

with prudence, and who would lead their life under authoritative supervision, with some not very detailed rule, and with the vows that give them stability of profession. Such groups would have to be small and various, lest standardisation return. Many might arise under the aegis of existing Religious Orders or Third Orders: others under the inspiration of individual hermits such as Charles de Foucauld.



A CENTENARY

ST RICHARD, BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

3RD APRIL, 1253

From his Life written by Friar Ralph Bocking, o.p., who had been for some time his Confessarius; and from an anonymous writer in *Capgrave*, published within a few years of the saint's death.¹

S AINT RICHARD, surnamed de Wiche, was born at Wiche in Worcestershire. His father was called Richard and his mother Alice. From his childhood he applied himself so diligently to learning as to excel in a short time all his school-fellows and others of his age. His elder brother, during his minority, was under ward, so that he came to his estate in great distress. Richard, pitying his brother's case and being not able to help him in any other way, made himself his servant, tilling his ground and serving him for a long time with much patience in the meanest and most laborious employments: by which means he so far gained his brother's love and affection that of his own accord he freely settled by deed all his inheritance upon him. After this his friends proposed to him an advantageous match with a young lady with a good fortune, which was upon the point of being concluded when Richard, perceiving his brother on this occasion was uneasy and having repented of having made over his estate to him, desired him to be under no manner of concern; for as he had generously given up his lands to him, he would with the like generosity restore them again, and that if the young lady and her friends approved of it, he would resign her also up to him;

¹ The whole is taken from Bishop Challoner, *Britannia Sancta*.

for he assured him he had never so much as once touched her lips. He was as good as his word, and quitting all his worldly hopes, he betook himself to his studies, first at Oxford and afterwards at Paris, where with two other chamber-fellows he lived in great poverty, feeding all that time only upon bread and pottage.

After he had made such progress at Paris in the liberal arts as to be judged worthy of the title of Master, he returned to Oxford, choosing rather to take that degree in his own country; to which he was shortly after advanced and for some time taught philosophy in that University. From Oxford, Richard passed to Bologna to study Canon Law in that famous University, where he remained above seven years, and became so proficient in that faculty that his Professor being hindered by his infirmities from continuing his daily lectures, could find no one so proper to substitute in his place as Mr de Wiche; who, for his part, behaved himself in that employ with so much wisdom and humility for above half a year, as to be highly praised and honoured by the whole University. The Professor would have detained Richard there, giving him his only daughter in marriage and all his worldly substance; but Richard, who was led by another kind of spirit, humbly declined the offer, and taking his leave returned to Oxford where he lived a most rigid and austere life, in labours, watching and other bodily mortifications; till by reason of the great opinion all had of his virtue and wisdom, he was unanimously chosen as Chancellor of the University.

The two most illustrious Prelates at that time in the English Church were St Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Robert (surnamed Grosstest), Bishop of Lincoln. These both at the same time (though the one knew nothing of the intentions of the other) made earnest suit to have Richard for their Chancellor, such was the esteem they had of his prudence and integrity. Richard gave the preference to St Edmund, and executed his office in such manner as became a saint. He was faithful in his charge, refused absolutely all presents, and was averse from all haughtiness and pride. He was perfectly just, affable, mild, modest and sincere, and all his words and actions were seasoned with a

certain unaffected humility and calmness. He stuck close to his holy Prelate in all his tribulations, and accompanied him in his exile. After Edmund's death, Richard retired into a convent of the Dominicans at Orleans, where he gave himself up to the study of Divinity and the reading of the holy Scriptures, till being made priest he returned to England to the care of the parish committed to his charge.

Boniface, who had succeeded St Edmund in the Archbishopric of Canterbury, obliged Richard to resume his office of Chancellor, and not long after, upon the demise of Ralph Neville, Bishop of Chichester, caused him to be chosen Bishop of that See. This provoked the King, because Richard had stuck so close to Edmund in his controversy with the King; and also Henry III would have his own favourite elected. But the Pope, having heard both sides, ratified the election of Richard and consecrated him with his own hands.

Richard, in his return homewards, visited at Pontigny the sepulchre of his old master, St Edmund, already illustrious for miracles. Then coming into England, he found all the revenues of the See of Chichester consumed by the officers of the King. To his Diocese, therefore, he went bare and penniless, and there, living at another's house and table, he diligently applied himself to the functions of his charge, often going forth to visit places in his diocese, and administering the sacraments to his flock. When he humbly demanded of the King the restoration of his goods, he was also repulsed with reproaches and injuries, which he suffered with wonderful patience.

After two years, the Pope, by threatening the King with ecclesiastical censures, obtained for Richard his lands and other goods. So the man of God, now being seated in his episcopal chair, began to shine forth with all kind of virtues more illustrious than ever. He was most fervent in prayer night and day, liberal in alms-giving. His charity increased with his revenues, whilst his carriage, his speech and his behaviour became more humble. Whatever town or village he came to in his diocese, he always made diligent enquiry after the sick and the poor, and not only bountifully relieved them in their corporal necessities, but visited them in person to comfort them and to refresh their souls with the heavenly

food of his pious exhortations. His brother, to whom he had committed the management of his temporal affairs, told him his profuse alms had already exhausted his stock and that the revenues of his diocese were not sufficient for maintaining so great a multitude of poor. 'Why, then', said the saint, 'sell the plate which is for my table, for, thank God, I can eat out of ordinary platters as my father did before me, and drink out of a common cup: surely it is not just that we should eat and drink in silver and gold, whilst Christ is suffering hunger in the persons of the poor. Sell also my horse, and let the price be employed in succouring the poor members of Jesus Christ.' Neither did he only feed the hungry, but also clothed the naked, and frequently with his own hands buried the dead. He founded likewise a hospital for poor priests, reduced through age, blindness or other infirmities, furnishing them with proper food and clothing that they might not be obliged to seek it by begging.

The Almighty was pleased more than once to declare by evident miracles his approbation of these great charities of his servant. When the news was brought to Richard of a very considerable damage he had received by fire, when all his family was lamenting the loss, he alone was unmoved, and with pleasant countenance, giving God thanks, bade his people be of good courage, for that there was yet enough remaining for their necessities: 'and perhaps', said he, 'God had punished us with this loss because we were not liberal enough, and therefore see that we give more bountifully for the time to come'.

Richard was ever stout and constant in maintaining the cause of God, and the discipline of the Church, without respect of persons, as he demonstrated on divers occasions. And yet even those offenders whom he was obliged to put under the censures of the Church, whenever they came to him, he treated with fatherly tenderness and wonderful charity. Whilst he was so mild to others, he was always severe to himself, wearing next to his skin, for mortification, a hair shirt, and sometimes a coat of mail. And as to his own kindred and relations, he would by no means advance them to spiritual preferments, for fear of being influenced by flesh and blood.

As to the spiritual functions of his ministry, it is not to be expressed with what zeal and labour he preached the word of God, both in his own and other dioceses. What a talent he had in treating with penitents and hearing their confessions; what pains he took in instructing the ignorant, in giving counsel to the doubtful, in encouraging the pusillanimous; and, in a word, how he became all to all, that he might gain all to Christ.

At length, by commission from the Pope, he undertook to preach throughout the Kingdom in order to encourage an expedition for the recovery of the Holy Land. He began with his own church of Chichester, and so proceeded along the coast till he came to Canterbury. Ten days before he arrived at Dover, he began to be ill of that sickness which was to be his last, yet he did not intermit his daily labours, but continued to preach every day, to hear confessions, administer confirmation, etc., as before; though his bodily strength was thereby almost quite exhausted.

At Dover he took up his lodging in an hospital called God's House, and there, at the request of the master of the hospital, he consecrated in the honour of his old patron, St Edmund, a church newly built, with a churchyard for the burial of the poor. Preaching on this occasion, he told his Auditory that from the time of his being made bishop he had always an earnest desire to dedicate, before he died, one church at least in memory of his aforesaid master, St Edmund. 'And now', said he, 'I return thanks to my God, who has granted my soul the accomplishment of her desire: and as I know the laying down of this my earthly dwelling is at hand, I beg the assistance of your prayers to defend me in my passage hence.'

The following day being Sunday, notwithstanding his sickness and great weakness, he rose at his usual time which was early in the morning, and going into his oratory began to sing the praises of his Maker. At the time of Mass he was taken as it were with a fit, and his people were obliged to carry him back to his chamber. And now his first care was to prepare himself for his last end by the Sacraments of the Church.

Mr Simon de Terring, his old friend, drawing near his

bed, the saint repeated to him these words of the Royal Prophet: I am rejoiced at the things that have been said to me, we shall go into the house of the Lord. And added that on the Thursday sennight he should keep a great holiday; which indeed was the very day he died, or to speak more properly, began to live. When he was asked what food he would take to support his weakness, he answered he wanted but one thing which was what St Philip asked of our Lord when he said: Lord, shew us the Father, and it is enough for us.

In his illness he desired a crucifix might be brought him. 'And thou knowest', said he, 'O Lord, that if it were thy pleasure I would be willing to suffer all reproaches and torments, and death itself, for thee: and as thou knowest this to be the truth, so shew mercy to me, for to thee I recommend my soul.' And as he drew near his end, he often repeated those words of the Psalmist, Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; and those of the Church in the Hymn to the Blessed Virgin: *Maria mater gratiae, mater misericordiae, tu nos ab hoste protege et mortis hora suscipe*; begging to be defended from his enemy in the hour of his death by her prayers, which words he desired his chaplains often to repeat in his ears.

At length, in the presence of many of his clergy and others of the faithful, he breathed out his soul into the hands of his Creator, to live with him for ever in his heavenly Kingdom, the 3rd of April about midnight, in the fifty-sixth year of his age, the ninth of his episcopal dignity, and of our Lord's Incarnation, *anno* 1253.

A great concourse of people came to his exequies: everyone thought himself happy that could but touch his coffin or any of his garments. He was buried as he had desired in his church of Chichester, in a mean place before the altar of St Edmund, which himself had dedicated on the north side of the church. God, who in his lifetime had wrought great wonders by him, honoured him also after death with many illustrious miracles which brought people from all parts of England to his sepulchre. Which miracles being carefully examined, and juridically proved, he was canonised for a saint by Pope Urban IV *anno* 1262.