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OF
POLAND

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SAINT HYACINTH OF POLAND

THE STORY OF
THE APOSTLE OF THE NORTH

By
Mary Fabyan Windeatt

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TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina

Nihil Obstat: Arthur J. Scanlan, S.T.D.
 Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: ✠ Francis J. Spellman, D.D.
 Archbishop of New York
 New York
 July 1, 1945

Copyright © 1945 by Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York.

First published in 1945, by Sheed & Ward, under the title *Northern Lights: The Story of Saint Hyacinth of Poland and His Companions*.

This book first appeared in serial form in the pages of *The Torch*.

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ISBN: 0-89555-422-4

Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 93-83094

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Published in the United States of America by
TAN Books
PO Box 410487
Charlotte, NC 28241
www.TANBooks.com

To the memory
of my Father,
William Fabyan Windeatt.

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sister Mary of the Compassion, O.P. (Constance Mary Rowe) was born in London. At the age of 15 she began to study art at the Clapham School of Art, and four years later became a student of the Royal College of Art, in London. There she made mural painting her principal aim, working under Sir William Rothenstein, Alfred K. Lawrence and Professor W. Tristram.

The question of "What is 'Good' and what is 'Evil,'" together with the conviction that the human soul was made to attain to the perfection of all truth, led her to the Catholic Church. She was baptized at the Brompton Oratory in September, 1931 and became a Dominican Tertiary in December of the same year. In 1932 she was awarded the Rome Prize for mural paintings, and her time as a student of the British School at Rome was spent in the study of painting in relation to its use in the Church.

Coming to America in 1936, she held exhibitions in New York, Washington, Boston and Providence. In 1937 she entered the cloister of the Dominican Sisters of the Perpetual Rosary, Union City, New Jersey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the use of books and other material relative to the life and times of Saint Hyacinth, the author wishes to thank the following:

The Dominican Fathers of Saint Vincent Ferrer's Priory in New York City; the Fathers of the Dominican House of Studies in River Forest, Illinois; the Fathers of the Dominican Priory in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, Canada.

Grateful acknowledgment is also due Mrs. Rose Lang of Brooklyn, New York, and Miss Jane Emmet of New York City, for their aid in translating much valuable source material, and to the Felician Sisters of the Academy of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Buffalo, New York—in particular to Sister Mary Benice, Sister Mary Annette, Sister Mary Amandine and Sister Mary Gualbert—for their criticism and suggestions regarding the historical and geographical aspects of this story.

The author is also deeply indebted to the Reverend Norbert F. Georges, O.P., S.T.Lr., Director of the Blessed Martin Guild, for his unfailing help and encouragement in preparing this first English biography of Saint Hyacinth of Poland.

SAINT HYACINTH
OF
POLAND

CHAPTER 1

FOUR APOSTLES

IT WAS Ash Wednesday in the year 1220, but the city of Rome was far from being in a Lenten mood. A spirit of exhilaration was abroad that did not correspond to sackcloth or ashes. Indeed, one might have thought it already Easter, especially if one looked at the joyful countenance of Stephen Cardinal Orsini. The old man was radiant.

“Napoleon! My young nephew Napoleon!” he kept repeating every few minutes. “A little while ago the lad was dead, but now he lives!”

Nicholas, the Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum, smiled. He had been present that morning at the Monastery of Saint Sixtus when the news had been brought that Napoleon had been thrown from his horse and killed. Others had been present, too, for this was a great day in the Eternal City. Several communities of nuns, heretofore living without cloister, had agreed to band together at the Monastery of Saint Sixtus under the Rule drawn up for them by the holy Spanish preacher Dominic de Guzman. All had been assembled for Mass and the

solemn ceremony of inclosure when the messenger had rushed in.

Recalling all these things now, the Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum looked closely at his old friend. "If I live for a hundred years, I'll never forget this morning's miracle!" he declared. "Your nephew was really dead, Stephen. Anyone could see that. But this Spanish friar... this Father Dominic... why, he was not at all alarmed. He comforted you a little, of course—but even I could tell that his thoughts were far away from the tragedy."

Cardinal Stephen nodded. "Yes, I know. Instead of being distracted, like the rest of us, he went ahead and offered the Holy Sacrifice. When all was over, he came to where Napoleon's body was stretched on the floor. Then—oh, Nicholas! What wonderful words he spoke!"

Cardinal Nicholas was silent for a moment, remembering how the Spanish friar had knelt beside the broken body of the young man and arranged the shattered limbs; how finally he had arisen, made the Sign of the Cross, then looked heavenwards and cried out joyfully:

"Young man, I say to you, in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, arise!"

Nicholas stretched out a reassuring hand to his old friend. "It has been a wonderful day," he murmured. "And one to remember forever, Stephen. For we have seen a saint at prayer and at work."

In a large house at some blocks' distance from where the two Italian Cardinals sat talking, other men were also discussing the morning's miracle.

These men were of a different build and coloring from the Cardinals, however—tall and muscular, with the fair hair and blue eyes that bespoke their Polish birth. The oldest, Ivo Odrowatz, wore the scarlet robes of a Bishop. He was seated in a large chair, with writing materials spread out on a table before him, while at his side stood two young priests, Hyacinth and Ceslaus, his nephews.

"We must try to see this Father Dominic before we go back to Poland," remarked the Bishop. "Oh, my sons! Pray, pray very hard that God will grant us the grace to speak with a man who can raise the dead to life!"

A soft glow stole into Hyacinth's eyes. "Maybe we should also pray for another favor," he suggested. "What do you think, Uncle Ivo? Could you use some of Father Dominic's friars in Cracow?"

"Of course we could use them!" put in Ceslaus eagerly. "What a wonderful ideal!"

The Bishop's eyes turned from one young face to the other, and a little smile flickered on his lips. "Would you joke at such a time?" he asked. "If I thought that there was the least chance. . ."

"Put it in the letter, Uncle Ivo. Ask Father Dominic to give us some of his friars, so that northern Europe may be converted. Ask him this now—at the same time you ask for the privilege of an interview."

There was a respectful insistence in Hyacinth's voice, and the Bishop smiled in spite of himself. Here was a young man born to be a leader.

"Very well," he said. "I'll put it in the letter. But

tell me—do you really think the good friar can spare us any workers for Poland?”

Ceslaus nodded eagerly. “Oh, yes, Uncle Ivo. I’m quite sure he can. Why, just yesterday I heard it said that in France alone Father Dominic has converted hundreds from heresy. Surely all this couldn’t have been done without many helpers?”

There was logic in these words, and the Bishop completed his letter to Father Dominic in a happy frame of mind. But an hour or so later, when he retired for the night, it was not to sleep. Tired though he was, he could not seem to relax. Again and again he kept seeing the holy friar who had presided that morning at the solemn inclosure of the nuns at Saint Sixtus, who had offered Mass and then raised a dead youth to life. Dominic de Guzman! What a remarkable man this was! And how wonderful if he and his followers could come as missionaries to Poland, even to Prussia and Lithuania and other pagan lands along the Baltic Sea.

“Our Northland needs preachers so much,” he thought sadly. “We have priests, it is true—but how many are truly holy, truly wise? Oh, dear Lord, please send us many of these white-clad friars, these well-trained sons of the Spanish saint!”

Alas for the Bishop’s hopes that the newly founded Friars Preachers could come to Poland! Ceslaus had spoken of them with more zeal than knowledge, and when the little group of northerners arrived at the Monastery of Santa Sabina for their interview with Dominic, an explanation was in order.

"Your Lordship, I have only a very few sons," said Dominic gently. "Some are in Spain, others in France—a mere handful here in Italy. So you see it would be quite impossible to send even one friar to your country just now."

The Bishop's face fell. "We do need priests so much," he faltered, "especially in the cities. I was hoping, and my nephews were hoping. . . but of course we understand, Father Dominic. You have work to do here in the South. Our wish is that God may bless your labors a hundredfold."

To this Hyacinth and Ceslaus added a fervent "Amen," and for a moment all was quiet in the room. Then Dominic approached the two brothers, looking long and earnestly into their eyes.

"Perhaps all is not lost," he said kindly. "Your Lordship, why not give me some of these young men who have accompanied you here to Rome? In just a little while I would return them to you as true apostles."

The Bishop stared. Hyacinth, a friar? Ceslaus? But before he could form a reply, Hyacinth was on his knees. His hands were clasped, his face shining. "Do you mean it, Father Dominic? You would really have me in your Order?"

"Yes, my son. And in due course you would return to your north country. You would preach God's Truth there and convert many."

"You will have me as your son, too, Father?" whispered Ceslaus anxiously. "I am older than Hyacinth, yet without his learning. Still, I give you my word that I would do my best to follow instructions;

that not a day would pass. . . .”

Dominic looked at the Bishop. “I think this young man speaks too humbly of himself, Your Lordship. Perhaps you would tell me the truth about him?”

Now Ivo Odrowatz, who had come to Rome for one purpose only: to be confirmed in his new post as Bishop of Cracow, was somewhat stunned at the sudden turn of events. Could it be that these nephews whom he had trained and encouraged for years in God’s service were being rather too hasty in their decision to follow the Spanish friar?

“Ceslaus has degrees in theology and law from the University of Bologna,” he said slowly. “He’s been a priest at the Cathedral in Cracow for about five years. . . .”

“And this younger brother? What of him?”

The Bishop gazed fondly at Hyacinth. “He, too, has a good education, Father Dominic. First at the University of Prague, then at Bologna. Like Ceslaus, he is now a canon of the Cathedral in Cracow. But do you really think. . . ?”

Dominic smiled—understandingly, affectionately. “Do I really think that men who are already priests can take to living as simple friars without a struggle? Oh, Your Lordship, have no fear! You have asked for workers, for apostles in the North. Soon you will have them. And not only in Hyacinth and Ceslaus. There are others in your retinue whom God intends for His service.”

The Bishop stared. “*Others*, Father Dominic?”

“Yes. I see one now—standing by the window.



"YOU WILL HAVE ME IN YOUR ORDER,
FATHER DOMINIC?"

And a second, by the door. Come here, my sons. Tell me if it is not true that God has suddenly touched your hearts with His grace—that now you are both convinced you must give yourselves to Him completely.”

All eyes turned to where Dominic pointed, and the Bishop gasped. Advancing toward the Spanish friar were two of his lay attendants—Herman, who hailed from Germany, and a young Czech named Henry. They were good souls, honest and hard-working, but never had the Bishop suspected that they might be interested in the religious life. Indeed, until this very moment they had seemed quite content to spend their days as servants in the episcopal household.

Dominic was smiling. “Well, Herman? Well, Henry? What do you ask?”

With one accord the two fell upon their knees. Yes, they also wished to be clothed in the habit of the Friars Preachers. Of course they were not priests like Ceslaus and Hyacinth. They had little book learning. But they would do their best to be of use in other ways if Father Dominic could find room for them in his religious family.

The friar nodded understandingly. “Room, my children? There is always room in a good work for men who are willing to start in the lowest place.”

Suddenly a lay Brother appeared in the doorway. There was an approving smile on Dominic’s face as he observed that the newcomer had with him a number of white woolen habits. Quickly turning to the four young men before him, he indicated that

they should prostrate themselves on the ground in token of their unworthiness to serve God as religious. Then, as a second lay Brother approached with a lighted candle and Holy Water, he began to pray in a clear and fervent voice:

“Stretch forth, O Lord, unto these Thy servants, the right hand of Thy heavenly assistance, that they may seek Thee with all their hearts, and obtain what they fittingly ask. . .”

Bishop Ivo watched the little scene with a fast-beating heart. What an amazing day this was! He had come to beg for missionaries from Father Dominic de Guzman. Instead, the holy man had claimed both nephews and servants for his preaching Order. Yet even as he thought on this, reassuring words echoed in Ivo's ears:

“Why not give me some of these young men who have accompanied you here to Rome? In just a little while I would return them to you as true apostles.”

Apostles! Apostles for Poland! God willing, the holy friar was right, thought the Bishop. Ceslaus and Hyacinth, even Herman and Henry, would do great things in the cause of Christ. . .