

LEGENDS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Our Lady of Deliverance

Sancto Virgo Virginium – Holy Virgin of Virgins

The history of the iniquities of the Parliament of Paris would fill a large volume. We will give an instance which might occupy a page in such a work.

On the 6th of February, 1737, a year after the government of the two Sicilies had fallen into the hands Of the Bourbons, and the same year in which the duchy of Tuscany passed into the house of Lorraine, the Parliament of Paris was bold in its pride. On that day it was in the humor to show, by some arbitrary act, its great power and good pleasure. It solemnly suppressed a confraternity.

What was this confraternity? That of our Lady of Deliverance, which had had a quiet existence of upwards of two centuries in church of St. Etienne-des-Grés at Paris.

Well," said a citizen, who supped that night with member of parliament, to his host, it was a strange act of yours to suppress the good confraternity of our Lady.

It has been done, however," was the answer. " But on what grounds?" asked the other "it was Established in 1533 by good citizens and Christians, and it has been confirmed by the bulls of four Sovereign Pontiffs. Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, Louis XIV, the Great Condé, and many other princes have thought it an honor to have their name inscribed in its register. St. Francis of Sales and St. Vincent of Paul were members of it and it was before the image Of our Lady Of Deliverance that the young Francis, as you know, was freed from the most cruel temptations.

" He was pursuing his studies at Paris, being in his sixteenth year, when the evil spirit filled his mind with the dreadful thought that he was of the number of the reprobate—that he would never reach heaven. So fearfully did the tempter try him, that he neither ate, drank, nor took repose, and his body became visibly emaciated. His tutor, who saw him become worse and worse each day, feeling a disgust for every occupation, sought in vain to obtain from him the cause of his dejection. The demon who suggested this illusion was one of those called dumb, on account of the silence which it imposes on those it afflicts. Francis, although deprived of those sweet feelings which the love of God imparts to the Christian soul, remained faithful to grace, and did his best to repulse the assaults of the evil one; but when he called to mind the calm and happiness which he had enjoyed before this trial, he could but weep and be sad. He remained in this agony for the space of a month.

After this time his fidelity was doubtless rewarded. A divine inspiration led him to the church of St. Etienne-des-Grés. He entered, and threw himself at the feet of the statue of Our Lady Of Deliverance, and besought her intervention in his behalf: "Obtain for me, from the bounty of God, that if I am to be eternally separated from Him, I may at least be allowed to love Him here with all my heart." Such was his prayer. He knew the power of the Memorare, and recited it with fervor. When he finished it, he found a sweet sensation stealing over him, and his fears entirely dissipated. Overcome with joy, he hastened to publish the benefit he had received; and he ever retained great devotion towards our Lady of Deliverance and the confraternity attached to it, which you have just abolished. Should not such a testimony as this have pleaded in its favor?"

The decree has passed," said the legislator.

" But consider the disquieted, the Sick, and women in labor, who have great devotion to our Lady of Deliverance. Travelers, prisoners, and the troubled in heart, address their vows to her."

Our law does not prevent their aspirations We have Only suppressed the confraternity.”

I give you credit for your consideration in not putting down our blessed Lady," replied the citizen with a malicious smile. But the confraternity was an admirable institution. Besides the care it took of the sick, the alms it distributed to the poor, it particularly sought to justify its title by procuring the release of prisoners. Every year it obtained the liberty of a great many imprisoned for debt. The royal authority itself had recognized the utility of so benevolent an institution. It confirmed its stability by many royal edicts in its favor. What is there in it which can excite your displeasure? Its sole employments were works of piety, charitable reunions, simple and beautiful and edifying ceremonies. Tell me what are your reasons? "

"I will give you but one, and that shall be a royal one: 'It hath seemed meet (appropriate) to us.'"
"To which, of course, I must bow in submission," replied the good citizen.

• The processions of the confraternity of our Lady of Deliverance were very plain when compared with those of Our Lady of Hanawycck (which we shall shortly describe); yet they were not without some interest. First came Our Lady's banner, richly worked, and borne by clerk in surplice, crowned with a wreath of flowers. The silver cross came next, carried between two acolytes, bearing lighted tapers, who were also crowned with flowers. Then the mace of the confraternity, adorned with two angels, bearing tapers, the whole silver gilt carried between two torch-bearers. The herald of confraternity marched after this; he was clad in a blue velvet tunic, covered with golden fleurs-de-lis, and wore on his head a wreath of flowers. Then came another cross-containing a portion of the precious wood of the Holy Cross. A beautiful statue of our Lady, surrounded by angels and rays of light, all of silver. A figure of St. Peter, of silver. That of St. John the Baptist, with the lamb, of silver. A figure of St. Roche, with the angel and dog, likewise of silver. A representation of St. Sebastian attached to a tree, having an angel over him crowning him, the whole in silver. Thirty young men, and then the whole confraternity, followed by the clergy. All who walked in this procession wore wreaths of flowers round their heads. Read the descriptions given by Jacques Doublet, the old historian of St. Etienne-des-Grés, and then tell me whether they do not beat our civic shows! (If this be the case in France, how much more is it so in this country?)

And thus, the confraternity was suppressed by Act of Parliament. But the venerated image of Our Lady of Deliverance, the Queen of the confraternity, remained in the hands of the people; and all in distress fled to her sanctuary.

It is an ancient statue of black stone, rudely carved, and held in great veneration since the eleventh century. There are many traditions attached to it, but as they rest on uncertain testimony, we will not mention them. What the Parliament of 1737 did not, the Revolution of 1793 effected. They suppressed the worship of God and our blessed Lady and shut up their temples.

The church of St. Etienne-des-Grés, stripped of its riches, was sold and pulled down! They, who carried off the crosses, and silver images, and other works in brass and metal, cared not for the stone statue of our Lady of Deliverance, which was of no material value. A pious woman, the Countess de Carignan St. Maurice, a devout servant of our Lady, who had great confidence in her protection, commissioned a person, unknown in the place, to buy it, who having paid for it, brought it to the countess, who placed it in a little oratory in her house, and then she thought herself secure. But her name was already written in the list of the proscribed. She was arrested and thrown into prison. There she was comforted by the companionship of the Superioress, Mother Valois, and many of the Sister Hospitalers of St. Thomas of Villanova, who with her threw themselves upon the compassion of our Lady of Deliverance. Thus did these good women

pray and hope in the asylum which the tender mercy of the revolutionists had procured them. Nor, did they hope in vain. The day of their liberation came; it was the 4th of October, 1794.

The Sister Hospitallers, fearing they should have no house to go to, felt troubled at separating from their companion. The convents had all been suppressed and their property confiscated; their houses were converted into prisons, barracks, or military depots. But by a singular protection or Providence, the house of the Hospitallers had escaped notice. The Sisters re-entered it, clad in a secular costume; but three months afterwards they were denounced to the club of their district, as disguised nuns, and it was immediately decided that the buildings occupied by the community should be sold, and accordingly they were covered with notices of public sale.

Madam de Carignan, on hearing this, made a vow to bestow her wealth and her dear image on the sister Hospitallers, whom she again placed under the special protection of Our Lady of Deliverance. All the sisters joined her in a novena, and great was their astonishment to see in ten days after, that all the placards had disappeared; no one thought of the sale, and the sisters remained in quiet possession of their convent. Time passed, and by privilege almost unique, the daughters of St. Thomas of Villanova passed through the revolution in this convent, without being molested, as were all the other religious in the city.

The holy image was erected in the house of the Hospitallers in 1806, and Pius VII attached several indulgences to it. The pretty little chapel in which it is now honored was not finished until 1840. Thus, surrounded by faithful virgins, the image of our Lady of Deliverance, who drew St. Francis of Sales from the depths of despair, who opened the prison doors of so many in distress, and who saved the pious inheritance of the good Hospitallers, still protects Paris, which hath need be delivered from many snares.

The Convent of the English Augustinian nuns, in the Rue des Fosses Victor, affords another instance of the singular protection of Divine Providence during the French revolution.