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In obedience to the decrees of Pope Urban VIII and other sovereign Pontiffs, the writer declares that the graces and other supernatural facts related in this volume as witnessing to the sanctity of Servants of God other than those canonized or beatified by the Church, rest on human authority alone; and in regard thereto, as in all things else, the writer submits himself without reserve to the infallible judgment of the Apostolic See, which alone has power and authority to pronounce as to whom rightly belong the Character and Title of Saint or Blessed.

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LIVES OF THE BRETHREN

OF THE
ORDER OF PREACHERS

1206-1259

Translated by
JOHN PLACID CONWAY, O.P., 1855-1923.

Edited with Notes and Introduction

by
BEDE JARRETT, O.P., 1881-1934.

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PROLOGUE

To all the Friars Preachers, beloved in the beloved Son of God, Jesus Christ, Brother Humbert,* their unprofitable servant, wisheth salvation hereafter in their home and here in their wayfaring the fulness of the works of salvation.

Surely it is the Saviour of the world, under whose charge lies the care of all ages, who, by the incoming of the Holy Spirit to their hearts, has inspired the writers of these legends to record such words and sayings of certain of his servants as are noteworthy of help, in order that the more wonderfully the memory of those blessed fathers is perpetuated in writing, the more may future generations be led thereby to salvation. Thus Eusebius wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*, and the Damascene the *Book of Balaam*, and Cassian the *Collationes Patrum*, and Gregory his *Dialogue*, and Jerome, Bede, Florus, Odo, Usuardus their various martyrologies, and Gregory of Tours, Peter of Cluny, and many others their many writings of the same kind.

Rumours have reached us of the accounts of our brethren of all nations telling of many things which took place in the Order or concerning it.

Were these written down they must assuredly be a consolation to the brethren and help them to advance in the spiritual life. For this very reason, therefore, many, devoted to God, urged us not to delay in appointing some one to compile such a work as this now offered you before forgetfulness, already destructive of much that should have remained in the hearts of the brethren, bury all in the tomb. When this was discussed by the Priors Provincial at the General Chapter of Paris in 1256, it was determined on their advice that all the brethren should inform us of whatever events in our history they thought worthy of being remembered. Now we certainly cannot excuse very many who have neglected to obey this ordination, but we commend very heartily those

who forwarded to us a great deal of material. This we gave to our most dear brother, Gerard of Limoges, then Prior Provincial of Provence, in whose industry in this sort of thing we have great faith, asking and ordering him that he should on examination select the best of them and edit them. The pages that follow prove what he has done. These we have shown to many discreet brethren; and since they have approved of them, we have authorised their publication.

It is not our wish, however, that this should be shown outside the Order without our special leave.

Do you, therefore, most beloved, read herein and see how carefully Providence has befriended our Order, and remembering this, grow always in greater love of it. Let those who have been negligent in sending matter to us for this book diligently correct their negligence. Let those to whom have happened such occurrences as are contained in these pages send an account of them to us or to whoever then be Master, that they may be added to this volume or duly inserted in it.

PART I

THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

CHAPTER I

THE ORDER WAS THE FRUIT OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S PRAYERS

It is clear from a careful study of holy Scripture, that the blessed Virgin is a compassionate advocate and powerful helper of mankind. By her prayers the fire of God's wrath kindled against sinners is tempered lest they perish, and countless blessings are showered down upon the world. Rightly therefore is she compared to a cloud between the consuming fire of God's justice and guilty man, softening by her tender influence the heat of his wrath. She is a vessel of loving kindness; and God allows his ire against sinners to be appeased through her and pours forth by her the waters of his compassion in blessings. One of the examples of this is the fact, revealed to many of God's servants, that this great Order was raised up by Almighty God's mercy for the salvation of souls, through her all-prevailing intercession.

Before the Order had as yet sprung up, a certain monk, a man of upright and holy life according to the rule of his Order, during three whole days and nights was rapt in ecstasy, scarcely giving token of feeling or life. While his brethren and bystanders were considering what should be done, he regained consciousness as if waking from a deep sleep. When all asked in wonder what had been amiss, and whether he had seen any marvel, he gave no reply but this: 'I was a little while in ecstasy,' whereas he had been so during three days and nights, nor would he for a long while mention what had been shown him. Some years later, when our Order had obtained a sure footing, and our brethren were scattered abroad on their ministry, two of them chanced to come into the neighbourhood to preach. On beholding them this monk began to make diligent enquiries as to their Order, name, and manner of life, since their habit was new to him. Their preaching being over, he drew them aside, and summoning other wise and sober persons, spoke thus to them: 'I feel, brethren, that the hour is come for me to reveal the secrets which the Lord was pleased in his

goodness to unfold to me and about which I have hitherto been silent, for I now see that they have come to pass. During the time that I was caught up in rapture I saw our Lady, Mary the Mother of God, during those three days and nights, upon bended knees and with clasped hands, pleading with her Son on behalf of mankind, and beseeching him to forbear yet a while that the world might repent. But although during all that time he spoke never a word, at length upon the third day he yielded and made answer: "My own Mother, what can I, or what ought I to do further for the race of men? I sent them patriarchs for their salvation, and for a brief space of time they gave ear unto them; I sent them prophets, and for a while they did penance. After that I myself went unto them, and I gave them apostles, but me they crucified and them they killed. I have since sent them martyrs, confessors, and doctors, and many more, yet despite their toil the world has not amended; nevertheless, at thy prayer—for it is not beseeching that I deny thee aught—I will send unto them preachers and men of truth, through whom the world shall be enlightened and reclaimed. If it so prove, it is well; but if not, there remains no further remedy, but I will myself come in judgement and be avenged upon them."'

Another like vision confirms the foregoing. It was told by an aged and holy Cistercian monk of the Abbey of Bonnevaux, in the diocese of Vienne, to Brother Humbert, who was afterwards Master of the Order.¹ It ran thus:

Pope Innocent III having sent twelve Cistercian abbots against the Albigenses [1207], one of them chanced to pass, with his companion, close by a great crowd of men and women gathered round a man who had just come back to life after being dead three days. Out of respect for his own sacred character and that of his Order, he felt loath to give way to his curiosity and draw nigh, but on second thoughts he sent his companion to sift the matter, and to ask the man thus restored to life whether he had witnessed anything deserving of being recorded. When, in obedience to these behests, the monk enquired of the man what he had seen, he made answer that he had beheld our glorious Lady, the Virgin Mother of God, during three whole days and nights,

¹ Humbert de Romans tells the story himself (Berthier, *Opera*, ii, p. 135).

upon bended knees and with clasped hands, tearfully beseeching her Son to have pity upon her in such terms as these: 'My Son, I thank thee for having deigned to choose me for thy mother and queen of heaven, yet I grieve exceedingly that countless souls should be lost, for whom thou hast undergone so many sufferings of poverty, hardship, and contempt. Therefore I beseech thy clemency, let not the great price which has been paid for them be lost, nor thy precious blood be shed in vain, but devise yet further means for their salvation.' Upon this the Son answered his blessed Mother: 'Holy Mother, what can I do, or ought I to do, further for the human race? Have I not sent them patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and doctors of the Church for their salvation? Have I not delivered myself up to death for their sakes? Ought I then to save the sinner equally with the just, the guilty with the innocent? This is neither in keeping with my justice, nor does it beseech my majesty, for although merciful to the contrite, yet am I just towards the hardened. But tell me, sweet Mother, how ought I to bring this about? What wouldst thou have of me? Ask, and thy request shall be granted.' At this the Mother continued: 'Mine is not to teach thee, my Son, who knowest all things, being the sovereign wisdom of the Father, yet am I sure that if thou willest thou canst find some remedy for this perishing people.' Such prayers as these did the Mother of mercy pour forth for sinners, kneeling at the feet of her Son. At length, on the third day, raising her up with great tenderness, the Son replied: 'I know, sweet Mother, that sinners are being lost for want of preachers, having none to break to them the bread of the holy Scriptures, or teach the truth, or open the books now sealed to them. Wherefore, yielding to thy entreaties, I will send them new messengers, an Order of Preachers, who shall call the people and lead them to everlasting joys; only then shall we bar the gate to all slothful, accursed, and empty-handed souls.' After this he saw appearing brethren clothed in the habit which we now wear, and the Son and the Mother sent them forth with their blessing, giving them power to preach the Kingdom of God. It is told that this same monk said afterwards in his monastery: 'If after my death—for I shall not live to see these messengers of

the Mother of God—this Order does not arise, strike my name from out your obit list, and never pray for me.’

From such revelations it may be clearly gathered that one and the same vision granted to both was a sign that the word of the Lord should come to pass and be speedily fulfilled.

A friar-minor, who had long been the companion of St Francis, told some of our brethren¹—one of whom in turn related it to Brother Jordan, then Master of the Order—that when St Dominic our Father was in Rome, during the sitting of the Lateran Council, pressing his suit before God and the Pope for the confirmation of his Order, as he was praying one night—according to his custom—in the church, he beheld our Lord Jesus Christ standing by his throne in mid-air, and holding three lances which he was about to hurl against the earth. At the same moment the Virgin Mother, falling on her knees, besought him to have mercy on those whom he had redeemed, and to temper his justice with mercy. ‘Seest thou not what countless wrongs they continue to heap upon me?’ said he. ‘Right willingly would I have mercy, but my justice will not allow evil to go unpunished.’ Thereupon the Queen Mother again addressed him: ‘My Son, I know, as dost thou, who knowest all things, how thou canst restore mankind to thy favour. I have by me one trusty liegeman whom thou shalt send into the world to make known thy word, and thenceforth it will forsake and bewail its evil ways, and follow thee, its Saviour. To him as fellow labourer shall I give another of my servants to toil in even way.’ Upon this her Son answered; ‘Behold, now I am appeased and I accept thy plan; yet show me the man thou hast chosen.’ Then the glorious Virgin, taking St Dominic by the hand, led him to our Lord Jesus Christ, who, with an approving smile, replied: ‘Right well and manfully shall he carry out what thou hast said.’ She then brought forward St Francis, whom our Lord praised evenly. The blessed Dominic earnestly scanned the features of his companion while the vision lasted; on the morrow recognising him in the blessed Francis, although hitherto a stranger to him, he ran up and tenderly embraced him with a kiss, saying: ‘You

¹ Dated 1215 in *Chronicle of Henry of Hervord* (p. 180), ed. Potthast, and *Legendæ Aureæ* (Graesse, Leipzig, 1850, p. 470).

are my comrade, let us stand together, and no foe shall prevail against us.’ After this he told his vision, and from that hour they became but one heart and one soul in God, and enjoined their sons to foster this brotherly spirit to the end of time.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE ORDER WAS FORESEEN AND FORETOLD BY MANY

PRIOR STEPHEN, of the Carthusian Monastery of Partes, in the diocese of Lyons, a man so highly reputed for holiness that he was deservedly called a saint, had a revelation from God, and foretold to his brethren the rise of an Order of Preachers. Having gained their credence in this matter, he requested, nay, enjoined upon them, to hold this Order ever in the highest reverence and esteem. This they did most devoutly afterwards, and continue doing to this day, welcoming our brethren as angels sent from God.

A Cistercian bishop¹ of the diocese of Orange, in the Province of Arles, by reason of his exceeding great piety and deeds of mercy, and still more on account of the charm and fervour of his preaching, in which he shone beyond belief, was universally deemed to be a saint of God. Often while preaching he used, in the spirit of prophecy, to foretell the speedy rise of the Order. ‘I foretell to you,’ he would say, ‘that there will soon come men who will preach in very different fashion, and who will bear the name as well as the office of Preachers.’ There are still some surviving who heard him say so.

The blessed Mary D’Oignies, of the diocese of Liège, used also frequently to allude to the coming foundation of the Order. She was a woman of the rarest innocence and perfection, whose wonderful life has been set forth in the lengthy and trustworthy narrative of James of Vitry, the cardinal bishop of Tusculum.²

Fulk, bishop of Toulouse, a prelate of great gifts and gentle blood, tells us in the life which he wrote of this same Mary D’Oignies, how, when rapt in ecstasy ten years before

¹ William Helia, Bishop of Orange, died 1221 (*Gams*, i, p. 592).

² *Acta SS*, Boll., xxv, p. 547.

THE LEGEND OF ST DOMINIC

This Legend was compiled by Gerard de Frachet from the *Book of Epilogues* of Brother Bartholomew of Trent, one of the saint's first companions, and from the *History of the Foundation of the Order*, composed by Blessed Jordan of Saxony, and dedicated by him to his 'sons by grace and joint heirs to glory'. The Legend dates between 1255 and 1257.

CHAPTER XXIII

HIS COMPASSION FOR SINNERS

So wonderfully tender-hearted was he touching the sins and miseries of men, that when he came near any city or town from where he could overlook it, he would burst into tears at the thought of the miseries of mankind, of the sins committed therein, and of the numbers who were going down into hell. If it chanced that after the fatigues of a long journey he had to lodge with secular persons, he would first quench his thirst at some handy spring, fearing to draw attention to any excess in drinking from his intense thirst, due to his wearisome travelling on foot. This he was always most careful to avoid, not only in drinking, but in everything else besides.

CHAPTER XXIV

HIS SPIRIT OF DETACHMENT

His heart was so centred in God that in the things of this world he kept himself detached not only from everything that was in any sense of the word precious, but even from things that were poor or of less consequence, as was apparent in his books, his clothes, belt, shoes, knife (a thing he seldom carried), and the like, which were all of the poorer sort, shunning everything that was either becoming or curious.

CHAPTER XXV

HIS STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF CHARITY

A PRIEST after hearing him preach right eloquently and talk most learnedly upon the sacred Scriptures, made bold to ask him what books he studied most. The man of God gave him this answer, that he studied more in the book of

charity than in any other: and this choice of his was most wisely made, for it is indeed an all-instructive book.

CHAPTER XXVI

LUST QUELLED BY THE FRAGRANCE OF HIS HAND

A STUDENT of Bologna was addicted to sins of the flesh, and although he used constantly to confess the same, yet he as often relapsed, until at last he declared it was a hopeless task trying to check his passions. While St Dominic was saying mass in our conventual church this student came in, intending to hear the mass and sermon. He went up with the rest of the people at the offertory, and while presenting his offering, kissed the saint's hand. This done, he became aware of a fragrance exhaling from it such as he had never felt before. It was indeed a truly marvellous perfume, but still more marvellous were its effects, for from that moment he felt all the strife in his members cease, and continency was suddenly bestowed upon him, so that what heretofore seemed impossible became for the future easy and natural; and right fitting it was that the fragrance of a virginal hand should expel the foul odour of lust.

CHAPTER XXVII

HE FORETELLS HIS OWN DEATH

SHORTLY before our holy father's death, a student of Bologna, named Alfred, heard this prophecy of his departure from his own lips. The blessed Dominic had been paying a visit to some secular persons who were his intimate friends, with whom this student was staying at the time, and as he rose up to go, among other things that he said at the moment, he foretold his own death while trying to lead them to a contempt for the world and a remembrance of death. These were his very words: 'You now see me alive, and well in body, yet before our Lady's Assumption I shall be taken away from this present life.' The event confirmed the conviction, for he departed to God shortly before the Assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary, as the students all remarked and told our brethren after his death.¹

¹ He died at 6.30 p.m. on Friday, August 6, 1221.