

OCTOBER VI.

ST. BRUNO, CONFESSOR,

FOUNDER OF THE CARTHUSIAN MONKS.

[From the short chronicle of the four first priors of the Chartreuse, compiled by Guigo, the fifth prior; from the larger chronicle called *Chronica de exordiis Ordinis Carthusiensis*, containing the history of the five first priors, written about the year 1250, according to F. Bye; from St. Bruno's life by Fr. du Puits or Puteanus, general of the Order, in 1508; from his life compiled by Guibert of Nogent, in 1101, and the life of St. Hugh of Grenoble, written by Gny, the fifth general of the Carthusians.]

A.D. 1101.

Sr. BRUNO was descended of an ancient and honourable family, and born at Cologne, not after the middle of the eleventh century, as some mistake, but about the year 1030, as the sequel of his life demonstrates. In his infancy he seemed above the usual weaknesses of that age, and nothing childish ever appeared in his manners. His religious parents, hoping to secure his virtue by a good education, placed him very young in the college of the clergy of St. Cunibert's Church, where he gave extraordinary proofs of his piety, capacity, and learning, insomuch that St. Anno, then Bishop of Cologne, preferred him to a canonry in that church. He was yet young when he left Cologne, and went to Rheims for his greater improvement in his studies, moved probably by the reputation of the school kept by the clergy of that church. Bruno was received by them with great marks of distinction. He took in the whole circle of the sciences, was a good poet for that age, but excelled chiefly in philosophy and theology, so that these titles of poet, philosopher, and divine, were given him by contemporary writers by way of eminence, and he was regarded as a great master and model of the schools. The historians of that age speak still with greater admiration of his singular piety.¹ Heriman, canon and scholasticus of Rheims, resigning his dignities, and renouncing the world, to make the study of true wisdom his whole occupation, Gervasius, who was

(1) Rob. Altiss. Chron. p. 77. &c.

made Archbishop of Rheims in 1056, made Bruno scholasticus, to which dignity then belonged the direction of the studies and all the great schools of the diocess. The prudence and extraordinary learning of the saint shone with great lustre in this station; in all his lessons and precepts he had chiefly in view to conduct men to God, and to make them know and respect his holy law. Such was his reputation that he was looked upon as the light of churches, doctor of doctors, the glory of the two nations of Germany and France, the ornament of the age, the model of good men, and the mirror of the world, to use the expressions of an ancient writer. He taught a considerable time in the church of Rheims; and is said, by the author of his life, to have been a long time the support of that great diocess; by which expression he seems to have borne the weight of the spiritual government under the Archbishop Gervasius. That prelate dying in 1067, Manasses I. by open simony got possession of that metropolitich church, and oppressed it with most tyrannical vexations and enormities. Bruno retained under him his authority and dignities; particularly that of chancellor of the diocess, in which office he signed with him the charter of the foundations of St. Martin aux Jumeaux, and some other deeds of donations to monasteries. Yet he vigorously opposed his criminal projects. Hugh of Die, the pope's legate, summoned Manasses to appear at a council which he held at Antun, in 1077, and upon his refusing to obey the summons, declared him suspended from his functions. St. Bruno, Manasses the provost, and Poncius, a canon of Rheims, accused him in this council; in which affair our saint behaved with so much prudence and piety, that the legate writing to the pope, exceedingly extolled his virtue and wisdom, styling him the most worthy doctor of the church of Rheims,¹ and recommending him to

(1) Conc. t. i. p. 365, and Hugo Flav. in Chron. p. 199.

his holiness as one excellently qualified to give him good counsel, and to assist him in the churches of France in promoting the cause of God. The simoniacal usurper, exasperated against the three canons who appeared in the council against him, caused their houses to be broke open and plundered, and sold their prebends. The persecuted canons took refuge in the castle of the Count of Rouci, and remained there till August, 1078, as appears by a letter which the simoniacal archbishop at that time wrote against them to the pope.

Before this time St. Bruno had concerted the project of his retreat, of which he gives himself the following account in his letter to Raoul, or Ralph, provost of Rheims, to which dignity he was raised in 1077, upon the resignation of Manasses. St. Bruno, this Ralph, and another canon of Rheims, named Fulcius, in a conversation which they had one day together in one Adam's garden, discoursed on the vanity and false pleasures of the world, and on the joys of eternal life, and being strongly affected with their serious reflections, promised one another to forsake the world. They deferred the execution of this engagement till Fulcius should return from Rome, whither he was going; and he being detained there, Ralph slackened in his resolution, and continuing at Rheims, was afterwards made archbishop of that see. But Bruno persevered in his resolution of embracing a state of religious retirement. Serious meditation increased in him daily his sense of the inestimable happiness of a glorious eternity, and his abhorrence of the world. Thus he forsook it in a time of the most flattering prosperity, when he enjoyed in it riches, honours, and the favour of men, and when the church of Rheims was ready to choose him archbishop in the room of Manasses, who had been then convicted of simony and deposed. He resigned his benefice, quitted his friends, and renounced whatever held him in the

world, and persuaded some of his friends to accompany him into solitude, who were men of great endowments and virtue, and who abundantly made up the loss of his two first companions in this design; he seems first to have retired to Reciae or Roe, a fortified town and castle on the Axona, or Aisne, in Champagne, the seat of Count Ebal, who had zealously joined St. Bruno and others in opposing the impiety of Manasses. After some time he went to Cologne, his native country; and some time after, was called back to his canonry at Rheims; but making there a very short stay, he repaired to Saisse-Fontaine, in the diocess of Langres, where he lived some time with some of his scholars and companions. Two of these, named Peter and Lambert, built there a church, which was afterwards united to the abbey of Molesme.

In this solitude Bruno, with an earnest desire of aiming at true perfection in virtue, considered with himself, and deliberated with his companions what it was best for him to do, spending his time in the exercises of holy solitude, penance, and prayer. He addressed himself for advice to a monk of great experience and sanctity, that is, to St. Robert, abbot of Molesme, who exhorted him to apply to Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble, who was truly a servant of God, and a person better qualified than any other to assist him in his design.¹ St. Bruno followed this direction, being informed that in the diocess of Grenoble, there were woods, rocks, and deserts most suitable to his desires of finding perfect solitude, and that this holy prelate would certainly favour his design. Six of those who had accompanied him in his retreat, attended him on this occasion, namely, Landwin, who afterwards succeeded him in the office of prior of the great Chartreuse; Stephen of Bourg, and Stephen of Die, both canons of St. Rufus in Dauphiné; Hugh, whom

(1) See Mabill. *Annal.* lib. lxxvi. n. 66, and Martenne *Nova Collectio Mon.* t. vi. pr. n. 30.

they called the chaplain, because he was the only priest among them, and two laymen, Andrew and Guerin. St. Bruno and these six companions arrived at Grenoble about midsummer, 1084, and cast themselves at the feet of St. Hugh, begging of him some place in his diocess, where they might serve God, remote from worldly affairs, and without being burdensome to men. The holy prelate, understanding their errand, rejoiced exceedingly, and received them with open arms, not doubting but these seven strangers were represented to him in a vision he had the night before in his sleep; wherein he thought he saw God himself building a church in the desert of his diocess, called the Chartreuse, and seven stars rising from the ground, and forming a circle, which went before him to that place, as it were, to show him the way to the church. He embraced them very lovingly, thinking he could never sufficiently commend their geuerous resolution; and assigned them that desert of Chartreuse for their retreat, promising his utmost assistance to establish them there; but to the end they might be armed against the difficulties they would meet with, lest they should enter upon so great an undertaking without having well considered it; he, at the same time, represented to them the dismal situation of that solitude, beset with very high craggy rocks, almost all the year covered with snow and thick fogs, which rendered them not habitable. St. Hugh having kept them some days in his palace, conducted them to this place, and made over to them all the right he had in that forest; and, some time after, Siguin, abbot of Chaise-Dieu, in Auvergne, who was joint lord of the same. Bruno and his companions immediately huilt an oratory there, and very small cells, at a little distance one from the other, like the ancient Lauras of Palestine. Such was the original of the Order of the Carthusians, which took its name from this desert

of Chartreuse. Some have dated its institution in 1086, others in 1085; but it is clearly proved by Mabillon¹ that St. Bruno retired to this wilderness in June, 1084, as one of his epitaphs and Sigebert of Gemblours, a contemporary writer, expressly mention. St. Hugh, by a charter dated in the month following, forbade any woman to go into their lands, or any person to fish, hunt, or drive cattle that way. They first built a church on a summit, and cells near it, in which they lived two together in each cell, soon after single, meeting in church at matins and vespers: other hours, prime, tierce, sext, none, and compline, they recited in their cells. They never took two refections in a day, except on the greatest festivals, on which they ate together in a refectory. On other days they ate in their cells as hermits. Pulse was given them in a certain measure on days when it was allowed them.

It is hard to represent the wonderful life of these holy anchorites in their desert. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluni, fifty years after St. Bruno, writes of them: "Their dress is meaner and poorer than that of other monks; so short and scanty, and so rough, that the very sight affrights one. They wear coarse hair shirts next their skin, fast almost perpetually; eat only bran bread; never touch flesh, either sick or well; never buy fish, but eat it if given them as an alms; eat eggs and cheese on Sundays and Thursdays; on Tuesdays and Saturdays their fare is pulse or herbs boiled; on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays they take nothing but bread and water; and they have only one meal a day, except within the octaves of Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, Epiphany, and some other festivals. Their constant occupation is praying, reading, and manual labour, which consists chiefly in transcribing books. They say the lesser hours of the divine office in their

(1) Act. Ben. t. ix. p. n. 86.

cells at the times when the bell rings; but meet together at vespers and matins with wonderful recollection. They say mass only on Sundays and festivals." This manner of life they followed without any written rule; though Mabillon thinks they conformed to that of St. Benedict in most points which were compatible with their plan of an heremital life. But others, with Bue, the Bollandist, find no resemblance, and say the practices were peculiar to their institute without being borrowed from any other in particular. St. Bruno left his disciples fervent observers of those customs and practices which he had established among them. This institute has been regarded by the pastors of the church as the most perfect model of a penitential and contemplative state, in which persons devote themselves to the most perfect sanctification of their souls, and by their tears and prayers endeavour to draw down the divine mercy on sinners and on the whole world.

St. Bruno is styled by the writers of that age Master of the Chartreuse, and sometimes prior; for, being the person who led the rest into that course of life, he was looked upon by them as their superior; and as he was the most learned, so he also excelled them in the fervour of his charity, compunction, and humility. St. Hugh, who at first received him as his child, became so great an admirer of his virtue that he took him for his father and spiritual director; and without regard to the difficulty of the ways, he often went from Grenoble to the Chartreuse, to enjoy the heavenly conversation of St. Bruno, and improve himself by his advice and example. That holy prelate felt an inexpressible joy in his heart as often as he heard any new novice had joined these true disciples of the cross; a joy which was often renewed in him; for their example awaked many from their spiritual lethargy in the world, and persons of all ages, even young boys, ran to the desert to take up the cross of Christ in their

company. The Count of Nevers, a lord of singular piety, made a long stay with them to learn to serve God with new fervour, and returned praising God for the wonders which his right-hand works in the hearts in which he dwells. He sent them soon after a rich present of plate, but they sent it back with excuses that it was useless to them. He then sent them a large quantity of leather and parchment for their books.

St. Bruno had not governed this congregation six years, when Pope Urban II., who had formerly been his scholar at Rheims, being informed of the holy life which he led, and being, from his own personal acquaintance, fully convinced of his great prudence and learning, sent him a severe order to repair to Rome, that he might assist him by his counsels in the government of the church. The humble monk could have scarce met with a more severe trial of his obedience, or made a greater sacrifice. Nevertheless, without further deliberation, he set out in 1089, having nominated Landuin prior at the Chartreuse. The pope himself, at the same time, had recommended that house to the protection of Siguin, abbot of Chaise Dieu. The departure of the saint was an inexpressible grief to his disciples. They, to whom the greatest austerities were pleasures, and the most hidden desert a paradise, whilst they enjoyed the presence of such a guide and master, found their rocks insupportable without him. The saint endeavoured in vain to comfort them, promising them he would do whatever lay in him to return to them as soon as possible. Several of them protested they would never be parted from him, and these he took with him to Rome. St. Bruno was received by the pope with all imaginable tokens of esteem and affection. His holiness kept him in his palace, near his person, and consulted him in all weighty affairs of religion and conscience. By his order, also, the saint's companions had an apartment assigned them in the city, where they endeavoured to live as they had done

in the desert; but they soon found it was not so easy a matter there to devote themselves wholly to their holy meditations, pious reading, singing psalms, and fervent prayer, in which consisted all their satisfaction. They could not shun distracting visits, nor observe such silence as they had done among the rocks, and which was so useful to them. This alteration drew tears from their eyes, and made them sigh for the solitude they had quitted. They complained to St. Bruno that they found not in the city what they sought. The saint ardently desired to conduct them back to the mountain of the Chartreuse; but not being able to obtain that leave for himself, he prevailed that they might return to the desert.

The tumult of a court grew every day more insupportable to St. Bruno, who had tasted the sweets of solitude and uninterrupted contemplation, and trembled amidst the distractions of the world. The pope had too great a value for such a friend to grant his request of returning to the Chartreuse; he even pressed him to accept the archbishopric of Rheggio, in Calabria; but the holy man excused himself with so great earnestness, and redoubled his importunities for the liberty of living to himself in solitude, that his holiness at length thought he could no longer offer violence to his holy inclinations, and consented that he might retire into some wilderness in the mountains of Calabria. The saint found a convenient solitude in the diocese of Squillaci, where he settled in 1090, with some new disciples whom he had gained in Rome. Here he betook himself to the exercises of a solitary life with more joy and fervour than ever. Remembering the engagement which his ancient friend, Ralph, the provost of Rheims, had made to embrace a solitary life, he wrote him from this desert an elegant and tender letter, inviting him to his hermitage, putting him in mind of his promise, and the obligation he had taken upon himself, and giving him an agreeable

and cheerful description of his desert, and of uninterrupted scenes of pure joy and delights which he and his companions found in it. From the turn of this letter it sufficiently appears how far the saint was from the least disposition of melancholy, moroseness, or harsh severity. Landuin, prior of the Chartreuse, went into Calabria to consult St. Bruno about the form of living which our saint had instituted at the Chartreuse; for those disciples were desirous not to depart in the least point from the spirit and rule of their holy master.¹ St. Bruno wrote them an admirable letter, full of tender charity and the spirit of God, which he sent them by Landuin when he returned in 1099. In this letter he instructed them all in the practices of a solitary life, solved the difficulties which they proposed to him, comforted them in their afflictions, and encouraged them to perseverance and watchfulness against all the attacks of their enemies.

The principal works of St. Bruno are Comments on the Psalter, and on St. Paul's Epistles, both of which are demonstrated to be the genuine productions of our saint, and answer the character given of St. Bruno, that he was one of the most learned men, not only of the age in which he lived, but of most others. He understood both the Hebrew and Greek languages, and was versed in the writings of the fathers, especially those of St. Ambrose and St. Austin. He is a strenuous advocate for the doctrine of St. Austin with regard to the mysteries of divine grace. In his Exposition of the Psalms he clears the literal sense, but always refers it to the spiritual, applying every thing to Christ and his church, as the sense principally meant by the Holy Ghost. The elegy in fourteen verses, On the Contempt of the World, or on the last things, which was composed by St. Bruno, is engraved under the picture of the saint in the choir of the famous Chartreuse of Dijon. It is a feeling complaint of the

(1) Mabill. *Annal. lib. liix. n. 109.*

general insensibility of men in thinking so little on a happy and a miserable eternity, and is inserted in several Latin prayer-books. Several other comments on the scripture, and other writings, have been ascribed to this saint, but belong some to St. Bruno, Bishop of Segni, others to St. Bruno, Bishop of Wurtzbourg, who both flourished in the same age.

St. Bruno being settled in his desert in the diocess of Squillaci, had no thoughts but of living unknown to men; but, as retired as he was, he had not been long in this new hermitage when Roger, sovereign Count of Sicily and Calabria, discovered him one day as he was hunting in that wood. The prince having conversed with him, was so much moved by his virtue, that he was extremely desirous to testify his esteem for him by some remarkable favours; but a love of poverty, and a spirit of disinterestedness would not permit the holy man to take advantage of his generosity in accepting any rich presents. The monastery De la Torre, in Calabria, was the second of the Order. St. Bruno established in it the most perfect spirit of humility, contempt of the world, retirement, and mortification, and continued by his counsels and instructions at a distance, to direct the monks of the Great Chartreuse in all spiritual and temporal emergencies. The time being come when God had decreed to reward the labours of his servant, he visited him with a sickness about the latter end of September, 1101. When the holy man perceived his death to draw near, he gathered his monks about his bed, and in their presence made, as it were, a public confession of his life; then made a profession of his faith, which his disciples copied from his mouth and preserved. It is very clear and explicit on the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation, and in condemning the heresy of Berengarius, which had lately raised great troubles in the church. The holy man thus expressed his faith of the sacrament of the altar, "I believe the sacraments which the church

believeth, and in particular that the bread and wine consecrated on the altar are the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ; his true flesh and his true blood, which we receive for the remission of our sins, and in the hope of eternal life."¹ He had more fully explained this doctrine of the church against Berengarius, in his comments on St. Paul.² He resigned his soul to God on Sunday, the 6th of October, 1101. An account of his death was sent by his monks of La Torre in an encyclical letter to all the neighbouring churches and monasteries, according to the custom, to recommend the souls of persons deceased to their prayers. Near two hundred answers to this letter are extant, and contain the highest eulogiums of his extraordinary virtue, wisdom, and learning.³ St. Bruno was interred in the cemetery of the church of the blessed Virgin de Torre; said by some to have been translated to that of St. Stephen—but improbably; for they were discovered in the former place in 1515. Pope Leo X. had granted in the preceding year an office in his honour to his Order; which is called an equipollent beatification, his eminent sanctity and many miracles after his death not standing in need of the formalities of a scrutiny. In 1623, Gregory XV., by an equipollent canonization, extended his office to the whole church. A bone of his jaw with two teeth were sent to the Great Chartreuse, a finger to the Chartreuse at Paris, and little portions to the Chartreuses of Cologne, his native city, and Friburg.

The motto of St. Bruno are these words of the Psalmist:⁴ "My eyes prevented the watches: I was troubled, and I spoke not. I had in my mind the eternal years. Lo! I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in the wilderness."⁵ This constant meditation on eternity often broke his rest,

(1) Ap. Mabill. Analect. t. iv. p. 400.

(2) In 1 Cor. xi. pp. 305, 306.

(3) In an appendix to the life of St. Bruno, printed in folio, in 1516.

(4) Ps. lxxvi. 6.

(5) Ps. liv. 8.

and made sleep to flee from his eyes; this animated him with fervour in his retirement, and perpetual penance, and made him watch whole nights in sighs and tears to implore the divine mercy. In this solitude his employment was sometimes to pour forth his soul in songs of praise, and to entertain himself on the sweet motives of the divine love; sometimes the remembrance of eternal joys comforted his soul, and gave him already a kind of foretaste of them; and he often considered the terrors of the divine judgments, and the eternal torments prepared for sinners, being strongly affected with the dread of that which is of all others the most grievous, the pain of loss, or the everlasting privation of God.
