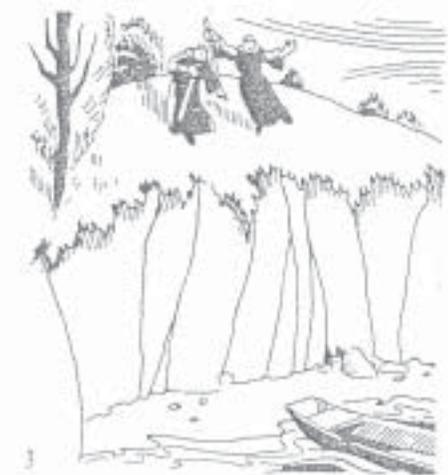




1. One summer's afternoon, two monks were making their way through a thick oak forest. The atmosphere was stifling and they could hardly breathe. One of them, with bright shining eyes, walked with long quick steps; the other, whose name was Roger, could not stand upright: he followed, looking tired, his face covered with perspiration.



2. Suddenly, a gap appeared in the thick foliage, and to their astonishment they saw a beautiful hill, called La Museresse. Amazed at the sight, they stopped at once. By St Benedict, exclaimed Brother Roger; this must be the younger sister of our Monte Cassino in Italy! Just breathe the scent of the thyme and the heather! Providence must have led us here.



3. They climbed to the top to thank God and take their night's rest; but when they arrived, they saw something which filled their hearts with joy: it was the Bay of La Hougue and, further on, the Bay of Les Vays - the sea, which they had not seen since they left Italy. The first monk was so elated that he cried out, "Come along; let's go and sleep on the beach! "



4. Brother Roger, however, was not at all keen. His poor feet here all covered in blood and he wondered what in the world they could do on the beach, which was as bare as the Egyptian desert. And when his companion said, Look! there's a boat over there lying on the sand; let's go and lie clown in it, he replied: You can go if you like; I'm not coming. And for the first time since they left Monte Cassino, the two companions separated.

5. The night brought other thoughts, and soon Roger was sorry that ,he had spoken so sharply. He got up from his place of rest on the sand and ran towards the spot where he had last seen his companion. But where had he got to? there was no sign of The boat; it had been carried out to sea by the tide, with the monk in it, fast asleep. Roger looked everywhere, but the only answer to his cries came from the seagulls. Then lie shed bitter tears; how could he have known that Heaven had guided his brother to the coast of England?



6. Most of that day, he wandered about here and there. The tide came in again, but still there was no sign of the boat; so he lay down on the sand, broken-hearted. But what could lie do? At last he mode his way to La Museresse, quite dispirited, and said a prayer to Our Lady. O Virgin Mary, watch over me, your son. I am lost in this unknown forest; show me the way to safety.

7. After making this loving appeal, he closed his eyes and fell asleep; and he dreamed that he saw a star fall from the sky. It crashed with a loud noise at the foot of the hill and set all the trees alight like so many torches. When the fire had burnt itself out, he saw a church as white as a linen alb rising up from the fire-blackened ground.



8. Then he heard wonderful singing coming from the church, loud and powerful, and he thought he must be in heaven. But then he woke up, and saw to his astonishment that the forest was still alight at the very place where he had seen the star fall. "It must be a miracle," he thought.

9. Bowing down to the ground, he made a vow to build a sanctuary in honor of the Virgin Mary, whom he now called **OUR LADY OF THE STAR**. At first, this was only a hut covered with branches. He cultivated the land surrounding it, and during the night, when he was praying, he could hear the nightingales singing.





10. *On one occasion, the peace of the valley was disturbed by a great commotion. William the Conqueror, the high and powerful sovereign of Normandy, was passing through with a troop of horsemen. He had come to view his fleet of ships from the top of La Museresse. There they were, ready for his signal to set sail across the Channel.*



11. *Looking back down into the valley, William saw the bell in the tiny hermitage. His haughty look relaxed. , Happy the man, indeed, thrice happy, who spends his days in this solitary place. When my heart stops beating, I want it to rest in this peaceful valley; I trust that my wish will be granted .*



12. *The Conqueror went down the hill, followed by his companions. The monk was weeding his garden, but he stood up to honour his guest. Good Brother Monk, said William, my will is that in this spot an abbey more beautiful than any other in my Duchy be built. And when he died, after conquering the kingdom of the Saxons, his heart was brought here in a golden urn, and there it found its resting place.*

13. The monastery did not take long to build, for everybody lent a hand, both the local inhabitants and occasional visitors. Some helped the monks to level the ground, others hewed the stone or drove the carts. Soon the attractive image of Our Lady appeared in the place of honour. It was set off by coloring and surrounded by lighted torches. Graces and favors rewarded builders and pilgrims.



14. During the consecration of the Abbey Church, the long ceremonies in the open air dragged on and on, but at last the heavy main door opened and the Bishop entered, followed by the people, who filled the six bays of the nave. The music of the Te Deum was re-echoed by the tall building, and from his vault near the statue of Our Lady, Brother Roger, the founder and first abbot of the monastery, was seen crozier in hand still mounting his guard of honour.



15. Two centuries went by, punctuated by the sound of the bells and the singing of the psalms. The days of the monks were taken up with the chanting of the office, work in the fields and the care of the Madonna and the pilgrims. A town had grown up on the hill; because of its position it was called MONTE-BOURG, a peaceful place and very prosperous. But all of a sudden, on 12 July 1346, while the Benedictine monks were singing None, an unknown knight made his appearance.





16. *Laura, the daughter of the town's innkeeper, who was busy with her spinning wheel, suddenly uttered a loud cry: she saw a knight thrown from his horse because he had ridden into a branch of hawthorn that was hanging over the narrow street. At the sound of his fall, the people came flocking to the rescue. He was given a few drops of elixir, and as soon as he could speak he gasped out: The English... the English!*



17. *He jumped on his horse and disappeared. This unusual event jerked the town out of its lethargy. A little later, a woodcutter named Angeot, ran up all out of breath. "As I was cutting wood and furze on La Museresse", he cried, "I happened to glance in the direction of the Bay of La Hougue and was frightened almost out of my life. A forest was coming out of the sea near the Saint-Marcouf Islands".*



18. *"The prophecy of the great Albert is being fulfilled", he continued; "When trees grow in the sea, only sand will be on the land". But what he had seen was not trees, but masts and sails: a mighty fleet was anchored in the harbour of Saint-Vaast and the English army had invaded the fields of the Cotentin.*



19. *The invaders ravaged and burned the Saire Valley. On Tuesday, 18 July, the English cavalry broke through near Alleaume and laid siege to Valognes and Montebourg. Montebourg is the key to Cherbourg. A forest of spears and banners appeared on the Haut-Geley, and Welsh and Irish foot-soldiers swarmed through the fields of green corn.*

20. *We must capture this place, cried the Earl of Warwick at the head of the cavalry; strike hard: the King has come only to claim his rights And the hurrahs went up from the whole army. The bowmen bent their bows made of yew; the arrows whistled through the air and fell on the besieged citizens like death-dealing rain. The townsfolk made a spirited counter-attack.*



21. *But what could a handful of brave men do against an army that was soon to defeat France itself at the battle of Crecy? The stockade they hastily erected to the north of the walls was soon set on fire. Through a breach in the wall, the heavy cavalry broke into the town, and the massacre went on, until nightfall put an end to it. The destruction in the town was beyond belief.*



22. The large number of people who had taken REFUGE in the Abbey saw a young girl come running up, her hair dishevelled. Two Welsh soldiers were pursuing her. It was Laura, and she was clasping a casket to her breast. She carried on until she fell down exhausted within a couple of yards from the gate; but before the two soldiers could catch hold of her, they were struck motionless by a vision.



23. They saw the Lord Abbot, holding his crozier and wearing a mitre adorned with the precious stones given by King Henry I of England and Normandy. He stood there, stiff and silent, like a stone statue; but in his eyes, there shone a light as terrible as God's justice. That was how the monk triumphed over the soldier... Later on, however, the abbey experienced many vicissitudes.

24. Thus, on Sunday, 14 June 1362, it was pillaged by the Huguenots: 2000 of them, armed to the teeth, laid waste the church and monastery, pulled down the statue of Our Lady and broke it to pieces. Then they did the same to the sepulchral monuments of several abbots. But the monks were not to be discouraged: they made good the disaster and erected another statue.





25. *The centuries passed, seemingly peaceful and unvarying. But, alas, the fervour of the cloister presented no attraction for souls living in the frivolous 18th century. The decay was hastened by the system of commendatory abbots. It reached the point when, in 1773, there was only one monk left in the monastery; the abbey reminded people of a hive which had been abandoned by the bees. How sadly the solitary monk walked through the deserted halls and cloister!*

26. *The last abbot was Mgr Talaru, Bishop of Coutances, who turned the monastery into a home for old priests, about fifteen of them, who came and lived in the cells previously occupied by the Benedictines. They liked the peaceful setting and the Great Tower with its reflection in the water of the pond; here they could wait in peace for death.*



27. *But after the massacres of September, 1792, they had to go into exile. Mgr Talaru, who had also retired into his dear abbey, was the only one left behind, and he felt like a shepherd who has lost his sheep. But he found comfort in contemplating the church, one of the masterpieces of Norman art. One autumn morning, however, he felt so sad that he said this prayer: Lord God, do not allow hatred to pull down this building which was erected by love!*

28. He was disturbed in his recollection by the sound of rapid steps. A man had run up and was now urging him to escape. Three ruffians have come to kill you; they are searching your rooms. You must flee! The Bishop gave a last look at the abbey church as if to preserve a better image of it; then he passed under the mill bridge and escaped in the direction of Saint-Floxel.



29. The three ruffians were mad at being outwitted. They took their revenge on the Abbey Church. Full of rage, they burst open the door; but once inside the buildings they felt uneasy at the sight of the great crucifix in the transept and the subdued light, and even by the sound of their own footsteps. Nevertheless, their leader, a stonemason from Caen, brushed his fears aside, took hold of a sledge-hammer and started breaking zip the statues.

30. But they could do nothing to the massive walls of the church. In due course, the tatter was converted into a kind of barn, and used as a store for the fodder of the Republic. During the winter of 1793, the western gales blew the roof off, and the building could no longer be used; it was decided to sell it for demolition. The tower was blown up with explosives by a hawker from Flers.





31. April 1844. The weather was sharp, in spite of the spring, and the time was close on 12 noon. A carriage drew up into the deserted courtyard and three religious in black cassocks and high white collars got out. They were Brothers of Mercy and had been sent there by their founder, Mgr Delamare, Vicar General of Coutances. All their belongings were dumped in the dovecote.

32. They then made their way to where the church had once stood, and managed to clear a pathway through the briars and scrub. Their arrival scared away the birds. Then they saw that all that was left of the columns was two shafts and a few mutilated bases. When they reached the entrance to the empty choir, the new arrivals joined their hands and prayed, uniting their prayer to that of the ancient monks.



33. Have you come on a visit? asked the two solitary inhabitants of tyre place. No », said Brother Benedict, the leader of the little group, “ we’ve come to stay “. In fact, Mgr Delamare had bought the abbey as the headquarters of his new order, the opposite number of the Sisters of the Christian Schools, founded by St Postal for the education of poor girls.



34. « God comes first ». Accordingly, at 4.30 a.m. the following morning, the three Brothers renewed their offering of their terrible daily grind, although they had no possessions, they were happy: there was so much to be done: ploughing and planting the fields, and getting the house ready; and, much to the amazement of the neighbours, they tackled it all. Even the old mill started turning and grinding the corn.



35. One day, sixteen months later, Brother Benedict was visited by a man who had just lost his wife. Would you be so kind, Brother, he said, as to become the adopted father of this lad, my only son? This boy, sent by heaven, became the first boarder in the establishment. But others came, attracted by the modern methods of forming and Milling used by the new monks.



36. To the Benedictine motto: Pray and Work, we could add TEACH: so said Brother Benedict, joyfully; then our mission will be complete. What about rebuilding the church? said a voice. That will come later when we have paid off our debts, replied the prudent Brother Miller. Once Our Lady has found somewhere to stay, we shall rebuild her house for her.

37. 29 May 1892: After the ceremony of confirmation in the abbey, the Bishop, Mgr Germain, asked the Brothers to leave him on his own until dinner time. He walked through the ancient nave now planted with flowers and came into the monks' choir, with its gravestones. He could hear the joyful shouts of the boys at play, and he thought, « Only a little way off there is life, and here there is nothing but death; and the devotion to our Lady has all but disappeared .,



38. During grace before meals, everybody noticed how transfigured he looked: but his bright eyes were only the sign of his interior light. My dear Brothers, he said, we absolutely MUST rebuild the walls of Mary's sanctuary. It is God's will, I am sure of it. These were the very words used by Mother Magdalen Postel when, at the age of 83 years, she started rebuilding the abbey church of St Sauveur le Vicomte.

39. And the miracle did indeed happen. The foundation stone was laid on 19 August, and although there were only 500 francs in the cash box, work started. And strange to say, whenever the workmen came for their wages, there was never any shortage of money to pay them. The whole population took a share in the operations, anxious to work for Our Lady. Two years later, the new statue was blessed, and devotions to Our Lady were restored, endowed with a feast-day in the liturgical calendar and enriched with indulgences.





40. Soon the first ex-votos appeared, in thanksgiving for conversions or cures. Louis Darot, the son of the carpenter of Villedieu, had been running a temperature for a week, and the doctor discovered he had typhoid with a risk of meningitis. The news was rushed to the abbey, and Brother Edmund arranged for the sick boy to be consecrated to Our Lady. In the first few days of the novena, there was an unexpected improvement in the boy's condition, and to the doctor's amazement, complete and rapid recovery followed.

41. On 7 August 1898, the first pilgrimage took place: 300 working men front Cherbourg. On the 18th, the first mass after an interruption of 100 years was celebrated in presence of 95 priests. Two years later, the praises of a new saint rang out in the church: it was St John Baptist De La Salle, who was being specially honoured in Normandy.



42. This saint had indeed communicated his faith and zeal for the education of youth to the Brothers of Montebourg who, like the Sisters of St Sauveur had adopted the Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Thirty five years later, the latter were destined to inherit the care of the sanctuary and the devotion to Our Lady.

43. 1903: A new offensive against the abbey broke out, inspired by the devil. The Brothers of Mercy were turned out of their house, and their property was sold by auction. The buildings, however, were saved, thanks to the efforts of their former students; they were soon being used as a training college for women teachers. Twenty years later, Mr Edme Sache shedding tears of joy, was to welcome his old teachers home from exile.



44. Their Superior was Brother Valentine. He made arrangements for the necessary repairs to be undertaken, and once again the people of Normandy showed their generosity. The choir was soon finished and inaugurated; only the towers were missing. Unfortunately, however, the Brothers of Montebourg had no vocations. In 1938, the few surviving members asked to be admitted into the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, to whom they transferred all their property.

45. The Brothers' first concern was for the boys. They developed the school, accepted boarders, started classes for agricultural and other vocational training which soon acquired a reputation extending to the whole of the Cotentin. After the War, the church was restored and given added beauty by the insertion of new stained-glass windows. Finally, it was consecrated in its dazzling splendour by the Bishop of Coutances, Mgr Guyot, on 23 April 1951.





46. *The Most Blessed Virgin inspired the Lasallian Superiors to proclaim Mary QUEEN AND MOTHER of all Christian Schools: was she not queen of the World and Protectress of our Congregation? Moreover, was of the Star, the symbol of faith, on the Institute “s coat of arms, as well as on the forehead of Our Lady of Montebourg? Our 16,000 Brothers were happy at the suggestion.*

47. *The new invocation was enriched with indulgences by several Bishops. On 2 September 1959, the venerable Chapter of St Peter’s Basilica unanimously approved a proposal of its Arch-Priest, namely, that the statue of Our Lady of the Star should be crowned pontifically by the Bishop of Coutances, on May 1, 1960. This was a great honour and a precious privilege.*



48. *On 17 June 1944, Brother Edward, Director of the abbey, was killed by a land mine. He was the victim chosen by God to fertilise this ground dear to Mary. His blood was added to the tears, prayers, gifts and labours offered in honour of the Virgin of the Star and for the spread of her devotion even TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.*

