

MAY 25 1951

The Doors of Monte Cassino

When St. Benedict first built the Monte Cassino Abbey nearly 1,500 years ago, he could hardly have known how many calamities his monastery and his order would survive. Its hardest blow came in our own time, in 1944, when Allied planes leveled the buildings during the campaign in southern Italy. There has been much controversy over this famous attack; many military experts who look back upon it now deem it unwarranted by the necessities of the time. The monks of the abbey, who have been recording disasters for centuries, are memorializing the Allied raid in a bas relief on the abbey's new bronze doors, side by side with the raids of bygone times.

But the impressive thing about Monte Cassino is not that its buildings have been destroyed, but that its spirit is indestructible. The abbey was established in 529, and sixty years later Lombard barbarians sacked it. The monks rebuilt it. In 884, the Saracens razed it; the monks rebuilt it. In 1349 an earthquake destroyed it; the monks rebuilt it. In 1799, French troops sacked it; the monks rebuilt it. It went down again in 1944 under the crushing weight of bombs, and today the monks are rebuilding it once more.

Since the world shows no sign of having learned to value the arts of peace above the science of war, Monte Cassino Abbey may not have seen the last of devastation and ruin. But if it is laid waste again, one may be sure that there will be patient hands to lay the bricks on top of each other once more, for the ideals it embodies are eternal. That is the real story told by the new bronze doors.