

rid themselves of the faults of girlhood. They are so young, poor dears! And children of haughty nobles, Franks or Saxons, they find lessons of meekness, and humility, and forgiveness, ideals so unfamiliar in their home life, very, very difficult to learn. But they have such warm hearts, and they love the dear Mother so much!

Let us ask Jonas to make them better known to us.* Here comes little Sister Ercantrudis.† The daughter of noble parents, she had been sent to the convent before she had quite emerged from babyhood; and there, so carefully was she guarded from all knowledge of evil, that she did not even suspect its existence, but during her whole life she kept the pure and innocent mind of a child. While she was still very young she was stricken with an illness that caused her terrible sufferings, but never once was the sweet child heard to utter complaint. "Marvellous the patience that was found in that maiden of tender years, marvellous her humility, marvellous her gentleness, marvellous her piety, marvellous her meekness, marvellous her charity. Amidst the sufferings she endured her strength of soul grew stronger, unshaken remained her faith, unalterable her goodness, incomparable her gift of tears." She was an example to all—the darling of the community.

It happened, however, that she committed some fault against the Rule, which, as we know, was very exacting. When she made known this fault in the public confession, which was made thrice a day in the presence of all the Sisterhood, the Abbess was obliged to impose a penance on her. But harder to bear than the bodily penance, however severe, was the deprivation of Holy Communion, which the Mother found herself also compelled to exact from her. It was the eve of the Feast of St. Martin, and poor little Sister Ercantrudis was broken-hearted to think that she could not receive her Lord on that great festival. She spent the whole night in prayers and tears, and in the morning she heard a voice saying that her fault was pardoned her, and bidding her go at once with that message to the Mother, so that she might receive Holy Communion with the rest of the Sisters, on that happy feast day, whose light had just then dawned.

For all her youth and innocence, she had the gift of discernment to a high degree, and was able to "steady" another poor young nun, who was passing through a period of great unhappiness, and tempted to renounce her vocation.

The story of her deathbed is beautiful—like nearly all those convent deathbed scenes which Jonas relates with such delight. As she lay in the darkness, she suddenly asked the nuns who were around her couch to extinguish the light. "What light?" they asked. "Do you not see," she cried, "the glory that has arisen, and do you not hear the strains of harmonious voices, singing together in canticles?" And to the psalmody of angelic choirs her pure soul sped aloft to its Creator.

At another of these saintly deathbeds, that of Sister Gibitrudis, Jonas himself had the happiness of assisting, and it was his privilege to be present in the little cell while the fragrance shaken from the wings of the herald angels yet filled it with paradisaical sweetness.‡

Sister Gibitrudis was a cousin of the Abbess, and, like Burgundofara herself, sprung, both on the paternal and the maternal side, from the noblest houses of the Franks. Even when she was a very little girl, she wanted to be a nun, but her father and mother, who wished her to marry and continue the family, were loth to allow her. To satisfy her to some extent they permitted her to build a little oratory for herself at the foot of their garden. But God wanted this pure heart entirely for His own, and as her father opposed His will, He struck him down with a heavy sickness, and the maiden herself with blindness. Terrified by these warnings, her father promised that, if God would spare him and his daughter recovered her sight, he would no longer prevent her from becoming a nun in Evoracas. God granted these graces to Gibitrudis's earnest prayers, and she found herself at liberty to present herself to her dear cousin—henceforth to be her Mother.

* Jonas devotes twelve chapters of the second book of the *Vita Columbani Abbatís Discipulorumque ejus* to an account of Evoracas. I quote from Bruno Krusch's edition in *Monumenta Germanicæ Historica*.

† *Vita Col.*, ii. 13.

‡ *Vita Col.*, ii. 12.

She was very devoted to the Abbess, and soon gave proof thereof. Burgundofara fell dangerously ill, and her life was despaired of. The whole community was in great grief, but the grief of none compared with that of Gibitrudis. In a passion of tears she went one day into the church, and asked God to take her, but to spare the dear Mother. Her sacrifice was accepted. Ere she rose from her knees before the Blessed Sacrament, she thought she heard a voice saying, "Go, handmaid of Christ. What thou hast asked, that shalt thou obtain. She will be left amidst the living, and thou shalt be freed from the bonds of the flesh." A short time after, she fell mortally ill of a fever. Her soul had actually passed from her body, and been borne aloft by the angels, and her eyes had seen the chivalry of Heaven, and the white-robed company of the martyrs gathered around the Throne, when she heard a voice bidding her return to earth, for her task was not wholly completed, her debts not wholly paid.

It appears that there were three of her young companions in the cloister who had offended her in some way, and she had not tamed her proud young heart sufficiently to bear them no grudge. So she had perforce to return to earth for six months longer, and forgive her comrades "their trespasses" against her, as she hoped to have her own forgiven.

After six months she was again attacked by a fever, and she was able to tell all the community the day and hour of her approaching death. "And so blessed was that death," says Jonas, with one of those personal touches which make his narrative so engaging, "that within the little cell where her body lay, you would think there was balsam being distilled, which to all of us who were there present, seemed a great miracle. And thirty days after, as we were celebrating her Month's Mind Mass, according to the custom of the Church, so great a fragrance filled the sanctuary that you would think that all the perfumes and unguents that ever existed were there concentrated."

The little glimpses which Jonas thus gives us into the conventual life and ecclesiastical customs of the period are of great interest and importance for the student of Church history. We learn, for instance, from the following story (while enjoying its quaint flavor, naive and delightful) that a beautiful old Irish custom, brought by St. Columban and his companions from their *Alma Mater*, Bangor, was observed by the nuns of Evoracas. While the community were receiving Holy Communion the Sisters sang that exquisite Eucharistic hymn (still preserved in the *Antiphonarium Benchorense*) which seemed to the old Gaels, our ancestors, so lovely that they thought angels had first composed it and taught it to St. Patrick and St. Sechnell:

Sancti venite
Christi Corpus sumite
Sanctum bibentes,
Quo redempti Sanguinem.

"On a certain Sunday, when the aforesaid Burgundofara and her community of nuns were assisting at the solemn mysteries of the Mass, and were already partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, it happened that a certain Sister among them, called Domna, having received Holy Communion, had returned to her place in the choir, and was singing, with her companions, *Hoc Sacrum Corpus Domini et Salvatoris Sanguinem sumite vobis in vitam perennem*. Suddenly her face and brow were illumined by a soft radiance that seemed to come from a globe of white fire. Two tiny little maidens who were standing by, immaculate in their childish innocence, saw the rays of light radiating from the countenance of the sad Domna, while she sang melodiously the Communion Hymn. Unable to contain their wonder, they began to cry out: 'Look, look, at the globe of fire shining from the face of Sister Domna.' Which when the Mother heard, fearing (with good reason, as afterwards transpired) lest vain glory might spoil the heart of the favored one, she bade them be silent."

The story goes on to tell that poor Domna *did* yield to the sin of pride, after having been the object of such predilection on the part of the Holy Spirit. And so it came to pass that the great favor that was meant for her was taken from her and given to the little innocent girls who had witnessed her transfiguration. The two of them fell ill: one of them, Ansitrudis, with terrible pains in her