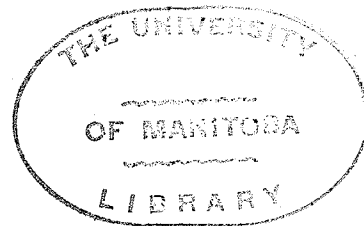


THE LIFE OF
SAINT GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM

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INTRODUCTION

I. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ST. GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM

Sempringham was a small, almost unknown village in Lincolnshire until the third decade of the twelfth century. In 1131, out of obscurity, it sprang into prominence when one of its inhabitants founded the only entirely English religious Order. Gilbert of Sempringham was born in 1183¹ to Jocelyn, a Norman knight of no mean standing, and to his pious English wife. But as so often happens with many hopeful fathers, Jocelyn was at first greatly disappointed with his son; for not only was Gilbert physically deformed in some way, which meant he would be unable to follow in his father's footsteps as a soldier and as owner of the family's demesne, but he was also sluggish in behavior and had a thorough dislike of studies of any kind. A younger son of a Norman lord, or one who showed no aptitude for the military life, was usually put to study in preparation for entering the priesthood or for becoming a monk of some kind: a very poor second to the life of activity followed by the lusty lords of William of Normandy and his successors. But for

1. Date given in the Dictionary of National Biography. Dr. Rose Graham, in her St. Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines, p. 2 note 1., gives the date as 1089, basing this on the supposition that the Bollandists made a mistake in taking the word "sex" as meaning six, instead of realizing that it was probably a corruption of "senex." There seems no reason to suppose, however, that "sex" was a corruption of "senex."

Gilbert even this course seemed unattainable, as in his early years he showed no sign whatsoever that he cared for religion in any way other than the habitual Mass - going. It appears that he was more or less ignored by his family, and even the servants made him a butt and refused to eat with him.

But Gilbert's mother, like Mary the Mother of Jesus, must have been keeping certain things in her heart. Before Gilbert was born she had a dream in which the moon came down from heaven into her lap, and she, rightly as it proved, took that to be a presage of the future holiness of her son, whose light would one day show others the difficult path of salvation. Her hopes in and prayers for her son were not disappointed when he showed the first sign of energy by suddenly going to France, where he commenced a period of eager study, not only in letters but in holiness also². He had previously idled his time away, but the turning point of his life had come. He returned to England with a reputation for goodness and learning, causing his father to treat him more like a beloved son than an outcast servant. Although he wore costly clothes, as became his station, he started his religious life by opening humble schools for boys and girls, acting with great discretion and humility. Apart from the ordinary rudiments of learning given to all of them, he organized the boys into a miniature monastic

2. See below, p. 75 note 3 .

order, where all the virtues were zealously cultivated, and a fairly severe discipline imposed. Gilbert seems to be unique among the founders of religious orders in that he had the experience of organizing an order, on a small scale it is true, before the adult congregation was established. For this indeed was the humble beginning of the Order of Sempringham - an entirely English foundation which never went outside the borders of England except for a brief sojourn³ in Scotland. With the acquisition of the parish churches of Sempringham and West Torrington, the opportunities for founding an Order were at hand. These churches had been built by his father, who had the right of patronage in them and who presented them to Gilbert. Gilbert accepted them in order to maintain his father's right of patronage, and after a few troublesome law suits, he was canonically installed as minister of those churches by Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln⁴.

His chaplain was Geoffrey, a man of proved holiness, and it was he who attended to the sacramental duties of the Churches and offered Mass, as Gilbert was not an ordained priest. These two at first lived nearby in a parishoner's home, whose daughter looked after them quietly and

3. J. Edwards, Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society, II (1908), "The Order of Sempringham and its connection with the west of Scotland," pp. 72-90. The Catholic Encyclopedia, VI, pp. 556-557 maintains that there were also two Gilbertine houses at Westmeath in Ireland.

4. This must have been before 1123, because Bloet died in that year, and Gilbert was at his court then.

satisfactorily, being a modest, kind young lady. Then Gilbert had a terrible dream about her. He put his hand in her bosom and inspite of great exertions, was unable to pull it away. He confessed this to Geoffrey, who in turn related a similar dream. So they decided to leave that house immediately, in case the dream was an omen of future sin; and they went to live in a room over the Sempringham church. However, far from being a bad omen, the dream was a happy presage, for the girl later became one of seven women who were the original nuns of Gilbert's Order.

All these events must have occurred before 1122 or '23, the date in which it seems probable that Gilbert went to live in the court of Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln who died in 1123, being succeeded by Alexander, "the Magnificent," nephew of Roger, bishop of Salisbury - that shameless nepotist and immoral statesman whose probable son, Nigel, became bishop of Ely ten years later. Gilbert, now a clerk, continued living in the new bishop's court, devoting himself to learning, piety and strict self-discipline; and so note-worthy did he become that Alexander forced him to become a priest, though Gilbert considered himself quite unworthy; an attitude of mind born of that humility, which was to colour his thoughts and actions all his life⁵. Soon afterwards, Alexander thought so

5. CE Vol. III p. 295 states that while Gilbert was carrying out his pastoral duties in the Lincoln diocese, he became a Canon Regular at the Austin Canons house at Bridlington. This is difficult to fit in with other references to his life. On the other hand, the Prior of Bridlington wrote to the Pope on Gilbert's behalf, when the former believed the lies spread about him by the lay brothers. (See below p. 15 .) Why should this particular Prior have done this unless Gilbert had had some close connection with Bridlington?

much of his holiness that he made him his confessor. But it was more than humility which prompted Gilbert to refuse an archdiaconate offered by the bishop a little later. Knowledge of the worldly pitfalls arising from such a position made him immediately say that there was no surer way to hell than to become an archdeacon. The time was fast approaching for him to commence the main work of his life.

In 1131 Gilbert found seven maids who longed for a close union with God and whose minds had readily assimilated all that Gilbert had formerly taught them; and these he enclosed as nuns, building for them a house and cloister against the north wall of St. Andrew's Church, Sempringham. But even before he enclosed these holy women in their convent, he had shown himself a kindly but firm minister to his flock - encouraging some by a kind word when it was needed, giving liberally of his resources where want was felt, and at the same time chastising severely those who did not act as good Christians. Although it seems likely that Gilbert had returned to Sempringham before 1131, Bishop Alexander still kept a close watch on him, and it was with his help and encouragement that the seven "took the veil." Their life was extremely strict right from the start; they were contemplatives in the true sense of the word, being completely enclosed and spending most of their time in continual prayer. One window alone was left unblocked through which the nuns received their daily necessities,

and through which any necessary talk could take place.

" . . . had men been able to live without the necessities of life, he would even have sealed up that window which he had left open only at the time it was fitting that it should be open."⁶

Because most of their days were taken up with prayers and other religious observances, Gilbert organized a few girls from the village to minister their natural needs. But when warned by Abbot William of the Cistercian house at Rievaulx⁷ that these girls living in the world might kindle dissatisfaction in the minds and souls of the nuns, he conceived the idea, no doubt at William's suggestion, of having a band of lay sisters, based on the Cistercian institution of lay brothers, tend the nuns. The lay sisters would also be under vows but of a less stringent nature than those taken by the nuns. Gilbert did not, however, rush these maids into taking hasty vows which afterwards they might regret, having imperfectly realized the difficulties and constant hardships and devotions of their state. Accordingly all had to undertake a year's probation.

But still the new order seemed incomplete to its Founder - there was no one capable of doing the heavy manual work needed for the support of the nuns and sisters. So once again the Cistercian example of lay brothers bore fruit outside that Order, this time more directly. Lay brothers were added to the Order of Sempringham whose sole task was the farming and

6. Monasticon Anglicanum, VI 2, P. VII.

7. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 11.

other manual occupations of the Order. These were drawn from former servants of Gilbert's family, former villeins desirous of breaking the feudal chain binding them forever to one master and to one spot on the earth, and any others who wanted to follow in Christ's footsteps, but who could not do so in the long-established Black Monk monasteries because they were illiterate. Soon the male equivalent of the nuns was to be added, the duty of which would be to instruct the women and minister to their spiritual needs. Men who could do this would have to be "literati," and would not have to do any manual work except perhaps at harvest time. But this is looking too far ahead, for before the canons were added, Gilbert was to go abroad, meet the leading monk of that age, St. Bernard, and receive Papal approval of his Order and its rule which had been drawn up with St. Bernard's help.

All the time the order was growing extremely fast, largely owing to the renowned sanctity of Gilbert himself, and to the simple, dedicated life followed by his religious. The process of growth was assisted by the grants of land and privileges given by the landed class, who, under Gilbert's direction built monasteries on their own domains. The first grant of land made to Gilbert after the enclosure of the seven nuns occurred in 1139, when Gilbert's feudal overlord, Gilbert de Gant gave him further land at Sempringham, and on this land the famous priory was built. Even King Henry II, whose strong reign commenced in 1154 after the chaos of

the preceeding nineteen years, encouraged Gilbert's work, and all the time Alexander of Lincoln supported and aided him. Being so firm a believer in humility and poverty, Gilbert at first resisted so many grants of land; and he may also have been influenced by the fear that lay control over the various monasteries might at a later date become a serious threat. Lay heads of religious houses had been a noted abuse in late Anglo-Saxon times not a hundred years before, and the general European Investiture contest, waged so triumphantly for the Church by Pope Gregory VII, still reared its grasping head. Secular powers, whenever Sees and Abbacies fell vacant, still desired to assert claims of appointment without reference to ecclesiastical authority and rights in the matter. But Gilbert realized that it was God's will that the Order should increase, so his next move was to provide the necessary government and rule for those under his care. He attempted to persuade the Cistercians to become the spiritual and temporal Supervisors of his Order, feeling that he had neither the ability nor capacity to look after it satisfactorily. He chose the Cistercians because they were a new, strict and most vigorous order, their first house in England having been founded in 1132, one year after Gilbert established his nuns in Sempringham. The Cistercian order held an annual Chapter at the Mother House at Citeaux, and thither Gilbert went to the Chapter of 1147, where he not only saw and spoke to the Pope, Eugenius III, but also St. Bernard the Cistercian of Clairvaux whose

burning zeal and ardour had long ago set and continued to keep Europe aflame with militant religious enthusiasm. Gilbert placed his petition before the Cistercians, but received the reply that that Order could not undertake to look after the religious and general well-being of another Order, especially one containing women. The Pope was obviously greatly impressed by Gilbert, and, with the advice of his counsellors, including the recommendation of St. Bernard who helped Gilbert draw up the Gilbertine Rule, committed the care of the Order of Sempringham into the holy and capable hands of its Founder. He bowed his head in obedience, and returned home with the Rule. As soon as the Pope had formally given his blessing to the new Order, it had been placed under Papal protection in perpetuity; which in theory should have meant that there would be no episcopal control exercised over it.

The time had now come for the completion of the Order with the addition of educated priests (canons). Without them, Gilbert felt his Order would be rudderless in a sea of ignorance and uncertainty; but with the canons the Order would become a whole - a living, thriving body working and praying for the salvation of its members inside its walls, and that of all outside. So occurred the revival of the English "double" monastery, unique in England at that time, but immediately to become flourishing and successful. More will be mentioned of the system of double monasteries, when the Rule of the Order, and the general European monastic

background will be discussed. Once the canons had been added, Gilbert had to draw up stringent rules for the almost complete segregation of the men and women, so that there could be no suspicion of scandal to which enemies of religion and of the Order could point.

That the Order had enemies seems evident from the fact that Gilbert's biographer, a Gilbertine canon who had known the saint, tells us of Gilbert issuing "An argument against detractors;" against those, that is, who tried to impute maliciously that the new Order, its Rule and Gilbert's teaching were against the Catholic faith. Gilbert himself seems to have written an answer, saying that although he had added certain devotional practices and other disciplinary innovations to be followed by his religious men and women, these did not vitiate the doctrines and traditions of the Church in any way; rather did such accretions enhance the former. We gather that these detractors, whoever they were, had no success in their designs against Gilbert and his Order. Gilbert, as do all founders of religious Orders, wrote down not only the Rule for his religious, "De Constructione, or De Fundatione, Monasteriorum," but various ideas for the furthering of their spirituality - the fruit of much thought and prayer. This same biographer gives the text of one letter Gilbert wrote to the Canons of Malton just before he died. It is full of loving kindness, common sense and encouragement; and he plainly drew attention to the relative position of lay brothers and canons when he told the latter that they had no

excuse for slackness in following the Rule, as the lay brothers did all the manual work which would otherwise distract them from their devotions and from their work in the three hospitals in their charge⁸.

One of the most important sections of the biography is that entitled, "How Gilbert fared in his Ministry"⁹. It is here that Gilbert's ability to control and help all those put under his charge is indicated. Gilbert always considered that the only satisfactory way for an individual to prepare in this life for eternal salvation was to spend as much time as possible in prayer, meditation and penance without the worry and cares imposed either by directing the administrative and temporal affairs of the church - as the abhorred arch-deacons did; or by the calls made when concerned with the spiritual welfare of members of an Order. But when Gilbert was shown the work to be done in the latter sphere, then his ideas of a solitary, prayerful life had to be left behind, and he turned to his task, putting into it all the vigour and holiness he would have used exclusively for his own spiritual life. By an exemplary life he led his spiritual sons and daughters along the narrow path of virtue; and how well he did this is seen not only by the expected eulogies of his biographer, but also by the renown and respect he and his Order obtained. Ever since he had turned away from the idleness of his youth, he had subjected himself to

8. Monasticon, VI. 2, p. XXII.

9. Monasticon, p. X.

a vigorous spiritual, intellectual and physical discipline, and his penances and fastings were all in the time-honoured tradition of the self-inflicted scourges of the saints. His biographer stresses the fact that he was completely unostentatious in his dress, and that whenever he travelled from one house to another, modesty was the most obvious feature: no retinue of servants and no costly accoutrements. Surely the emphasis laid upon the sobriety of Gilbert indicates that many monks acted and dressed as though the court and not the cloister were their regular habitation. Even in old age - a state Gilbert was accustomed to for many years as he died when over a hundred - his mind remained active and he never desisted from his customary practices and devotions until forced to, through excessive weakness just before his death.

His great humility showed itself in many ways, one of the most noticeable of which was his reluctance to become a Canon in his own Order. It was precisely because he had drawn up its Rule that he hesitated so long before yielding to the arguments of his advisers and friends, who wanted him to be invested with the Canon's habit. They were afraid that if this did not happen, after his death the next Master might be forced onto his Order from another. Roger, Prior of Malton, Yorkshire, therefore, clothed him in the habit of a Gilbertine canon. Roger was to be the next Master after the Founder's death; but owing to the latter's increasing age, he had been relieving him of some of the burdens of ruling the ever-growing and fairly scattered Order.

Before coming to Gilbert's last days, two "highlights"

as it were, in the history of the Order during his lifetime must be mentioned. The first occurred in 1164 when Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was forced to flee the country, after having resisted the far-reaching claims of Henry II over the Church in England. Becket was sheltered and actively assisted to reach France by the Gilbertines. After the uproar of the Council of Northampton when Becket refused to yield to the King on any score whatever, he left the Council Chamber amidst threats and jeers, and fled to Lincoln in the company of a Gilbertine brother who had been with him at Northampton¹⁰. At Lincoln, Becket put on the habit of a Gilbertine lay brother, and thus dressed went from one Gilbertine house to another. Finally, given a ride from the Chicksand community in Bedfordshire, Becket reached the Kent coast whence he sailed¹¹. He was not to see an English shore again for six years; and when he did return in 1170 it was to meet, as he knew full well, his martyrdom. This ended the help given by the Order of Sempringham to Becket, but there were quite unexpected repercussions. The following year saw Gilbert and his order accused of sending money overseas for Becket's use - a crime punishable by exile. This accusation had no foundation in fact at all; but Gilbert, when he was so charged, refused to deny or affirm it, being afraid that a denial might be construed to mean a refusal on his part to act for the good of the

10. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 17.

11. Graham, p. 18.

Church because he was afraid of the consequences. Gilbert and his priors were therefore in immediate danger of exile, and the latter could not understand why their Master was acting so obstinately over a matter in which he and they were, after all, guiltless. They were unable to understand the grasp of temporal and spiritual issues which nearly all saints are blessed with. As it turned out, however, Gilbert's firmness instead of causing exile, resulted in even more honour and respect being paid to him. For Henry II, abroad at the time, sent word to his judges trying the case, that no action was to be taken until he returned to England. So Gilbert and the priors were set free; and it was only then that the former spoke, saying, that in the first place, no one in the Order had sent money to Becket, and secondly, that his reason for remaining silent had been through fear that others might have misunderstood his motives, to the dishonour of the Church, the Order of Sempringham and of himself.

It was unfortunate that Becket, a few years after, was to believe the lying tales about Gilbert spread both at Rome and in England, by two recalcitrant Gilbertine lay brothers. This incident occurred, it appears, about 1166 - 1167¹². It has previously been noted that the lay brothers were drawn from the lower sections of feudal society; and

12. Dom. D. Knowles, English Historical Review, L. (1935), "The Revolt of the Lay Brothers of Sempringham," pp. 465 - 487. Dom. Knowles shows that Dr. Graham's date of 1170 is too late.

human nature being what it is, it was not really surprising that two men were able to lead other lay brothers astray. They demanded certain relaxations in their Rule, and accused Gilbert, among other things, of having forced them to make a second profession. The Pope listened to their slanders and believed them, as did many others at Rome including Becket. Gilbert's biographer includes an account written by the saint of the affair. The leaders of the revolt, Ogger and Gerard, committed a double sin, because they had been looked after from childhood by Gilbert, taught a trade and shown every kindness. It was their ingratitude which hurt Gilbert greatly. Not only the Pope but the exiled Becket wrote to Gilbert, and in England he was forced to go to one court after another to answer these false charges. Professor David Knowles had published all the letters extant on this incident¹³, and they show that most of the English bishops and the king were wholeheartedly on Gilbert's side. The king wrote to the Pope, in a letter that was a thinly veiled threat, to the effect, that if Alexander did not absolve Gilbert from any trace of guilt, he and his nobles would take back all the lands they had given to the Order. The Archbishop of York carried out, on the Pope's orders, an investigation of the charges in his diocese, and found them all false; while William, bishop of Norwich (one of Gilbert's main

13. Ibid.

supporters) found the same thing in the diocese of Canterbury. All along Gilbert maintained his innocence, and the Pope could not withstand this overwhelming evidence, realizing also, that the far from idle threat of the king was too serious to be ignored. So he admitted his mistake and for himself and his successors confirmed to Gilbert and his successors the privileges of the Order, with the assurance that no change in the rules, customs or practices would be changed "without the advice and consent of the senior and more thoughtful section of the Order."¹⁴ Whenever reform was needed, the Pope or his successors could only initiate proceedings in consultation with the Master and his priors. So the lay brothers revolt ended with the complete vindication of Gilbert, and a reconciliation between him and his fallen sons. But Ogger refused to ask Gilbert for forgiveness and for reinstatement in the Order, and he remained in this sinful obstinacy to the end of his life. Gilbert agreed to a partial relaxation of the rules concerning the lay brothers' food and dress, which was ratified about 1187 in the presence of Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, with the consent of the General Chapter of Sempringham.¹⁵ Henry II's respect for Gilbert and his Order was shown not only in the Becket controversy and lay brothers' revolt. The king had given much land to the Order, together with privileges and immunities - those holes

14. Monasticon, VI 2, p. XIII.

15. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 23.

in the feudal system and society which turned it into a beehive of exemptions, with the monastic orders, for one, in their separate cells working to maintain and extend such privileges. Gilbert's biographer never once mentions the king without a tone of obvious respect, even though one would expect at least a tacit condemnation, from a monk after all, of the King's furious actions against Becket. Even the hot-blooded Queen Eleanor is said to have rejoiced because her sons were blessed by the holy man.

Gilbert died in 1189, the same year as Henry II, when he was over a hundred. He died at Sempringham after giving his blessing to all the priors, who were far from being the only ones who mourned the dead saint. From the King to the humblest villein, great sorrow was felt; and the former in France, when he heard of Gilbert's death said that the evils recently fallen upon him were caused by the demise of his friend - and Henry II was not a man given to excessive words or sentimentality. Gilbert was buried in the Priory of St. Mary at Sempringham, the main house of the Order; and his tomb could be seen by both nuns and the canons in their respective halves of the Church. Almost immediately there were reports of miracles worked by him, as indeed there had been during his life time;¹⁶ and eleven years after his death, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter, initiated the customary enquiry into the life, works

16. A large number of miracles are given in John Capgrave's Life of St. Gilbert, pp. 118 - 134.

and miracles of the holy man with a view to canonisation. After the usual comings and goings to the Papal Curia, early in 1202 Gilbert was canonised; Archbishop Walter ordered that his Feast be kept on February 4th¹⁷ the date on which he died. The translation of the new saint occurred in the October of the same year¹⁸, and one can imagine the splendour of that service, held before a great and colourful gathering of the faithful, which included the highest in the land. Indulgences were granted by the Archbishop and the bishops for all who visited yet another English shrine.¹⁹

So ended the earthly work of the Founder of the Gilbertines. He had left a vigorous and expanding Order - partly contemplative, and partly concerned with the administration of hospitals, orphanages, poor hospices and so on. Although the Order was completely destroyed when Henry VIII was organizing his planned plunder of the Church, the work of St. Gilbert of Sempringham cannot thereby be counted a failure. His foundations, together with those established after his death, provided for many men and women the means of spiritual betterment; surely the greatest gift any man could bestow upon his fellows. At his death, there were thirteen houses in being: nine for men and women, and four for men alone.²⁰ Of these thirteen, ten had been founded in the reign of Stephen (1135 - 1154). Gilbert's

17. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 27.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 24.

biographer, no doubt carried away by great enthusiasm, estimated that there were 1,500 women and 700 men in the Order in 1189; but this no doubt is an exaggeration. Apart from strictly monastic houses, Gilbert had established, or the Order had been given, quite a number of hospices, hospitals and such like, to be looked after chiefly by the canons, assisted in some of them by the lay sisters. So in this respect the canons were not an exact male equivalent of the nuns, who had begun by being strictly enclosed, and remaining thus were never allowed outside the cloister, except on a few occasions specifically mentioned in the Rule.

The Order of Sempringham had a remarkable success during the lifetime of its Founder, and after his death it continued to flourish; though it should be noticed that benefactors of the Order when granting new sites for houses generally specified they were to be solely for canons and not for nuns also. This tendency to bequeath "single" monasteries was probable due to the increasing number of nunneries founded in the last decades of the century; and perhaps once the original fervour had lessened, the danger of unchastity in a double monastery became more apparent. That geography had much to do with the Order's initial success is shown by Professor Knowles when mentioning the locations of the majority of monastic sites in the early Norman period; "... the total absence of any houses north of the Midlands helps to account for the mission of Gilbert of Sempringham and its success in the middle of the twelfth century."²¹

21. David Knowles, The Monastic Order in England, p. 139.

Another point made by Professor Knowles in the same chapter, is the lack of nunneries in the years immediately preceeding Gilbert's foundations; and, coupled with the fact that the Order began purely as one for women, this would account for the large number who entered in central and northern England. Previously those who felt called to the religious life had nowhere to go. It must be kept in mind that a feudal population was largely static, and only ladies of wealth and high standing could possibly travel up and down the country. As with all "movements" in the world's history, the environment of a particular person at given time is of prime importance when assessing the "whys" and "wherefores" of successes or failures. Gilbert of Sempringham laid the firm foundations of his Order at a time in English history which was witnessing nineteen years of deadly civil war (1135 - 1154), in which the barons waxed strong and menacing, ravaged the country from end to end, and changed sides as quickly and with as much thought as they changed their horses; and in which it was said that "God and his saints slept." It would appear on the surface that such times were quite inimical to religion in any form, but on the contrary the period was most fruitful from the point of view of the growth of English monasticism. In spite of the bloody war, the period was one of intense religious belief, and even the most hardened mercenary must occasionally have had conscience stirrings, when the sight of devastated land, homes, churches and monasteries could be seen on all sides. Eustace fitzJohn is but one

example. He had refused to obey the king, Stephen, in the years just before 1138, had joined forces with the Scots and ravaged the north of England until defeated in that year. Realizing the misery and damage his wanton attacks had caused in 1150, he founded what were to become two of the greatest Gilbertine houses: the Yorkshire priories of Malton and Watton. Once new religious houses were established, men and women could easily be found to enter them, wishing to cut themselves off from the surrounding evils, and to make reparation to heaven for those evils. The sight of new Orders springing up in the north of England - the Cistercian Order was firmly established in England by the end of Stephen's reign, and there were also many houses of Augustine and Premonstratensian Canons as well as the Gilbertines - must have surely kindled hope in the hearts of the war-weary and suffering people, and made them realize that God after all was not sleeping.

But it must not be thought that the "Black Monk" monasticism, which had received new blood and ideas in the reign of William I when the great reformer Lanfranc held the See of Canterbury, had decayed. It was certainly true that there was much laxity, and this appeared worse than it was when contrasted to the strictness of the new Orders now in England. The tempestuous and immoral William II had not been able to weaken the work of his father; and under Henry I this work came to fruition, digging in roots still further, though very few new monastic houses were founded. With the death of Henry I, who had kept Papal interference

and reform at bay, the new ideas and reforms from the Church on the continent came sweeping into England, all the more successful and powerful for having been so long denied. With this influx of further religious enthusiasm, the work of the Conqueror and Lanfranc was further consolidated. So it was that Gilbert, born in an obscure village in Lincolnshire, could, after an equally obscure childhood, achieve his glorious success.

The reign of Henry II (1154 - 1189), was generally a troubled one with regard to Church - state relations. Even more determined than his grandfather Henry I, to prevent Papal interference within his domains, Henry II might have succeeded in cutting England off from all Papal control in temporal matters had it not been for Archbishop Becket's steadfast and often obstinate stand against him. But with the Order of Sempringham, Henry seems always to have been on exceptionally happy terms: the one bright spot on the darkened canvas of ecclesiastical and secular quarrels. There can be no doubt, that on the purely earthly level, the remarkable expansion of St. Gilbert's Order owed most to the ever-present and beneficial support of Henry II.

II. THE GILBERTINE RULE, AND ITS SETTING AGAINST THE MONASTIC BACKGROUND OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

The Rule which St. Gilbert of Sempringham drew up for his Order was not one which belonged exclusively to it. The word "Order" is rather misleading when applied to the religious bodies before the coming of the Friars in the thirteenth century. Today, a religious Order is one which binds all its houses and various components together under a definite Rule and way of community living, which belongs to no other Order. But before the advent of the Franciscan and Dominican Friars, religious houses or groups of religious foundations were bound together in a very nebulous way, if at all. Only a strong head of a group of monasteries could do anything in the way of centralisation. At the time of the founding of the Gilbertines, the Cistercians were firmly established in Europe and England; and when these are compared to the Benedictine or Black Monk monasteries - for so long the only ones of any number and consequence - their Rule and government was more strict and far more centralised. In this respect the Cistercian Order is placed between the older "Orders" and those of the modern era, and has been called the actual fore-runner of the latter. The Gilbertines were largely based on Cistercian example, and likewise indicated more centralising tendencies than were general at that period.

But it must always be kept in mind, however, that whatever the colour of their habit, monks of all branches

and houses followed the Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia as adapted by St. Benedict of Aniane to a greater or lesser degree. Some monasteries used the Rule merely as a guide, either adding or subtracting sections as the need was felt; while others, notably the Cluniac group of Black Monks, kept more closely to the Rule. This was true at least in theory, but by the twelfth century, in practice, relaxations and additions toward an easier life and discipline had often crept in over the years. Whenever a splintering occurred off the main block of monasteries or off one particular house, with a few monks leaving to seek anew the way of Christ and the Rule in its strictness and simplicity, the new monastery so established usually shone in spirituality and fervour. The original aim of the Cistercians had been just that: Robert of Molesme and a few companions in 1098, being dissatisfied with the existing state of monastic life, desired to live in the wilderness where the evils and distractions of the world, and those of the wordly monasteries could not touch them. The Rule of St. Benedict was to be followed in the spirit as well as in outward observance. But the Cistercians differed from the reformers of previous centuries, in that they added to the Rule certain other regulations and usages, mainly the result of the thought and work of the Englishman, Stephen Harding. These lifted the new Order right above all other monasteries, and turned it into a living and overwhelming force which swept Europe in an amazingly short time. These additions and changes will be discussed later in this section.

Thus it was not surprising that St. Gilbert, when drawing up the constitution and Rule for his new Order, should follow tradition by choosing only certain parts of the different rules and monastic customs then in use, simply because at this period there was no other alternative. But apart from this aspect, there was another more urgent reason for his eclecticism. When his Order was complete, there were four distinct segments within it: two female and two male, of which one from each sex was educated in some way; while the other two sections being quite illiterate, were socially and intellectually inferior to the former. These then could not be expected to follow the same life and rules as their more literate brethren. St. Gilbert had besides, a particular purpose for each group in the Order, and so had to find a suitable rule for each also; and following the Cistercian example, whose main appeal was the centralised authority placed with the Mother House, he added his own special regulations to existing rules without substantially altering them.

Before entering on the details of the Gilbertine Rule, it is first necessary to give a brief glance at the state of various orders, their rules and practices in the first half of the twelfth century, so that the Order of Sempringham, first started in 1131, can be placed as accurately as possible into the picture of twelfth century monasticism. Before the pontificate of Gregory VII, there had been, from the time of St. Augustine of Hippo, various decrees issued by individual bishops or by Church Councils from time to

time, regulating the lives of clerks and priests who served the larger churches and cathedrals. Secular clergy all through the "dark" and middle Ages had been particularly prone to all the evils of the world around, and the reforming decrees were an attempt to make such clergy live together in some kind of community, almost like monks. But it often happened that there were too many loopholes left which encouraged further laxity. But St. Gregory the Great, Pope from 1073 to 1085, was responsible for the regularising and encouragement of "regular" Canons, issuing a 'code' of very severe decrees to be followed by clergy serving large churches and Cathedrals. Unlike many previous reforms, those of St. Gregory were, as is well known, unusually successful in all spheres of church life. The point to note at this juncture is that these canons were largely concerned with parochial and missionary work, and in this respect were quite different from the monks whose lives were completely entwined with those of their communities. However, during the twelfth century there was a gradual shift of emphasis, and "Orders" of Canons began to appear. These were fundamentally different in three respects from their parish brethren, and were now far more akin to regular monks. First, each "order" of Canons acquired a technical uniformity through the adoption of a common name and patron. Secondly a contemplative element was added unknown before, which later was largely to break away from the older Canons and become independent. Finally the machinery for common government was

also acquired.²² With regard to the Rule used by the Canons, Regula of Saint Augustine was the basis in the main, for he had been a great advocate of communal living by clerks and priests.

Although his Regula had been specifically written for his sister and her order of nuns, it applied equally well to Canons. By 1131, the Canons Regular of St. Victor (founded circa 1108) and the Premonstratensian Canons (founded 1120) were well established in England; and it seems likely that their example inspired Gilbert of Sempringham to add Canons to his Order after 1148. Although the contemplative element had firmly fastened itself on most Orders of Canons by this time, the pastoral and missionary side was not forgotten. Some houses of the Premonstratensians, for example, were not concerned with this work, while for others it was their main raison d'être. Gilbert's canons were certainly divided between the two elements: they led a secluded spiritual life, yet, apart from being the spiritual directors of the nuns in the double monasteries, they also were given the task of looking after Gilbert's fruits of mercy and charity - the hospitals, hospices for the poor, orphanages and so on, which were so close to his heart. The Rule given to his Canons was naturally that of St. Augustine; and it is interesting to note that the Lateran Council of 1139 had enforced that Rule on all regular Canons, together with the customs of the Austin and Premonstratensian Canons which, based on St. Augustine, had proved so successful.

22. J. C. Dickinson, The Origin of the Austin Canons, p. 60.

But the Order of Sempringham did not contain a majority of Canons. The Order had been founded simply as one for nuns, presumably because of the dearth of nunneries in central and northern England until after the disastrous reign of Stephen (1135 - 1154), and because Gilbert seems to have had a special gift for dealing with women. Why was it then, that not many years after its inception, the Order of Sempringham became one containing many "double" monasteries? Its Founder must have felt that, though lay brothers were quite adequate to undertake the heavy manual work which women obviously could not do, there was a further need of a small group of educated men to be attached to each nunnery, having as its main task the instruction and guidance of the women. Canons were the obvious answer, for they, instead of concentrating on the needs of a parish for example, would concentrate and consecrate their efforts on the enclosed nuns. Here too, Gilbert could find several examples in Europe of 'double' monasteries. The Abbey of St. Nicholas of Arrouaise had been founded circa 1090 with three hermits. But the third abbot of this foundation, Gervase (1121 - 1147) had instituted the house as a 'double' monastery; and examination has shown a marked Cistercian influence within it. Then about 1100, Robert of Arbrissel founded the quasi-monastic house of Fontevrault containing three sections: nuns, lay sisters and Robert with his priests. This foundation was to achieve great fame, and Gilbert when he first went to Europe as a youth must often have heard excellent reports of it and of the Arrouaisian houses. But

it was Fontévrault which exercised the greatest influence over the Gilbertines: for example, the abbess (or, in the Gilbertine houses, three prioresses) in both orders ruled the men and women; the Canons when taking their vows dedicated themselves to the service of the nuns, and it was the latter who held "the purse strings." So, while double monasteries were an integral part of twelfth century monasticism on the Continent and aroused no wondering comments, in England the Gilbertines were at first regarded as something of a novelty, even though double monasteries had not been unknown in earlier English history.

When a study is made of church and monastic history of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, one is struck by the frequent and often eulogistic references made about the Cistercians. Not since St. Benedict of Nursia himself had a group of monks had such a tremendous, almost overwhelming influence on the life, thought and practice within the cloisters. Again and again, Cîteaux and Clairveux, the latter the foundation of the greatest Cistercian, St. Bernard, have to be noticed, and one contemporary is supposed to have said that eventually the world would become wholly a Cistercian monastery, so fast was the Order growing and spreading. St. Gilbert based the government of his Order almost entirely on the Cistercian model. The Black Monk monasteries, that is, those who followed St. Benedict's Rule in some form or other, had received a tremendous moral and spiritual 'boost' under the capable and wise guidance of William I's Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, but life

in these monasteries was tending, by Stephen's reign, to become somewhat stereotyped and even lax. The Cistercians burst upon the medieval world precisely to save further relaxation of the Rule, and prevent further monastic participation in Secular affairs demanded by a feudal society, in which the Benedictine monasteries had been caught up, to the detriment in many cases, of the monks' spiritual life and effectiveness.

The founders of the Cistercians were determined to discard all the extra ritual relaxations and practices which had come to distort St. Benedict's Rule. The Cistercian Rule was drawn up containing a lengthy list of what Cistercian monks were forbidden to do. The very comprehensiveness of the list indicated most clearly the evils which had woven a cocoon around St. Benedict's Rule and around many monasteries purporting to follow it. From the start, the Cistercian Order had no part in the existing feudal society, while the Black Monks were an integral part of it; but it must be added that the original purity of aims advocated by the Founders of the Cistercians, was lost, or were tending to become obscured, by the end of the twelfth century. The three-fold unity of St. Benedict was to be the key to a balanced spiritual life: namely, liturgical worship, private prayer and manual work. In many Benedictine monasteries, the former two had taken second place, and liturgy held the stage. In 1131, the Cluniac Cardinal Matthew d'Albano is reported to have said:²³ "...le travail

23. Andre Chagny, Cluny et son Empire, p. 72.

de la psalmodie, ...a remplace le travail manuel; ce qu'on retrenchera de l'eglise, il faudra le restituer aux champs."

Because the monasteries were often run as lay baronies to all intents and purposes, a whole army of villeins and freedmen were employed to work monastic demesnes; for the majority of Black Monks were educated clerics, drawn therefore from the upper, rich classes. The illiterate might find a niche somewhere in a Benedictine monastery, but he would not be said to be a true member of the religious. But the Cistercians, by instituting the "conversi" or lay brothers, who did all the heavy work in Cistercian monasteries, gave dignity and a religious vocation to men, who otherwise could not have possibly been considered eligible. These lay brothers lived separately in granges some way from the monasteries proper, and were controlled by a 'grainger' and not directly by the Abbot of the monastery.

The example of lay brothers forming, as it were, an order within an order, was followed by several religious foundations, including the Gilbertines, whose lay brothers had been added when the nuns and lay sisters alone made up the Order of Sempringham. So, from the start, class-distinctions were unknown in St. Gilbert's Order. There was a freshness and vigour in the new Orders because of their strictness and severe living, and Professor Knowles writes of this: "To pass from --- the day at Cluny c.1090 to the Cistercian consuetudines gives the reader something of the sensation of passing from a stale and heavy

atmosphere into the fresh air. Once more there is space to move about in."²⁴ The real strength of the Cistercians, however, was the government of the Order which, while allowing each house a certain measure of autonomy, ensured the obedience to the Mother House, and the universal following of services and practices. This tendency towards centralisation was a reflection of similar processes developing in the Church at large and in Secular "national" governments.

The Cluniac group of Benedictine monasteries was more of a homogeneous whole than other Benedictine groups, but the Abbot of Cluny's power rested solely on his own personality and sanctity, and not on adequate machinery which could enforce discipline even with a weaker Abbot. The General Chapter, held annually at Cîteaux, was the main event of the Cistercian year; for here problems of all kinds were thrashed out and new policies promulgated. This is not to suggest of course, that the Cistercians were unique in holding a General Chapter; they merely utilised an existing institution for more efficient purposes and results.

The fervour and efficient machinery of government of the Cistercians had not been lost on Gilbert of Sempringham, who went to the General Chapter of 1147, for the express purpose of asking the Cistercians to undertake the care of his Order. Gilbert's going to the Cistercian Chapter indicated that the hard and fast divisions between modern Orders were then completely unknown. Gilbert did not gain

24. Knowles, MO, p. 211.

his desire, being designated by the Pope as Master of his own Order; but he did gain immeasurably by the contact with the leading Cistercians of the day, and by seeing the obvious success of their work. Failing to obtain Cistercian supervision for the Gilbertines, the Founder decided to incorporate much of the former's usage into his Rule, which he, assisted by St. Bernard, drew up at Citeaux where it was also approved and blessed by the Pope, a Cistercian, Eugenius III. The General Chapter of the Cistercian model was the most obvious institution adopted by St. Gilbert, and the Gilbertine one held at Sempringham also sat on the three Rogation Days chosen by the Cistercians for their Chapter.

But the position of the Prior of Sempringham was quite different from that held by the Abbot of Citeaux. The former had no extra power or privileges which the other Gilbertine priors did not have, for the Master of Sempringham was the head of the Order and was not attached to any monastery, but was engaged in perpetual visitation of all the houses in turn. Gilbert's successor, Roger, for example, was Prior of Malton, a position he had to give up when elected Master. But the Master of Sempringham was elected by the General Chapter of the Order, as were the Abbots of Citeaux and of the Cluniac monasteries. The method of election in the Gilbertine Chapter was a rather complicated procedure which is not of great importance; but it should be noted that the canons were the only electors, though presenting their candidate to the nuns for their general approval. The Abbot of Citeaux, if sinful or infirm, could be deposed by the

next General Chapter; and he in turn could depose his Abbots if the occasion demanded such an action. This, was copied exactly by the Gilbertines. Immediately a Master died, a special General Chapter had to be called which met as soon as the dead man was buried.

Apart from the different positions held by the Abbot of Citeaux and the Master of Sempringham, there were other instances where the Cistercian and Gilbertine paths diverged. When a new Gilbertine priory was envisaged, it was usual for a Prior and twelve canons, drawn from one or more existing houses, to set out to establish the new foundation. The new house owed obedience directly to Sempringham Priory as the Mother House of the whole Order, and not to the house from which the new Prior and his canons may have been drawn. Not more than thirteen and not less than seven was the number laid down for the beginning of a new foundation, depending on its size and potentialities. In the Cistercian usage, thirteen was the minimum number required to start a new monastery, and all had to come from one house only. The new daughter house obeyed its mother in most matters, before the Mother House of the whole Order at Citeaux.

Once a religious Order is more or less well established, certain minimum requirements have to be met before a new foundation can be settled and the full religious life observed. The nucleus of another Gilbertine family, for example, had to have these buildings in some shape or other for strict observance of the Rule. These were, the Oratory, Frater, Dorter and Guest Hostel. Also, to have the requisite

books was indispensable in order that the liturgy and all devotions could be satisfactorily carried out. These were the Missal, Book of Uses, Psalter, Hymnary, Book of Collects, Antiphons and Responses. An interesting point was the issue of clothes to the original members of a new priory: the canons had to be most careful of their clothes which had to last for two years.

It has been mentioned above that the Rule of the Order of Sempringham was made up from a number of generally contemporary monastic customs and rules. But this is not to suggest that St. Gilbert did not add and subtract whenever he thought fit. His biographer states that he chose "certain most beautiful flowers" of many practices and customs from several churches and monasteries,²⁵ and that where innovation occurred, the Catholic faith far from losing from such a change, as certain detractors would like to maintain, rather saw its glory enhanced. But again and again the Cistercian influence is apparent at every turn, and Professor Knowles quotes the editor of The Gilbertine Rite, Canon R. M. Woolley, as saying:

"the ... Use is generally speaking Cistercian. The body of the Missal is evidently copied directly from the Cistercian Rite but on the other hand a considerable amount of variation (shows) great eclecticism, as to the sources from which the various forms were derived."²⁶

The lay brothers used the Cistercian Uses of their conversi entirely. Their work made it necessary for them

25. Monasticon, VI. 2, p. IX.

26. Knowles, MO p. 206, note 5.

to have more sleep and more food than the canons, and their attendance at church services was, of course, limited. Being illiterate, their knowledge of the Order's prayers was similarly restricted, and they had to learn only four by heart, so that they could follow the services they had to attend. The lay sisters, though not living separately as their male counterparts, likewise were granted the same relaxations with regard to food and sleep, and also had to learn the minimum number of prayers. The lay sisters came directly under the control and guidance of the Prioress, while the lay brothers were controlled not by the Prior, but by the grainger who lived with them at their grange.

The most eclectic section of the Gilbertine Rule was that of the Canons. The Charter of Charity, Institutes, and Book of Uses came from the Cistercians, but the everyday customs of the Augustinian and Premonstratensian Canons had the most influence on the practical part of the Canons' lives. It is an interesting point that the original Sempringham Rule contained only one direct reference to St. Augustine.²⁷ Perhaps this is not really surprising, as these "... enjoined little but a common life and the renunciation of property, (so) he added many statutes for their guidance from the customs of the Augustinian and Premonstratensians."²⁸ It would appear that the Gilbertine Canons were more contemplative in some respects than the

27. Dickinson, op. cit., p. 78, note 6.

28. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 57.

Cistercians. It is true that they had the task of looking after the various hospices of the Order where these were attached to one of the Priories, but, this work apart, their time was divided between liturgical devotion as a community and private. The canons had to improve their own spirituality first in order to assist the women in theirs, ". . . they passed their time in worship, improvement and reading in church, chapter and cloister."²⁹

By comparing the daily honarium of the Canons³⁰ with that of the Benedictine monasteries as indicated by Archbishop Lanfranc in his Consuetudines,³¹ it strikes one immediately that the very thing the Cistercians opposed and abolished - namely the extra psalms, litanies and so on which over the years had been added to the Rule - was very much the focal point of the Black Monks' lives. Gilbertine practice seems to waver between the Cistercian and Benedictine usage.

The nuns were given the Rule of St. Benedict which was the only Rule for women available at that time; but ". . . pratiquée non comme dans les abbayes bénédictines, mais comme à Cîteaux; silence rigoureux, travail manuel, lectio divina, office divin."³² The nuns of the Order were the strictly contemplative section, so the Benedictine usage

29. Graham, p. 58.

30. Graham, St. Gilbert, Chap. III.

31. Nelson Classics, ed. by D. Knowles.

32. Bernard de Clairvaux, p. 33⁴.

was most suitable for their needs, consisting as it did of much praise and prayer in the choir. It must be kept in mind that the other three parts of the Order had been instituted to help the women and allow them time for prayer and contemplation. In actual practice, the nuns' ". . . daily life closely resembled that of the Canons. They kept the same hours for the church services, the Chapter, frater, work and reading in the cloister."³³

The regulations for discipline are always the most strict and severe at the beginning of the life of a religious Order, and it is therefore not surprising to find Gilbert's code of discipline for his religious extremely rigid. For example, there were special instructions given to the nuns and canons going to the General Chapter, and these were so precise as to allow no loophole for ambiguity or misunderstanding. The Prior, Cellarer, two Prioresses and the Scrutators General and Scrutators of the Cloister³⁴ represented each house at the Chapter. The women had to ride in an enclosed cart so that none could see them, and had to be accompanied by "mature" brothers. No one of the Order was allowed to eat or sleep anywhere except at another house of the Order. There were several hostels established for the prime purpose of housing the Gilbertine travellers to and from the Chapter. There had to be a certain amount of relaxation in the dietary regulations for those travelling, but what

33. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 68.

34. See below, p. 40 .

extra food was allowed would not be considered sufficient for anyone travelling on a train today, let alone on horse-back or in an uncomfortable wooden cart.

The daily Chapter had long been established in all monasteries whatever their allegiance, and the Gilbertines were no exception. Here it was that a portion of the Rule was read out every day, and where punishments were meted out to those who had infringed the Rule, being harsh or less harsh according to the gravity of the fault. To the modern mind, solitary confinement and frequent scourgings are repugnant, but in monasteries, these were and are regarded as inevitable and very necessary. Sitting on the floor of the frater for meals for a month or more, or having to exist on bread and water alone were the most common forms of punishment. To modern Catholic readers, it appears strange that it was fairly usual for a religious to be deprived of Holy Communion for as much as seven years for certain offences. Theologians today condemn such a spiritually fatal practice, but it must be remembered that frequent Communion has been advocated only in comparatively recent years.

Miss Graham notes a rather amusing disciplinary action taken in connection with the religious habit. The clothes of the men and women in the double monasteries were made by the nuns and lay sisters, except for the men's shirts and breeches. "If anyone refused a garment because he did not like the colour or thought it too short, he went without it for a year. The same penalty awaited him who lost his

clothes unless they were indispensable."³⁵ These were also definite regulations concerning the monastic buildings and their arrangement. It is interesting to find that the rooms of the nunnery were to be " . . . better built, more beautiful and more honourable than those of the men."³⁶ The Canons of the Order wore white habits in imitation of the Cistercians, while the nuns, being "Benedictines," had black Habits - the outward differences in their appearance reflecting the differences of the various rules and usages incorporated into the Order.

A brief word is needed on the Scrutators and Scrutatrices of the Gilbertines. These were appointed, with the approval of the General Chapter, to assist the Master when the Order grew so large that it became impossible for one man to carry out adequately all the duties and journeyings his office demanded. The Scrutators were two canons and a lay brother, and their female opposites, the Scrutatrices, comprised two nuns and a lay sister. These undertook some of the Master's work, though of course their duties were defined and regulated. The Scrutatrices, for example, could only go on visitations once or twice a year, and could not lodge in any priory of the men except in the granges of their own Order if there were no alternative. Whenever these officers of the Order returned home, they had to undergo a kind of "customs inspection." All their baggage was opened in front of the

35. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 70.

36. Graham, p. 55.

Prior (or Prioress, if the nuns were concerned), to see that nothing was brought into the house forbidden by the Rule. If a brother disobeyed in this respect, he was punished by fasting and the scourge. If a nun or sister so erred, she was "cashiered" to the lowest rank, forbidden Communion for seven years, and sent to another house, "to be chastened by discipline and fasting."³⁷ It is difficult to imagine what incentive there was to make an attempt at smuggling things into a monastery, and what kind of articles they would be. The rule of poverty enjoins the complete renunciation of all personal belongings, which is perhaps harder to obey than is generally realised.

All the same, there were certain duties which only the Master could fulfill. For example, his consent was necessary for the transfer, sale and purchase of land, woods etc. - in fact for everything above the value of three marks. The Canons did the actual buying of everything, but the nuns held all the money. The Master's seal had to be affixed to all charters of which two copies were made, one being kept in the house directly concerned. No litigation of any kind could be undertaken without his actual presence.

There still remain a few other points to be noticed with regard to the Gilbertine Rules and customs. In the churches and buildings of the Order there was not to be found the ornate and rich ornamentations and liturgical objects so much a part of the Benedictine rite; and parallel with this simplicity of ornaments and architecture was the prohibition

37. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 54.

of all singing and chanting in the Gilbertine services. Distractions occurred with singing to the dishonour of God and to the spiritual detriment of those who prayed. Again this was completely at variance with the Benedictine way of thinking, and it seems that here the Black Monks enriched the liturgy to an admirable extent. St. Gilbert was again imitating the Cistercians in the matter, whose aim was always an appeal to simplicity as the most direct way to achieve deep spirituality and wisdom. With this aim always in mind, both the Cistercians and Gilbertines reintroduced a long novitiate, which had not been known in Black Monk monasteries for many years, as Lanfranc in his Consuetudines indicated.³⁸ Even the lay sisters had to undergo a year's probation.³⁹

But there was one important aspect by which these two new Orders took second place to the Benedictines. The latter's monasteries had for centuries been the centres of Europe's intellectual life, and their ascendancy had been due partially to the schools which were attached to nearly every monastery. Neither the Cistercians nor the Gilbertines had schools for any boys except those hoping to enter the religious life. This was in retrospect a great loss both to themselves and to European culture to a lesser degree, for by the twelfth century the Benedictine monasteries were losing their intellectual leadership, (largely owing to the

38. EL op.cit; p. 107. Lanfranc states that a novice is admitted to full stature as a monk, only "...when many days have passed."

39. Monasticon, VI. 2, p. VIII.

continuing growth of the psalmody, and the monks' increasing participation in the secular affairs of their estates), and the Cathedral schools and Universities were rising with great success in their place.

So it was not until the thirteenth century that the initiative and leadership in learning centred again around religious orders, and then it was the new orders of the Franciscan and Dominican Friars, and not the old Benedictine and Cistercian houses, which carried aloft the torch of learning. No writing was allowed in Cistercian and Gilbertine Monasteries in theory, except with special permission, which in practice, seems often to have been granted. The sad part is that both orders had lost their original purity of spirit and ideals by indulging in matters of the secular world, namely sheep rearing, by the thirteenth century. One could forgive their short sightedness over the question of learning, if spiritual values had remained unimpaired. But to be fair to St. Gilbert, it should be stressed that while he lived, his aims in their original simplicity and ardour remained intact; and these were to provide the means for all men and women who so desired to seek their own and others' salvation; and it seemed to him that writing and other studies were unrelated to these aims.

If the Gilbertine Order had not entirely disappeared at the Dissolution, more attention would have been paid to it and to its Rule which form an interesting commentary on twelfth century monasticism. St. Gilbert combined in his Rule all that was best and most flourishing in the monastic

orders of his day, with the exception, just noted, concerning intellectual studies. Though lax in many ways, the Benedictine monasteries could not be ignored containing in themselves as they did all that was best in the tradition of St. Benedict. But at the same time, the new and vital Cistercian Order had even more to offer in the development both of the spiritual life and of monastic government. However, because most of the houses were 'double' during St. Gilbert's lifetime, his Order made its own unique contribution to English monasticism - a contribution which was appreciated and respected by contemporaries, lay and ecclesiastical, rich and poor, titled and untitled.

III. A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE GROWTH AND SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE GILBERTINES.

In the previous chapter, it was seen that the Order of Sempringham was founded almost contemporaneously with the Cistercian establishment in England, and that the former was based to a large extent on the more powerful order. But as with all institutions, religious or secular, there comes a time when the original fervour and ideals are either lost sight of or crushed by unavoidable contact with the lower standards of the everyday world. This chapter then is really the story of the Gilbertines' inglorious end at the Dissolution, leaving no trace other than archeological curiosities. The Cistercians suffered from the same failings which ended in the same way, but for reasons later to be mentioned, their overthrow in the sixteenth century was not final.

After the death of their founder, it appears that economic factors were largely responsible for the Gilbertines' increasing participation in secular affairs; and for their consequent loss of the spiritual ideal set forth so clearly by St. Gilbert's life, work and writings. But this is to look ahead too far, and to ignore the growth of the Order, both spiritually and materially (i.e. in possessions) in the years immediately following Gilbert's death in 1189. Although the Gilbertines had been placed directly under the Pope's protection when their Rule was approved by Eugenius III, and under the King's patronage in

temporal matters, they were still to suffer much infringement of their privileges, and from the thirteenth century onwards were being "bled dry" by royal and papal exactions. Feudal society consisted of a mass of customs, and members of that society were always attempting to gain privileges and exemptions from those customs. The Gilbertines were particularly fortunate in their attempts, more so than orders which had roots on the continent, which at once made them suspect. The Gilbertines ". . . held their own courts on their manors for their tenants, free and villein, and received the amercements or fines from them."⁴⁰ Again, "They were exempt from attendance at the Sheriff's court of shire and hundred, and could only be summoned to plead at the King's court or before his chief justices."⁴¹ So the Cistercian ideal of cutting their order off from feudal bonds as far as possible, copied by the Gilbertines to a large extent, almost from the start was impossible to maintain by both Orders. In spite of the royal favour consistently shown to the Gilbertines they often suffered (as did all classes of society) from the arbitrary exactions of royal officials. "In fourteen years (1243 - 1257) the House of Malton paid £94. 14. 3d for gifts to sheriffs and bailiffs,"⁴² and the Order was equally incompetent to prove exemption from

⁴⁰. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 79.

⁴¹. Ibid.

⁴². Ibid.

the heavy forest fines. But there was no real cause for grumbling, because although the Gilbertines suffered much in the way of fines under Richard I, they gained from him two concessions, or rather a removal of concessions, which they valued above all others. The canons and nuns were allowed to elect freely the new Master after the death of the previous one, while the Priors remained in complete control of the Order's properties, churches, land etc. until a new Master had been elected.⁴³ It needs only a small amount of knowledge of the Middle Ages to realise the value and importance of these two privileges. Medieval England saw time and time again abbacies and bishoprics kept vacant by the king for his own profit, the prevention of free elections, and the imposition of an undesired and often undesirable royal nominee in the vacant office. So in this respect, the Gilbertines were fortunate.

But by the end of the thirteenth century the Order of Sempringham had reach and passed its zenith as far as its spiritual life and fervour were concerned; and parallel with this decline in spiritual values went an increasing absorption in material matters caused by more grants of land by pious laymen or by actual acquisition of land by the Order, - a thing absolutely forbidden in the Rule. The more wealth and lands acquired the more could be taxed by the king and Pope alike. So in place of St. Gilbert's exemplary Order, one finds a sordid picture of religious

⁴³. Graham, op. cit., p. 82.

men and women concerned chiefly with maintaining their privileges and material possessions. Litigation became more and more frequent as the years went by, and as the Order acquired more enemies. The papal machinery for taxing the clergy was becoming a useful instrument at the end of the thirteenth century, and generally the king found it more worth his treasury's while to come to a monetary agreement with the Pope over the taxation of the clergy's spiritualities (i.e. tithes and other offerings), than to oppose such Papal exactions in England. So secular and regular clergy and bishops were caught having to pay the king taxes on temporalities, and the Pope, with the king's acquiescence, on spiritualities. The poverty of the Gilbertines, which was extreme in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, had its roots in these exactions, fines, taxations and debts. The latter were generally owing to the Jews, thoroughly hated by everyone, yet protected by the king, as their wealth on occasions provided all the necessary ready money when the demand for it arose. Then the right of purveyance hit lay and ecclesiastical houses alike - wherever the king and his huge hungry court moved about they all had to be fed by the unfortunate house which was picked as the court's stopping place. Many a monastery was ruined by such a visit, whose duration did not have to exceed a week for this to happen.

When the Gilbertines were founded, and during St. Gilbert's lifetime, relations between the Order and the episcopacy were extremely amicable; but such a pleasant state of affairs did

not survive long after the Founder's death. The Papal Curia was besieged by a veritable flood of petitions from the Order, maintaining the bishops were trying to usurp the exemption privileges which the Order had had ever since its foundation. The bishops wanted to exert their control over all parts of their dioceses, and to them the exemptions of the monasteries of all orders from the visitations conduced to slackness in spiritual and temporal matters. Although the Popes, on receipt of a large fine, generally issued the required Bill when such pleas were received from the monasteries, the bishops were often justified in their complaints concerning either the complete neglect of the Churches belonging to a monastery, or at best, the serving of them by incompetent and poorly paid clerks. The Lateran Council decree of 1179 made the bishops require all monasteries to pay their vicars enough to ensure they could carry out their duties adequately.⁴⁴ These vicars were the incumbents of Churches belonging to religious houses of which the Gilbertines had many, which they continued to collect, pleading poverty as an excuse for breaking the Rule which expressly forbade this practice. In his book The Monastic Ideal, H. B. Workman seems to be quite correct, when he states that the Papacy has to bear much of the blame for the lowering of the moral and spiritual tone of monastic orders, for it used them under the guise of "papal protection," not only as a means of making money, but as a weapon against the episcopacy in each country, whose aims and ideals were

⁴⁴. Graham, op. cit., p. 105.

often at variance with those of the Papacy.⁴⁵

The Cistercian example had been a happy inspiration to St. Gilbert, and no doubt it had continued to inspire the Gilbertine religious whose houses were often established quite near Cistercian foundations. But this example was later to prove an unfortunate one with regard to the spiritual lives of both orders. The economic prosperity of thirteenth century England was, in the main, due to the fine wool which found its way all over Europe; and the Cistercian order was one of the leading producers of wool. The location of most of the Cistercian and Gilbertine houses was ideal for the rearing of sheep - a fact which soon impressed itself onto receptive minds in both orders. Rearing sheep and preparing the wool for home and overseas markets, involved even further participation in matters secular with the usual results. However much economic historians might praise the foresight and skill of the religious orders which became entangled with the wool trade, others can do little else but deplore the subsequent results. The Gilbertines' chief source of revenue was acquired from wool, and in the fourteenth century onwards it was in the form of cloth that the wool found markets and brought the money back to the sheep rearers. In John's reign, Gilbertine cloth was already well known; and in 1193, the Order's wool and cloth for that year was taken as its part in the ransoming of Richard I - a fate suffered by all the great wool producers. The order was exempted

⁴⁵. H. B. Workman. The Monastic Ideal, Chapter III.

from many tolls and customs, and was therefore tempted to act as a "factor" (or middle men) in the wool trade all over the country.⁴⁶ There were many royal ordinances issued against such trading which indicated how deeply in the mine of the world's economy the order had sunk. Its dealings were often patently illegal, and the debts which accrued came through pledging the wool for years in advance, while not taking into account that the yield in some years might be below average. For example in 1320, Sempringham owed £1,000 - a debt incurred by wool speculation with an Italian merchant. Italian merchants as well as the Jews often lent money to the order. Francesco Balducci Pegolotti wrote a book called La practica della Mercatura dealing with the wool trade of the fourteenth century. A list he included is quoted by W. Cunningham,⁴⁷ and this cites all the English monasteries concerned in the wool trade with Flanders and Italy. Eight Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire are quoted, and nine in other counties. Here are the entries for Sempringham Priory and that of St. Catherine - outside-the-walls, Lincoln.⁴⁸

"Samperinghamo la buona mar. 20 e lla mojana mar. 10½ e i locchi mar. 9., annone da 25 saccha;" and "Santa Chaterina di Nicchola la buona mar. 22½ e lla mojana tratti mar. 12½ il saccho, annone da 35 saccha per anno."

⁴⁶. Unless otherwise stated, the details of the Gilbertine participation in the wool trade are taken from Dr. Graham's articles in the Victoria County Histories, (Lincolnshire 2.) pp. 179 - 189.

⁴⁷. The Growth of English Industry and Commerce.

⁴⁸. Ibid.

The Order of Sempringham was never very wealthy and was thus more liable to feel the effects of natural or humanly-inspired disaster than, for example, the richer Cistercians. Between the years 1315 - 1321 most of England suffered a devastating famine caused by the flooding of fields which destroyed the crops. The death rate was high, partly because of starvation and partly owing to a plague.⁴⁹ In the Patent and Close Rolls of the reigns of Edward II and Edward III⁵⁰ there are many entries indicating that not a few Gilbertine houses were deeply in debt. As so many find today, it is not so much paying back the principal which hurts, but the exorbitant interest. Disaster seemed to follow disaster in the fourteenth century, the middle years of which witnessed the feared and fatal Black Death which found an excellent breeding ground among the insanitary dwellings of the day. In the two years, 1348 - 49, about half the population of England died, and all monastic houses suffered the loss of part or all of its inhabitants. Farming, trade, commerce and industry suffered heavily because of the acute shortage of labour; and it was the day of reckoning as far as the already dying-out class of serfs were concerned. They demanded and received commutation of their serfdom from their masters, lay and ecclesiastical, in exchange for money payments and the resulting class of freemen divided into two distinct and mutually hostile groups. One group

49. Graham, St. Gilbert, p. 140.

50. Graham, pp. 144 - 146.

was landless, and became the hired labourers; the other took advantage of the difficulties of the former landed feudal aristocracy and became tenants on the impoverished feudal domains. The comparative ease with which a labourer could now be hired and command a wage fifty percent higher than a few years previous to the Black Death, was the death knoll for the system of monastic lay brothers in pre-Reformation England. "Many were attracted into the ranks of labourers who might otherwise have become lay-brothers and given their services for nothing. . . ."51 In the past poverty and other forms of distress had caused monastic houses to seek to acquire yet more lands, and this happened again in the last half of the fourteenth century. Instead of pooling their resources and reconciling themselves to the abandonment of certain of their houses, and transferring the inmates of depleted houses to richer ones, the Gilbertines went a few more paces along the road of eventual destruction. They might acquire more land but very few pious people now presented properties to them, as the feeling was already present, one hundred and fifty years or so before the English Reformation, that monasteries were yearly becoming more anachronistic.

There seems to be little known record of the Order in the fifteenth century, and where there is a ray of light, it shows nothing but extreme poverty,⁵² coupled with the ever growing laxity and indifference of the Gilbertine religious. Even before St. Gilbert died, the number of women joining his Order

51. Graham, op. cit., p. 151.

52. Op. cit., p. 153.

was declining as many nunneries were being founded all over the country by the end of the twelfth century. The Wars of the Roses demoralised and ravaged the whole country, which would account for the apathy which was found in the Gilbertine houses when they were dissolved in the sixteenth century. But in fairness to the Order, it must be added that there is evidence that the regulations against learning of a purely intellectual kind were relaxed, and Gilbertine canons were to be found at the three universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Stamford from the fourteenth century onwards, though the latter was not destined to remain a centre of higher education. In 1242 Robert Lutrell founded Sempringham Hall for Gilbertine Students.

It was not until this century that research has shown that the religious houses dissolved by Henry VIII were already more than half way on the road of complete secularisation. Hardly any monasteries, especially after the Black Death had retained their lands complete - in fact most had been forced to lease large portions to secular tenants. Vocations to the religious life had dropped and the numbers in the various houses and their later history tells a sorry tale.⁵³ The Priory of St. Catherine's outside Lincoln was founded circa 1148 by Robert de Chesney, bishop of Lincoln. After St. Gilbert's return from the Cistercian Chapter of that year, the bishop gave the Priory many lands, and extra revenues to be taken from tolls. The Hospital of St. Sepulchre at Lincoln (which had been founded by Robert Bloet while he was

53. VCH op. cit., pp. 176 - 178.

bishop of Lincoln (1094 - 1123)) was given into the care of the canons; while the lay brothers held quite separate estates. Not long after lay sisters were added, whose task was care of the sick. St. Gilbert limited to sixteen the number of canons in this Priory with twenty lay sisters. It is not known whether there were ever any nuns at this Priory; but when it was dissolved only five lay sisters were working in the hospital. Compared with other houses of the Order, the Priory's endowments were considerable, largely owing to the very profitable wool trade. The thirteenth century saw considerable extensions and acquisitions. But in the fourteenth century the limitless needs of the sick caused a heavy drain on finances forcing the canons to send out collectors. To aid the good work, indulgences were granted to all who either gave money for the sick or helped to repair or build sections of the hospital. Reckless speculation in lands and wool resulted in the accumulation of many debts. The Priory suffered many violent and malicious attacks by its enemies, who often laid hands on the religious, and deliberately ruined their lands. Then came the Black Death, from which the Priory never fully recovered - a picture of depression which could be seen all over England's once flourishing country side. In 1538 the House was surrendered to Henry VIII's commissioners - two months before any other Gilbertine foundation. St. Catherine's had been singularly unfortunate in her last Prior, and this unworthy man seems to have been more than willing to have taken the pension offered by the Commissioners to him and thirteen canons.

But the three lay sisters received nothing. In the following year, the property was sold for £209. 5. 9d - a price which was quite high and more than the prices given for the other Lincolnshire houses.

Another fairly important house was the Priory of Alvingham, founded between 1140 - 1154 by Hugh de Scotney or one of his tenants as a double house. Within a few years this Priory possessed lands in Alvingham, Cockerington and Calthorp. St. Gilbert limited the number of nuns and lay sisters to 80 and that of canons and lay brothers to 40, all of whose lands were steadily increased in the thirteenth century by the purchase of properties and lands sold by the financially embarrassed lesser baronage. This Gilbertine house was established near the Cistercian foundation of Louth Park, and the two houses drew up an interesting compact. For example, neither could acquire or hire for a price cultivated or uncultivated land without the consent and advice of the other; and this arrangement was to be kept in reference to twenty townships in Lincolnshire. The house was surrendered in 1538, with the Prior, seven canons, the prioress and eleven nuns receiving pensions. In 1539 the property was bought with much of its domains for £131. 16. 5d.

It has been mentioned previously that real poverty and hardship had affected many houses, one of which must have been the Priory of St. Saviour, Bridgent in Horbling, which was too near Sempringham for it to receive grants of land which always went to the Mother House. St. Saviour had the

task of keeping a causeway and certain bridges over the Fens in good repair, a task which apparently was infrequently and badly carried out, even though tolls were granted to the house for this purpose. It suffered great distress during and after the Black Death, then in 1445 a disastrous fire nearly destroyed it completely. By the time of the Dissolution it was merely a cell of Sempringham,⁵⁴ and was surrendered as part of the latter's possessions in 1538. In 1535, St. Saviour had only been worth £5. 1. 11½d, and it was bought in 1539 for only £7. 7. 2d - even in that century a very small sum for property and lands.

Of the Gilbertine foundations dissolved by Henry VIII, there were twelve or thirteen, founded after St. Gilbert's death, which were largely for canons alone. When investigating the post - Gilbert history of the Order, one receives the impression that no longer were its houses exerting much influence on the world around, but as the cares of their lands accumulated, so did the interests of the religious turn inwards at the same rate, being only concerned with their lands and their properties, and disregarding everything outside the bounds of the house. Then came the enforced leasing out of much of the Order's lands, and the almost complete disappearance of the lay brothers, with the result that with decreasing numbers in all sections, the remaining religious must have become apathetic and concerned, in many cases, with the hard fight for mere survival. But this

⁵⁴. i.e. a house not autonomous in any way.

picture of Gilbertine decline, which after was mirrored in nearly all the religious houses at the time of the Dissolution, should not be used, as it was by Henry VIII's hench-men, as an excuse to condemn the Order out of hand for complete laxity. There seems no reason to think that the liturgical portions of the Rule were not still carried out, at least outwardly, even though the regulations forbidding the acquisition of property and all that that entailed had long ago been conveniently forgotten. The actual details of the dissolution of the Gilbertine houses, as far as the records allow, has been more than adequately dealt with.⁵⁵ The general procedure of the king's commissioners in setting about to force the religious houses to surrender is well known, and this plan was followed with its usual success with the Order of Sempringham.⁵⁶

Once the Order's houses fell, so did the Order forever, and the reasons for this are not far to seek. Just as its very "Englishness" had been the greatest source of its strength and wealth in the lifetime of its Founder, so the very same thing proved to be its undoing. Having no roots or even offshoots on the Continent, Henry VIII was able to cut down the Order and dig up its roots simultaneously. The

55. Graham, St. Gilbert, Chap. VII.

56. The last Master of Sempringham, Robert Holgate, and also Prior of Sempringham (which he should not have been while Master of the Order), was a disgrace to his Order and to himself. After surrendering Sempringham to the king's commissioners, he became the Protestant Archbishop of York in 1545.

Gilbertines can now only be seen through the mists of history - of interest only to religious historians and archeologists; but when these mists are penetrated, the Order can be seen resplendent in the light of its early fervour, even though this was to become merely a dull glow at the end of its long and varied career.

IV. VERACITY OF THE GILBERTINE CANON AND HIS PLACE IN
TWELFTH CENTURY WRITINGS.

Hagiography is a definite literary form and follows, to a lesser or greater degree, certain conventions and usages peculiar to itself and to its age - as do all other literary and art forms. Modern biographers and hagiographers are extremely scientific in the way they approach their subjects, and today it is almost impossible to find a "life" in which an uncritical attitude has been adopted. But the aims of medieval hagiographers and chroniclers were generally not concerned with giving a fair and unbiassed account of events or of people. There was no strict division of function between the hagiographer and chronicler - or to use present-day terminology, between the biographer and historian, ". . . the historian and annalist was ipso facto a hagiographer . . . for chronicler and hagiographer were traditionally one man, performing a double duty."⁵⁷ The hagiographer and chronicler had certain axes to grind, and grind them they did. Black or white were the only two colours recognised by both. The hagiographer held up his saint as a moral example, whose life was to be a lesson for all to imitate. Similarly men who, whatever other merits they had, were immoral or who showed scant respect for the Church's power and "liberties," were attacked unmercifully and damned outright for their contumely by the Chroniclers - always clerics whose visions were strictly limited to ecclesiastical horizons.

57. C. W. Jones, Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England, p. 57.

In order to place a saint on at least an equal footing with the whole galaxy of saints, the hagiographer had to exaggerate the worthiness and holiness of his subject; and the sure way in medieval times of proving his virtues, was to list as many miracles as there were pages to write on. The question of common sense and critical appraisal of what he wrote was outside the hagiographer's aims and methods. This picture is, however, very general, and individuals varied in their writings, depending on their own intellectual maturity, on the influences around them and on how far the latter affected them.

The biographer of⁵⁸ St. Gilbert has to be placed in this picture, yet at the same time particular notice must be taken of the age in which he lived. The twelfth century witnessed the growth of a remarkable crop of chronicles - a literary offshoot of the general renaissance of European culture - which, for the first time since the Venerable Bede, were products of minds capable of analysis and criticism. Up until the first half of the twelfth century, chroniclers had been in the main monks, and so out of direct contact with events outside their particular monastic environs. But the Black Monk monasteries suffered a decline in all respects at this time, and as the new orders were not concerned with

58. A Gilbertine canon, who ". . . est très probablement Ralph, sacriste de l'église de Sempringham, auteur du premier Recueil des miracles de saint Gilbert." (Bernard de Clairvaux, op. cit. p. 328 note 3). Ralph wrote the life and an account of the saint's miracles with a view to Gilbert's canonisation, and presented them to the inquiry of 1201. He dedicated them to Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury (1193 - 1205).

literary achievements, the pre-eminence in learning and literature passed to the Cathedral schools and to the new but flourishing universities. The Chroniclers of these new centres of thought, though still clerics, were generally in close contact with secular and courtly (episcopal, royal and papal) events; and it was not surprising that their minds, as reflected in their writings were much more receptive and liberal in outlook than their monastic predecessors. William of Malmesbury, Gerald of Wales, Roger Hoveden, Walter Map, Symeon and Turgot of Durham - the list is lengthy of the "new" men with their different approach to the recording of events and to the description of people. That is not to say they were unbiassed - Gerald of Wales is known for his vitriolic attacks on his many enemies, not least among them being the Cistercians, but they did attempt to analyse what they wrote, and tried to be more critical of their "heroes" and their behaviour. This rivallry had a salutary effect on the monks, for circa 1170 and onwards, once again the monasteries (old and new this time) were centres of literary endeavour.

It does not appear, however, that St. Gilbert's biographer was caught up to any large extent in the general trend of the twelfth century literary revival. His professed aim was still the same and if accuracy suffered while this aim was being fulfilled, then nothing could be done. Even as late as the Reformation, and for long after Protestant and Catholic hagiographers were extremely biassed, uncritical, unfair and often extremely vitriolic. It is

only in our own century that a different approach to the subject of all biographies has been fully appreciated and developed.

Yet one has to avoid being too severe on this clerical chronicler, and must try to judge him not entirely by our modern standards, but by his own. He felt he had a divine duty of perform by relating St. Gilbert's story, and to some extent he must be judged on whether he fulfilled his aim as satisfactorily as possible. Are the events chronicled probable, reasonable, and based on fairly good evidence? The question of miracles cannot be included here, because it must be kept in mind that miracles were accepted as being commonplace in the life of any holy person. As C. W. Jones points out, hagiographers have certain stock - in - trade phrases, incidents and miracles without which a saint's life could never be considered complete. "To enforce the notion of predestination, prodigies are often narrated about the saint's death."⁵⁹ Convention, not originality, was needed for the desired effect; and certainly St. Gilbert's biographer is full of conventional and commonplace hagiographical terms and occurrences.

The faults in the writing of Canon Ralph have to be mentioned, not only because they are indicative of those of all hagiographers of the age, but because they do detract from the better relating of Gilbert's life and works, and from the latter's credibility. The most common fault of all writers concerned with people and events, even in the twelfth

59. Jones, op. cit., p. 73.

century, was the almost complete lack of discretion in the selecting of materials. First-hand knowledge is treated as of equal worth as fifth-hand material, and in this case, any fact which might add to Gilbert's glory is included as being the truth. The canon is so keen to make his subject a saint on earth, with no vices or even imperfections of any kind, that St. Gilbert emerges in the most glorious technicolour of saintliness, which is not only quite unnatural but also very unfair to the saint. St. Gilbert becomes indeed a "plaster saint," thoroughly priggish and dull. When dealing with the revolt of the lay brothers,⁶⁰ for example, the author gives no hint whatever that these brothers, ignorant and earthy though they were, may have had a legitimate grievance against Gilbert - all humans err, even the founders of religious orders. But right at the conclusion of this lamentable affair, we learn, almost in passing, that after the lay brothers had asked Gilbert's forgiveness, he modified their Rule in the presence of St. Hugh, bishop of Lincoln some time afterwards. Ogger and Gerald, the leaders of the revolt were, it is true, proud and out for their own gain, but the rank and file who followed their bad lead wanted nothing except an equitable adjustment to their exceedingly rigorous rule, and, no doubt, a clear reiteration of their administrative duties with regard to the canons, whose advent had at first greatly disturbed them.

Another example of uncritical writing is the way the king and royal family are treated. Because the Gilbertines

60. See below, p. 127.

were exclusively English Henry II regarded them with favour, endowing them with much land and property, and granting many privileges and exemptions. Accordingly, we are never given a glimpse of the king's bad side and actions, not even during the Becket controversy; no more than a brief and gentle rebuke is administered to the angry and impulsive monarch.⁶¹ Queen Eleanor took her sons to be blessed by Gilbert,⁶² but not a word is said of the well-known lapses of the Queen and her children. Even the very anti-clerical King John is called "worthy."⁶³

This Life of St. Gilbert is the fullest extant, and there are no other sources with which it can be fully compared. So any criticisms levelled at this author tend to be based on modern standards and on the higher standards set by his contemporary chroniclers. It is by these norms that the Life appears unbalanced and incomplete; and one cannot avoid the feeling that much has been omitted about St. Gilbert - either accidentally or deliberately.

These criticisms would, no doubt, be set at nought by the author, as having no bearing on or relation to his aim. In all fairness to him the good points of his biography must be examined. He makes the point of stressing that he knew Gilbert very well indeed, often spoke with him and generally came under his benign influence. He often states quite definitely that Gilbert said this "to us" or "we saw" Gilbert

61. See below, p. 124.

62. See below, p. 141.

63. See below, p. 157.

do something else. Many details also must have come from first-hand witnesses, because in no other way could he have known much about them. Gilbert's early years were related by the saint himself, but details of his sojourn at Bishop Alexander's court, and of the beginnings of the Order seem to be second-hand knowledge. Perhaps the Ralph himself was one of the first to join the Order when the canons were added. But these favourable points cannot entirely offset the other and plentiful vague assertions concerning Gilbert's way of life, good works, premonitions felt by his mother before he was born and so on. On the other hand, the author does admit that Gilbert was physically deformed, and that in his early years this physical weakness was a mirror of mental lethargy. The notorious archdeacons are scathingly condemned, but this again is obviously done to heighten Gilbert's sanctity in contrast to their sinfulness. One feels that if Gilbert had accepted Bishop Alexander's offer of an archdiaconate in the Lincoln diocese, his biographer would have got round this inconsistency in some way. Bishop Alexander, "the Magnificent," gave unfailing moral and material support to Gilbert and the Order, but no mention is made of his utter worldliness and his neglect of things spiritual by his concern with those temporal: a state of affairs quite abhorrent to Gilbert himself. In this instance and when dealing with the royal family, Gilbert's biographer has gone to the other extreme from the usual forthright condemnations of evil doers by chroniclers of the earlier periods.

There is one other point in the canon's favour which should be included here. The documents relating to the lay brothers' revolt must have been seen by the author and carefully copied, and they are to be found in the three Mss. which are the sources for St. Gilbert's Life. These documents consist of eleven letters relating to the revolt, written by various English bishops to the Pope, by the king to the Pope and by the Prior of Bridlington to the Pope on Gilbert's behalf.⁶⁴ Dugdale has omitted all these letters except one in Monasticon, and this is the letter from William, bishop of Norwich to the Pope on Gilbert's behalf, urging the latter to realise Gilbert's innocence of the vicious charges brought forward by the wayward lay brothers.⁶⁵

In spite of the many faults manifested by St. Gilbert's biographer, what he maintains concerning Gilbert's own worth and the high regard with which all people felt for him, is borne out time and again by the many favourable references made in other contemporary chroniclers after Gilbert's death. Walter Map, although full of bitterness and ribaldry against most Orders, including the Cistercians, gave unstinting praise to the saint and to his flourishing and well-reputed Order.⁶⁶ Ralph de Diceto and Roger of Hoveden,⁶⁷ William of Newburgh⁶⁸

64. See below, the bibliography, p. 172 .

65. Monasticon, VI. 2, p. XXXI.

66. Map, De Nugis Curialium, ed. Wright, p. 59.

67. ed Stubbs, Rolls Series.

68. ed. Howlett, Rolls Series.

and John of Hexham⁶⁹ all mention the saint and the Gilbertines very kindly. So Ralph canon of Sempringham, if it were he who wrote his Master's Life, was only relating, admittedly in often flowery and exaggerated language, what many felt about St. Gilbert.

69. Rolls Series.

V. SOURCES FOR THE LIFE OF ST. GILBERT OF SEMPRINGHAM.

The primary sources for the life of St. Gilbert are contained in three manuscripts, two of which are in the British Museum (Cotton Cleopatra B1 - from the first half of the thirteenth century; and Harleian 468 - from the second half of the same century); and one is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. (Digby 36 - from the end of the fourteenth century). As with all original documents, these are available only to the few who have opportunity to study them. Accordingly, the research on St. Gilbert's life is done mainly from the Monasticon Anglicanum - a collection of medieval documents gathered together and edited by Sir William Dugdale (1605 - 1686), who did so much to bring to light and preserve countless manuscripts from all over England. The section on St. Gilbert contains most of the contents of the three manuscripts, though several miraculous occurrences are omitted, and all the extant letters on the Lay Brothers' revolt, except one,⁷⁰ Dugdale may have worked on the principle that letters and miracles add nothing of much importance to St. Gilbert's life.

After the Monasticon, John Capgrave's Life of St. Gilbert (written together with the Life of St. Augustine), is next in importance.⁷¹ John Capgrave (1393 - 1464) was an Augustinian Friar, who seems to have appreciated the close contact that

70. E. H. R. Op. cit., Professor Knowles has published all the letters. The one included in Monasticon, is number 5 in Knowles' list - that written by William, bishop of Norwich to the Pope on Gilbert's behalf. See above, note 66.

71. Cotton Manuscript, Vitellius D XV - now extinct.

had always existed between his Order and the Gilbertines. He wrote this work in English for the nuns at Sempringham who could understand little Latin. He included many miracles not found in Monasticon, and one of these is quite impressive. Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury fell ill at the time of St. Gilbert's translation in 1202, and was only cured after beseeching Gilbert's intercession.⁷² Capgrave also included the text of Innocent III's sermon on the saint which was sent to England to be read there.⁷³ But apart from the intrinsic value of having St. Gilbert's life written in English, which is of interest to students of medieval literature, Capgrave does not add much to our knowledge, and even omits important facts to be found in Monasticon. He does not find it necessary, for example, to mention Gilbert's physical deformity and his boyhood idleness.

A friar of a different order, Pierre Helyot (1660 - 1716) of the Franciscans was another Dugdale in his way, only he was concerned solely with the history of religious orders.⁷⁴ He travelled widely in France and Italy collecting material for his eight - volume work whose title is far too long to quote here.⁷⁵ The history of the Gilbertines, although extinct by the time he wrote, finds a place in his work, and is interesting because the Order is seen through a Frenchman's eyes.

72. Capgrave, The Life of St. Gilbert, p. 116.

73. Ibid, pp. 136 - 138.

74. Encyclopedeia Britannica, Vol. XIII, p. 256, B.

75. See the Bibliography, p.173 .

All future Lives of the saint were based in some way upon the above-mentioned sources. The Bollandists in their Actae Sanctorum for February 4th, include two short lives of St. Gilbert, one of which is merely a reprint from Capgrave. Then the saint's life is included in Butler's and in other Lives of the Saints, but no new material comes to light. There are two modern authors who have done a great deal of research on St. Gilbert and who must be mentioned here. Dr. Rose Graham published her Life of St. Gilbert and the Gilbertines in 1901, and this book is still the only one written in English. Mlle. R. Foreville, of the University of Rennes, forty years after Miss Graham's book came out, produced her Le Livre de Saint Gilbert de Sempringham in 1943, and she has unearthed a number of additional facts, while substantially following Miss Graham in most respects. The Gilbertine Uses and Rites have been discussed in several publications, a list of which has been included in the bibliography.

There are, of course, hundreds of references to St. Gilbert and the Gilbertines in various manuscripts, secular and ecclesiastical; and no doubt, there are hundreds more unknown. But from the evidence we now have it seems unlikely that any new material which may come to light could alter, to any large degree, the work of Miss Graham and Mlle. Foreville. Professor David Knowles of Cambridge has done research on the Lay Brothers' revolt,⁷⁶ which is quite invaluable. The work of these three bring us right up to date on Gilbert of Sempringham.

76. See above, p. 14, note 12.

THE LIFE OF SAINT GILBERT, CONFESSOR.

I.

The shining light of justice who enlightens all men coming into this world, and who wishes them to come to a knowledge of His Name, illumined the faltering parts of a failing world by the rays of His new light in a time of decline. His star, when its ray had been sent down from heaven, was lit under the shadows of our night, just as a star lights up the surrounding sky. This star was a man of irreproachable life whose name was Gilbert, chosen as a servant of God in those parts of England at a place known as Sempringham. He was born into an illustrious family - a fact which in itself is often, as it should be, a spur to the pursuit of virtue. He surpassed all other members of his family and his age in his exemplary conduct. His father Jocelyn, was a hardy soldier, and a man both wealthy and good: a Norman having many possessions in various parts of Lincolnshire. His mother was sprung from English stock of faithful parents, but by birth inferior to her husband's rank.¹ Parents dwelling in the midst of their own people make their whole progeny famous by the generation of so great a son, the glory of whose future greatness was revealed, it is said to his mother, either through a sign or by a dream.

1. Actually in St. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 3, Dr. Graham has shown that the non in this sentence in Monasticon p.v. is an interpolation by a later hand in the Cleopatra Ms. (see above, Chap. IV of the Introduction). It is not to be found in the Digby nor in the Harleian Mss. Therefore Gilbert's mother was not of the same social standing as her husband.

For before the infant was born, she saw in her dreams that the moon came down from heaven and she held it in her lap. Undoubtedly this was a sign, as afterwards it was made manifest, that her offspring, as a torch prepared by God, should wax great as time went on, in the world: just as a spark lying hidden in the ashes, shines with a great brightness when placed in a candlestick,² as a light for all men who dwell in the house of the Lord.

Not without warrant did the Holy Ghost compare him with the moon, for as a member of the Church, which is the designed moon for all eternity, he appeared in his early years as one of very slight form. But among the vicissitudes of his worldly life, by a light borrowed from the sun which is Christ, after alternations of waxing and waning, he prospered steadily; and at length reclined in the bosom of the Mother of Divine Faith, afterwards being received into the chosen repose of the heavenly mother, Jerusalem. That is to say, that at the beginning of his life, as he was young in years, he was likewise mediocre in reputation and virtue; and he was so despised in his father's house, as he was in the habit of telling us, that the servants did not deign to eat with him. His bodily appearance was also misshapen and uncouth, with no noticeable quality of mind which was able to redeem the fault of his deformed exterior. There was, however, lying dormant within him whatever afterwards, through the granting of grace, he could be or was in his maturity, in the goodness, that is to

2. Mark, IV. 21., Matthew, V. 15., Luke, VIII. 16, and XI. 33.

say, of an excellent nature. He was as a lamp, despised in the minds of the rich, prepared for the appointed time. Thus the Lord wishing the gift of His goodness to be attributed to supernatural grace and not to human efficacy, makes him a pauper and then enriches him, humiliates and then lifts him up; elevating one who was destitute from the dust, and raising up the pauper from the dung heap, so that he may sit with princes and possess the throne of glory. The Lord brings forth clouds from the ends of the earth - He, Who summons those things which are not, as though they were, choosing the weakness of the world to confound whatever is strong.

HIS ADOLESCENCE.

II.

So with divine dispensation, whose mercy is far above our understanding, he applied himself to the study of letters in his early life, because, as is rightly understood, there are greater rewards in the mode of life to be brought out of the chosen vessel and armory of the Holy Ghost. But the burden of learning - usually a heavy affliction for boys - frightened him in his early years, so at first his progress was slow. Then his parents' guidance brought him a small amount of assistance towards an academic discipline. Quite abruptly, however, he was jolted from his former inertia, I do not know whether from shame or fear, and deserting his country he travelled into parts of France where, while

he searched himself inwardly, he began to empty his mind of childish things, shed his early sloth and plunged earnestly into the art of letters although his friends proved little help to him in this respect.³

But the youth of fair promise learnt quickly in his schooling in virtue and in the discipline of moral training, soon becoming the devotee of every form of goodness of which he afterwards became the advocate. Being informed for so long with liberal and spiritual studies, he then deserved the name and position of a teacher. Indeed since morals adorn knowledge, and since without virtue wisdom is a widow, he earnestly set to work to wed the discipline of a most upright life with that of liberal knowledge - free from those things which the wanton world of vice encourages. Even then he breathed the savour of the kind of faith to which he already aspired; for indeed at the age when the corruptible body is nearly always at war with the soul, the flame of illicit desire more dangerously insinuates itself into human hearts, and in this fight even many older and more learned people succumb. But inwardly restraining his spirit he did not give in to his lower nature either by indulgence, or in the enjoyment of wordly pleasures. No one ever heard from the

3. A young man, who had any bent towards learning, always tried to study for a while on the continent. In this way, many of the current European religious and literary trends reached and flourished in England. In Chap. XVIII of Bernard de Clairvaux op. cit., p. 327 Gilbert's place of study in France is stated. "...il vint faire ses études à Paris, rentre dans son pays avec la licence doctorale...." So it would appear that Gilbert went to one of the leading centres of learning and did extremely well there.

beginning to the end of his life that he ever touched a woman. For now, even then become a martyr, he offered himself as a sacrifice to the Lord, thus deserving to carry his body as a vessel of purity for the Lord for up to one hundred years, because he had kept himself pure. Since he had surmounted the serious problems of adolescence, he was later chosen, not unworthily, for the difficult task of extending his rule over the weaker sex.

HOW HE DIRECTED HIS SCHOOLS.

III.

Finally he returned from France to his native land, and began to trade with the talent of knowledge which he had received in abundance, passing it on to the boys and girls from the surrounding areas, and bringing in return from them a great deal of profit to the table of his Lord. For these are the first ones in which the Order of Sempringham was founded, and whom he himself, while still a lay man, organised while they were still lay people, not only in the rudiments of secular learning, but also in morals and in the monastic discipline. He compelled the boys, who had been forced away from the freedom of playing and wandering about at will, to be silent in church, to sleep in a kind of dormitory, not to speak or read unless in designated places, and to practise other forms of an upright life - all on the pattern of life in a monastery. For from boyhood this had been his favourite employment. Always labouring and unwearied he remained preoccupied with the task which

is considered the highest of virtues, namely the gaining of souls for God. Thus he was able to succeed in all things, by word, deed and example. Indeed, he kept himself unspotted from this world always occupying himself with excellent and spiritual works.

Conforming only in dress and countenance to ordinary people, inwardly he was quite different. While wearing rich and showy clothes as befitted the status of his birth, he changed the shape of them as far as possible to conform with humility. He was outstanding as a lover of justice and truth, a conscientious cultivator of chastity, sobriety and all other virtues, which caused him to become venerated and praised by all, and won for himself everyone's affection and favour. Now at last his father rejoiced in the goodness of his son, and began to cherish the youth with fatherly affection, giving to him of his own riches everything necessary. At length he presented his son to the vacant parish churches of Sempringham and Torrington founded on his own demesne; and as is the custom of the country to the bishop of the place also. Gilbert was unwilling, it is said, but consented that he might defend his father's rights of patronage in these churches, to which he was legitimately admitted and canonically installed. But after many troublesome suits in the courts, which his enemies ranged against him seeking to remove his father's patronage and his own person, he eventually possessed his benefice in peace paying enough of his own debt for his position by showing, in his excellent ministering of the church, as much care for spiritual as for material matters.

HOW HE DIRECTED HIS CHURCHES.

IV.

He lived in a porch of the church of Blessed Andrew at Sempringham, leading a most praiseworthy life alone, except for a chaplain of upright life named Galfridus. Before living there, they had been lodged in the house of a certain parishoner in the town. There a strange delusion seized both of them concerning the landlord's daughter who served them faithfully. It seemed to Gilbert that in a dream he put his hand into the bosom of this girl, and was unable to withdraw it. Being a man of outstanding chastity, he reacted violently to this dream lest it presaged, as human nature is frail, a future sin of fornication. When he revealed his dream and temptation to the priest, the latter in turn confessed that he also was harassed by the same unpleasant dream. After this, following the counsel of the Apostle,⁴ they speedily left that lodging, and in the cemetery of the church built a house for themselves where they left behind the activities of the village; and always together they never moved far from the church. But truth to tell, this vision in the dream, far from being the advance warning of future sin, foretold glorious achievement. For this virgin, after a while was to be one of the first of seven virgins, in whom the same father launched the congregations of his whole Order, and into whose bosom the priest and his diligent friend inserted their hand as into the recesses and repose of the church whose founder he was, whence he could not withdraw it.

⁴. St. Paul.

For he concentrated all his work and virtue towards the spiritual building up of a good conscience and perpetual peace; and as long as he lived he could not be driven from this sense of duty, never freeing himself from the obligation of protection. So in his church he was assiduous at his Holy meditations, and was a prompt, farseeing and faithful disbursor of the rations of wheat of his Father's household, so to speak. The result of the guidance his hearers received was that they kept to the monastic ideal of life for the most part, even including those who had taken no vows. Removed as they were from convivialities and uncleanness, from public shows and drinking bouts, they devoted themselves to works of mercy and learnt duly to pay the church tithes. Whenever they entered their church they could be distinguished from other parishoners of Sempringham by their devotion at prayer and lowly mien which their spiritual father Gilbert had taught them.

Since the Samaritan has to pour both wine and oil into the wounds of the wounded man, this doctor of souls in his role of protector, learned to use both kinds of treatment according as the time or place suggested. One of his deeds, which must be reckoned not a miracle but a righteous act, shows how severe he was when attacking the rebellious, just as he showed himself gentle when exhorting those who were well inclined and subservient. A certain man, one of his parishoners, behaved fraudulently concerning the tithe of his produce which he ought to have surrendered to the church when the time for its collection and that of those other dues

came by. Instead he placed the offerings with his remaining corn in his granary at home for his own use at a later date. This the rector knew about, so he forced that farmer to turn all his grain out of his barn, and to found out each sheaf in front of him; from the tenth part, which seemed to belong to him and the church, he had a pile made in the middle of the village green which he then destroyed by setting fire to it. He did this out of hatred of such a crime and as a warning to others, thinking it shameful to hand over for the use of man that which had been stolen from God and His Holy Church. For he was a high-spirited man, and regarded the loss of material goods a small price to pay for the maintaining of justice and the rights of the Church.

HOW HE DWELT IN THE COURT OF BISHOP ALEXANDER.

V.

Meanwhile he entered the service of his diocesan bishop, Robert, known as Bloet,⁵ bishop of Lincoln, in whose house he served at first as a clerk. Then after Bloet's death he lived without complaint at the court of Alexander the former's successor.⁶ He considered it was an excellent thing to live under episcopal rule and to devote himself to such a purpose rather than to wander here and there with complete license as is the custom of the witless. But although he was involved in the restlessness of the court, he never neglected

5. Robert Bloet, bishop of Lincoln, (1093 - 1123).

6. Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, (1123 - 1148).

his duty of pastorel care;⁷ but on the contrary, by first devoting his chief attention to his own affairs, he was able to take charge of all matters concerning repayment of debts, annuities or other reasonable payments. He preserved and gave everything to the poor, except what he needed for life, and this he obtained from the revenues of Sempringham, for he did not take for his own use any of the revenues of Torrington. When he was away from his own hospice, spending his time around the bishop, he saw God as a guest in orphans, widows, the aged and the enfeebled sick, whom he fed and clothed with the fruits of his own husbandry and with the revenues of the churches.

To what extent the love of God burned within this man who kept the commands of charity in respect of his neighbours so well, is witnessed by many examples of his utterances and by the regular devotion to prayer. For although it was his habit throughout life to pray at all hours, he secretly stole hours for prayer whenever he could. He did not do this, as so many do, merely with moving lips while his mind dwelt on various distractions, but with his mind, hands and eyes turned up to heaven. It was by the beating of his breast and by genuflection that he indicated the desire of his inmost soul. Some instances prove this point. Once he invited a

7. The fact that Gilbert, although living in the court of bishops who were better administrators of the king than they were churchmen, looked after his churches with great solicitude, is a telling commentary on the usual behaviour of incumbents of parish churches. Many of these shamefully neglected the cares and duties of their parishes, and spent their time enjoying the worldly and often wealthy pleasures often to be found in episcopal courts at this time.

fellow clerk at the bishop's court to pray with him. As they stood together before the steps of the altar singing in descant the Psalms of David, whenever the name of the Lord or God occurred or any matter in a Psalm which indicated a halt in their singing, Gilbert prostrated himself, and following his example the clerk did the same. This went on for so long that he became worn out, and swore he would never pray with Gilbert again. At another time, a certain bishop received hospitality from Gilbert's Lord in the Chamber of the bishop where Gilbert usually slept. As he lay awake this same bishop saw on the opposite wall by the light of the moon the shadow of a man - sometimes standing, sometimes on his knees, throughout the whole night. Not knowing what this was but thinking it might be a ghost, the bishop lapsed into great mental numbness. But when he carefully investigated this shadow, he found the man of God standing before his couch praying, and he noticed his elevated hands, and his knees often bent in genuflection. The bishop arising early the next morning, jokingly accused his host of having in his Chamber a dancer who had terrified him the previous night. So we notice this as an example; for he himself testified that while at the court he undertook more fasts, vigils, prayers and other spiritual exercises than afterwards; and in this way he brought his body into subjection. For as his servants stated, when he accused himself, he would scourge his body more before his conversion than after it. Once, however, he had received the habit of holy religion, it seemed that his flesh was conquered. When he became the guardian of the

vineyard, he carried out fewer punishments as he could not guard his own vine so well. This was not through laziness and neglect, but should necessarily and charitably be blamed onto the occupation with the duty of his Order; and indeed we read that the Blessed Martin⁸ was less virtuous after he was bishop than before.

WHEN HE WAS FIRST ORDAINED AS A CLERK.

VI.

When he was called into the ranks of the Lord and made a steward in the house of God, he agreed to be invested with the insignia of ecclesiastical orders, making himself equal to each duty as far as human nature allows. Corresponding to the growing dignity of positions was the increase in the holiness of his life. In addition to his own sense of duty, the Holy Ghost indeed prepared a dwelling place in him; so that it was clear that he received both the reality as well as the character of the sacrament. For those people, as it is authoritatively testified, in whom the grace of the Holy Ghost is diffused in seven-fold channels, when they receive Holy Orders receive more grace in this same advancement up the spiritual ladder. It happened thus with this servant of God when he was raised from true worth and holiness to a state of even greater worth and piety. His clothes were not extravagant and so suitable for a clerk; he was also temperate and sparing in eating and drinking. He never covered his tonsured head. He only spoke when it was necessary, and his

8. St. Martin of Tours. (bishop of Tours, 371 - 397).

walk was measured and grave, so that he was already considered to be more of a regular canon than a secular clerk.

WHEN HE WAS MADE AN UNWILLING PRIEST.

VII.

When his stature and sterling qualities were recognised amid widespread wonder, whatever was known of him was everywhere spread abroad, and he was hailed as a devout and learned man. He became the model of a just man, even being regarded as such by his patron whose life he had himself come to imitate. From being a pupil he became the bishop's master, and laid before the latter's feet steppingstones on the path to virtue. He, noting Gilbert's foresight and love of justice, thought it desirable and necessary to give him the power of loosing and binding sins. His sanctity gave him the power and his discretion gave him the knowledge by which he could fairly express the judgements of the Church. So he wanted Gilbert to become the judge and intimate advisor not only of the sins of the whole people, but also of his the bishop's own flock - and this in fact happened. The holy man was at first violent in his opposition. He turned the proposition over in his mind feeling unworthy to administer so great a sacrament; and considered that it would be too difficult to maintain himself firmly on such a lofty pedestal. To what eminence and dignity does the service of God call a man, and how meagre in comparison are human capabilities. He, Gilbert, would be called upon to give account of his stewardship in this service; and to what dangers would he be exposed

after his appointment as God's mediator, when he himself was in need of the prayers of others. Furthermore, he directed his thoughts to the very greatness of the sacrament. If one receives or administers it unworthily, he makes himself a worse man. A fall from a higher station is always the more grievous; and what might be regarded as a foible in a man of lowly dignity, is judged a crime in his superior. The higher one's station, the more blame is attached to his shortcomings, and the privileges of the order deflates blindly-raised presumption. The greater the borrowing the greater the debt; and God exacts the interest of repayment as He pleases. His superior having regard to the interests of the Church and the grace of the person involved, exerted praiseworthy violence on one praiseworthily resisting and following the example of blessed Valerius⁹ and Epiphanius,¹⁰ he ordained the unwilling Gilbert priest. From a sense of duty Gilbert accepted the dignity; for the same reverence with which he had sought to decline the honour, persuaded him to welcome it as an act of obedience. Being a subject himself, he subjected his will to that of his Superior; for a Superior is often able to recognise qualities in his subordinates better than they themselves. Thus Gilbert deserved high praise - from the point of view of both his willingness and

9. St. Valerius, bishop of Saragossa. He was persecuted under Diocletian, and died in 315 A. D.

10. St. Epiphanius, probably the Palestinian who had been a monk from his youth. He became bishop of Salamis (in Cyprus), and was famous as a preacher against all forms of heresy. He died in 403 A. D.

his reluctance; because, while his sense of reverence made him unwilling, his obedience compelled him to accept this office. The centurian who thought himself unworthy of Christ's presence in his house is praiseworthy;¹¹ while at the same time Zacchaeus¹² is blessed for accepting Christ as a guest. But Peter, although he confessed himself a sinner and was terrified by the miraculous draught of fishes,¹³ denied Christ, and is only blamed for it. Judas on the other hand, since he was not afraid to act irreverently, is damned.

HOW HE SPURNED THE RICHES OF THE WORLD.

VIII.

So he became a priest, and his ardour for this task had been increased by his youthful spiritual exercises. Now he was more mature and more learned in doctrinal matters, he was more in a position to set an example. So, by deeds rather than by words, he made known his idea of what the title and duty of a priest consists; and anyone who had not been told could tell that here was a true priest of God. His unfailing charity showed, after he had become a priest, that he was indeed a recipient of the Seven Gifts of God. So it is that the beginning of good works is a contempt of all that is evil; and it is generally found that when faults are cast off, the

11. Matthew, VIII. 5 - 13. Luke, VII. V.V. 2 - 10.

12. Luke, XIX. 2 - 8.

13. Luke, V. 3 - 9.

exercise of virtue grows in their place. At first he strove with all his might to keep himself unstained by the world, so that whatever he did afterwards he would be able to offer a pure and untainted faith to God. Once freed from former shackles, he despised himself and his connections with the world in order to embrace the Cross. As I said, he renounced everything and since he put behind him all excess and the tenacious desire to possess things, he only used mundane things for the necessities of life. He undertook the journey as a pilgrim on the road and did not count on assistance for life, nor the reward of his country. He knew just how much he needed to satisfy the demands of nature, and what he left after the need was satisfied could go for another's need. Then it happened that a certain archdiaconate of the Church of Lincoln, rich in resources and honours, was offered to him, but he refused it saying that he knew no quicker nor more ready road to destruction.¹⁴ He said that that road was not the cause but the occasion of perdition, since the office of Archdeacon does not force one into sin; but at the same time it is difficult to administer this sort of office without sin. The ministry of the Church is good and it is useful to one who serves her well; but there are few who hear causes for the sake of souls, but many who do so in order to make money. Therefore he feared the office lest an increase of faults followed an increase of riches,

14. The office of an Archdeacon was, in the Middle Ages, generally recognised as being one for those who did not care for their own or for others' spiritual welfare. Cf. Chaucer's Prologue to The Canterbury Tales p. 43 in Neville Coghill's verse adaptation. (Penguin Classics.)

and if he were to draw more out of the fount of money he would not be satisfied from the urn of avarice. He preferred properly to look after the few souls whom he had in his charge, than with many commitments fail to do what he ought.

Indeed, since it is an aspect of justice to avoid evil things, he, being a true priest, set out to do good works, striving diligently to subject his daily cross to the sacred fire which always burnt in the tabernacle of his breast, and in which he burnt himself as a sacrifice to the Lord. For it is not sufficient merely to refrain from seizing or lusting after the goods of others, we have to strive to give our own goods away. So he conducted himself with this ideal in view, but not with blind self-assurance nor with indiscriminate actions. Because he wanted to reach the pinnacle of virtue, he sought out what was the better way and truer path to perfection and seized it. At first, therefore, he laid the foundation of charity in deep humility which consists of a contempt for one's own qualities whose recognition awaits the glory of heaven. As he achieved these internal virtues, he rid himself of access to wordly goods which are regarded, erroneously, as improving men, but in actual fact degrade them - listening to the voice of the Lord, "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give to the poor. Come then and follow Me."¹⁵ So he disposed of his goods and gave them to the poor, not from any regard of vain-glory, but out of zeal for charity whence his righteousness remains forever. When he had decided to divide his goods among the

15. Matthew, XIX. 21. Mark X. 21. Luke, XVIII. 22.

poor, he chose such of the poor whose poverty was honest and accompanied by the fear and love of God; so that he, sowing in blessings, reaped the blessed rewards of his charity.

THE BEGINNING OF THE ORDER OF SEMPRINGHAM,
AND THE ENCLOSING OF THE RELIGIOUS.

IX.

At that time when Henry I¹⁶ was reigning in England, as the same author relates in the book which he wrote about the construction of the monasteries, there were certain secular girls in the village of Sempringham whose minds received the seed of God's word which Gilbert himself had very often preached. The girls were already white to harvest¹⁷ and they blossomed out with dew and warmth. These, desiring to conquer their sex and wordly distractions, longed to be joined to the heavenly spouse without hinderance; and the holy Gilbert full of God's love saw this. When he was disposed to give the parish churches of Sempringham and Torrington with divine protection, and bestow his property on the needy, he could not find men who wished to live for God in so strict a manner; so he thought it worthwhile to give his wealth for the use of such as were deemed worthy, and who might claim the kingdom of heaven for themselves and for others. Therefore he made friends of the mammon of ~~an~~ unrighteousness who would receive him into the everlasting

16. Henry I. (1100 - 1135).

17. John, IV. 35.

tabernacles.¹⁸ Not at first, however, did Gilbert find followers for his teaching among men but among women, and he called them together to rejoice at the finding of the lost coin;¹⁹ and these afterwards gained many friends in their chastity. There must be a great willingness to do services for the less fortunate. That is the way compassionate nature urges; it is what divine counsel advises, and from it arise hopes of greater gain.

Indeed, the fruit of the virgins was a hundred-fold; and in order to preserve their state, leaving all, he received a hundred-fold and possesses eternal life. Besides, he brought his goods to the just according to that command concerning the true laws of giving, "Give to the good, and receive not sinners."²⁰ So he consecrated seven of these virgins who were burning with the desire for heaven and whose souls were temples to the Spirit of seven-fold gifts, so that their virginity might become meritorious when adorned with virtues. For what profit accrues if the lamp has no oil; what benefit is there in having a pure body with an evil mind or a tainted heart; for this might be the state of good infidels whose whole life is yet a sin. But so that these virgins might become holy in mind, and their bodies vessels of sanctity, he prepared them by laying before them those precepts by which they would work for their own salvation.

18. Luke, XVI. 9.

19. Luke, XV. V.V. 8 - 9.

20. Ecclesiasticus, XII. 5.

Since no one who is eager to do God's will entangles himself in wordly affairs, so as to be pleasing to Him to whom he dedicated himself, and since tender virginity can easily be tempted by the craftiness of the serpent if exposed to all the attractions of the world on every side, Gilbert shut them up away from the noise of the world and from the sight of men. So, on entering the king's chamber, the betrothed would be free to receive the embraces of Him alone. Since it is not sufficient to abstain from evil to gain salvation unless the result of good works follow, Gilbert also laid down for them a law of sanctity, and taught them those things which are pleasing to their heavenly spouse; and taught them always to cling to His Chaste embraces by carefully chosen actions. In this way he gave them the precepts of life and discipline: that is, chastity, humility, obedience and charity - persuading, indeed ordering them to keep these ways and others of good living. They joyously received these things which they carried out with devotion.

For the likeness of a precious pearl shone in their minds, to gain which they gave both themselves and all they had, and so acquired it. Although human, to achieve their desire, they yet lived on a supernatural plane, but they could not ignore their humanity and live outside their flesh. So Gilbert administered for their use all those things which carnal need demands - in food, clothing, buildings and in the other necessities of life according to the manner and measure of their several natures. In this way also when the nuns' houses had been duly organised as the demands of religion

require, and the cloister closed up on all sides, he enclosed lay sisters of Christ who alone would live there under the wall of the Church of Blessed Andrew the Apostle in the village of Sempringham at the north wing - all done with the help and advice of the venerable bishop Alexander. A window, however, was left unsealed through which the necessities of life could be sent into the convent. He wished to place uncleanness where it belonged - in the world, and to banish it from their land, from their kindred and paternal homes, up to the point that they now conformed to the principles of the Church. On the other hand, as they had become the Church they forgot these things: that is to say, departed from all curiosity, concupiscence, and worldly ambition, so that they might convert the desire of their beauty into a desire for the heavenly King. He wished, I say, to show through this incarceration of their bodies, the chaining of their souls to God, and to ensure their separation from many things of the world which often separates one from closeness to God. Since he would not allow them to leave under any circumstances even for the task of administering and acquiring necessities for themselves, he allotted for their service some girls from poor families to act as servants, who were to be dressed in secular habit, and whose care it was to see that whatever had to be given or received should be passed through that window. Had men been able to live without the necessities of life, Gilbert would have even sealed up that window which he allowed to be open only at the fitting time. There was a door, but it was never open unless he gave

the word; and then not so they could go through it, but that he might enter when he was on business with them. He himself kept its key which he always used to carry about with him wherever he went, as though it were the badge of a jealous man.

THE CALLING OF THE LAY SISTERS.

X.

Besides making provision for their peace and quiet in case anything in the way of external disorder should occur, Gilbert learnt from religious and prudent men that it was not safe that young secular women, wandering about wherever they pleased, should minister to the nuns, lest they corrupt good habits with evil talk and relate or do something tainted with the worlds' godlessness which might upset minds steeped in monastic ideals. So it happened through the persuasion and advice of these men that these serving maidens asked that a habit might be given to them together with a life of Religion, in order that they might serve the handmaids of Christ in a poor but honourable life. See how the seed of corn when it falls to the earth brings forth another ear, which Blessed Gilbert saw and rejoiced in his heart because of this devotion for the faith. But he did not wish to place the heavy yoke of the vow swiftly and lightly on those untrained, especially on the simple and ignorant who promise many things they do not understand and more than they can undertake, in case afterwards in their zeal for repentance they cast off that yoke to their greater ruin and the overthrow of holy religion. For the

spirits of the neophytes must be proved lest Satan transform himself into an angel of light,²¹ or the wolf put on the fleece of a lamb, the sparrow the feathers of a hawk, and the rustic ass the limbs of a lion. So that they might understand what they did and could make up their own minds on reaching the requisite age, he told them beforehand and laid stress on all the difficulties of monastic discipline and way of living - a way of life more confined than they had ever known or seen anywhere. He preached a contempt of the world and the laying aside of all private possessions; the curbing of their will and the mortification of the flesh; the never-ending labour and the infrequent rest; the many vigils and broken sleep; the extended fast days; the small amount of food; the rough clothing and the lack of grooming; the enclosed state of the cloister to prevent their doing any evil or wickedness and to prevent their speaking at any time instead of keeping silent. He also stressed the regularity of prayer and meditation, lest they mentally dwelt upon unseemly things; all of which they asserted was pleasing to them on account of God. They reckoned on hardship in place of soft living; work instead of rest; strength instead of spinelessness - provided only they could obtain what they desired. The necessity of poverty and the task of begging impelled them to wish to submit to hardships, so that they could ensure their everlasting reward. Meanwhile, the love of God and the salvation of souls attracted them as the means, through temporal labour, of meriting eternal rest. In this way virtue accrues from necessity. For although the end of the

21. 2 Corinthians, XI. 14.

undertaken task proved to be less than perfect, perhaps, in certain things, yet in the long run it did not hinder but secured the end of good work. But Gilbert in his foresight still did not want to bind them to the vow, as custom dictates probation for the religious life; indeed he urged them to wait for a whole year so that their desire might grow with the delay.²²

THE CONVERSION OF THE LAY BROTHERS.

XI.

Since woman's care avails little without the help of man, Gilbert added men to the Order and appointed them to do the external and heavy tasks - that is to say, some who had worked in his household and on his lands, some whom he had supported from childhood, some who had fled from their masters²³ and who had freed themselves by taking vows of religion, and finally some who were outcasts and beggars. For there was a servant in the Gospels,²⁴ who on the word from his Lord, went out into the streets and lanes of the city, and whomever he found - the poor, the sick, the blind and lame - he forced to enter for the purpose of filling his Lord's house. So it was that these men, just as those in the parable, at first from lack of human needs and then from the

22. By the twelfth century, the probation period for a novice in most monasteries was negligible.

23. By becoming a religious, a villein could break the feudal bond which tied him to one master and to one piece of land for life.

24. Luke, XIV. 21 - 23.

desire of heavenly life, sought and longed for the same object which the lay sisters had, and upon whom in the same way Gilbert bestowed the same attention as he had on the former. Then at last he gave them all, lay brothers and sisters, the habit as a sign of humility and of their renunciation of this world's attractions. He also preached to them many grave and a few less serious matters, which we have noted above, besides these things which are suitable for the soul: such as, humility, obedience and patience, and other similar virtues which are difficult to put into practice, but are sources of great gain. All these they accepted most willingly, and pledged themselves under oath to keep them. Lo, the talent doubled, a single one he received in the case of the women, and then this doubled from the men and women together. Behold this union of women, like the necklace of a bride fashioned by the hand of the craftsman.

THE SPREADING OF THE MONASTERIES.

XII.

Already the time had arrived that the chosen men should go out with the chosen women into the field of the world and remain in the villages and cities of the people. Already the day was drawing near when the vine, whose roots the Lord had planted, might fill the earth, spreading its branches to the shores of the sea and its shoots to the river, in order to disseminate in the course of time, by the will of God, the seed which He Himself had sown in the first parents of that life. Many rich men and nobles in England, lords and barons,

seeing and approving the work which the Lord began, and discerning the good that would follow, offered farms and estates and many possessions to the holy father; and under his guidance they began to build many monasteries throughout several areas. The Bishop Alexander of Lincoln himself began, and the illustrious king of the English, Henry II,²⁵ finished all these undertakings which the man of God with fear and trembling and with a certain amount of compulsion accepted; while resisting a great deal and wholly despising even the accepted gifts, so that he might always choose holy poverty. He also feared the numerous faults which marked servants of pride, according to that saying, "In the multitude of the people is the glory of the King."²⁶ To begin with, when he had enclosed these first seven he did not consider placing many more above those already living; but when he saw the work of God increase through the multiplying of the monasteries, he did not wish to stand in the way of the will of God, neither to obstruct the devotion of the rich nor to be indifferent to the sustenance of God's servants; knowing this to be a virtue from God and not his own. So he committed all things to the wisdom of the counsels of God, Who always uses the ministry of good and evil in His own good time, and always in a perfect way.

WHEN HE WENT TO THE LORD POPE EUGENIUS.

XIII.

25. Henry II, (1154 - 1189).

26. Proverbs, XIV. 28.

Seeing that the sons of God were increasing daily in number, and advancing in virtue until they became very great, Gilbert thought, as many good men do think, that he was unworthy, because unequal, to such elevation, and contemplated throwing off this burden from his own shoulders - realising at the same time that it was an honour. He wished to commit the power of head of the Order into the hands of someone or some people whom he might find suitable and vigorous. Just as another Moses might say to the Lord, "I beseech, O Lord, send the man whom you are in fact going to send, to whom you will entrust complete leadership of this throng - one, which is beginning to form into a great race. You know that since you tell your servant that he should lead this people, I have become to a lower life: that is a secular in regard of those people whom I ought to lead by virtue of my deserts and station. I know that strict judgement is given to leaders, and I am afraid that if I am no better than the rest, I may become in your sight worse than I was before."²⁷ Then he went to the Cistercian Chapter²⁸ where it happened that Pope Eugenius²⁹ of beloved memory had come also. Gilbert hoped to transfer the care of his houses into the safe hands of the Cistercian monks; for they, in his estimation, were more able than the rest to undertake humble tasks because of their regular dispensing of hospitality. He also considered them

27. Exodus, IV. 13.

28. The Cistercians held their annual General Chapter at Citeaux. The one Gilbert attended was that on 1147.

29. Pope Eugenius III, (1145 - 1153). He was a Cistercian monk originally from Clairvaux Abbey.

to be the most religious of all the Orders since they were more contemplative and more severe in the following of the Rule;³⁰ and it was this which caused him to believe that his work might more safely be delegated to them. The rigour of their Order, the newness of their foundation, would ensure that the ideal, which he had considered, would be strictly maintained and guarded. But the Lord Pope and the Cistercian Abbots said that the monks of their Order could not be set over the religion of others, especially of nuns. So the favour Gilbert sought was not obtained, and he was ordered on the directive of the Apostolic See and the counsel of holy men to carry on with what he had started, with Christ's blessing. The Lord did not wish the Congregation of Sempringham to be deprived of its own shepherd and guide, who would be better for it than ten others; and He arranged that his merit should extend to the gathering of the hundredth fruit, because so far Gilbert remained one of the other kind of men. For our sister, the Congregation, that is to say, is still small and doesnot have the fruitfulness of spiritual directors or preachers who can nourish it with milk, sustain it with solid food, arrange internal matters, protect external needs and strengthen it everywhere at all times.

WHEN THE DIRECTION OF HIS ORDER WAS COMMITTED TO HIM

BY THE LORD POPE.

XIV.

30. The Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia (480 - 547), which is the foundation of all monastic rules.

The protection therefore of the assembled flock was given into the charge of Blessed Gilbert by the holy Pope Eugenius, since a better guardian could not be found and was impossible to find than he who was the founder; nor could there be a more ardent zealot for this elevated life, than he who had undertaken the primary and most important work in the establishing of the Order. Indeed the holy man pleaded against the weight of such a discipline; the disadvantage of declining years for the honour; his unworthiness to be a spiritual guide, and finally brought forward his inexperience and humility as an excuse. For he was afraid that his task in those matters for which he had been preferred was beyond his strength; that his firmness of mind would gradually be disturbed; and that the sweet occupation of his loved solitude and assiduous contemplation would come to an end. But as the Apostolic Lord was a prudent man he understood the apologies of humility which sprang entirely from devotion and so allotted to Gilbert, in whom he saw no desire for preference, the duty of shepherd with an easy and more composed mind. For it was always Gilbert's intention to cling to or strive after humble things, and it was the Lord's will to exalt him, who was so humble, more highly.

So the Blessed Gilbert, when he realised the divine decision concerning himself, did not dare to withstand any longer the heavenly decree which had arranged this appointment. But to prevent depriving himself of the other virtues, in which he was so strong, by continuing his resistance, he

dutifully obeyed God and His Vicar the Pope, hoping in this way for a more ample reward, since he had no delight in undertaking the Order's guidance. So that he might secure the salvation of many, he neglected his own interest; experienced long before in efforts of contemplation, he now agreed to devote himself to the works of a holy duty in order to reap the fruit of the other life. Indeed it was only right that he should become the dispenser of those heavenly fruits which at first he had owned, since, by giving them to the poor, thereby making himself a complete pauper, and by acting as a servant and not as a lord governing his own goods, he could govern those men and women entrusted to him. Because of the signs of this kind of holiness and the unanimous testimony given by many, Pope Eugenius is said to have grieved that he had not known of the man before; for he would have wanted to elevate him to the Archbishopric of York³¹ when that See was vacant, had the knowledge of Gilbert's merits reached him earlier. It was also on this journey that he became such an intimate of Blessed Malachy, Archbishop of Ireland,³² and of Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux,³³ that he alone

31. In 1140, King Stephen appointed William Fitz Herbert as Archbishop of York - an appointment which was violently opposed by the Cistercians led by St. Bernard. William was accused of the usual un-priestly sins - from unchastity to avarice. Pope Eugenius III, a Cistercian himself deposed William in 1147 in favour of Henry Murdac, Abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Fountains. In 1153, when Eugenius, Murdac and Bernard were dead, William again became the Archbishop.

32. St. Malachy, the great friend of St. Bernard, and a great ecclesiastical reformer in Ireland. He was born in 1095 and died in 1148 at Clairvaux in St. Bernard's arms.

33. St. Bernard, (1091 - 1153). Founded the great Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux in 1115.

was present with them, when, through their prayers, they healed a sick man. Both the Archbishop and the Abbot gave him each a staff, both of which possessed certain virtues and powers; and the Abbot gave him also a stole and maniple.

THE ORDINATION OF THE CANONS.

XV.

Then Father Gilbert returned to his own country since he had not achieved his purpose - that is to say, through his desire for humility he had wanted to flee from the burdens entailed in the pastoral care of his congregations and churches, and had determined to place the control of his Order under the direction of the Cistercian monks; but he had not procured his wish. Moved therefore by this divine ruling - as one may rightly believe - and compelled by necessity, he called to a role of responsibility men who were educated and in Holy Orders, and entrusted to them the governance of all whom he had brought together; educated men so that they might rule others; in Orders so that they might be strong in the privileges of the Church; men that they might protect women; educated men that might reveal to both men and women the path of salvation. Being priests they could wield the pastoral office for all. So by this command of God, and by the advice of wise and holy men, he acted in this way. For the decrees of the Fathers' lay down that it is requisite for monasteries of maidens to be ruled with the assistance and direction of monks or clerics. It is well in the case of virgins dedicated to Christ, that the spiritual fathers chosen for them should be able as priests,

not only to protect them with wise directions, but also give them doctrinal instructions.

THE SEPARATION OF THE MEN AND WOMEN.

XVI.

Indeed sacred canons provide that monks and clerics should not live with women, but be far removed from intercourse with them, and should not be given permission to enter other than the vestibule. The lord Gilbert followed these injunctions, and no one was more strongly devoted to chastity than he. So he decided that the canons' dwellings should be far from the nuns' houses, just as in one village or city there are different religious houses. Because the canons were removed quite a distance from the nuns, they had no access to them except to administer the Holy Sacrament, and then in the presence of many witnesses. The church, however, in which divine service is celebrated is common to all, but yet only for the celebration of Mass once or twice a day. There is a partition wall all the way round, so that the men could not be seen by the women and the latter not heard by the men. For they have their own canonical prayers in which they say the Divine Office. But whenever there was a most urgent reason for approaching the nuns, no one was allowed to enter to make a call, not even the Supreme chaplain, unless many accompanied him to watch the proceedings. Then those nuns who do speak can be heard but not seen with an unveiled face by any of the men. If it were ever necessary for a message to be passed in or out of the

door, four persons were specifically appointed for this purpose - two old men, who were quite trustworthy, on the outside, and two mature sisters on the inside, through whom all necessary communications were made. Thus each side could hear but not see the other.

THE RULES OF ALL THE RELIGIOUS.

XVII.

By these arrangements he had called all men as well as women into the unity of a society and into the bonds of peace. So that he might lead each and everyone to be of one accord, he made them as in one heart and soul with God, appointing to each of them a definite way of life - bearing in mind the sex, age and station of each, and setting limits above and beyond which they could not proceed without breach of discipline. He wished however, to act with a greater degree of authority, but at the same time to avoid being considered arrogant and presumptuous should he impose, in an over-bearing way, his will upon others without regard for their feelings; but after all, his powers were entrusted to him by the Holy Ghost. Consequently, to ensure that his subordinates would more readily accept the way of life that had been marked out for them, he imposed a double monastic discipline upon them - imposing the Rule of Blessed Benedict³⁴ on the nuns, and on the canons that of St. Augustine.³⁵ So

34. Cf. note 30., supra.

35. St. Augustine of Hippo, (354 - 430).

the examples of Christ, the saints, and the evangelical and apostolic doctrine were brought forward for all; and while the monastic as well as the clerical elements held onto the principles of justice by being subjected to his Rule, Gilbert himself in no way departed from the perfect way of life in the monastery.

HIS WRITINGS.

XVIII.

It is fitting that laws of constitutions be changed: laws, that is which alter with places, times and people, and for various incidental reasons; and so Gilbert found his Rule to a less extent in those already established rules - selecting, choosing and sifting, as it were, certain most beautiful flowers from the rules and customs of many churches and monasteries; thus striving towards a specified and adequate pattern. The flowers were those which he considered more necessary for and corresponded more closely to the needs of weak men. He devoted so much care in the culling and unravelling of the customs, that like a true angel ascending and descending Jacob's ladder,³⁶ he included not only important and most necessary regulations, but also small and apparently trivial sections in case he were accused of an imperfect doctrine, or his followers accused of ignorance concerning the law. All these matters he committed to writing so that posterity would be mindful of them, and accept them as binding instructions. Since their codification would constitute his

36. Genesis, XXVIII. 12.

law, disregard of them might thus be better avoided. He called this code by the appropriately dignified term of Scripta - a weighty title for weighty matters - to point out how much reverence and obedience they demanded. He then wrote to Pope Eugenius explaining the pattern of his laws and describing the constitution which their codifications that were necessary and add the weight of his acquiescence to whatever he thought reasonable and correct. In this way there would be no scope for calumnious utterances, and sanction would be given to those who conformed with these laws when they were strengthened by the approval of the Holy Father. The Pope carefully read through the code article by article, and found no fault in it. So he recommended it should enjoy perpetual observance, and under his seal authorised that what had already been decreed or would be decreed in matters appertaining to religious duties by Father Gilbert, should enjoy inviolable permanence. His successors Adrian³⁷ and Alexander,³⁸ together with other pontiffs at Rome, confirmed this authorisation, and endowed it with even greater force with the accord of eminent cardinals.

THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE ORDER.

XIX.

Father Gilbert, relying on these expressions and supported by these authorities, gathered together the sons

37. Pope Adrian IV. (1154 - 1159).

38. Pope Alexander III. (1159 - 1181).

of God from everyplace and assembled them within the four walls of one building - the house of God; and with Jesus Christ Himself as the topmost corner-stone,³⁹ square stones were arranged upon the edifice's lowly foundation. This is the dish of Peter⁴⁰ sent down from heaven with four cords, full of all kinds of animals which he cleansed to allay the sins of his age, and incorporated into the body of the Church. Here is the vicar and imitator of Peter. Here is the chariot of God with innumerable thousands of the just, the humble and the tranquil, that carries itself to a place without bounds. The Lord has thousands of diverse kinds - in sex, age and tongues - who rejoice in the promised hope and gratuitous love; for the Lord is among them in Sinai: the holy place, that is, in His fulfilled command which is also to be fulfilled. This is the chariot of Aminadab⁴¹ - the chariot of a willing people, of the voluntary poor of Christ. It has two sides: one of men, the other of women; four wheels: two of men clerk and lay, and two of women, lettered and unlettered. Two oxen draw the chariot: the clerkly and monastic discipline - the former of Blessed Augustine and the latter of holy Benedict. Father Gilbert drives the chariot over any terrain - rough or smooth, high or low-lying. The way by which he and his Order go is narrow, but the reward is eternal life.

Even a wicked spiteful man seeing this chariot running along with such a combination of ministries and ministers

39. Ephesians, II. 20.

40. Acts, X. 11 - 17.

41. Canticle of Canticles, VI. 11.

might say with Balaam,⁴² "How beautiful are your tabernacles, Jacob and your tents, O Israel," and he who yearns for happy circumstances might say with Jacob⁴³ and Heyla "This is the camp of God." For what will you see in this Sulanites lately returned here but the companies of camps?⁴⁴ The camp is to ward off the enemy, the chorus to glorify God; the camp as a defence against a keen assembly, the chorus to celebrate joyously God's triumph. For what greater degree of hatred can he make towards the enemy; what greater kind of trophy can he take from the enemy, than there may be one agreed code on behaviour imposed upon so many different and differently disposed men? There lives the wolf, a ravager in former times, living with any tame and quiet lamb; and the panther with its mottled coat lying with the kid, admitting himself despised and sinful. There the heifer subdued with the once fierce lion reposing with a sheep, full of simple harmlessness; and the Infant Christ, even though humble and holy, threatens them with a stern discipline, as a means of attaining a life of happiness. There too the rhinoceros teaches the sheep to be mild, and the unbroken bull, of his own accord, submits his neck to the yoke. There the young deer hunts the hound, and the lark hunts the hawk, and the turtle dove flies to the stars with the eagle. There the wolf forgets his craft, and the carrion crow spurns the corpse

⁴². Numbers, XXIV. 5.

⁴³. Genesis, XXXII. 2. In this chapter there is mention only of Jacob, and it is difficult to discover who "Heyla" was.

⁴⁴. Canticle of Canticles, VI. 12, and VII. 1.

offered him. There too the young men and maidens, old men with young may praise the name of the Lord, because every age and station and both sexes exult, not their own, but God's name alone. Indeed His Holy Spirit gathers scattered mankind together, making them live together, no matter how different their manners may be, in one house with only one form of life. This is how love bears away ill - feeling, and convivial jollity makes men live like brothers together. Why should each man or rather every man, care more for the good of his community than for his own welfare; and each take the necessary things of life from and out of one organism? Why should everything be distributed - weight, number and size - according to respective ranks without ill-will? Why should all the churches, just like a single church, although scattered in different parts of the world, differing in types of food, clothing and other ingredients of life, act in common accord? Everyone throughout the Order, whatever the funds of the houses he may rightly hold, is not allowed to sell anything of any sort unless he has been granted permission from the head of the whole Order. So much are all aspects built around the one head, with the limbs subject to him, that each individual thankfully allows his rule to be enforced in all things concerning life or death. Everything belongs to the other members of the community, and at the same time to God.

This wonderful unity of individuals as of churches and the unprecedented sharing of possessions which make one thing all and all things one, was found in the diversities of so

many hearts and monasteries. For besides that unity of hearts which charity occasions, Gilbert ordained that all the customs applying to the men should be applied equally to the life of the women; and similarly with those aspects that could be passed over from the women's life to that of the men - provided that the spirit of the rules which they professed were kept. For the sake of peace and harmony, he enjoined these precepts on both sides equally. This reveals his great wisdom and tact, for he distributed his way of life to everyone in such a way that it suited all. He was certainly a man of great sanctity, for unless he had been from God, he would not have been able to achieve anything, nor able to teach in any way other than that which he lived, since his doctrine exemplified his life's conduct for those whom he taught. For that doctrine portrayed his holiness, and this procured the effect of his doctrine. Because the humble man, chosen from ordinary people accomplished such great things within a few years, they are to be ascribed to his extraordinary distinction, in addition to supernatural piety. For besides hospitals for the poor and infirm, for the ailing sick, for those with leprosy, and for widows and orphans established and governed by him, with much labour and industry he organised in his lifetime thirteen conventual churches with their appurtenances, four of which were for permanently established canons living separately, and nine were for nuns living with their rectors and brothers. In these, as we calculate at the time of his death, Gilbert left behind 2,200 men and women wearing our habit, living by common rules; and

this number excludes innumerable religious who died before him. Thus it is clear that God was with him, and crowned all his efforts with success; and it appears that this disciple of God had been instructed through the discipline of the one Master, Christ, and through the blessing of the Holy Ghost. He appointed this way of life and examples of living to people of both sexes, as so many servants of God: examples which he did not learn from any man. For no one else was the founder of that Order, nor was the Order known before he founded it.

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST DETRACTORS.

XX.

He composed a defence against anyone who, unfriendly and spiteful, finding himself unable to criticise his life tries to find fault with his doctrine; but a blameworthy doctrine is unable to proceed from a praiseworthy life. Indeed his life does not oppose good habits, nor his doctrine oppose the Catholic faith, when that faith has effected such qualities in him through love; so that none of his statutes concerning religious observances need be discountenanced. The introduction of new teaching, however, does not oppose that of the universal Church, but rather strengthens it. Certainly anything profane is to be eschewed, but not every introduction of new matter: new verbal ceremonies may be perfectly in accord with the doctrines of the Church, as St. Augustine himself says. Besides, this new code of observances does not annul any law human or divine; no violation but

confirmation of holy canons is involved, for it is revered by princes, accepted by provincial bishops, and ratified by the Holy See for all time to come. It is greatly praised all over the world wherever it is known; and more important wonders and miracles prove it to be pleasing to God. Because these facts are strong evidence, and because of the world's testimony we now propose to describe from the beginning how Father Gilbert conducted himself in his priestly duties - to spread the praises of God and His glory, and to help those who heard him.

HOW GILBERT FARED IN HIS MINISTRY.

XXI.

Gilbert's next concern was for his sons in God. He strove, with God's help to introduce a corporate spirit. As the Psalmist says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."⁴⁵ He became, thanks to his persistence in cultivating virtue, the beard of God's true priest Aaron; and just as the tunic of Christ was an indivisible whole as is the Church, so he introduced Christ at this end of time into his house by means of the cloak of brotherly concord, prepared by himself in his own words. He was sprinkled by an ointment of spiritual grace descending from Christ's head, so flourishing in all his virtuous endeavours to become worthy of his appointment as an example of pious living for the rest of his house. A good tree brings forth good fruit; well-filled seeds appear on robust

⁴⁵. Psalm CXXXII, 1.

plants. So he strove with all his strength to avoid staining his soul with any unclean thought or with any deadly pleasure which could lure him into sin. He kept his flesh wholesome and unimpaired as from his mother's womb. Sometimes the presence of a woman violently repelled him, and he treated her evil temptations with contempt because he, who bore the vessels of God, wanted to remain pure. He wore no ornamentation on the hands which were able to cleanse others of their sins. He indulged in the most stringent physical labours so that he could fulfil his priestly duties perfectly; and these labours were in addition to his efforts towards virtue - such as piety, humility, compassion and truthfulness which are the signs of a pure heart. To procure or watch over the needs of those in his charge, he frequently undertook journeys on both sides of the sea: to palaces of kings and bishops, and to the courts of nobles; suffering great inconveniences, he did this many times for the sake of the church which had been put into his charge. He suffered from the torments of the invisible enemy, who always endeavoured to hinder his efforts, and from visible enemies also, who insulted him not only with words but with lashings too.

He loved all the churches⁴⁶ equally, and was therefore equally anxious about the affairs of each of them: the heavier the business of all of them, or the greater the

⁴⁶. The word "church" seems to be used in three ways in this document. First, it means the universal Church; secondly that which Gilbert founded, i.e. his whole Order; and thirdly, the individual monasteries which, as in this instance, are often referred to as "churches."

mistakes of each - all were held as matters for his decision; with the result that he worked the harder for all. But when as an interlude in the rigours of travelling, he called upon some monastery on a visit, he did not eat the bread of idleness, but, apart from being concerned with problems of replenishments for the journey, he set himself to do some task with which he had come prepared. Sometimes he would write, or worked at many other things pertaining to various problems and to the building of his houses. While engaged in these matters, he preserved complete silence, but his heart rang with the praises of the true God, and his lips constantly moved in recitation of psalm and prayer. So when he had to speak, he spoke from a full heart and from enthusiasm for his task; for he not only proclaimed what inspired him, but practised what he preached. His words were always concerned with wise and knowledgeable matters. He was truly wise in teaching and in extending his acquaintance with eternal and heavenly truths; knowledgeable in his organisation and arrangement of worldly matters; wise in his advocacy of virtue and condemnation of vice, and in knowing the time to give guidance and praise. He managed all these weighty matters so carefully and shrewdly, that it did not matter whether he had spoken or not; for there was advantageous advice in his words and discretion in his silence. God had given him such wisdom as was necessary to counteract each vice that he met, and the appropriate amount of censure. By a biting reproof he cured a certain nun of a burning and reckless desire for sinful pleasure kindled by the wiles of

the wicked enemy Satan. Again, he immediately brought one of the brethren into most complete submission by a sharp blow from his staff, when the former had become so incensed by anger that he wished to leave the monastery. The maxim was this: to wash guilt away freely, and to maintain unimpaired within himself that charity towards those of his brethren, whom he reproved, which they maintained towards him. Those with him saw how his castigation fell more heavily upon his nearest kin when they were at fault - so much so, that he required a number of stubborn and rebellious kinsfolk be kept out of his sight, so that they could render complete satisfaction for their sins in the most humble way possible. Anyone not connected with him in any way but who showed exemplary conduct, was shown preference over his kin. A righteous way of living bound them more closely to him with the more sacred bond of love, than if they had actually been related to him; and if he were bound to some by a closeness of birth also, these he embraced for the sake of justice with a double affection. We have seen that what he used to deny, in spite of prayer or various bribes, to great and wealthy men, he granted to a simple member of his brethren or of another's if his way of life warranted it. He had a cheerful sense of humour and polished address, but no undesirable ingredient could be found in his speech. Thus he was affectionately loved by his own brethren and by others alike.

THE RIGOROUSNESS OF HIS LIFE.

Gilbert accepted all the burdens which he had imposed on the lesser brethren as if one of their number - in so far as it was becoming that he should do so. His clothes were no whiter, his food no more carefully prepared than theirs. The place where he slept at this time was no more private, and the fare on his table was as monotonous except when he was entertaining. Even that was a rare occasion, and the more varied fare seemed the result of compulsion and not of desire. His mounts were not out of the ordinary, and his riding escorts were simple men. When on journeys he was attended by one lay brother and two of the humble clergy, and had no imposing array of horses and servants. During his journeys on horse-back, he spoke to his companions not with fantastic tales, but in prayers and psalms. He always brought alms along with him to give to the poor as they ran to meet him; his hospitality though frugal was adequate, but in amount not equalling the expense of the profligate, nor an inheritance which would be gladly accepted by the grasping sort. When he used to eat, he liked to be served - not because he took for himself, but rather because he gave to others. He was a cheerful host, and if his guests were not satisfied with his fare, his jovial countenance atoned for its deficiency. While generous for others he appeared sparing for himself. He caused many a complaint when he rose from the table because he had left food on his plate, and his fellow guests were amazed that he was able to lead a normal life with so little food. For if anything sweet had an appetising smell at a banquet to tantalise the taste, or if

something looked wholesome and well-prepared, and was praised by those sitting with him at the table trying to persuade him to eat, he often took his untouched food and passed it to the one who had praised it, or to anyone else. He did this to avoid giving scandal, and to indicate that he had no pleasure in the food whatever.

He always abstained from meats and from their nourishments except in the time of great weakness; he even refrained from eating fish throughout the whole of Lent and Advent, but ate oils, legumes and cheap fare of that kind frequently and willingly. Fish and similar foods used to be prepared for him, to prevent him dying through excessive weakness, even though he did not know and did not want such things. He deducted the first share to God and divided almost all the rest among his table-mates. A certain vessel was placed on the table in front of him at every meal, which he called the dish of Our Lord Jesus, and into this were put, for the assistance of the poor, not just the remains of his meal but the main and largest portion. We have seen that when he approached the table or sat down, he shed tears into the rich dishes, because he was driven to satisfy his human condition for daily nourishment. Using wooden and earthenware vessels and horn spoons, he shut out all the vanity of the world and the attractive superfluity of metals. After gaining mental refreshment from the divine word rather than bodily sustenance from earthly food, he was able to take a proper amount of time for work, and to give himself up to reading, praying and sacred meditation. He never changed his garments

throughout the whole year, and did not require more in winter and less in summer. Content with only one tunic he refused the use of a pelisse made of skins. You would be amazed and moved to pity if you were to see the limbs of an aged body scarcely holding together, the bones often contracting, the shoulders shaking and teeth chattering, when heat was removed by nature as well as by accident. He considered it best to wear in between his outer garment and hair shirt, a middle one of wool to indicate conformity of servanthood, and to avoid popular applause. When quiet night calls for limbs to lie down, Gilbert - having first said customary psalms for himself and his religious, for kings, bishops and the Pope, for the faithful living and dead - after the seventh hour was past, did not lie upon his bed all night long, but sat on it and still kept on his day garments, and had no pillow of soft feathers to support his head. But since there was nothing to hold up the back of his head, and having heavy sleep weighing on his nodding head, he always pressed his head onto something in front. In this way sleep fled, and he was free to while away the night with prayer.

On the straw-covered floor he used to sit on his mattress which was covered by a woolen blanket, and he would speak to no one until morning. After nightly Lauds when the passions of the saints were recited and the dead absolved, for himself as well as for the whole flock committed into his care, he made a humble and complete confession, seeking absolution from the brothers and giving his for all the sins of those absent as of those present. Afterwards he gave the blessing,

after the custom of Blessed Job,⁴⁷ who each day offered a sacrifice for each one of his sons. But he never allowed a day to pass by in idleness - being occupied with praying, reading, contemplation, and in turn devoting himself to good works. Thus he carefully divided up his time. He devoted himself to each problem, not individually, but to all at the same time; but this did not mean to say that he devoted himself less dutifully to the following tasks. He did not disregard his own salvation by caring for others; nor did he neglect the divine because of the human; nor did he slacken in the care of internal matters for the sake of the external. Contemplation elevated him before all other things, but next to this he was elevated by compassion for others. He often lamented when hymns and canticles were sung or read; and although passionately attracted by the pleasantly sounding voices of the church, he was more pleased with the ideals behind the words. For lest any extraneous event or internal distraction turn away his mind from the taste and understanding of the Divine Word, when he discovered or heard that distraction, he composed for himself certain signs on his fingers - relating each word or prayer to individual joints; and by such a device he fixed in his mind the remembrance of the words more tenaciously.

Such was the lesson of a pure mind's devotion, which urged only reflections upon the soul's one spouse and which carried Gilbert away from wordly matters; and from it poured out the whole nature of charity. For, just as he used to

⁴⁷. Job, I. 5.

pray joyfully from his love of God, he used to console those in distress by sharing their tears, out of his compassion for his neighbour. We have seen that when anyone had erred in some serious matter even to deserve excommunication from the Order, at first Gilbert adopted a stern, almost inexorable attitude when the delinquent repented, so that he might both try the contrition of the penitent who had to expiate his sin to the full, and to strike fear in others. But when he realised the true and full change of heart, he shed tears in the presence of all for the lost sheep and farthing⁴⁸ which had been found; and calling together the brothers and friends, he himself rejoiced more fully and so caused all to join in the rejoicing. Thus by his own distress and by suffering with these who were distressed, he followed Jesus with his cross. By ruling himself strictly, he was therefore the most upright director of others, and showing the signs of a good shepherd, he deserved to be numbered among the more worthy members of the highest King. Thus, by loving the Lord, he was chosen by God and men: indeed, it was almost unavoidable that those over whom he was set should choose him as their head, in as much as he was the first father and founder of them all, their maintainer and administrator; and they ardently desired him to be so perpetually, it if were at all possible. He the appointed Master, although they had not appointed him such, but rather he himself had organised them all under his leadership and was in all things among them as one of them, did not shrink from taking up the external badge of the habit,

48. Luke, XV. 4 - 9.

so that in all ways he would conform with his flock.

Up to that time he had not used the uniform religious habit which he had given to them, nor had he taken any specific vows of religious discipline. But wearing grey garb, he shunned gaudy-coloured clothes. I believe he maintained this postponement of his vows, until his little colony had gained greater strength through increased numbers. He was afraid, however, of obtaining a reputation for arrogance, if he should take a solemn vow to observe the Rule which he had himself founded, although it came from God. This attitude caused great concern to his colleagues; as they foresaw that it would be a dangerous thing to pledge themselves to a man of a different habit. It might happen, if he to whom they made their first profession, were not of their number, that some man of another allegiance might succeed him - either by compulsion, or, as often happens, through the influence of a prince. They begged him with persuasive arguments as to the probable outcome of his continued refusal, to accept the habit belonging to the rank of him whom he had ordered to be placed over the rest of the brethren.⁴⁹ They would be led by his example more eagerly and freely, if he himself were to follow the road he had indicated to them. These pleas and counsels influenced him greatly, mostly because he saw that it was by divine guidance that his life's work had been

⁴⁹. i.e. the habit of a canon. Roger, Prior of Malton, was of course a Gilbertine canon and it was he who was chosen by Gilbert to be his successor. In actual fact he was effectual head of the Order before Gilbert's death because of the latter's extreme old age. Monasticon, VI. 2, pp. XI - XIII.

started, and had prospered so far; and realising Rome's authority as well as his own had been given,⁵⁰ he dutifully agreed to do as they asked.

WHEN HE RECEIVED THE CANON'S HABIT.

XXIII.

One of the leading canons was a certain Roger, a native of Sempringham, who had been placed over the church at Malton, and was known as a prudent and upright man in all matters of religion. The congregations of nearly all the monasteries desired him as the successor of Blessed Gilbert. Gilbert himself considered him in this light, as indeed he deserved on account of the general approval, as one who by his worth could act as his deputy if the need should arise; and so placed him over the father from the position of a son, and over the Master from the position of a disciple. He rendered obedience to him, and profession to the place and Order of Sempringham according to religious custom. Thus from Roger's hand he received the Canon's Habit at Bullington. From then on he wore the great honour of the badge of humility as long as he lived. So that Roger would indeed be his superior as with all the others, Gilbert arranged almost nothing concerning the ordering of his own affairs without the former's advice and consent, so that all he did should be enacted. For Gilbert trusted his fidelity and was confident of his prudence; planning to set the faithful and prudent man over himself to begin with, and then over his company of religious men and

50. i.e. to the Order.

women.

So Gilbert confirmed and agreed to all those matters which seemed necessary for such an edifice belonging to God. The ancient enemy saw four appointed walls on four square stones erected against himself, joined together with the very strong cement of charity, fortified with so strong a guide that they could not be overwhelmed; and greatly bewailing he saw another, nearly Gilbert's equal, provided as his assistant for the perpetual support of that house. Therefore he perceived with perturbation all the obstacles, which he had erected from the beginning against that establishment, brought to nought. Since he was unable to destroy Gilbert's principles, and cast down the already established and perfect work, he continued at least to injure him in some other way. This was indeed his evil thought - he, who always wishes to do some injury. On the other hand, this was also the divine plan of God. The devil knew well how to use evil means, and because he had prepared this wicked design, the clemency of God turned it into a blessing. There was a church already constructed and well-placed in his eyes, and so he decided to trouble it in respect of its ecclesiastical discipline. How frequent and familiar it is to be buffeted by the waves and to be thrown into distress by the winds, but at last to reach the unharmed harbour of safety. The Lord wished, as I mentioned before, to test the Order with many trials; and even while it was weighed down with assaults, it always remained impregnable, and so deserved to receive the perfect reward. The Lord wished, I say, to test the completed work so that he might

strengthen it if it appeared firm. As far as it found repose and stature through constancy in its first trial, so through continual perseverance it obtained eternal stability.

HIS CONSTANCY.

XXIV.

That most notable persecution flared up at this time: in the days, that is to say, of Henry II, king of the English. This persecution was aimed against the Blessed Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, standing firm for the divine laws and the liberty of the universal Church. Divine Providence did not wish to deprive Blessed Gilbert and his Church of a part in this victory, but so that she might be worthy to be counted among the daughters of the true Church, he made her conflict legitimately with her Mother, and at the same time triumph in a happy outcome. So nearly the whole of England combined to overthrow the Church and Blessed Thomas and he could not find a place where he could rest his feet. When all plotted and contrived together to lay hold of him and hand him over to the will of the king, he was received peacefully into the monasteries and houses of Father Gilbert, receiving his companions and ministrations from the brothers, while his journeys and hiding places were organised with careful circumspection. But as malice grew, and the same blessed priest, an exile from England, had fled to the King of the French, Louis, the lord Gilbert and his religious were remarked upon, because after Thomas' banishment going against the king's command, they were alleged to have sent much money

abroad and given assistance in whatever Thomas had need. Since this false report was believed by the vassals and ministers of the king, they, Gilbert himself as well as all the heads of all his houses, were compelled to appear before the king's judicial officers, so that if it were proved they were guilty, all would be sent into exile. But the merciful judges allowed him, as his holiness was widely known, to swear under oath that the charges were really false; and in this way he and his companions could return unharmed to their own home. Although the very holy and wise men could, with complete faith and perfect truth have done this, yet he refused because it would have redounded to the injury of the Church. He said he preferred to go into exile rather than take such an oath. For he reasoned that, although the truth of the matter was otherwise than they thought, and indeed there was no harm in swearing under pressure - indeed the greater evil attaches to him who exacts the oath rather than to him who gives it; yet it seemed to oppose the justice of faith and piety, however, if he were to swear and leave a bad example to his contemporaries and to posterity. It would be a kind of impious sacrilege for the shepherd and the church to assist such a cause, when at that time it was the greater sin not to defend the church with all one's strength. In a similar manner, under Machabeus, the old man Eleazarus would not eat pig's flesh. He did not wish either through fear of death, or through love of life, or through the old friendship of man to pretend having eaten, lest he, the old man, gave bad example to the living by violating the country's laws because

he had been afraid of death.⁵¹ Similarly with our old man: while he could not leave the church unprotected, he did not wish to appear as though he had done so, lest in the minds of men the weak action weakened others, and in the sight of God caused disfavour as though the act had been done. Therefore God's decision was withheld when Gilbert did not agree to justify himself in this way, and the judges feared to condemn him. So he waited in the city of London with his companions, standing by for what the tribunal might enjoin, and always prepared for all eventualities in order to maintain the unshakeable truth. In this expectancy, all his brethren were desolate and extremely afraid, namely that at that very moment they would have to abandon both their community and country. Certain of them were prepared to take that oath, thinking along these lines: it would be possible to swear truthfully, and that it was wrong to abandon the places of their profession for such a cause. Gilbert forgot earthly fear when, sitting in court with his lamenting companions, he bought certain wax toys from a boy who was selling them, for no other purpose or use except to make a joke for his friends, and to show how he despised their grounds for fear.

In his main house also he used to jest in that fashion with enjoyment, and he was a source of wonder to everyone in the divine services at the very sweet sounding harmony of that spiritual choir; for he valued all rejoicing when he fell into various tribulations. Therefore on the final day, when all were afraid to hear the bad news that without delay or hindrance

51. Machabees II, 6, 18, ff.

they would be ordered to go into the threatened exile, royal messengers came from abroad to the judges, who were commanded in the king's name to defer the accusation of Master Gilbert and his fellow monks, until the time when the king himself had full knowledge of the matter. Then and there he was sent away in peace, and with all his followers allowed to return to his own domains. Then, since he was freed from all exaction and coercion, and having no action to deny or confess, he spoke freely to the judges, without placing his hand on the sacred scriptures, nor even looking at them. Without paying any attention to the procedure of the court, he addressed them in terms by which they could clearly discern his innocence of the falsity with which he was charged. This caused everyone to marvel at the man's constancy because he had not wished to act under the compulsion of such harsh threats, both to his own danger and that of his followers. Now, however, he could act with safety, because he acted afterwards of his own free will.

THE TROUBLE OF THE FALSE BROTHERS.

XXV.

So the restless enemy, seeing he had failed in the previous kind of assault and that Gilbert was now held in more respect by his people, was enraged with further and bitter malice; and diligently tried to discover in what other manner, or for what other reason, or with what other means he could overturn the divine plan. For, because nothing had been gained from his previous efforts, he now devoted himself to devices of

another sort to achieve his ends. In his previous attempts to incriminate Gilbert, his reason was his defence of piety, and his method was to persuade him to wield his authority rather than to study justice. His instruments were the external objects that Gilbert sought. Everything that profited rather than obstructed his intended victim had been easily brought to nothing. But in this new assault he resorted to directly opposite methods. His reason for the attack was his fight against religion; the method by which he was to proceed was justice; his instruments were what were to be seen in Gilbert's own house. For he said, through the lying mouths of certain people, that Gilbert himself was the subverter of the sacred order and of ecclesiastical institutions: a charge which could easily turn everyone against him. So that he might prove this more definitely, the devil served both right and justice in the dispute; and intending to make it appear even more credible, he organised witnesses from Gilbert's household servants. Who might not set himself up in this affair against him? Who would not allow holy religion to be overturned? Who was not to believe him to have a just cause - he, who wished to proceed so justly? For Satan had obtained through his accomplices, that is to say the lay brothers, many warnings and commands, from both Secular and ecclesiastical lords whom he had turned against Gilbert. The latter's examination, according to the concept of both common and canon laws, he (Satan) committed the inquiry of his case to judges who in the ordinary way were truly impartial.

But who would fail to believe what his neighbours said;

those who to all appearances clung to their devotion to God, and who demonstrated their piety? There were those who determinedly urged on the attack, since virtue follows reason rather than violence. There was an added worry to the already weighty troubles, for men of his peace,⁵² in whom he hoped, who used to eat the same food as he, and whom he had greatly cherished, increased the hypocritical deceits against him - a fact which caused him great pain. Again, besides the inconveniences of old age he was troubled by bodily frailty. But in spite of this and far away in the furthest corners of England, he was often, nevertheless, compelled to appear in his own person in order to hear the charges. Also the greatest burden of all was that servants presumed to impeach their master: lowly and unknown men assailing an outstanding and noble person - men "whose fathers," as the Scriptures say, "he would not deign to put with the dogs which guarded his flocks."⁵³ Now his name became part of their canticles and proverbial to them. Indeed the persecution emerged similar to that used against the early Church, against which the libertines of the Synagogue rose, who were ex-slaves and the first to reject Christ's faith. He who wishes to know more about these matters may learn more from the words of the holy man himself in the writings he left behind him concerning the foundation of the monasteries, where he states, "Two lay brothers raised up the head of this rebellion and discord,

52. i.e. men who were under Gilbert's protection.

53. Job XXX, 1.

to whom more than any of the others I had committed the keeping of all our houses.⁵⁴ Two others were associated with them, one of whom I admitted when he was little more than a beggar, seeking his living by weaving; and the other, Ogger the Smith by name, I adopted when he was a boy long before he became a smith, together with his three brothers unskilled in any trade. His father I also accepted, who was nearly at his last gasp. Then his aged mother and her two beggar daughters who had been very ill for a long time. Indeed I permitted Ogger and one of his brothers to learn the trade of a smith from our brethren, and the other two the trade of a carpenter. These in company with other brothers rose up against me and against our canons, lying as God knows, and spreading evil reports about us throughout many areas.

"They even incited the Lord Pope Alexander himself, a man of great holiness, and the Roman Court against us. The Lord Pope himself, believing the words of this Ogger, issued against us an exceedingly severe command and harsh judgement; and after a few words I will speak the truth and not lie, God be my witness. This was the reason for the madness of Ogger and Gerard, who took certain properties for their own use in an underhand manner, followed their own wills, and deviated both from their profession and religion. Having their own palfreys, they rushed all over the place, sparing neither their chastity nor honesty, and became targets of mockery and

⁵⁴. Because the canons were concerned with the spiritual needs of the nuns, or with looking after the sick in their hospitals etc., the lay brothers inevitably gained much authority in the administration of the Order's lands and general business.

scorn for clergy and people. When I heard all this, I wished to call them back from the path of error to the way of truth; from infamy to a good reputation; from incontinence to chastity. But making light of our reproach and that of our brethren, they defamed me and our canons and we became objects of wonder and common gossip in many different places."

With these words the very patient man bewailed his misfortune, which, unless he felt with natural affection, (he did not judge from this----).⁵⁵ But since he overcame all things with answering tolerance, he deplored their fall from grace in no small measure, and said his mind was disturbed more on this account than on account of his own troubles. For, when those perverse schismatics had instilled many falsehoods into the ears of the highest of all bishops, secretly carrying off the possessions of their houses, and when they had procured effective letters of the Pope's will by suppressing the truth, Gilbert obeyed the apostolic commands implicitly, although obedience for him concerned that which was evil, and he received the messengers respectfully even though they were his adversaries. Therefore in the legal disputes, he was often called into court and driven into the presence of bishops and prelates, who levelled many charges against him. But he, maintaining an unshakeable mind, would not deviate from the position of righteousness, neither through fear of punishment nor through the pressure brought to bear on him by the judge; and went so far as to assert that he would rather cut his throat, than change the first profession of the lay brothers

55. Lacuna in the text.

or the institution of the Order which had been sanctified with privileges of many apostles, and maintained long before and up to that time. In their period as novices they completely failed in those things put before them; and now they could not obtain, either by force or guile, what they wanted. So they turned to prayers, begging for mercy and humbly imploring that a few of the rigours they had to undergo might be moderated. Being a gentle man he received all his sons back with the kiss of peace in his all too generous reconciliation with the defaulters, and promised that, when the institutions of the Order were emended with the authority of the Lord Pope on the advice of religious men, he would obey in all things with humility. However, Ogger alone, the hammer of the holy man, as I will put it, persisted in his wrong doing, and, unmoved by the prayers of his brothers and by the admonitions of the judges or assessors, only agreed to return to the unity of the Order if the Master drew up new regulations in the Order as he dictated. Since Gilbert could not act so opportunely, Ogger did not desist from his obstinacy, and almost to the day of his death continually assailed that Order which was his own as well as Blessed Gilbert's. But he accomplished little or nothing, for being always cut off from his brethren, he also withdrew from that trade from which he got his name.

His perversity was greatly displeasing to God which was shown by the fact that he did not die an obscure death. He could not be punished, as many could, through his descendants as he had none, but his shame was mirrored in his damned sire.

His father never rebuked the sins of the flesh committed by his son; but even knowing and taking pleasure in them sometimes approached to receive the Lord's Body. Wonderful to relate and terrible to see was the sequel: the Lord spurned the dwelling of an unworthy host, when through the latter's mouth, nostrils, ears or eyes He cast Himself out of that dwelling, clearly showing that he was not a member of the communion of the Church. The Church, as far as she could do so, had cut him off; and he who could not partake of the Sacraments of the united Church, passed away quite unready for death. Of his accomplices who were the originators or abettors of the main issue of the division, scarcely any died under happy circumstances. At length, all the sinfulness of Ogger's part and that of his colleagues was revealed; then the Saint was justified in the whole affair, and God's love ordained that peace should once more reign in the Church. Almost all the English bishops and prelates had known Gilbert either through friendship or affinity, or from his fame which was well known; and these sent his writings together with notices and messages relating the whole truth of the matter in respect of his steadfastness, to the Lord Pope Alexander. By these, they commanded the worthy Master Gilbert to God, his wonderful works and praiseworthy group of followers who truly lived up to their calling. They noted clearly and truthfully the insolence of those rebels, begging in unison that the worthy man might be firmly restored to his former position, and be so strengthened as to be inviolable, and thus frustrate the artifices of schismatics. The illustrious king Henry II himself also testified in the same way, and

similarly entreating, sent his letter with royal messengers, maintaining firmly at the end that if the Order were changed through the deceits of those rustics, who were, as he said, serfs tied to the land, he would take back in that area all the domains and possessions which he and his nobles had bestowed, because of the religious devotion of the converted. If the Pope commanded that the same order and first establishment be kept with customary vigour, the king himself would hold the Order under his protection in accordance with his power, and regard it with the greatest honour and reverence as he had in the past.

THE INDULGENCE OF THE LORD POPE.

XXVI.

The Blessed Pope was moved by these prayers when the testimonies revealed the situation to him; so he sent his Apostolic command in a Bull granting to Blessed Gilbert and his successors the promise that nobody should be allowed to correct or change their religious life, vows or reasonable institutions, without consultation and consent of the senior and more thoughtful members of the Order; nor should anything be added to their practices that seemed to clash with what religious observances they had previously agreed upon, or with the better founded customs. Whatever needed future correction in the Order, Gilbert, or his successor, would gather the customs together and change them, after seeking advice from the priors of that Order, and would make what emendations should be deemed appropriate under the circumstances. Further-

more, the Lord Pope Alexander granted, as concessions to the holy father Gilbert, his successors and the holy house of Sempringham, many other exemptions and privileges for their permanent strength. These promises were augmented and strengthened by the pontiffs of Rome who succeeded the former; so much so that every onslaught of evil could be resisted, and the Order could rejoice in its strength and stand uninjured.

YET ANOTHER ASSAULT.

XXVII.

And so in this struggle Father Gilbert emerged gloriously triumphant, and always gave evidence of a toughness greater than what he in fact possessed. The more severely the enemy harried him, the more courageously and manfully he resisted, and the more felicitous were his victories. He was like Blessed Job who suffered no harm although so many external dangers assailed him; and the sterner the conflicts he endured, the more he had to be asked about them - how closely and how regularly he had to endure their assaults. This was so in order that he might become part of Christ's diadem, just as the gold was proved after three purgings in fire, and silver after seven. Wearied by his many battles - as many foreign as civil - it was his own resistance to himself that he had over-come before he could win every kind of laurel. Apart from his natural physical weakness, he suffered from hardships of illness and the pressure of his increasing years. Furthermore, the hardships of his life hastened old age. His vision became blurred as though in a

mist. Whether this hazard should be attributed merely to nature's gradual abandonment of men, to chance, or to the malice of the enemy, I do not know. Such indeed was the constitution of his body, that at such an age it could no longer retain any vestige of his eyesight's light. We cannot tell whether his blindness was the result of mere chance or of the enemy's attacks. We do know that he weakened his eyes by shedding their substance, so to speak, in much weeping, and that his eyes underwent much harm as the result of wind, dust, of keeping vigils, and of other hardships. It is uncertain whether this was an assault against his soul. Anyway in whatever manner it happened, or if indeed it happened to him as part of God's plan, we need feel no embarrassment in relating it, for this affliction met Isaac and Jacob and many other holy people. Indeed, this may be a source of joy to us: when we realise that this was the result not of the wrath and hatred of God but of His mercy.

HIS OLD AGE.

XXVIII.

His virtue increased as he grew weaker, and according as the vigour of life faded from his body, the more he deserved to be held up as an example of a noble-spirited man. Although his body was infirm and sick, and although almost blind, his spiritual energies in no way diminished. On the contrary, he maintained throughout his life all the zeal and enthusiasm that he had shown as a pastor in his earlier years. It was a source of admiration to all who saw how alert his senses, how

clear his thinking, how calm his disposition and how accurate his memory remained. Nobody was able to deny his good hearing, his eloquence, his firm foot and steady hand also; and how loyal in his turn he was to his successor; how much he basked in the light of God's love, and how keen his affection remained for his brethren. The name of Christ was never absent from his mind or his lips. His tongue and his hands were ever prepared to help those near him. His prayers, sighs and tears were continual - unable to conceal the feelings of his mind within. As the Lord of the house of Israel had appointed him to watch over His interests, he could not now, as it was necessary, exercise the required vigilance; so he prepared one to do so in his place - eyes, hands and feet to fulfil these duties. He entrusted to the afore-mentioned prior of Malton, Roger, all the monasteries, so that he might with his counsel deal with the more weighty matters. Under the latter, he appointed separately from the ranks of the men and women, one or two called Surveyors or Scrutators general to keep close watch on the conditions of all the houses, to make whatever small improvements were necessary, and to report to Gilbert matters of greater importance. Gilbert himself was head of all the houses as became his preeminence in understanding and holiness; so he reserved for himself final arbitration in all matters, and undertook, as long as he lived, responsibility for the professions of all committed to writing.

Therefore, as he retained every portion of his former duties, and as he was no longer able to travel on horseback,

he arranged that he should always be carried to the various religious houses in a sedan-chair.

His conduct was as it had always been - whether he was travelling, or in a hospice, at table or in bed - in fact in all his usual activities and at all seasons. He even enforced a more rigid discipline on himself. Because of his blindness and consequent inability to participate in worldly matters, he concerned himself completely with spiritual affairs. He had spent a lifetime of good works and deeds, and deserved to be favoured ceaselessly with the pleasures of sweet contemplation. He spent the whole day either in helping to provide for the bodily needs of the poor, or in listening to readings. Again, his mind, hands and lips would be occupied in prayer, or else he was busy conversing with his brethren concerning holy matters. He was pleased with no discourse unless it concerned God and true eternal life - otherwise he would not even listen patiently. What he said was short and to the point, even when speaking on holy and edifying matters. He was mindful of the words of the Psalmist: "I was crushed and humbled, kept silence from good things."⁵⁶ Then he turned his attention to his longing and prayer for heaven, reciting such words as, "How long O Lord, will you forget me? Forever?"⁵⁷, or "Alas, my sojourn has been lengthened."⁵⁸ When one thought he was restfully sleeping in bed, one saw him with hands inside

56. Psalm XXXVIII, 3.

57. Psalm XIII, 1.

58. Psalm CIX, 5.

his mantle, eyes turned up towards heaven, murmuring holy words to himself, ears alert. But when in conversation he considered that either he or one of those about him had uttered some impropriety, he straightway received the sacrament of Penance with great devotion, humbly begged forgiveness and accepted his penance. At night he kept vigil, maintaining his earlier watch in prayer, and left his bed whenever he could be sure of privacy in order to make the genuflections before it, as far as his body would allow such motions. Whenever his companions found him lying in this posture, he pretended to blame them for not preparing his bed correctly the previous evening; for he wanted only God Himself and the Saints with whom he conversed at night to share knowledge of what really happened.

HIS ABSTINENCE.

XXIX.

I will mention the scantiness of his food, for even during the extreme weakness caused by the sickness which overtakes old men, he never yielded to the persuasions of his brethren not to eat with them in the refectory. He never wished to eat apart from their table as far as possible, even though his little room was a long way from the common refectory, and the many steps up to it caused him a great deal of trouble. When the others asked him to spare himself, at least a small amount of pain and weakness, he answered in a petulant way, saying, "Gilbert will not be a good example for those who come after him, by eating dainties alone in his room." And so,

supported by the arms of his companions, one on either side, he reached the table with some difficulty, and there he aggravated rather than improved the condition of his frail body by taking no food. He never overlooked the fact that he was a servant of God and of his companions. Later he would rise from the table and after being similarly borne back to his cell, spent the rest of the day in similar spiritual ways.

HIS MUNIFICENCE.

XXX.

This is a digression on the life of our Blessed father Gilbert: a digression on his way of living. These are the proofs of his virtues and worthiness of his habits, wonderful deeds in which he surpassed the greatness of the most powerful of princes. For he did not imitate the brightness of the holiest men; on the contrary, his lustre could be imitated by others from the example he set. For who, of the leading men of the age - kings, I say, or popes - has been able to rival him in the number of his wonderful deeds in our times. When he, a pauper, and a clerk when spoken of at first, gave beautifully of all his patrimony - all, that is to say of what he had - he collected an increase from the decrease of his wealth, and great riches from poverty. But I consider it is to be greatly wondered at, that as an ordinary layman working in the Court,⁵⁹ he did not acquire the knowledge of the monastic rule of discipline from any man there - a rule which, however, he kept.

⁵⁹. The bishop of Lincoln's court.

Not merely did he keep the rule himself, but gave it to many others for their observance. So it was that his holiness made him pleasing to God, and his generosity made him loved by men. Both qualities caused him to be respected by all. Kings and princes used to honour him; popes and prelates gave him their support faithfully, relatives and non-relatives loved him exceedingly; all people revered him as the holy one of God. We have seen bishops fall down at his knees and seek his blessing; and from far distant lands, in which the fame of his holiness had resounded, we saw other bishops coming to ask for part of his clothing, in order that, in their own lands, they might hang up these things, as relics, in public places.

Certain leading church men have interpreted passages in his writings and his sermons to the people as prophetic. "Blush, Sidon, says the sea."⁶⁰ They identified themselves with Sidon, and Gilbert they truly saw to be the sea. Thus they realised that the man, who was a secular in that he bore no ecclesiastical dignity, not only seemed to equal but even to surpass the loftiest shepherds of the church in advancing the cause of the church. Even the great king Henry II paid him the great honour of not having to come to court to discuss the affairs of the church. On the contrary, the king was not ashamed to seek, along with his lords, Gilbert's counsel within the latter's monastery. Humbly he knelt to receive his blessing, and willingly accepted his advice concerning the salvation of his soul. It was a source of joy to his queen, Eleanor, too, that her sons,⁶¹ both future kings, received

60. Isaias XIII, 4.

61. Richard and John.

Gilbert's benediction. These princes regarded the state of their domain and the success of their affairs as depending on his loving presence and prayers. So, when sometime later, this same king Henry heard the news of Gilbert's death, while being attacked by his sons, he said in his great grief, "Indeed I can tell he has left this world. It is only because he is dead that these evils strike home against me." He spoke of his great esteem for Gilbert and about his sorrow at his death, and said he wished for a limit to his grief. He derived consolation from the thought suggested to him by his attendant nobles: he could understand how much Gilbert had prayed for him when he was still alive, and now that he was among the saints, his prayers would be more efficacious.

THE MIRACLES HE PERFORMED DURING HIS LIFE.

XXXI.

How well does God know how to diffuse the glory of his saints among mankind. He both reveals and enlarges upon their merits. He kindles a torch and places it, not in some obscure spot but upon a candlestick, so that whoever enters may see its light. He makes manifest to the eyes of men those whom He embraces in His bosom. God in fact gives such men graces, in accordance with their future greatness among man-kind, by making them remarkable for their miracles. Thus men may recognise the path and may feel confidence in the truths in which they have placed their hopes, and so attain eternal life. Divine goodness employed this sense of piety in the case of this saint; first by infusing Grace by which

his merits might proclaim themselves, and later by increasing his mercy so that His good works should shine with virtue. These then are the miracles performed by God on earth through the agency of our blessed father Gilbert during his lifetime.

It must be admitted that we do not live in an age when God's will is made manifest by signs. It has been well said that we are not instructed by signs, and today prophecy no longer exists. It is equally true that Gilbert was more conspicuous for his saintliness than for his miracles as a means of substantiating his pious acts and his preachings. Nevertheless, he brought help also to the many souls who could only believe miracles, and many signs were divinely manifested through his agency. By means of these signs, both his saintly life and the sincerity of his teaching were substantiated. It was revealed to a certain devout man of noble rank that the whole world should rejoice in Gilbert. This noble man was Adam of Amundeville, a wealthy soldier and worthy of faith. Adam dreamed that while he was standing in the middle of a huge throng which had gathered in some open space, he saw a bishop, dressed in his ceremonial robes, come down to him. Adam asked him who he was. "Surely you who have twice been in my service must know," was the reply. When he admitted that he did not know, the priest told him, "I am Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, known as St. Thomas." Adam rejoiced at hearing this, and expressed his admiration at his saintliness. "Thanks be to God," he said, "who performed such wonders on your behalf, my Lord! For I believe that there never has arisen, nor ever will arise, one in whom the world

might so much rejoice as in yourself." "But there will be one such holy man, I tell you," was the reply. When asked his name, he answered in one word - "Gilbert." I cannot but assume that this was any other than Gilbert of Sempringham. We are certain that there has as yet been no other whom he might have meant. That there will be no such in the future I choose to believe for these considerations: what future joys, what future happiness can we hope to be than in this man who has provided for so many men such spiritual and temporal benefits? What greater happiness can meet our world when he has disbursed upon it such a wonderful record of achievements, and such a wealth of heavenly signs? What greater happiness than that his glory has shone not only in his own land but throughout the whole Church? What greater happiness than what has been accorded to men to share with the angels? This glory we see and cherish to ourselves. In our joy we cannot - indeed we must not - pass over in silence what we in fact know.

THE ILLNESS FROM WHICH HE DIED.

XXXII.

Both the human deserts of the model life which he led and the means necessary to gather his band of followers, were removed from him when it pleased God to reward his earthly labours by eternal rest. As the time for his summons approached, his manner became increasingly harassed and he stated that no longer could he endure his mortal life because he was being deprived of all the comforts of human nature.

Indeed he was beset by disease and the effects of declining years. He is compelled to leave this retreat, and a certain disease from its very nature clung to him, for his companions were always old men. But by the gift of grace - so remarkable were the circumstances - this old man, wearied by so many afflictions, lived out his last years through this period so that he was able to reach his hundredth year with great physical strength. Indeed when he attained his hundredth year, every part of his body was normal with the exception of his loss of sight. But God's intention was to strengthen him by many tribulations, and to protect them to the extent that his eternal rewards were destined to be great. Nature therefore has no complaint, nor is there any offence to grace - to such an extent was he prepared to satisfy both of them: nature-by being willing to die, and grace-by being willing to prolong his life if it were expedient. He then wrote letters to the effect that his ordinances should hold good in all his churches. At the same time he begged that their prayers might secure for him strength at his death. He bequeathed his blessing, and forgave all those willing to follow his Order after his death, all the violations from the rules and customs that they had assumed. At the same time he warned those, who sought to sow the seeds of discord and disunion, that his forgiveness would not apply to them. Since, in the sight of God they would not have repented, it would be agreed that they would be a lasting reproach to themselves. The time was now approaching when his devoted soul would leave the shelter of his body. In the monastery in the island of

Cadney, he was fortified on the night on which Our Lord was born with Extreme Unction and Holy Communion. In this state he awaited in prayer the hour of death which all law ordered him to undergo. Before the fetters of his soul were loosened, however, the opportunity was taken by his companions and chaplains to remove him from the monastery with all possible dispatch. There was a risk that, if he were already dead, his remains might be stolen or forcibly detained for burial in their own churches or monasteries by the secular land-owners through whose territory he had to pass. Leaving the highways, they took him as secretly and yet as quickly as possible to Sempringham, so that he might be buried where he had founded his principal monastery. In the precincts of this place by divine dispensation all his priests (or canons) of all the churches, and many of his other disciples were strengthened by his blessing and spiritual directives. They were sollicitiously advised and instructed upon peace and unity, and the steadfastness of their Order which they must continue after his death. On the last day of his mortal life, when all had left the place in which he was lying, he, who succeeded him in office, sat alone before Gilbert's couch. The moment of his death was now at hand.

For a long time previous to this he had been silent, as one prepared for his last flight. Nobody had spoken to him, for he saw and heard nobody; intuitively, as I imagine, sensing the presence of someone sitting close by, he quoted sorrowfully yet clearly and openly the verse from the Psalm,

"He bestowed and gave to the poor, and asked it back"⁶² as though to say, "He bestowed his gifts on many, He gave and did not sell; and to the poor, not to the rich." Then he added, "It behoves you to do the same." He also uttered some other words which I do not know. I believe that the person meant by these words - in contrast to the more learned opinion of a former commentator⁶³ - was that same man who bestowed everything he had upon the many, whom he had united in the service of God; and who gave out of reverence for charity and sold his possessions, not in the hope of any earthly gain but for the poor who might take him up into the eternal Tabernacle. He did not do it for the sake of the wealthy, for to give to them is both useless and undeserving, and furthermore of no advantage for himself in his search for the kingdom of heaven. And so, when he is about to die, he rejoices on their behalf and requests his appointed successor a similar action. St. Paul similarly rejoices and derives spiritual comfort from these circumstances at the time of crisis: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course and have kept faith. As for the future, a crown of justice has been reserved for me, and God the just Judge will give this to me at the day of judgement."⁶⁴ Also the holy king of the Scots, David⁶⁵ repeated a verse of the psalm

62. Psalm 112, 9.

63. It is not known who this "former commentator" was.

64. 2 Timothy IV, 7.

65. David, king of Scotland (1084 - 1153).

seven times when he was on the threshold of death - a verse in which he had placed his hopes, "I have given judgement and justice. You will not betray me to those who calumniate me."⁶⁶

HIS DEATH.

XXXIII.

The following day - the day he was destined not to survive - was Sunday: the day when his toil was laid aside. The night passed, and day was approaching, so that he was able to say: "The darkness will not comprehend me, nor will it obliterate me."⁶⁷ Now came the hour of Morning Lauds: there were some praising God at the setting of the morning star. Those around Gilbert could scarcely speak - sobs and tears held their tongues still in their throats. That was indeed a day of tears - the day that took away from us our father and pastor, our kinsman and our friend. Other monks in other monasteries do not have the privilege of having - and of losing - such a spiritual father. He begat us, in the words of the evangelist, whatever our number was, or had been. He nursed and cherished us just as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. Now what are we to do, Lord Gilbert, now that you are no longer in our midst? To whom shall we go? Whom are we to follow? We fear that now you are gone we may be scattered and wander like sheep who have lost their shepherd.

66. Psalm 114.

67.

It is not you we should grieve for, but ourselves and those who will come after us. It is of no avail to spend this time in mourning, or to grieve over your death. For this is the beginning of our consolation, and the commencement for you of everlasting glory. We do not therefore indulge in mourning on your behalf, or on behalf of ourselves. Rather do we rejoice for you and for all of us who are left, forever. So on that Sunday he died, on the 4th of February, A. D. 1189, just as night was giving place to day, while the assembled monks were singing Lauds. He journeyed from the darkness of mortal life and the toils of the world into true light and eternal rest. After leading a lengthy life of over a hundred years, he departed to live in the house of the Lord, and to praise God forever. As was most fitting this was later revealed to one of his own order; for we are given to believe that a virgin from the ranks of the order saw his happy seat in Heaven in a vision sent from God. Indeed clear visions and manifestations were sent to those whose faith was strong enough to make them worthy - visions that showed that Gilbert beyond all doubt has been united with the Assembly of Saints in Heaven.

THE VISION IN QUESTION.

XXXIV.

During the same night that the soul of Father Gilbert left this world, such a vision appeared to a member not of his own but of another monastery. It happened to one Agnes, a nun in the nunnery at Appleton in Yorkshire. What she saw

was a large church situated in what appeared to be a most beautiful place, and to the west of this church a spacious mansion in which the last rites were being performed for, as it seemed, some great dignitary. The bier was elaborately adorned with silken draperies, and surmounted with crucifixes, candles and other such things suitable for the occasion.

Agnes was struck with wonder at the scale of the funeral, the like of which she had never seen before. There was a large throng of by-standers, so she asked one of them whose death was being marked by such a splendid funeral. She was told that Master Gilbert of Sempringham had departed this life, and that it was fitting that his burial should be accompanied by such veneration. Immediately the body rose up from the bier on which it was lying, took up the bishop's crook in his hand and in a voice deeper and sweeter than she had ever before heard commenced to chant the verse from a Sequence,

"Let us show the joy of a pure mind with our voices in song."

All the by-standers raised their voices to Heaven, and joining their voices with his, proceeded singing towards the church.

When Agnes saw alive him who she had been told was dead, she remonstrated with her informant. "You think I did not know Gilbert; but I know him well, and he is not yet dead. Who do you say this is on the bier?" Her informant replied, "Do you not know what happened to St. John the Evangelist? Just as he undertook to watch over the Mother of God, so Gilbert has undertaken to look after those who imitate him." "I know,"

she answered, "that he is my Master, and appointed to take charge of this place. I hold the whole of his life as something

I should keep in my memory." What happened to St. John," replied the by-stander, "will happen to Gilbert." And so, as the whole procession moved on, she asked where the cortege was going. She was told in reply that it was going to meet every other similar procession in the world. They all entered the church and stood assembled before a large crucifix. Then countless people from every part of the world came streaming in together, led by choirs singing together in deep-pitched voices. Certain of the newly arrived processions Agnes recognised. When she saw the vast numbers of the throng, she became afraid that she might be crushed by their numbers, so she left the church. Immediately the dream ended; but there lingered in her nostrils a smell of such wonderful sweetness that for the rest of the day and for a long time afterwards, maintained its savour in some mysterious way. Then she hastened to Matins and on her way to the chapel told her Sisters who were gathered around that she was sure that their master Gilbert of Sempringham had died - this she had learnt in a dream. Shortly afterwards came the actual news of his death, and it was realised that it took place at the same hour of the same night as she saw the vision.

ANOTHER VISION.

XXXV.

A similar though a not identical vision came to a lady steeped in the most exemplary practices, the noble wife of the worthy Rudolph of Hauville. In her dream she seemed to see and hear a throng of angels ascending into the Heavens

singing sweetly together hymns of great praise. Two further blessed choirs followed their ascent and confronted them, bearing between them three youths dressed in linen. The one in middle who was visible from the waist upwards, and although with boyish features had a completely bald head. The other two sitting one on either side of him were visible from the shoulders upwards and were of much less prepossessing appearance. When she asked who these were, she was told that the one in the middle was Master Gilbert of Sempringham, who was dead as far as the mortal world was concerned and was on his way to God. She hesitated, wondering if the other two were canons of his order. She was told that although they were not canons, they were good and holy men on their way to God's keeping. This faithful woman had this vision also on the night of Gilbert's death; and on arising next morning told her husband what she had seen. And after he took note of the day he too later realised that it coincided with that of his death. Later it was revealed to one of the canons of the order where Gilbert was to be taken and laid to rest. This canon saw in a dream, shortly after the death of the saint, one of his brethren who had died shortly before. He asked the departed brother a number of questions to which he received the answers he sought; then he discovered the state of his master, where he was and what should be done. "He is not with us," was the reply, "but in a higher place," for immediately he died he was placed among the choirs of virgins." The vision did not shirk from stating the truth.

HIS BURIAL.

XXXVI.

In this respect I believe that heaven had a hand in what happened to his saintly soul. Due solemnities took place around his corpse for part of four days. All the priors and priests of his Order were entrusted with the burial of their so illustrious spiritual father. When they assembled on the day appointed, along with all others of their profession, they were found to number more than twenty two hundred.

It was on the fourth day - that is the third ferial day; a number of abbots were standing close by, drawn from the ranks both of Gilbert's Order and many other religious Orders - religious people of either sex. There were also men of noble birth, as well as wealthy men, together with an enormous thronging congregation - people who had flocked together from all sides upon hearing of the death of the holy man. After the solemnities of Holy Mass were performed, his body was completely washed with water; and afterwards this water was given to many invalids to drink, and was in fact conducive to their restoration to health. The body was then placed in holy priestly vestments and laid in the place of burial. Between the high altars of Blessed Mary and St. Andrew the Apostle, he was laid with the highest honours in a kind of double cave closed in with walls on either side. Here he was able to be venerated by the men approaching from one side, and by the women approaching from the other. The stone of remembrance was not placed in position until all who were

present each embraced that part of the body that he could touch, and all rivalled one another to implant a kiss upon his holy and revered body as though in final farewell. To some little boys and girls there was something horrible in kissing a corpse; yet faith gave them the courage to touch it, and their devotion compelled them to give indications of their love. How great was the grief of everyone. What deep laments came from the choir of monks and virgins at this first and final separation from their spiritual leader. They could not hope to enjoy the guidance of his equal in the future. Yet God has His Will manifested through His chosen agent; the bargain was fulfilled on both sides - the task was done and the wages paid. This fact is borne out clearly by the following signs which occurred in the vicinity.

THE SUBSTITUTION OF HIS FIRST SUCCESSOR.

XXXVII.

Greatest and most remarkable was the miracle that occurred on the day of his burial when his frail body was laid in the tomb. Then, to the surprise and yet with the desire and request of all, without hindrance or contradiction of anyone, by everybody of both sexes alike, the man who is now father and director was appointed and elevated to the headship that rules, actuates and restrains the limbs. It was taken for granted by many and by almost all the other members of his province that a falling off of the ramifications of the house of Sempringham would occur upon the loss of so strenuous a ruling head. So to everyone's surprise and while

they discussed in their amazement what they should do, there came no answer but that he, who during his life had always striven for peace, had successfully solicited perpetual peace for his house now that he had come before his Creator. Countless other signs of miracles - apart from what are here mentioned - followed, by which the cares not only of the human body, but of the heart were looked after. At the same time, those who imitate his deeds are confounded, and the falseness of their claims is exposed; doubts concerning heavenly glory are dispelled, and the mouths of those who deride his deeds are closed. May he, with the help of his merits and the intercession of his prayers, suppress our vices, overcome our adversities, help us with his virtue. May he benefit and give increase to the Catholic Church by his true devotion, grant us eternal rest at our deaths, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost is honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE BEGINNING TOWARDS THE CANONISATION OF BLESSED GILBERT.

XXXVIII.

The grace of our heavenly Creator which had so much magnified the name of Blessed Gilbert by assisting his enterprises during his life-time, now deigned to add to his glory after his death by wondrous signs. Lest anybody either today or sometime in the future should doubt the manifest truth of these signs, I propose to relate the whole story briefly just as it happened. When this man of God, Gilbert had departed this life, in order that it might be known that his deeds

were acceptable to God, in the first year of his deposition and in following years, signs of his virtue began to take place frequently at his grave. Yet the brothers of his house of Sempringham sought secrecy, as indeed is the custom among all people committed to the religious life. Shunning the glory of this world, they failed to publicise certain things to avoid seeming to seek an opportunity of boasting of miracles. This impression would be created, they believed, if they divulged all that had been done by their founder. So more than eleven years went by after his death, and many miracles had been performed through Gilbert in many places. Some of the fraternity called attention to this studied secrecy concerning the deeds of God and by his saints. They pointed out to Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, a man much respected for his wisdom, that this suppression deprived Holy Church of due honour, and that the counsels of the wise were being unnecessarily held back. Hubert wept for joy, and copiously thanked God, as he heard the number and the wonder of Gilbert's miracles, for deigning to perform such works even in those late times on behalf of one of his servants. Of Gilbert's sanctity, he did not, in his goodness, doubt, for he knew it well. Now he did not doubt the works that he had performed, although these had only just been disclosed; but in order to strengthen the convictions of others, he ordered that a thorough investigation should be made of what he had heard. So he wrote to several abbots of his archdiocese to the effect that they should conduct diligent inquiries into this matter. They were to inform him in their

reports, he said, of what they discovered; for the more adequately he was told of all these matters, he could seek authority with the greater assurance to secure the canonisation of this holy man at the Apostolic Court.

The abbots, who had commenced their inquiry as instructed, gathered a large number of persons - both religious and secular, and reached the holy house of Sempringham on January 9th, 1201, the day on which the worthy King John together with his train of courtiers arrived. They gave minute examination to all evidence to be found concerning the miracles. To Archbishop Hubert, as well as to the Pope, they made known their findings. His lordship of Canterbury sent to the Holy See the letters that he had already received adding a direct message of commendation of Gilbert's saintliness and the highest praise for his wonderful powers. He asked that all these revealing facts should be promulgated in as much as he was a good man. His persuasions caused many leading abbots and bishops throughout England to write in similar vein; many priors and prelates also sent letters of commendation, making the same request. Even the worthy King John along with many of his nobles wrote no less persuasive letters. Two lettered brethren of the Order set out for the Holy See, equipped with all these testimonies and a document containing an account of his life and deeds. The fate of these two brothers was also miraculous; they returned safely in the greatest heat of the summer season, although many died through disease, and they passed untouched through the midst of their enemies who had tried to trap them, but were, as it were, struck with acroisia

as in the case of Eliseus.⁶⁷

When they returned from the Curia, they brought back the reply of the Apostolic See to the deeply - concerned Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Ely, and the Abbots of Peterborough and Warden. The reply commanded solemnly that together they should go to the place of his burial, and that a three day fast be observed by the whole college of the Order, so that all the brethren should beg and seek from Him, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and to implore Him to reveal also the way of discovering this truth for life. Then, not only through evidence, but through actual witnesses, through the growth of his fame abroad and authentic writings might conclusions be reached concerning Gilbert's personal merits, the truth of his signs, his deeds and his miracles. They were faithfully to document all, sign it under the pledge of their own seal, and read this evidence through suitable persons to the Curia; and these men should swear in the presence of the Lord Pope, and then proceed to the Apostolic See. All this was done strictly in accordance with apostolic usage. On September 26th, the above-mentioned Archbishop together with the bishops of Ely, Bath and Bangor, the Abbot of Peterborough since the Abbot of Warden had departed for the Chapter of the Cistercians, and many priors and a few archdeacons, canons and clerics from the cathedral of Lincoln, many well-known teachers with a great train of attendants - all journeyed to the house at Sempringham, after having fasted for three days. First the grace of the Holy Ghost was invoked,

67. IV. Kings, Chap. VI.

and they minutely examined all the witnesses having made them swear under oath - religious and secular, clergy and laity, men and women - concerning the nature of the wonders that Gilbert had performed. The testimonies of all these, faithfully recorded in writings and signed with each witness's seal, were sent closed to His Holiness the Pope. Also added were testimonies concerning Gilbert's mode of life and his intimate remarks, and what utterances had been publised abroad through hearsay. While they tarried there, however, for a period of four days, the truth which they sought was revealed by a remarkable miracle which took place at the tomb of the saint, now complete. A certain young man who was suffering in the throes of a permanent twitch of the head and occasional loss of understanding, was cured. Shortly afterwards he was sent to Rome as evidence of the cure, arriving there and returning completely normal. Five canons were also sent to Rome and six lay brothers, some of whom had been restored each from his deformity, by the merits of Saint Gilbert. Some of them had been present also at the cures of other people. This was done in order that the previous evidence that had been put before the Pope in the form of documents, would now be rendered beyond doubt by the actual words of men whom the Pope had before him.

These ambassadors then, set off swiftly on their journey, trusting in the help of God and St. Gilbert. Their eagerness was encouraged by a happy dream that they had seen both before and at the time of their departure, and which promised a happy outcome for their errand. They arrived at their destination,

not without difficulties. Although Satan tried to restrict their journey somewhat, they reached Rome on December 31st, and on the 2nd of January reached Anagni where His Holiness was staying at that time. God gave them so much grace in the eyes of the Sovereign Pontiff and his cardinals, that on the tenth day after their arrival, they were able to rejoice with the purpose of their mission fulfilled. Furthermore, a deliberative assembly of the cardinals took place in the Pope's presence. Their documents were inspected, and the witnesses who had come with them were carefully examined under oath. When a great measure of agreement was found in all present and the matter had been judged insomuch as it was possible to human reason, it pleased Divine Dispensation to relax Its severity, and Divine Counsel showed the Truth concerning the matter at issue to His Holiness as he made his enquiries. One night around the 10th after their arrival, at the Vatican the Pope lay awake in bed, more than was his custom, and began to think over the proposed canonisation of St. Gilbert, and he asked God that He would deign to give him another sign as to what should be done at this point, and to grant His help if the canonisation was to take place. At this juncture sleep interrupted his train of thought, and while he slept a vision came to him. He saw before his eyes a huge and lofty tower. Wishing to gain access, he was helped in - according to custom - by the hands of those gathered closely around. Inside he found a couch laid out and elaborately embellished. Near the couch a priceless eastern curtain was suspended, emblazoned with images of the Saints. He wondered

at the beauty and the splendour of the curtain because, although he had such an object by his bed, it was not of eastern design. He reached out to hold it, and began to devise how he might mount it above his bed. Meanwhile he went into another room nearby, and on his return, he thought more assiduously of what was to be done in the matter of the canons from Sempringham and of the canonisation they sought for their saint. A voice from above came down to him saying, "The Archangel Michael will be your help in this business." The sovereign Pontiff woke up, thrilled by so clear and so important a revelation, for he realised that God's will was that the canonisation should take place, and that he himself was His agent for so decreeing among men. Immediately he composed a special prayer for St. Gilbert, and this, along with a Secret and a Post Communion which he later composed, he decreed were to be said in commemoration of the Saint. This prayer is, "plenum in nobis...etc;" the Secret, "Accepta sit tibi...etc;" and the Post Communion, "Quod ad te Domine... etc." Even so, being a man of utmost caution, he wished to feel absolutely certain of the matter. He therefore asked a man of great sanctity and erudition, what was the meaning of the dream. The Abbot of Reiner was a man who lived a life of solitude in the mountains, and because of his reputation for holiness and wisdom, was held in veneration by the Pope and the whole Church alike. This man was summoned and ordered by the Head of the Apostolic Church to think over the dream and explain its meaning. He was infused with the Spirit of St. Joseph, or that of Daniel. "There is no need to think long

upon this," he said, "for both dream and meaning are quite clear. The great lofty tower you saw is the true worthiness of Your Holiness. Into this eminence, according to your wishes, you were elected by others. You did not seize it for yourself, but others gave you this appointment. The ornamented couch is a clean conscience, in which we must rest as in a bed; for the Psalmist says, "I will moisten my bed with my tears."⁶⁸ The curtain around the bed, with its images of the saints, is the commemoration of the Saints, which is the ornament of conscience as long as their memory lives on in our hearts and by our works. You began to devise schemes concerning it just as you conjectured as to what was to be done concerning this Saint, who, according to my judgement also must hereafter be commemorated among the saints. What you sought during your waking hours, you requested in your sleep, and God answered your prayer since the Archangel Michael is promised you as the helper due to you. Michael has been appointed in charge of Paradise, and has been granted charge by God of all the souls received there, and he has received the holy soul of Gilbert among the souls of saints. And in that everlasting palace of the Blessed spirits over which Michael presides, the title of Saint has been accorded to him along with appropriate honour. Sew him in then, as he should be, to part of the working of that curtain - in other words, join him to the number of Saints whose memory is kept."

This statement of the Abbot pleased the Pope; without delay he called together all the Cardinals of the Holy See

68. Psalm VI, 7.

who were there assembled in full session. Then he presented the Archbishop of Rheims, who bore great testimony of the sanctity of blessed Gilbert whom he knew as a young man in England. This took place in the presence of all, clerics and the rest of the people; all were sitting except only the envoys from England. His Holiness himself preached a long and noble sermon concerning the great deeds and miracles of St. Gilbert, and the evidence he had accepted and the witnesses whose testimony had been admitted. After many proposals and entreaties were discussed, necessary for many reasons, he canonised St. Gilbert with the common assent of the whole Church, and decreed that his memory should be celebrated among the Saints.

The canonisation of St. Gilbert, occasioned by the Saint's own merits, and aided by the evidence of many miracles and the persuasion of many revelations, caused him to be enrolled in the catalogue of the Saints on the 11th of January 1202 A.D. In fact in the sixth age of the world, six days after the epiphany of Our Lord, on the sixth ferial day on the sixth hour of the day, in the sixth year of the tenth novenal cycle beginning with the sixth letter of the dominical alphabet at Anagni, it was solemnised by Pope Innocent with the concurrence of the Holy See. At the time, John, son of King Henry II, was king of England; Hubert was Archbishop of Canterbury. But ruling everywhere is Our Lord Jesus Christ to Whom all honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE TRANSLATION OF ST. GILBERT CONFESSOR.

XXXIX.

And so the glory of Blessed Gilbert was revealed, and he was solemnly canonised, as has been stated, in the seat of Christianity. The Pope then directed all his writings to the attention of the Archbishops of England, and sent back to the head house of the Order at Sempringham all that became known following the beginnings of the enquiry into his signs and sanctity. He pointed out how quickly and discreetly the matter had so far been dealt with, and asked finally that they should maintain humbly and devoutly the honour which he had solemnly and carefully granted. They were to celebrate with all solemnity Gilbert's feast through all their provincial houses. In his instructions to the Archbishop of Canterbury, he commanded that as he had been so requested by the brethren of that Order, he should elevate the body of this same Confessor with due honour and reverence, since he was buried in his province. The Archbishop and St. Gilbert's Order, after all preparations were complete, set about the elevation of the body enthusiastically - the Archbishop, because the command was the word of God, the brethren of the Order, because it was a command they eagerly wished to fulfil. Admittedly, in the case of Saints of olden times, and those whose memory disappeared with the passage of years, antiquity itself, or the carelessness or ignorance of man, left them for years in obscurity, no actual vision gave previous assent to this reburial. Yet they believed it sufficient that clear revelation had been given, first by God and afterwards by men, for setting about the task. This was particularly so since they had

received their orders from the Holy See, to which they gave obedience just as to a command direct from God. And since they were urged to do this during their own life time by the Sovereign Pontiff still living at this time, they feared that it might be dangerous to delay, and accomplished what they had been commanded without hesitation.

In the year of Our Lord 1202, these Brothers convened their Seniors through their Master upon the order of the Archbishop. It was the vigil of the Feast of the Holy Cross. They assembled so that on the next Sunday after the Feast of St. Dionysus they could solemnise the translation of St. Gilbert the Confessor. This the Archbishop devoutly and willingly did, with the solemnity that the undertaking of such a great duty demanded. He took it upon himself to proclaim this matter to all his fellow-bishops who exercise sway throughout England, bidding and entreating that all who could do so should be present with him on the appointed day; and that they should cause it to be proclaimed throughout their dioceses, to the effect that those who should wish to visit the portal of this holy Saint, should note the day of these great solemnities. The day specified for this was October 13th. There occurred a glory of heavenly revolutions manifesting divine approval. At the time when this event was happening, there appeared to one of the nuns while sleeping another nun of the same Order, who had died during the last year. Among other things that she said, this nun stated that a general assembly was being held among the Saints in heaven - a manifestation of their desire to assemble on the

day specified for the translation of St. Gilbert. She further stated that all the members of their Order who were awaiting their day of Salvation in purgatory would suffer no pain from the hour of the heavenly excitement, until the day when the rites actually took place. There was no doubt that the Blessed Spirits were there at the time - this was confirmed by certain clear portents. On the eve of St. Gilbert's elevation, a Sunday, the Archbishop of Canterbury and certain other bishops and priests opened the mausoleum, where the pledge-offerings were kept. These they took up with reverence so that, like lotus-flowers in their appointed places, they be placed together in proper fashion on the morrow without delay in a holy receptacle. This solemnity was to take place during the singing of hymns and sacred canticles. It was then that several of the clergy and many laymen also, saw a huge fiery globe like a multitude of candles all lit together, as they said, or like a large shimmering star. This descended from heaven once, then again, and then a third time; then it rose again over the roof of the church opposite the tomb. Upon its third approach, however, it seemed to penetrate the roof of the church and fall inside. When they saw this, some of them urged the others to come out and see what they described as the light of Christ above His Church.

Others who were keeping watch before the Saint's tomb one night before the translation, saw similar prodigies; they saw a huge light through the stained-glass window coming close to the tomb three times, and on the third occasion descending into the hollow where the saint had been laid. A wonderfully sweet

smell filled the nostrils of all present, when in order to prepare a place for assembling the bier, workmen had removed a small part of the masonry from the place where first he had been laid. These were not the only manifestations of heavenly glory attached to the event - there were others: when a stone from the monument was removed, there was discovered the red dust of decomposed flesh such as, it is said, that of dead virgins.

THE CHASUBLE.

XL.

The silk chasuble in which the body was enshrined at burial was found intact. After the sacred relics had been removed and washed, the venerable Archbishop in charge of the proceedings withdrew a little from the bier. He was so violently stricken by the impact of a serious illness, that the holy office he had begun, and on account of which so many holy people and such a gathering of laity has assembled, seemed unlikely to be completed. When it was found that no improvement was forthcoming from the human ministrations which were proffered and which he believed would be efficacious towards his recovery, stricken with grief over more than his own pain, he poured out prayers and entreaties to God and to St. Gilbert. He requested that strength would be given to him, through the merits of the saint, to complete the obsequies which he had begun. He had scarcely finished his prayers when every vestige of his illness immediately disappeared - indeed he acquired more strength than he had before the ailment first made itself

known. Immediately afterwards the time for the night office arrived; the once-stricken priest gave thanks to God, and preparing himself along with the priests with him, offered himself for canonical duties during the assembly - duties in honour and love of the saint on whose behalf the solemnities were taking place. He executed them decorously and with deep devotion. The next day, when the Church dignitaries were assembled, he appeared well and happy, and told them what had happened to him, at the same time praising the virtue of God and His Saint, virtue that had so patently shown itself present in him. At the appropriate hour the solemn procession began; it began with the holy obsequies, the blessing of holy water by a bishop, the dedication of a casket of relics, which were then placed on the shoulders of certain leading and noble figures of England who were present. It was led by the clergy; following then were the bishops with an immense throng, the nobles bearing both the holy relics and their blessed container. We know for sure that when certain sick people approached and touched these pious objects, they were set free of their tribulations from that very hour. After a sermon from the Archbishop, which treated of the sanctity and wonders performed by Blessed Gilbert and of what was portended by the whole of this ceremony, Mass was celebrated by the Archbishop himself. Towards the end of this, after the Holy Sacrament had been distributed, but before the sung Communion, the relics were put back in a clean linen cloth beneath a precious silken robe. These objects which the lord Archbishop had given for this purpose, were then enclosed in a consecrated jar. Next was

added a document giving an account of St. Gilbert's life and miracles. It also contained a summary of his canonisation and translation, along with the signatures of the bishops and abbots who assisted them. The whole, prepared beforehand, was strengthened with sheets of lead so as to remain a lasting monument; all these objects were laid in the sepulchre together. The casket was sealed and set above a marble wall in the place where the saint had been previously placed at rest. The Mass was then completed, and when all the ceremonies were concluded with due solemnity, each joyfully made his own way home.

THIS IS THE INSCRIPTION ON THE SHEETS OF LEAD.

"Here lies Saint Gilbert, first father and founder of the Order of Sempringham; laid in this lowly place by Hubert, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, by order of Pope Innocent III, 13th of October in the year of Our Lord 1202."

THIS IS THE INSCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENT WHICH WAS PLACED
IN THE CASKET.

"In this cask are contained the remains of Blessed Gilbert, priest and confessor, first father and founder of the Order of Sempringham. There are many tokens of his leading a distinguished and thoroughly praise-worthy life. But this is his chief claim to note: that he chose poverty of his own accord, and granted all the material gifts, which God had bestowed to him, to the needs of his Brothers and Sisters, whom he established wisely under a code of discipline

and whom he zealously safeguarded. God granted him such grace and virtue through the years that he built four regular houses of canons and nine monasteries for holy nuns. In these establishments he left at the time he went to God - not to mention the countless people whom he had outlived - around seven hundred religious men and one thousand five hundred Sisters perpetually devoted to the service of God. He died at the advanced age of more than a hundred years in the year of Our Lord 1189 on the 4th of February, during the reign of the worthy King of England, Henry II. Through his own merits, together with the evidence of many miracles and with the clear approval of divine revelation, he was canonised and enrolled as one of the Saints by his Holiness Pope Innocent III through the Holy See at Anagni, in the presence of priests and people, on January 11th in the year of the Word Incarnate 1202, in the third year of the illustrious reign of King John, during the holding of the See at Canterbury by the venerable Archbishop Hubert, who at the order of the Holy Pontiff Innocent III, in consort with Eustace, bishop of Ely, and Abbot Acharius, bishop of Peterborough, made a close investigation into the miracles which Gilbert, with divine help performed. They sent their evidence faithfully recorded in writing, sealed under their own signatures, to the Holy See. To this evidence His Holiness the Pope added further certainty to his sanctity, and encouraged by signs, caused Gilbert to be numbered among the Saints in the fourth year of his pontificate. In the same year, by order of the same Pontiff, the Saint was

translated by the above mentioned Archbishop Hubert in this lowly place on October 13th, assisted by the venerable bishops of Norwich and Hereford. There were gathered many abbots and other church prelates, with the great and distinguished noblemen of England, in the presence of a vast assembly of clergy and laity. The above-mentioned Archbishop, along with his fellow bishops and abbots, has each appended his signature to this document, and has placed it in this lowly place to add perpetual memory to these circumstances."

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Bernard of Clairvaux : Commission d'histoire de l'ordre de Citeaux.
- CE : Catholic Encyclopedeia.
- CL : Nelson's Classics, The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc.
- EHR : English Historical Review, Vol. L.1935.
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