkable effect that

souls were not only converted, but so strongly moved that they desired to forsake the world to enter the religious life. Within six months Reginald himself received into the Order over one hundred persons, among them many distinguished doctors and students. It became a by-word that "it was hardly safe to go to hear Master Reginald if you did not wish to take the friar's habit." He was hailed as a second Elias, so wonderful were the results of his preaching.

Under his government the community at Bologna became a model one. The man of God ruled the friars with a severity wholly compatible with the sweetness of his character, and his tender love for them was the cause of whatever severity he showed against the enemy of their souls. His great success and singular talent determined Dominic to remove him to Paris, hoping that he might wield there the same powerful influence. Bologna's loss was indeed Paris' gain, and the expectations of Dominic were fully realized during the short but brilliant career of Reginald in the French capital. There also, his marvelous eloquence was irresistible, and soon all Paris flocked to listen to "the great Dominican." Among those whom his preaching drew into the Order were Blessed Jordan of Saxony, Roland of Cremona, the first Dominican to hold a chair at the University, and Moneta, an eminent theologian.

Our good friar was once asked how he, who had been accustomed to a brilliant life in the world, could persevere in the strict discipline of his Order. Reginald's answer is typical of a great soul. "Truly," he said, "I do not merit any thing for that before the tribunal of God. He has given me so much consolation in my soul, that the rigors of which you speak have become very sweet and easy."

From the day of his entrance into the Order of St. Dominic Reginald had spent himself unreservedly for souls. Less than two years' apostolate exhausted his strength, and towards the end of January, 1220, he was attacked by a grave malady. At the approach of death he was asked by the prior of the convent if he would permit Extreme Unction to be administered. "I do not fear the assault of death," he replied, "since the blessed hands of Mary herself anointed me in Rome. Nevertheless, lest I appear to make light of the Church's sacraments, I will receive it, and do humbly request that it be given to me." Shortly afterwards the holy man passed away, amidst the tears of his sorrow-stricken brethren. This occurred early in February, 1220.

Reginald's body was placed in the Church of Sainte Marie des Champs, and for four hundred years was an object of frequent pilgrimage by the faithful. Admonished by a secret instinct that his bones would work miracles, crowds went to his tomb to be cured of fevers, both of body and soul. Their piety and devotion were not deceived, for numberless cures proved the power of his intercession.

Between 1605 and 1608 his body, found incorrupt, was removed from its original tomb and placed in a reliquary. In 1614 the church wherein rested his sacred remains was given to the cloistered Carmelite nuns. "This circumstance," says a biographer, "happy from one point of view, was regrettable from another." His reason was that while the Carmelites venerated deeply the relics of Reginald, the pilgrims could no longer approach the tomb, now enclosed in the monastery. Little by little the people forgot the route to the place, and the relics of the Dominican friar remained objects of veneration to the nuns alone until the French Revolution, when they were profaned and destroyed.

Devotion to Reginald, however, continued in the hearts of the people from century to century. Of course, his memory was held as sacred by all the children of Dominic. In 1875 Pius IX, after due examination of his cult by the Congregation of Rites, placed him among the Beati of the Church, and permitted the Order of St. Dominic to celebrate his feast once a year on February 12. May it not be said that the greatest panegyric that has yet been pronounced on Reginald is the fact of his being raised to the altars of the Church over six hundred years after his death? Today, in France, especially, there exists a lively devotion to Reginald, and he is continually called upon as protector against all fevers and diseases.

Owing to concurrence with a feast of greater liturgical dignity, the feast of Blessed Reginald this year was celebrated on March 15. For all Dominicans it was a solemn reminder, of the anniversary of one of our first illustrious Dominicans, and we also were impressed with the happy realization that our beautiful Dominican habit, with its white emblem of purity and black cloak of penance, has already passed through seven hundred years of unchanged existence—the same model that came from the hands of Mary, our Mother and Protectress.

—Brother Reginald Hughes, O. P.