

# **HISTORIC SHRINES OF SPAIN**







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BY

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TO

**Berengneta, Marquesa de Riscal**

AND

**Mencia, Marquesa de Viana**

*Affectionate and happy remembrances.*





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## INTRODUCTION

The chivalrous devotion of the Spanish people to the Mother of the Redeemer dates from the earliest days of Christianity. Magnificent temples, teeming with the richest and noblest in art, were raised to receive her shrines in all parts of the Peninsula, from the crowded city to the bleak sea-shore, from the sandy plain to the rugged mountain top, where, from sunrise till sunset, no sound was heard save the singing of birds and the chanting of prayers. Architects, artists, and workmen gave their talents and their labors wherever a new church was to be built, many of them asking, as sole recompense for their services, a last resting place in the edifices they had erected and adorned, and a remembrance in the prayers of the faithful.

Every one of these monuments has its particular story in the popular traditions which formed the national poetry of the Middle Ages, and although many of the original temples have disappeared, the legends remain

and still form attractive sources of inspiration for the poet, the artist, the romancer and the dramatist.

In writing the stories of the Spanish shrines no attempt has been made to fathom the why and the wherefore of the traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation through successive ages of Roman conquest, Moorish dominion and internal warfare. The origin of the venerated images, their secretion in mountain fastnesses and woody solitudes at the first alarms of Moorish invasion, and their miraculous apparitions after centuries of concealment under the earth or in caves, are not related as historical facts sustained by more or less authentic proofs: the reader, therefore, must not look for numerous footnotes, annotations, references to rare works, extracts from the chroniclers, or other evidences of profound learning and deep research, for the legends are merely retold in the unvarnished language of the people, as they were gathered during a residence of several years in Spain.

These tales are the mystic delight, the spi-

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ritual treasure, the cherished lore of the Spanish race, that keeps them in touch with the Saints, and makes them address the Holy Mother as "Madrecita", "Mariquita", "Pilarica", "Morenita", and other names of familiar endearment, without the slightest semblance of irreverence, and hearing them in the land of chivalry, and sunshine, and mysticism, where we walk in the footsteps of saints, and feel their presence in the very air we breathe, dwelling in the places hallowed by their memory, and worshipping in the precincts which preserve their relics, the earnest belief of the children of the soil imparts itself unconsciously, putting to flight the spirit of doubt which, under colder skies and in less romantic climes, thrusts itself upon us: but here we become impregnated with the faith of the land, and so impressed by the visible signs of supernatural events, that we forget to question, and even forget to wonder, for in Spain tales of saintly marvels are as common as tales of knightly valor, and the apparitions of Santiago, the miracles of Saint Dominic, or the ecstatic visions of Saint

Teresa, excite no more wonder here than do the heroic feats of the great Pelayo and the Cid Campeador.

Although we live in an age when practical matter-of-fact logic and plain statistics take the place of tradition, we will recall some of these old legends and listen for a while to the simple narrative of the story-tellers of a by-gone day, whose tales are the particular inheritance of the children of "la tierra de Maria santisima".



“Yo tambien muchas mas cosas traslado que creo, porque no me atrevo à pasar en silencio lo que otros afirman, ni quiero poner por cierto en lo que tengo duda. ”

*(El Padre Juan de Mariana. Lib. X. Cap. V.)*

“ I, too, relate many more things than I believe, for I do not dare to pass over in silence that which others affirm, nor do I care to state as true that of which I have doubts.”



# OUR LADY OF THE PILLAR

AT

## ZARAGOZA

Zaragoza..... arise and claim  
Reverence from every heart where freedom reigns,  
For what thou worshippest ! thy sainted dame,  
She of the Column, honoured be her name  
By all, whate'er their creed, who honour love.

WALTER SCOTT.

The sentiment of the Zaragozans toward their beloved Virgen del Pilar is far different to the ordinary devotion paid to a favorite saint : it is an inheritance from their forefathers, a love that is born with them and ends only with their lives : it is interwoven with their patriotism, with their nationality, with their home life, and with their daily tasks and amusements. In their *Jotas* she is the ever recurring theme, and their patriotic songs acclaim her as “ La Capitana de la tropa aragonesa. ” To her shrine they repair in

their joys as in their sorrows, and the words they use in addressing her are not the ordinary forms of prayer with which the favors of the saints are implored, for to them she is not far away in heaven, but here, among them, in her own shrine, where she has dwelt for over eighteen hundred years, and when they speak to her it is with the familiarity of a friend, with the confidence of a lover, and with the faith of a child.

During the heroic siege of 1809 when frail women, faint with fatigue, disease and hunger, fired the guns and defended their homes, barricading doors and windows with the dead bodies of their husbands, parents and children, it was the cry of "Viva la Virgen del Pilar," that filled their hearts with courage, and gave strength to their tired arms, and the greatest kindness one could show towards the wounded, when all hope had fled, was to take them to the Capilla Santa where they could gaze upon the little brown face of "La Pilarica", and speak with her, and kiss the pavement of her house, and die breathing her name.





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The tradition of her appearance to the Apostle St. James is part of their religion and part of their patriotism, and to doubt it would be to be false to both. The church of the Pillar was the first raised in her honor, and it is the firm belief of every Zaragozan, rich or poor, ignorant or learned, that "it will last with the Holy Faith until the end of the world," in support of which they state the fact that in spite of the vicissitudes the city has suffered since its conversion to Christianity in Apostolic times, the sacred image has escaped injury, the rites of the Christian religion have been celebrated unceasingly in the church since St. James first officiated in the chapel dedicated to the Virgin, and its altars were never defiled by pagan rites through all the centuries of war, rapine and desecration by Romans, Goths, Moors and Vandals. Even Time, the great destroyer, has failed to leave his traces on the statue, which although nearly nineteen hundred years old, does not show the slightest sign of decay.

The Spaniards found their belief of the

christianising of Spain by St. James on traditions of extreme antiquity, supported by such writers as St. Hypolite in his treatise "De duodecim apostolis," St. Isidor, the Venerable Bede, and others, and verified by the ancient Spanish liturgy, Gothic, Muza-rabe and Toledano. To these proofs may be added that of the innumerable pilgrimages that were made to the tomb of the Saint by the entire Christian world, by which we know that it was generally believed, not only that St. James came to Spain to spread the Gospel but that, after his martyrdom, his body was brought here and buried by his disciples in a little town of Galicia which he had favored as a dwelling, and from which he used to set forth on his journeyings to teach of Christ throughout the Peninsula. This was Iria Flavia, now Padrón. The body was afterwards removed to a nearby village, Liberum Domum, which later became the famous Compostella, Field of the Star, for according to tradition, a miraculous star which appeared over the spot where the Saint was buried, was the means of the discovery of his tomb.



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(about the beginning of the ninth century) which had lain hidden in the earth during the first centuries of Mohamedanism. That the Saint came to Caesar Augusta and founded the first church of the Pillar is a tradition firmly fixed in the minds of the Aragonese, and this is the story, handed down from generation to generation, sung by the poet, and immortalised by the artist, of the Virgin's gift to the city of Zaragoza.

The Apostle St. James, after having carried the cross of his Divine Lord and Master into the provinces of Judea and Samaria, passed over to Spain to preach the faith there before returning to Jerusalem, where he was destined to be the first of the disciples to shed his blood for the doctrine of Christ. He disembarked at Carthagena, where his simple eloquence won the hearts of the rude Iberians, who came flocking in large numbers to receive the sacrament of baptism at his hands. In Andalucia, Toledo, Portugal, Galicia and Castile he met with the same success, and when he entered Zaragoza his fame had travelled before him, and the light of

faith spread quickly throughout the city.

On the night of the second of January, forty years after the birth of the Saviour, St. James was walking along the banks of the Ebro with seven disciples whom he had won to the faith in Zaragoza. The sky was aglow with myriads of stars, the toils of the day were over, both man and beast had gone to rest, and, inspired by the calm beauty of the night and the contemplation of the glories of the heavenly dome, in whose wonders they saw the Master's hand, they spoke reverently of the sublime mysteries of the Divinity.

At the same hour the Blessed Virgin was in Jerusalem, praying to her Son for St. James, who, she knew, would be soon called upon to give his life for the faith. She begged so ardently that he might be triumphant in Spain, which country was, even in her lifetime, the object of her special predilection, that the Saviour, moved by her prayers, presented Himself to her in her humble dwelling, and comforting her with gentle words told her to go immediately to Spain and tell the Apostle to return to Jerusalem, but to

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erect a temple in her honor and name in the city of Zaragoza before leaving it, where she would be venerated, and where He would grant all the favors that should be asked of Him through her intercession.

After saying these words He disappeared, and a band of angels, singing canticles of joy, filled the room, and raising Mary on their wings bore her through the air.

St. James, kneeling near the banks of the Ebro, was praying with upturned face while his companions, fatigued with the labors of the day had, like the other apostles, who slept while their Master prayed, closed their heavy eyelids and fallen asleep. All at once a flash of light illumined the fields, sounds of heavenly music filled the air, and the seven disciples, aroused from their slumbers, gazed with wonderment and fear at the apparition before them. Seated on a throne of light, borne aloft by angels, was Mary, whom they supposed in Jerusalem. Angels knelt around her on transparent clouds, and others, playing mystical harps, sang the sublime words with which, forty years before, the Archangel

Gabriel had saluted her in her home in Nazareth, " Ave Maria Gratia plena, Dominus tecum. "

St. James, gazing on this vision with ecstasy, saw the angels suspend the throne in front of him and place themselves before it, when Mary, taking from the hands of the seraphs a small column of jasper, upon which was placed a beautiful statue of herself carved in wood, with the child Jesus in her arms, showed it to St. James, and giving him her blessing said :

" James, servant of the Most High, blessed be thou by Him, and may He fill thee with His divine grace ; " to which the angels answered " Amen, " and their Lady continued : " My son James, the Most High and Mighty God of Heaven has chosen this place that you may consecrate and dedicate here a temple and house of prayer where, under the invocation of my name, He wishes to be adored and served, and all the faithful who seek my intercession will receive the graces they ask if they have true faith and devotion, and in the name of my Son I promise them

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great favors and blessings, for this will be my temple and my house, my own inheritance and possession, and in testimony of my promise, THIS PILLAR WILL REMAIN HERE, AND ON IT MY OWN IMAGE, WHICH IN THIS PLACE WHERE YOU WILL BUILD MY TEMPLE, WILL LAST AND ENDURE WITH THE HOLY FAITH UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD. This you must do at once, and when your work is accomplished, you will pass over to Jerusalem, where it is the will of my Divine Son that you make the sacrifice of your life where He gave His for the redemption of mankind. ”

She then commanded the angels to place the column with its sacred image where it stands to this day, and as the angelic cortège disappeared, St. James and his disciples praised God, and offered to Him the first shrine ever dedicated in this world to His Blessed Mother. They afterwards built a modest chapel, sixteen feet long by eight feet wide, to enclose the Virgin's gift, but this succumbed to time and the elements, and was succeeded by several others, the sacred column, however, always remaining on the spot where the

angels had placed it. The piety of the faithful, and the offerings of numerous pilgrims who, attracted by the fame of the miracles of the Virgin of the Pillar, came from all parts of the world, raised a church which remained until the end of the seventeenth century, when Charles II, the last monarch of the Austrian dynasty to occupy the Spanish throne, built the gorgeous edifice which now enshrines the pillar and image, and the first stone of which was laid on the feast of St. James 1686.

In 1753, King Ferdinand VI. engaged the celebrated architect Ventura Rodriguez to build the sumptuous chapel in which the image is now guarded, and which covers the place where tradition says St. James built the first one. Above the high altar is a carving of the Virgin extending her hand to the Apostle, and over the altar at the right of this is a picture of the seven disciples of St. James. On the left is the altar where, under a rich canopy of silver, against a dark background thickly studded with diamonds, stands the traditional Pillar with the statue of the

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Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus. Mass is never celebrated at this altar, it being the tradition that St. James officiated here, and there is no record that any other priest has done so since. A silver railing of exquisite workmanship runs the whole length of the three altars, and the walls of jasper and marble glitter with offerings of gold, silver and precious stones, which flashing in the light of the numerous silver lamps, fairly dazzle the eyes of the spectator, and evoke severe criticisms from travellers, who are unanimous in the assertion that the whole interior of this church is lavish, extravagant, and in very bad taste. The Zaragozan sees only "La Pilarica" and the costly gifts which have been offered in faith, and devotion, and love, to adorn her Holy Chapel: gifts from kings, queens, princes, and noble knights who have prayed at this shrine through succeeding centuries: gifts from pilgrims who have come from afar on foot to lay their offerings at her feet: gifts from saints who left their jewels here before retiring from the world for ever: gifts from humble peasants, from toilers of

the deep, and from the poorest of God's poor, who saved, and hoarded, and went hungry for years in order to offer a token of their love to La Patrona. In bad taste? perhaps : but the eye that sees beyond the material, sees the sentiment of the giver, and when it is realized that every jewel, every embroidered mantle, every ornament, one might almost say every stone, of the church of the Pillar, is a token of love, with its history and its reason, those who come to criticise will remain to marvel and to pray.

It was in this church that the old kings of Aragon knelt to take their oaths of fidelity to God and to the people. Isabel the Catholic came here frequently and gave priceless jewels to the treasury of the Virgin : the Emperor Charles V., his head heavy with the weight of crowns, visited Our Lady of the Pillar and laid his sceptre at her feet before retiring to the monastery at Juste : the enigmatic Philip II., the pious but weak Philip III., the gay and gallant Philip IV., all left memorials at the shrine, while the turbulent don John of Austria had such a devo-



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tion for the Virgin of the Pillar that he desired his heart to be buried in the crypt of the Holy Chapel.

Among the many documents of historic interest which are carefully guarded in the massive carved cases of the majestic Chapter Hall of the cathedral of Toledo, is a quaintly written manuscript of records compiled by the prebendary Juan Chaves Arcayo, in which is given a minute account of events in connection with this cathedral and the church of Our Lady of the Pillar at Zaragoza, extending from the latter part of the fifteenth century until the middle of the seventeenth, from which the following is extracted :

“ Reception of the Sovereigns of Castile, Saturday, Twenty first of April of the year One Thousand Four Hundred and ninety-eight. The Chapter set forth to receive the Sovereigns of Castile, and, the Reverence being made, all returned to the Cathedral, where the Reception took place according to the custom, and the response ‘ *Tua est potentia* ’ was sung followed by prayer. The

Sovereigns of Castile were don Fernando and doña Isabel. ”

“ Reception of the Sovereigns of Portugal in Toledo.

“ The following Thursday the twenty-sixth of April, One Thousand Four Hundred and ninety-eight, the Chapter set forth to receive the Sovereigns of Portugal, don Manuel and doña Isabel, daughter of don Fernando and doña Isabel, in front of Lázaro Buey, and there they stopped until the members of the chapter arrived, and afterwards those of the city, afterwards the Clergy, and after all came the King of Castile, and he came without any ceremony whatever, neither of trumpets nor of other instruments, until the arrival of the King of Portugal, when fifty trumpets sounded, with sackbuts, clarions, and fifteen pairs of kettle-drums, and thus they came to the church, in which they were given a reception similar to that of the Sovereigns of Castile. The following Sunday the twenty-ninth of April, all the Sovereigns came to the church, and pontifical mass was celebrated by the Archbishop, don Fray

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Francisco Ximenez, at which the said Sovereigns assisted, and at its close a seat was placed for the Archbishop on the steps of the altar, and for the Sovereigns on the steps of the next altar ; then came the cavaliers of the Kingdom, and they took oath to the Sovereigns of Portugal as Princes of Castile ; then they kissed their hands, and the Constable of Castile paid them homage, as did also the Procurators of the Cities ; and from this City they went away on the Tenth of May for Zaragoza to repeat these ceremonies, and were there refused the oath. They remained until the Queen of Portugal gave birth to a son, and she died on Thursday, the Twenty-third of August, which was the same day, and her body was placed in the church of St. Francis of Zaragoza, from which it was taken to the monastery of St. Isabel of Toledo, founded by the King don Fernando, her father, on the lands of doña Ines de Ayala, his maternal great grandmother ; and on the Twenty-second of September the prince don Miguel was baptised in Zaragoza, which was the one born on the afore-mentioned

day, the Twenty-third of August. ”

The Infanta Isabel mentioned in these records was the eldest child of Isabel the Catholic, and had been previously married to Prince Alfonso, the only son and heir of Juan II of Portugal. The nuptials were celebrated by proxy with great splendor, and the nobles gathered in magnificent array from all parts of Aragon, Valencia, Cataluña and Sicily to witness the betrothal of their sovereigns' eldest born, and to add lustre to the ceremonies. All the pages of the royal household wore new brocade costumes, heavily embroidered with gold and silver. The Queen and the bride appeared at all the fêtes, which lasted for two weeks, dressed in cloth of gold and resplendent with jewels, and attended by seventy of the noblest ladies in Spain. Jousts and tournaments were held, in which the King greatly distinguished himself. Among the articles mentioned in the trousseau we find four costly necklaces of gold set with pearls and precious stones, with many other jewels of great value ; rich tapestries, twenty robes of silk and brocade, four of

drawn golden threads, six of silk, embroidered with pearls and gold ; and linen to the amount of twenty thousand florins, the entire magnificent wardrobe being estimated at one hundred and twenty thousand gold florins.

The bride was received at the frontier by don Manuel de Viseo, son of the cousin of the King of Portugal, and many of the chief nobility, who escorted her to Eborá, where she was met by the bridegroom and his father, and the nuptials were celebrated with great solemnity and splendor. But the Catholic Queen's beautiful daughter was not destined either for earthly happiness or for length of days. She had been a bride eight months after these festivities when her husband was thrown from his horse and killed, and the widowed princess returned to Castile in a litter hung with black.

Juan II. having no other son, was succeeded at his death by the don Manuel de Viseo who had been sent to meet the Infanta on her arrival in Portugal, and who on that occasion had been deeply impressed with her beauty, and as soon as he ascended the throne

he asked for the hand of his cousin's widow. She declined at first but finally consented, and the marriage was celebrated without the customary pomp: eighteen months later, while her parents were chafing at the refusal of the Aragonese to recognize her and her husband as princes of Castile, "without having time for mature deliberation," ambition and anger gave place to sorrow at the Infanta's unexpected death. "The Aragonese abide by their oaths, therefore they never make them rashly," was the respectful statement with which the oath was refused; but they granted to the little Prince Miguel that which they had withheld from his mother. He died, however, before he was two years old, and with the close of his short life ended the tragedies hidden in the few words entered in the records of the Cathedral of Toledo.

The visits of many monarchs and wealthy princes, and the generous gifts of the faithful to the Patroness of Aragon, formed a treasure of such immense value that it could not fail to excite the avarice of the invading French army, whose commander, Marshall Launes,

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after the capitulation in 1809, demanded a "present" of jewels from the shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar as one of the conditions of surrender. This "present" was valued at one and a half million dollars, one jewel alone, a large heart of diamonds, on the centre of which stood a swan of pearls with outstretched wings, the gift of one of the queens of Spain, doña Barbara of Portugal, being worth fifty thousand dollars. It would be difficult to estimate the actual value of the treasure as it exists to-day, for many of the jewels are practically priceless on account of their antiquity and historic associations, while new gifts are constantly being added. The mantles, which are used exclusively for the adornment of the sacred image, form a treasure in themselves, the description and historic records of which would alone fill volumes. The collection is so large and so varied that a different one could be used every day in the year, and all are of extreme value, many of them being almost covered with precious stones, heavy embroideries of gold and silver, and laces of inestimable worth.

The Holy Chapel is never empty for one moment from day-break until the doors are closed at night; the crowds come and go continually; very few people pass the church without entering, if only to salute "La Patrona" and pass out again. Every now and then one sees a monaguille in cassock and surplice, wending his way carefully through the groups of worshippers, carrying in his arms a tiny baby, perhaps only a few weeks old; this is the one occasion in his life when a son of Zaragoza is privileged to touch the sacred image; he is raised in the arms of a chaplain and his innocent face, wet with the waters of baptism, is pressed against that of "La Pilarica."

There are chaplains whose time is entirely given to the services in the Holy Chapel; four of these guard the vestments and jewels of the Virgin, which they change according to the rites of the Church and the festivals of the year; no other person being allowed to touch the statue, or to have access to the mantles and ornaments which belong to it. Every morning, as the first streaks of dawn







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break through the sky, ere the last stars have faded, one of the chaplains sings the "Mass of the Infantes," so called because the choir is composed of eight small boys called Infantes, who are dedicated to the service of the Holy Chapel and serve the many masses that are celebrated in it daily. This mass is the first of the innumerable prayers that are murmured unceasingly from this moment until the echo of the last notes of the Salve dies away in the vast arches at nightfall. It is considered a great privilege among the Zaragozan families to have a son an Infante of Our Lady of the Pillar; besides the eight above mentioned there are Infantes who belong to the noble families of the city, who are consecrated by their parents to the Virgin, and who wear a distinctive costume as long as they remain in her service: this consists of a purple cassock, a white rochette, and a ribbon worn around the neck to which is attached an image of the Patroness. The boys are very proud of their uniform, which they don on feast days and when they walk in processions.

The feast of the Virgin of the Pillar is celebrated with great pomp and ceremony on the 12th of October, and begins with the Mass of the Infantes at four o'clock in the morning. The city puts on holiday attire for a week, all work is suspended, and visitors pour in from all parts of the Peninsula to make their devotions at the famous shrine and take part in the rejoicings. On the 11th of October, bands parade the streets, and fireworks are let off at intervals: this is the formal announcement to the public that the festivals are about to commence. Trains arrive every half hour loaded with passengers from every nook and corner of Aragon, and some from the remotest parts of Spain. As they near the city bright-colored kerchiefs are seen waving from the windows of the coaches, and as soon as the towers of the church are sighted the cry of "Viva la Virgen del Pilar" rises in one deafening shout from all throats. As early as two o'clock on the morning of the 12th the crowds begin to enter the church, and when the shrill treble voices of the Infanticos sing the first notes of the

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mass, the edifice is so packed that it is difficult to move. At the conclusion of the service the stream of worshippers pours out at one end and in at the other, and this goes on during the entire day, it being utterly impossible to estimate how many come here to pray on this occasion.

When the sun has set and night begins to fall, the bells peal a joyous call to the Salve ; all the doors are thrown wide open and the church is soon filled to its capacity, without apparently diminishing the immense throngs that have gathered in the Plaza del Pilar. All classes are here, peasants in the picturesque costumes which proclaim the places from which they hail ; children in fine clothes, and children in rags ; women wearing the latest French hat, and women with their heads envelopped in the historic mantilla, or in an old shawl ; working people from near-by, and tourists with Baedeker in their hands ; pretty faces, ugly faces, merry faces, sad faces, young faces and old faces mingle with throngs of soldiers, priests, Infantes, all pressing in one moving mass to hear the sol-

emn notes of the Salve, the last act of devotion of the Feast of Our Lady of the Pillar.

Outsiders may look upon this tradition as absurd and impossible, but the Zaragozan sees nothing unusual in it; he dwells in an atmosphere of saint love, and the inhabitants of Heaven do not seem so very far away from him, for he has evidences of their presence on all sides; he lives with them, talks with them, invokes them, coaxes them, reproaches them and loves them with a familiarity that might appear irreverent were it not for its genuine simplicity, and there is no place in the world where devotion to the Holy Mother is so deeply rooted as in the heroic city of Zaragoza, where her shrine has been defended with the lives of thousands of her children, and where it is firmly believed that her venerated image will surely last and endure "with the holy faith until the end of the world."

# OUR LADY OF COVADONGA

IN

## ASTURIAS

O Holiest Mary, maid and mother ! thou  
In Covadonga, at thy rocky shrine,  
Hast witnessed whatso'er of human bliss  
Heart can conceive most perfect ! Faithful love,  
Long crost by envious stars, hath there attained  
Its crown, in endless matrimony given ;  
The youthful mother there hath to the fount  
Her first-born borne, and there, with deeper sense  
Of gratitude for that dear babe redeemed  
From threatening death, returned to pay her vows.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

The name of Covadonga contains in itself every remembrance of Goth, and Moor, and Christian that is linked with the history, the nationality, the heroism, the loyalty and the religion of the Spanish race, for it was here that the stragglng bands of fugitives from the battle grounds of the South found a secure shelter when they fled from the con-

quering invader, not as fear-stricken cowards, but as resolute patriots who realized that valor and prudence lay in flight, and not in a useless resistance to a foe that out-classed them in discipline, in equipment, and in leadership.

The two armies met on the fertile plains of Jerez, where the infidel army was encamped on the banks of the river to which the Arabs afterwards gave the name of Guadalete, the River of Death. For two days the fighting waged without ceasing, and on the morning of the third day, which was Friday the 31st of July, 711, don Rodrigo confessed his sins and received the Holy Eucharist, as did all the Christian soldiers. The Pagan host came sweeping down into the valley to the sound of martial music, the brilliant robes of many hues, the flashing swords and the flying banners giving an appearance of magnificent splendor to the invading army. The battle began with showers of arrows, stones and javelins, and the desperate valor of the Goths had almost won the day when the traitor don Oppas, the intrusive archbishop



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of Seville, and all his followers, suddenly went over to the enemy and turned their weapons against their own countrymen. From that moment the day was lost to the Christians, and the battle-field became a scene of wild carnage and massacre. The number of slain on both sides was so great that the river ran red with blood, and was choked with the bodies of warriors and horses. The air was infected for months, and for over half a century the bones of the dead lay in heaps upon the plain, and it is said that even to this day, fragments of Gothic armour and Moorish scimitars may be dug out of the surrounding soil, and from the bed of the Guadalete.

The fate of don Rodrigo has remained shrouded in mystery ever since that doleful day: whether he met death in the thick of the battle, or whether he escaped and lived as a hermit in the solitudes of Lusitania, has never been known. His war-horse, Orelia, was found dead on the banks of the Guadalete, and near by lay the King's helmet, encircled by a crown of gold, his battered

armour, and his mantle, embroidered with the royal Gothic arms, but the body of don Rodrigo was not among those of the Christian knights, and it was supposed that it might have been borne away by the tide with thousands of others, for he was never seen again, dead or alive, by his own people; but after two centuries had passed away, when don Alfonso, King of Leon, had wrested the city of Viseo in Lusitania from the Arabs, a hermitage was discovered in a field outside the city, in front of which stood a stone sepulchre bearing this inscription :

HIC REQUIESCIT RUDERICUS

ULTIMUS REX GOTHORUM

*Here rests Rodrigo*

*The last king of the Goths*

From this it has been inferred that he fled to Portugal and spent the rest of his life in this solitary hermitage in prayer and penance.

During the three days combat at Jerez, a knight of noble mien and commanding stat-

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ure, fought valiantly by the side of the king, bearing in one hand the royal standard of the Goths, and with the other wielding a sword of enormous size, while he constantly urged the Christians, both by example and encouraging words, to resist the foe: this was don Pelayo, a near kinsman of the monarch, who, when don Rodrigo had vanished from the scene, and the Christian soldiers became seized with panic and confusion, gathered together the remnants of the fleeing army and marched with them under cover of the night to Toledo, and later led them to Asturias. He was accompanied on this melancholy journey by the Archbishop of Toledo, Urbano, and many noble citizens of the South, and they took with them a large number of relics and sacred vessels, the holy scriptures, and the writings of St. Isidore, St. Ildefonso, and St. Julian, which, for their better preservation, they placed in a cave two leagues distant from the spot on which the city of Oviedo was afterwards built. They then retired to the hilly recesses of Asturias and fortified themselves in that part known

as Covadonga, "cueva-honga," deep cave. Other fugitives joined them from all those parts of Spain which were attacked and taken by the Moslems, and by degrees their spirits revived under the influence of Pelayo, whom they had chosen as their leader, and they set themselves to build homes and temples, to till the soil, and to prepare for a struggle against the infidel conqueror that would end only with the victory of the Cross.

In the cavernous depths and rocky heights of the Asturian mountains the Christians possessed an impregnable fort; the sterile soil, the hilly wastes and the bleak plains of this region had no attraction for the Moors, whose covetous eyes had beheld the flowery meadows of Andalucia, rich with all the fruitful beauties of nature, enhanced by the noblest works of man, and they did not dream that those bare hills and rugged passes enclosed a centre of resistance which was destined to effect, after seven hundred years of warfare, the expulsion of the invader from the cherished land of his conquest.

Seven years after the defeat of Guadalete,

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the Moorish general Alcamah led an army to Asturias with the intention of destroying these last remnants of opposition to the Mohamedan rule. The spirit of rebellion had already shown itself in various parts of the conquered territory, and many bands of Christians had joined Pelayo, especially from Vizcaya and Cataluña. It was felt by the Moors that these discontented mountain dwellers might infect other parts of the country with their patriotism, and it was decided to disperse them before they could become too dangerous. Alcamah had an immense army of Moors, in which were many Christians who had accepted the Moorish rule; with him also was don Oppas, prelate of Seville, who was of royal Gothic descent, and had undertaken to use his relationship with don Pelayo to persuade him that resistance was folly against such odds, and who fully believed that his cousin, after an interview with him, would surrender without striking a blow.

As soon as it was known that Alcamah was on his way, Pelayo chose one thousand

of the bravest and strongest of his adherents, and with them entered a large cavern in Mount Auseva, now known as the cave of St. Mary of Covadonga. This curious cave is in the upper part of the rocky mass, from whose centre springs the source of the river Deva which, rushing underneath the cave with a loud roar that is answered by a thousand echoes from the surrounding hollows and rocks, dashes over a precipice and falls with a tremendous noise into a basin ninety feet below. It is said that Pelayo came across this prodigious cave while he was pursuing a man who had committed a crime, and whom he was determined to punish. The man fled to the hills, leaping over chasms and climbing crags with a disregard of danger born of the fear of justice, while Pelayo followed urged by his desire to capture the criminal, who suddenly darted into an opening and disappeared from his view. Pelayo followed but was confronted by an aged hermit who, with Christian charity, had placed the fugitive in a place of safety, and begged his pursuer to show mercy to one who had

