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FOREWORD.

IT is with profound thankfulness that in presenting this first Christmas Number of the "TRINIDAD GUARDIAN" to our readers, we find ourselves able to wish them, in the formula of the good old British greeting "A Merry Christmas." In the past four Christmas seasons, when all the world that mattered to us was plunged in agony, such a phrase was out of place. The British people carried on with a high heart, but they did not exhort one another to be "merry" when the shadow of death hung fiercely menacing over their own loved ones and over all the brave men of their breed who had gone forth to fight.

Four Christmas Days have we spent under this shadow; these festivals of Peace were soberly honoured amid the thunders of War. But at this Christmas time we may thank, each man his God, that the guns have ceased, that men are no more being killed and maimed and poisoned and that the enemy, the author, preparer and instigator of those frightful years of carnage, has been forced into the most complete and abject surrender that the world has ever seen.

And so, our hearts swelled with the glad possession of VICTORY, we may rightly and properly wish all our friends

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

They will, we hope, find much to entertain and interest them in the stories and articles which make up this Number. It gives us particular pleasure to announce that our invitation to local writers was productive of most happy results. With two exceptions—the article on "The German Claim to Cultural Superiority," by Mr. W. B. Tarn and the poignant sketch "On an Old Battlefield," by Lord Dunsany, both of peculiar merit,—all the contributions published are by writers resident in the Colony. Among the very large number of manuscripts submitted there were many of considerable promise which we were not able to use. Next year, we hope greatly to enlarge the size of our Christmas Number and thus be in a position to offer a more extended scope for the literary talent which Trinidad undoubtedly possesses.

THE EDITOR.

THE MONKS OF ST. BENEDICT.

THEIR LIFE AND WORK IN TRINIDAD.

(The following article has been written with the approval and authority of the Lord Abbot by a Special Representative of THE TRINIDAD GUARDIAN.)

THE Right Reverend Mayeul de Caigny, O.S.B., the Lord Abbot of Mount St. Benedict, landed on the shores of Trinidad on December 27, 1911, and immediately began to cast about for a suitable site on which to found a Monastery. The quest extended over a period of three weeks, and on January 17, 1912, Mr. Andrew Gomez, of St. Joseph, indicated to him the present spot as being eminently suited for the purpose. It is an imposing range of mountains, forming the northern boundary of the district of Tunapuna, a populous centre of activity in the colony. Here, on this mountain range, some 2,000 feet above sea-level and away from the busy haunts of men, a handful of ascetic, devoted Brothers of the Order of St. Benedict, led by the Lord Abbot, began their labours. Joined in 1915 by two other ~~monks~~ and later by choir monks, the Lord Abbot and his noble self-sacrificing disciples of St. Benedict have laid the foundations for the establishment of an organisation which is destined to exert a powerful influence on the life and thought of a very large section of the community. The visitor to Mount St. Benedict from Port-of-Spain arrives at Tunapuna, which nestles beneath the frowning range of mountains already referred to, and then begins the journey for the crest on which the Church and Cloister are erected. The road leading thither is necessarily circuitous, but a wealth of engineering skill has been expended on its preparation and, although at some points it coils macajuel-like, this winding course gives to it the advantage of maintaining a comfortable gradient, so that when one reaches the end of the journey one hardly realises that he has been clambering up something like 800 feet of mountain road. It is a very creditable performance of the Public Works Department. This is the main road; but there are numerous subsidiary roads, constructed by the

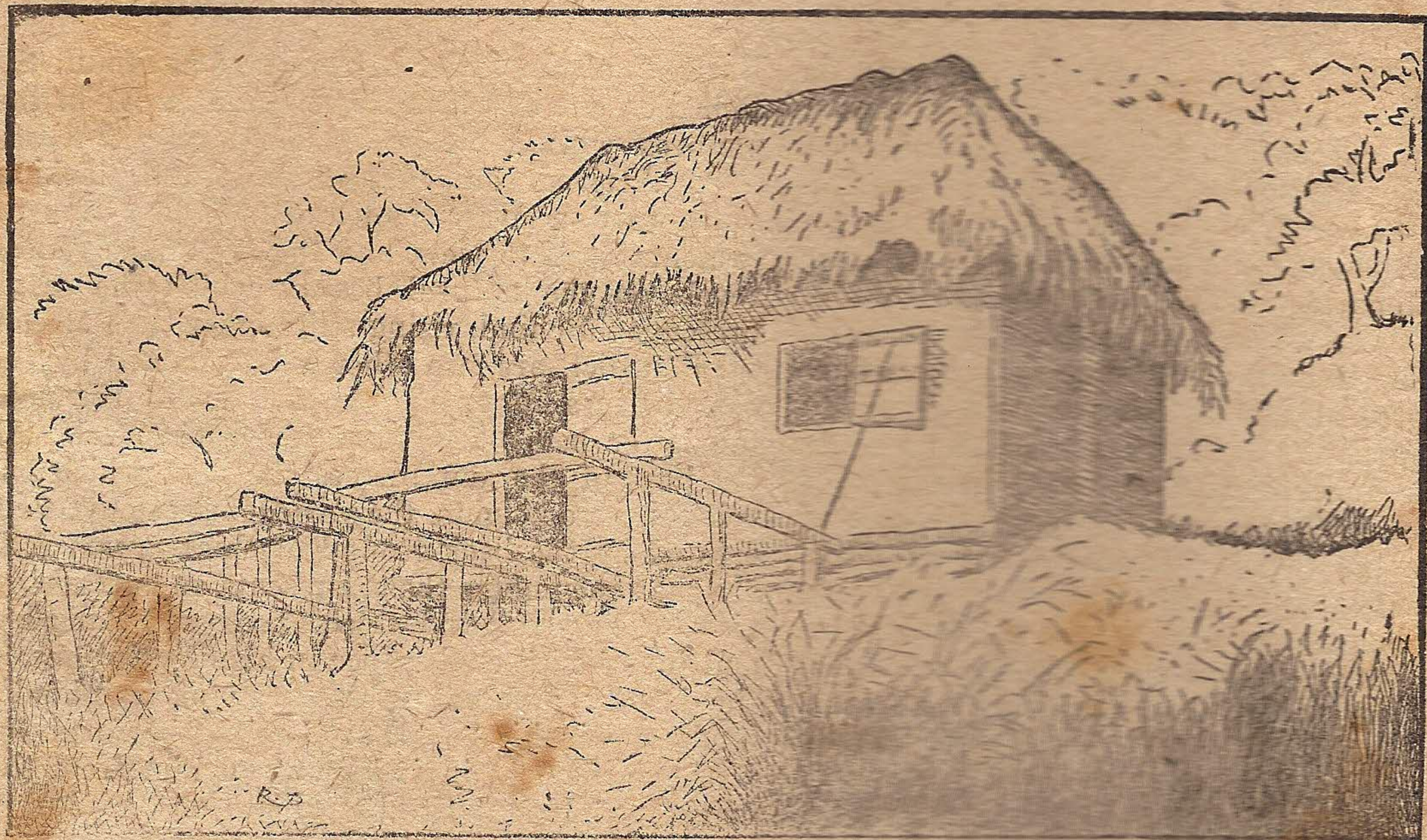
Brothers of the Order in residence at Mount St. Benedict, one of whom may be seen in one of the pictures with a sledge in hand on the roadside. Arrived on the summit and looking south-ward, a lovely stretch of low-lying country presents itself to view, and the eye of the visitor revels on the natural beauty which the scene presents. Behind, rising still higher than Mount St. Benedict, are two other ridges named by the Benedictines, Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon, the latter being 2,000 feet above sea-level. As the heat of the sun pierces the mist which envelopes these heights, the variegated colours thus created by the back-ground of thick, green foliage that encumbers them, presents an entrancing view. The ecstasy which possessed Kingsley and found such exuberance in his descriptions of the beauty and natural scenery of Trinidad's landscape in his "At Last" might be forgiven, if the reader sat in judgment on him from the heights of Mount St. Benedict, on a lovely sunny day, such as it was the privilege of the writer to enjoy on the occasion of his visit.

After elbowing my way through a crowd of some 400 persons who had taken part in a pilgrimage to the shrine and who had just completed their devotions in the Church, I entered the Repository where Bro. Michel, a Belgian, was in charge, and presented my card. I was very courteously received, and while conversing with him I observed several pilgrims purchasing books, pictures, medals, scapulas, candles, statuettes and other religious objects, which are on sale there. The card had been sent by Dom Michel for the purpose of procuring me a guide and friend and, in the interval that elapsed before his arrival, I had gleaned some interesting information from my host of the Repository. "When we came," he said, "the mountain was quite bare and we were told that it was impossible to live here as the mountain was cursed. At that time, there was that little thatched hut

(pointing to the picture of the Benedictine beginning in Trinidad, which is presented in this article.) It was inhabited by an East Indian who was employed as an overseer by the former owner of the property. The Fathers took it over and stayed there for a long time while they gradually erected the buildings now standing on the mount."

By this time my guide, Brother Hugo, had arrived, and both myself and a friend who had accompanied me on the visit, found him a very courteous and entertaining leader. We were first shown into the private Chapel of the Lord Abbot where there is a beautiful statue of St. Benedict in the grotto. Here, he is represented in the bloom of youth, with a saintly countenance that is most convincing. Historians are familiar with this

whose interior is very pretty. On the northern side are a statue of St. Benedict in his maturer years, and a variety of offerings strung on the wall. These were purchased by pilgrims at the Repository and presented to St. Benedict. On the southern side is the Grotto of Lourdes in which the statue of little Bernadette has been placed. It was beautifully decorated with flowers and plants and encircled with electric bulbs for the occasion of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. I was informed that in the evening when the electricity was turned on, this grotto with its decoration and illumination presented an enchanting picture. Prior to my visit on the second occasion, I had taken part in the Mass which began at 8.30 a.m. and I was deeply impressed with the piety and



The overseer's hut which stood on the Site of the present Monastery buildings when the Lord Abbot purchased the estate in 1912.

period of the Monk's life when, after about two years' study in Rome, whither he had been sent at the age of about fourteen, he fled into solitude near Subiaco, in Italy. There he remained some three years until, found by some shepherds, he began his missionary work and drew into his fold many noblemen which led to the founding of the Order of Benedictines. In a very short time, twelve monasteries were established with twelve Monks in each. This was the origin of the Order. In the panelling of the Altar, erected by the Brothers, beside the statue of St. Benedict, one recognises a finely executed piece of workmanship, exemplifying the high pitch of proficiency in the carving art to which the Brothers of the Order in Trinidad have attained. We passed into the Church

humility of the community, as in sweet accents, they rendered these grave Gregorian chants and performed the other rituals of the Church, including the solemn ceremony of vowing fidelity to the Community, which took place in connection with a lay Brother.

We were next taken to the Chapter Room where the conferences of the Brothers are held and advice given daily by the Lord Abbot. Adjoining the Chapter Room is the Refectory or Dining-room. In the centre of the southern side is the pulpit where one of the Brothers reads while the Community take their meals. It bears the inscription *Cibus Cuius Melior*, with the word *Pax*, in the centre. Around the clock at the western end are the words *Quaes Vulnerant Ultimo Neci*. A study of this section of the

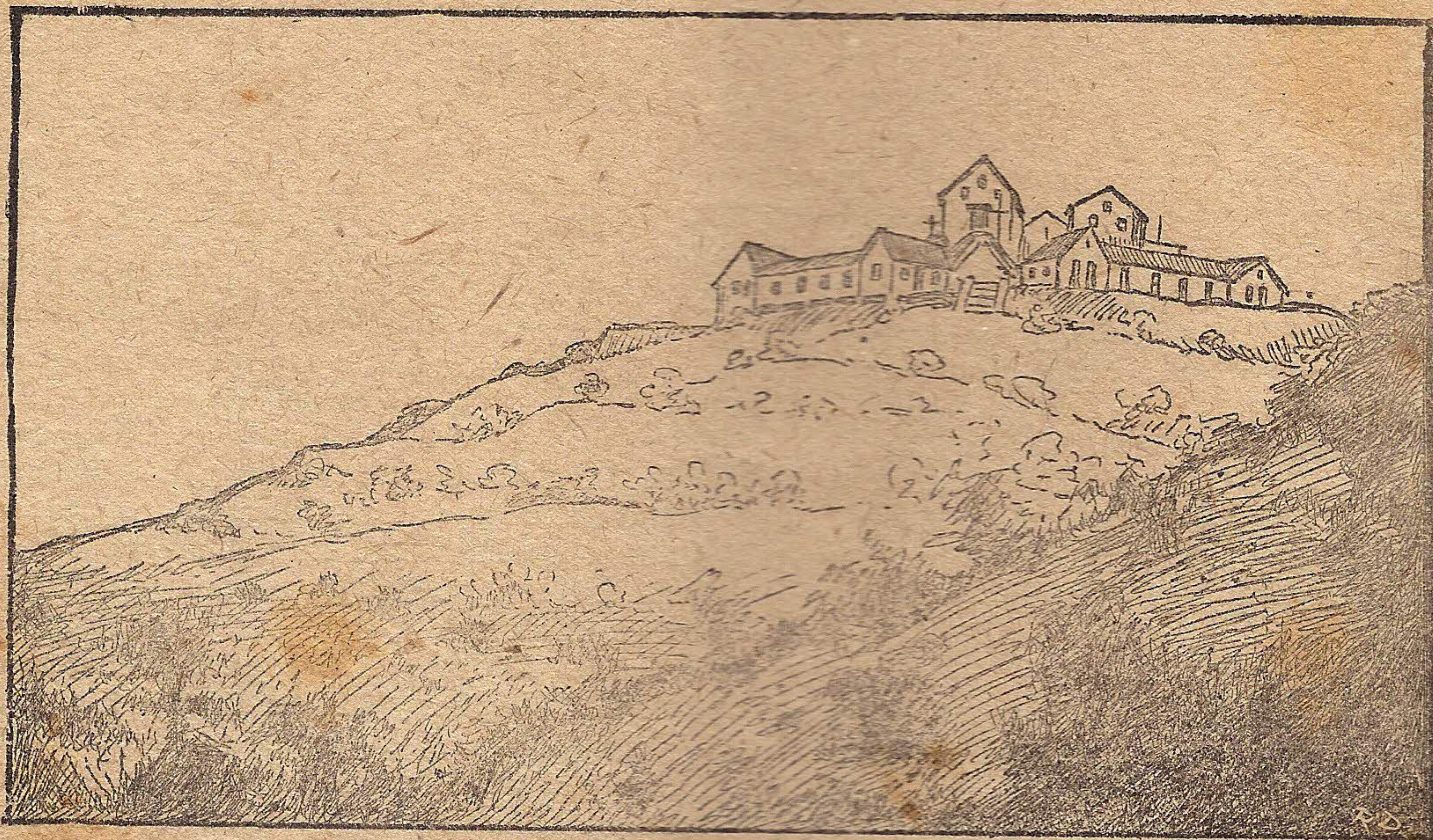
Benedictine

monastery reveals, in an austere manner, the simplicity of the life of the followers of St. Benedict. The tables are uncovered, the plates are of enamel, and there is a general primitive air in the arrangements. The Community consists of about thirty Brothers for whom the meals are conveyed from the kitchen below the Refectory by means of a lift, a most ingenious contrivance installed by themselves. Abstinence is observed twice weekly and fasting also on the same number of days, except from Easter until October 14.

Gazing through the eastern window one sees the "Rest House" on the left and the "Guest House" on the right. In the "Rest House," there was a number of pilgrims whose faces indicated that they were in happy enjoyment of the solitude and silent beauty of the surround-

of this Cross and of the Church and buildings, occurs in the course of this account.

The Cemetery forms another interesting section of this organisation. It lies to the south of the Church with a massive concrete cross made in one day by some of the Monks, standing at the western end. In front of it are lovely Prince of Wales crotons of dark and light shades, with the willow trees, the branches of which sigh in the wind, skirting the edges. Fortunately for the Community, there has been no necessity to make use of any portion of the ground set apart for the burial of members of the settlement. There is only one well-cared-for grave outside the spot, and it is the resting place of a Russian lady who died on the Mount in 1916, after the most patient care and attention had been lavished upon her.



A View of the Monastery from the South.

ings. The scale of fees of admission varies and the suave hostess in charge of this most necessary adjunct of the Institution informed me that the charges range from six pence to five shillings in the course of a day, the maximum being for board and lodging. The "Guest House" is used by excursionists and others who visit the Mount, especially in large numbers. Between these two buildings, and standing on an artificial mound of stones, is a huge Cross of Calvary which, before the war, had been placed in a blazing circle of electric lights at eventide, but which the Monks had to remove in order to conform to the conditions of the Defence of the Realm Act. But with a face beaming with smiles, the Lord Abbot assured me that he is about to replace the circle and the lights. A picture, giving an easterly view

Walking across from the Refectory in a westerly direction one comes upon the Gallery of twelve rooms, where the Brothers are housed, with the residence of the Lord Abbot a little distance away. It is proposed, at a later stage to enclose the little knoll near by with massive wall fences, and erect a permanent Gallery to house the members of the Community, so that the residence will be on an eminence. In the enclosure a garden will be laid out. At the south-western end of the Gallery, in which the Monks reside at present, is the Library and, as should be expected, it is replete with works of theology and philosophy; there is Church, Secular, and Monastic History; general literature, including the works of the best authors, and a drama of illustrious men which dates from 1698. In the collection are to be found the

works of Cardinal Mercier whose Christian piety played such a stirring part in combating the devilry of the German Military caste in their crusade of lust, plunder and rapine against the people of gallant little Belgium in the Great War now coming to a close at the Versailles Conference. The philosophical and theological works of the Lord Abbot find a place in this Library. Emerging from the Library, I came upon a beautiful flower garden where the roses were in full bloom, and where the silvery spray of the limpid water from the fountain in the centre played upon the flowers beneath. One could not help feeling that the charm of this spot lent added beauty to the Cloister and the decorations of the Sacred Edifice. On the southern side of this gallery, the Apiary is situated with about fifty hives of busy bees. Every box is divided into two, sometimes three, apartments. A simple contrivance has been made for the purpose of extracting the honey and this branch of the operations of the Cloister which is already very large is gradually being extended. Further on, one comes upon the vegetable garden in which the choicest vegetables are grown and beyond this, the tall, sturdy coconut palms are coming into prominence, and, in course of time, will rear their lofty heads.

An extensive area is being planted in cashew, and although the project is in its infancy, the

deal of this vintage will be made for the use of the Brothers and their guests.

The Belfry is located at the south-eastern end



The guest and rest houses with the Calvary Cross in the foreground.



A Brother at work on the mountain road.

Brothers have begun already to manufacture some delicious wine from the juice of this fruit. In a short time, it is expected that quite a great

of the Church and contains six bells—three large and three small, each designed to fulfil its special mission. The three largest are on top and are named Holy Trinity, Our Lady and St. Benedict, respectively. At every turn one sees evidences of the stability, labour, ingenuity and withal, simplicity of the Brothers in residence.

They are very ingenious and industrious, these disciples of St. Benedict, and in the workshop ample testimony is given to support this statement. There is installed in it a Mietz and Weiss 15 h.p. engine, operated with crude pitch oil, drives the motor for the supply of electric light, the working of the lathe, and all other purposes for which it is required. All the furniture used in the Institution is made in the workshop by members of the Cloister with native woods taken from the surrounding land, five hundred acres of which is the property of the Monastery. Near the engine is a contrivance made by one of the Brothers for shelling coffee and cleaning peas, a duty which is performed with admirable precision.

The Oratory was next visited where the younger Brothers offer up their morning devotions. Here, also, there are fourteen apartments in which members of the Community reside. The Tailor Shop and Laundry are hard by on the opposite side.

Continuing the inspection in the same direction, the entertaining guide conducted us to a bridge about 100 feet in length; built over a yawning chasm. It is supported by iron pillars sunk into the rocks with concrete foundations. The design was conceived by the Lord Abbot and carried into execution by one of the Community. This selfsame Brother is responsible for the installation of the machinery which gives to the Institution the very efficient water service it possesses, its source being on the hills and rendering the pressure very powerful. In six years this Monastic Settlement has made wonderful progress, and the Lord Abbot is responsible for the statement that last year the Community was able to purchase an estate in the neighbouring hills and valleys, from Mr. M. J. de Silva, of Golden Grove Estate, Arouca, on which are planted, cocoa, coffee, coconuts, etc., and where, together with other parts of the Mount, the beautiful flowering of the immortelle and of the poui creates a scenic view that cannot easily be forgotten.

With an air of thanksgiving and of delight, the Lord Abbot, taking a retrospect of the operations of the Community which he controls in this Island said: "It is a pleasure to live in the British Empire. I have a ~~Missionary~~ ^{missionary} who is a Missionary in ~~Nassau~~ ^{Nassau}, and who was a Chaplain with the British Army during the Burmese war, and ~~missionary~~ ^{missionary} five years ago, he said it was the best thing I ever did to select this site to build upon. The Abbots who came in 1914, de-

clared it an ideal spot for a Benedictine Settlement, better than anything that can be found. I have visited several places in North and South America, but I would not change this spot for any other. On the top of the highest peak one sees the Bocas, Venezuela, the Harbour, Mount Tucutche, the Mountain range in Manzanilla and the virgin hills of Guayaguayare."

I have briefly referred to Mounts Tabor and Hermon in the beginning of this narrative. Access may be had to both by way of the bridge just described, and for a great distance along the route one becomes enamoured of the luxuriance of the vegetation, both useful and ornamental, which confronts one on his journey. The self-supporting efforts of these cloistered disciples, leading the simple life, are prodigious. Their happy and smiling countenances point to the fact that they experience joy in all branches of the life of solitude they have elected to follow, and in none more so than in the tilling of the soil. Through their ability and energy, in the words of Isaiah: "The fertile valleys smile with the fulness of the harvest, the mountains and the hills break forth into song, and the trees of the field clap their hands." On every hand there is abundant evidence that a bounteous Nature has responded unreservedly to the inroads of the Monastic Community, in seed time and in harvest, and when the master hands of these Holy Recluse have erected the Sanitarium on their highest mountain peak with its concomitants, as is their wont, then, indeed, Tabor and Hermon will rejoice in their name.

The sketches in this article are taken from photographs kindly placed at our disposal by the Lord Abbot.

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