

LEGENDS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Our Lady's Knight

Mater Purisimi – Mother Most Pure

At the siege of Pampeluna, by the troops of Francis the First, in 1521, a gay and gallant officer, who had exhibited no great signs of sanctity, defended the town for Charles the Fifth. was called Ignatius of Loyola.

In spite of all his efforts, the French army entered the city. Ignatius, faithful to his charge, retired to the citadel with a soldier, who was the only one who had sufficient courage to follow him; and though he found it garrisoned by a most insignificant number of men, he sustained several assaults, when a breach was made, and the victorious army entered. In the struggle, the young officer broke his right leg, and was wounded on the left one. He had behaved with such gallantry that the French spared the garrison for his sake. He was borne with honors to their general, who gave orders for him to be conveyed on a litter to the castle of Loyola, which was situated at a little distance from the city.

We will not dilate on the fortitude displayed by Ignatius during his illness, which was very severe, as the leg, which had been badly set, had to be rebroken, and a bone which protruded below the knee to be removed, besides other trying operations. This would involve the necessity of entering into details of the saint's life, which are sufficiently well known; Our legend relates to one fact alone.

As he grew convalescent, the young officer became weary. He had spent his youth at courts, first as a page, then as a courtier, and, lastly as an officer of merit. Born of a noble family, he had been nurtured to pleasures, and his vanity had ever been flattered. Hitherto (he was now twenty-nine years of age) he had paid little attention to his duties as a Christian; he had led the life which is commonly pursued by worldlings. He now asked for some books to amuse him and trifle away the time. What he desired were the romances and tales of chivalry, then so much in fashion. They knew he liked this reading; but whether no books of the kind were at hand, or a disposition of Divine Providence interfered, the attendants brought him the History of Christ, and some volumes of saints' lives.

Passionately addicted to romantic authors, he felt at first little taste for the books presented to him, but gradually he began to pay more attention to them. He admired acts of heroism he had not supposed practicable in other careers than his own; nor did he fail to perceive that the immortal crowns gained by the innumerable troops of martyrs, anchorites, confessors, and virgins, who had overcome in so many and such fierce combats, were far above the vain applause of this world. He felt a strong desire rapidly arise in him to follow the traces of those whose lives he now read with avidity. He asked himself if he were more timid than the virgins, less bold than the martyrs, whose wondrous deeds of mortification and painful torments so interested him? Whether God, whose rewards were so sure, was not more worthy of love than the inconstant creatures of earth? Whether heaven did not deserve more efforts to gain it than the riches and honors of such doubtful tenure here below? God gives his grace to the heart who desires and seeks it; Ignatius did not long wait for it. He saw his duty, and he resolved to perform it. He devoted himself entirely to God, forsook the worldly life he had hitherto led, and determined to follow in the path of the saints.

If the disorders, of what is called youthful folly, are made light of by worldly consciences, how differently does the soul, which enters seriously into herself, and examines her state by the help of God's light, regard them. Faults which men scarcely perceive; because they offend not their sense of propriety, are presented to the soul in their true light. Judged by the code of the saints,

they are crimes, for they have outraged the majesty of God. They required expiation. Happy was he in having been born a member of that holy Church in which penance restores and raises the soul to God's affection. Repentance urged austerities; he willingly embraced them, fecking so inflamed with the love of God, as ready to undertake anything or make any sacrifice in his service. But he felt the want of some protector in his new career. Could he find one more potent or more kind than the ever-Blessed Virgin Mary? Penetrated still with military spirit, he placed himself under her banner, and became her faithful knight. As soon as he was able to quit his couch, he mounted his charger, and set out, saying he was going to visit his uncle, the duke of Najare, who had frequently sent to inquire after him during his illness. After paying his respects to his relative, he sent away his servants, and set out alone for Montserrat.

Upon this steep mountain, whence such charming views of Catalonia are presented to the traveler's sight there had long been venerated a celebrated image of the Blessed Virgin. Wondrous legends were attached to this famous pilgrimage. We fear to record them here, lest they should shock the sickly faith of this age. According to the historians of the image of our Lady of Montserrat, it was brought into Spain in the first age of the Christian era, if not by the apostle James, at least by some of his disciples. It was in great honor during the Roman domination at Barcelona. When the Moors invaded the country, it was concealed in a cavern at Montserrat, where it was discovered in the ninth century.

At this period, we rest upon more certain ground the annalists of Catalonia, upon the faith of an inscription found in 1239, and preserved in the monastery Of Montserrat, relate that in the year 880, under the reign of Godfrey the Hairy, count of Barcelona, three young goatherds, who guarded their flocks on the mountain, saw, during the night, a great light issuing from a part of the rock, and rising up to the heavens. At the same time a superhuman melody struck their ears. They informed their parents of what they had seen and heard. The Bishop of Manrese, accompanied by the magistrates, and a large body of the Christian Inhabitants, went the next night to the mountain. The wondrous light again appeared. The prelate, seized with admiration, fell on his knees, and remained some minutes in prayer; on rising, he went to the spot whence the light proceeded, where he found an ancient image of the Blessed Virgin. He desired to bring it to Manrese. But on arriving at the spot where the monastery had since been erected, the carriers found it impossible to move the image further, from which the good bishop understood that to be the place our Blessed Lady had chosen for her sanctuary.

Mabillon, who considers it certain that the image was venerated before the Saracenic invasion, and the venerable Canisius, who places this pilgrimage among the most celebrated, give implicit credence to these particulars.

Many miracles followed the recovery of the holy image.

A hermit, who led a retired life in a cave at Montserrat, hitherto a pious and austere man, received one day a companion, who was quite unknown to him, and who took up his abode in a neighboring cell. The stranger soon gained his esteem by his apparent sanctity. But, say the popular legends, this man was no other than the devil in disguise. He knew the weak side of the hermit, who was somewhat vain of his rigorous penance. How miserable is the condition of the soul that discards humility. The poor hermit fell into the snares of his wily companion, and committed a great crime. The death of the count of Barcelona's daughter was imputed to him. It was at this time that the image was discovered. The tradition further states, that through the

intercession of our Lady, the little child was restored to life, and the hermit to a sense of his fallen condition. There must have been some grounds for the accusation, for he fled the country, went to Rome, confessed his sins, and retired to the desert, where he spent seven years in severe penance.

Several other prodigies are told on credible evidence. and many were the sick restored to health after the physician's skill had failed; many the dying children restored to a parent's embrace; many the evils, both corporeal and spiritual, healed at this holy shrine.

It was before this sweet image that the young Spanish officer was going to accomplish the project he had formed. Knight Of the Blessed Virgin I He dreamt but of this title, though he yet knew but little of its real import. 'Mixing his warlike fancies with Christian thoughts, he regarded this life warfare and a struggle, nor did he mistake therein. He desired to present, as a trophy, his material arms to our Lady of Montserrat, and receive from her those spiritual ones which enable her children to gain the good fight of salvation.

As he journeyed on alone, thinking over his resolutions, he was joined by a Moorish knight, who seemed to be following the same route. The travelers saluted one another; and as they rode side by side, exchanged words of courtesy. They soon came in sight of Montserrat, which Ignatius had declared to be the end of his journey. The renown of the place its venerated image, and our dear Lady herself, offered natural subjects of conversation. The knight thought he perceived a contemptuous smile quiver on the lips of the Moor as he recounted one of the latest miracles which had been wrought by our Lady's intercession. Hard words ensued; and, as generally happens, Ignatius, growing warm, soon fell into a passion. The Christian disappeared; the soldier obtained the mastery. He would have the Moor, who was not of his faith, believe and reverence the same as he did. He was provoked at his obstinacy, and drew his sword, believing that to be an affair of honor, which was only one of prayer and persuasion. The Moor, seeing he had a valiant adversary to contend with, like his nation, not deeming it prudent to engage with superior force or skill, and trusting less to his saber than to the swiftness of his Arab steed, stuck his spurs into his sides, and fled with the rapidity of an arrow. Ignatius, who was also well mounted, followed in pursuit; but on arriving at two cross roads, one of which led to the monastery, while the Moor had followed the other, he, like a true pilgrim, who had vowed to go directly to Our Lady's shrine, paused for an instant. Could he give further pursuit without breaking his vow? He did not hesitate, but turned his horse's head direct to Montserrat. And now his passion having cooled, he acknowledged the first intervention of his Blessed Queen in his behalf for, thought he, " the saints of whom I read did not make converts by the means I was about to employ."

In the monastery he found a monk of eminent sanctity, who 'had formerly been grand vicar of Mirepoix, in France, whose name was John Chanones. Ignatius considered a model of every Christian and monastic virtue. To him he had recourse, and with deep emotion and bitter tears made a confession of the sins of his whole life.

Being thus purified in the sight of God, he remembered having read in books of chivalry, that the candidate for knighthood the night watching and praying in his armor, which was called *the vigil of arms*, and wished, in like manner, to sanctify the object on which he was bent. In his military accoutrement, which he was soon to dispose forever, who watched and prayed the

whole night in front of our Lady's altar, standing and kneeling, offering himself to Jesus and Mary, as their knight, according to the chivalric notions he had imbibed in the world, and which he now wished to sanctify in the service of God.** In the morning he suspended his sword to a pillar near the altar as a sign of his renouncing the military profession, he gave his horse to the monastery, his clothes to a poor pilgrim; and clothing himself in a coarse linen suit, he received the Holy communion, and set out seeking how best he could fulfill his engagements to our Lord and his Blessed Mother.

He now, doubtless, saw before him the glorious vision of the great work he was to begin. The Church, attacked and mined by the licentious advocates of a pretended reformation, stood in need of an intrepid champion. He conceived the project of his celebrated society, which was not fully established till 1534, when it was inaugurated in the crypt Of Our Lady of Montmartre (an oratory raised, according to tradition, on the very spot where the apostle of Gaul received the of martyrdom), near Paris, on the feast of the Assumption. It was afterwards confirmed by a papal bull, dated the 27th September, 1540.

We cannot here relate the further career of St. Ignatius (who became a great man and eminent saint), of his companions, and of his society, and its persecutions by men who knew it not. It arrested the progress of the reformation, elevated education, spread abroad knowledge, encouraged and enlarged the study of the sciences, the Gospel to the new world, and gave to mankind a host of great men in every branch of knowledge, and illustrated the pulpit by its eloquence. Always innocent, but attacked by weapons it disdains to employ in return, judged without a hearing, the Society of Jesus continues its steady path along the royal highway to cross, traced out by its Divine Master, its members, following the recommendation of the Gospel, do good to, and pray for, those who calumniate them.

** Life of St. Ignatius, by Father Bouhours, book i