

* Christians love one another! This could hardly be true all the time; we have more than enough evidence of ordinary human sin, from the bribing of Judas Iscariot onwards. But the remark was not absurd, for the early Christians set up a system of care for the poor and the sick, widows and orphans. Such a thing had hardly been seen before, except among small groups of Jews. It caused surprise, and even people who otherwise scorned the Christians felt a reluctant admiration. It attracted converts; a less than pure motive for becoming a Christian. A widow might be starving; if she joined a church she would receive a dole, which might be tiny for it depended on what the congregation had, but it was something.

There would be the usual grounds for people to join societies – they might have a good friend who belonged, or marry a member.

Then there were miracles, dreams and visions. Far the most important and frequent

miracle was that of healing. Galen was the best physician of Roman times, but no more than one in ten of the herbs which he prescribed could have had any physical effect; and even such expert medicine could be bought only by those with money. Faith was likely to be a better cure for the ordinary person.

Demons

Demons were a matter of observation. There were people with epileptic fits, where it seemed that a force inside them cast them on the ground, making them roll their eyes and gnash their teeth and bite their tongue. Because of this apparent presence within, the old Greeks knew the disease as 'the sacred illness' or 'the disease of the demons'. It was evident to them that this was not the choice of the soul that suffered but was the work of an evil spirit within; only the clear-sighted physician Hippocrates said it was an illness like others. It was clear too, in their

A monk exorcizes a demon; from a manuscript of Rabanus Maurus in the abbey of Monte Cassino. To the left the chapter heading, *De exorcismo*. On Monte Cassino, a hill north of Naples, was an old temple which St Benedict took and turned into the mother-house of all Western monasteries.

