

SAINT ANTHONY

THE WONDER-WORKER
OF PADUA

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by

Charles Warren Stoddard

*“The works that I do, he also shall do;
and greater than these shall he do.”*

John 14:12

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Prologue

The Five Friars

The afternoon shadows were lengthening under the walls of the monastery of Santa Cruz, a house of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, at Coimbra. Life within that holy house stole on as slowly, as regularly, and for the most part as silently, as those deepening shadows. Each morning it was renewed as cheerfully as broke the dawn upon the waves that wash the shores of Portugal; each noon it was radiant with the fullness of spiritual joy; each evening it hushed itself to rest with prayer and praise; and these three epochs in the daily life of the cloister were heralded by the mellow peal of the Angelus as it was wafted over the embosoming hills, and throbbed into silence in far-off, fainting echoes.

Now and again something occurred in the monastery—something slight in itself, but enough to break in upon the peaceful current of events and create an interest or excitement that fairly startled the gentle occupants. There were guests from time to time—quite a number of them; for the worldly are ever curious concerning the inner life of those who though in the world are not of it. Therefore there was a guest-master

at Santa Cruz, as there is always a guest-master in every monastery; and his office it is to receive those who desire to see the chapels, the relics, the cloisters. It is the duty and the pleasure of this guest-master to conduct visitors through the monastery and to entertain them; and thus relieve the friars from all distractions, such as sudden and unexpected calls from prayer or labor.

One day at Santa Cruz five stranger guests arrived—three priests and two lay-brothers, disciples of St. Francis, whose Order was then but ten years old. These friars had been assigned to the mission in Morocco, and were on their way thither when they sought the hospitality of the Abbey of Santa Cruz. Who shall say that it was chance alone that brought them thither? They were Franciscans. Not far distant from Coimbra, the pious Queen of Portugal had established the Convent of St. Anthony of Olivares; it was situated in an olive grove, whence it derived its name. The house was small and poor, but it was large enough to shelter the five friars; and the Brother Questor, whose duty it was to ask alms for the needs of the brethren, would have gladly shared his frugal fare with these apostles who were on their way to martyrdom in Morocco. But they passed Olivares and sought the gates of Santa Cruz, and were there given heartfelt welcome.

Was it for this reason that, as the Franciscan chronicles tell us, “Queen Urraca sent for and lovingly received the friars?” For indeed she held their Order in great esteem, and inquired many things concerning

their errand, most courteously offering to supply all their wants. Not content with the brief account of their General's intention which they gave her, this lady, thirsting as the hart for the word of God, engaged them in spiritual discourse, drawing thence much sweetness and consolation; then, taking them apart, she besought them, for the love of Him for whose sweet name they were going to torments and death, to beg of Almighty God to reveal to them the day on which she should die. And, albeit the friars endeavored by all means to escape her importunity, saying that they were most unworthy to know the secrets of the Lord, and other words of like import, yet did she at length prevail with them to give her that promise which she craved. And so, after fervent prayer, they again came before the Queen and bade her be of good courage; for that it was the Will of God that her end should be very shortly, and before that of the King, her husband. Moreover, they gave her a sure sign; for, "Know, lady," they said, "that before many days we shall die by the sword for the Faith of Christ. Praised be His Divine Majesty, who has chosen us, poor men, to be in the number of His martyrs! Our bodies shall be brought into this city with great devotion by the Christians of Morocco, and you and your husband shall go to meet them. When these things shall come to pass, know that the time is come for you to leave this world and go to God."

The guest-master of Santa Cruz was a youth of four and twenty, who was already ordained. He had a

marvellously beautiful countenance and was singularly engaging in manner. Naturally, he was thrown much in the society of the friars, and often conversed with them of the extraordinary history of Portiuncula and of the miracles wrought by their seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi. Certain it is that the five friars perished in their blood at the hands of the infidels. Their bodies were brought home in solemn state, attended by various supernatural manifestations calculated to inspire reverence and awe.

It was the King's wish that these relics of the first Franciscan martyrs should rest in the principal church of the capital; but they were mysteriously guided or conveyed to the monastery of Santa Cruz, where they had lodged, and where His Majesty had a superb chapel erected, in which the relics were repositied.

Many marvels were witnessed at that shrine, and these deeply touched the heart and the spirit of the young guest-master. But a few months before he had held converse with these very friars, who were then joyously seeking the palm and the crown of martyrdom; now they were in paradise, and he was kneeling beside their holy dust—a poor friar groping blindly after that light that should illumine him and make clear his path of life.

One day, kneeling at that tomb, his heart aflame with love and veneration, from the depths of his soul he cried out: "O that the Most High would grant me to be associated with them in their glorious sufferings! That

to me also it were given to be persecuted for the Faith—to bare my neck to the executioners! Will that blessed day ever dawn for thee, Fernando? Will such happiness ever be thine?” Thus, through chaste communion with the five friars—call it not chance that brought their hearts together—through the sufferings, by the sacrifice, and at the tomb of the five martyrs, did Fernando de Bouillon find his vocation.

Chapter 1

Fernando the Novice

Who was Fernando de Bouillon? He was the son of Martino de Bouillon, and Teresa Tavera, his wife, who were of ancient lineage and noble birth. Don Martino descended from the illustrious Godfrey de Bouillon, who led the first Crusade and was the first Frankish King of Jerusalem. He was the grandson of Vincenzo de Bouillon, who followed King Alfonzo I in his campaign against the Moors, and who, in acknowledgment of his deeds of valor, was made governor of Lisbon. This office became hereditary in the family of De Bouillon; and Fernando, as first son of the house, was heir to it. And Doña Teresa was hardly less illustrious. Her ancestors had reigned over the Asturias in the eighth century, until the invasion by the Saracens.

Don Martino and Doña Teresa occupied a sumptuous palace close to the cathedral of Lisbon. Here Fernando was born on the 15th of August, 1195. Eight days after his birth he was carried with great pomp to the cathedral, and there received in Baptism the name of Fernando.

Though nothing of a prophetic nature preceded the birth of Fernando, it was soon evident that he was no

ordinary child. Born on the Feast of the Assumption, it was at the shrine of Our Lady del' Pilar he received the grace of Baptism. To the Blessed Virgin his mother consecrated the babe when returning from the baptismal font; Maria was the first name he learned to utter, and the hymn he heard oftenest from his mother's lips was "O Gloriosa Domina!" As a child, the sight of an image or a painting of the Madonna would change his tears to smiles; as a religious, he placed himself under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin; as an apostle, he was her champion, ever sounding her praises, ever ready to do battle in her cause. At the age of ten, beautiful in form and feature, with an inner spiritual beauty that gave his face an almost angelic expression, possessed of a sweet and gladsome nature, a quick intelligence and a lively imagination, he had already shown a preference for the secluded paths of a religious life.

During five years of his infancy Fernando attended the cathedral school in Lisbon, clothed in the garb of a cleric. He was a pattern of all the proprieties. In this exquisitely refined child virtue blossomed like a flower, and breathed forth a delicate fragrance that all who approached him became conscious of.

It was now he gave the first manifestation of that power which, through him, was to work wonders so long as he lived—wonders that have never ceased, and are never to cease in this ever-wondering world. Kneeling one day at the shrine of Our Lady in the cathedral, his eyes on the tabernacle wherein the Blessed Sacrament

was veiled, a demon, one of those baleful spirits that still tempt and delude the unwary, appeared before him. Startled as he was, with the pious instinct of nature he traced upon the marble step where he was kneeling the Sign of the Cross. The vision vanished, but to this hour is seen that sacred symbol indelibly impressed upon the marble. In that hour Fernando's fate was sealed.

With everything to make life alluring—youth, beauty, health, wealth, high birth and gentle breeding, devoted parents and idolizing friends—the child turned from them all. It was his destiny. Already able to meditate upon the foolish rewards of life and labors in the world and for the world alone, Fernando exclaimed: “O world, how burthensome thou art become! Thy power is but that of a fragile reed; thy riches are as a puff of smoke, and thy pleasures like a treacherous rock whereon virtue is shipwrecked.”

He seems to have resolved on this occasion to enter the religious life; to turn from the luxurious delights that had never appealed to his nature, and accept poverty, humility, and obedience as his portion. This resolution once formed, nothing could cause him to reconsider it.

At the gate of the Abbey of St. Vincent he implored admission; “being attracted thither,” as the chronicle quaintly records, “by the renown for learning and holiness of its men.” Surely nothing could have offered him a more pleasing prospect than the society of such as these; nothing afforded him more perfect satisfaction.

Chapter 2

Fernando the Scholastic

What wonder that the child should have turned from the world in his fifteenth year, when most children at that stage of development find an indescribable joy in mere physical existence? From his earliest infancy his life was an involuntary consecration. He was meekness, compassion, love personified. He had a special devotion to the impoverished and all those in sorrow and affliction. He was never known to utter a falsehood. All the offices of the Church were dear to him. He never failed to hear Mass daily, and joyfully and most reverently to serve. Our Blessed Lady, pattern of purity, was his chosen patroness. For the amusements which were the delight of his companions he cared nothing; the pleasures of life he never knew, and hoped never to know. He was the natural enemy of idleness; was instinctively studious; and of a sweet solemnity, which did not oppress but rather edified his associates, and endeared him to them.

What wonder that he should turn from the maddening crowd and seek the seclusion of a cloister? There was nothing unwholesome, nothing unnatural in his resolve to quit the world while yet a child in years. For

a youth of his temperament—a temperament which was an angelic heritage—there is really but one step to be taken; firmly, but in all humility, he took it.

Without the walls of Lisbon stood the Monastery of St. Vincent, a house of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. Having obtained the leave of his parents, he went thither; and, casting himself at the feet of the prior—called by some Gonsalvo Mendez and by others Pelagius—he asked to be admitted to the holy brotherhood. Naturally edified by the gentle and reverent spirit of the youth who knelt before him, the prior received him with affectionate tenderness, and in due course of time he was clothed in the white robe of the Order.

What happiness of heart was his, what peace of spirit, what serenity of soul! Alas, they were short-lived! His friends, missing him sorely sought him at all seasons. If he had before this been to them an engaging mystery, a surprise by reason of his unlikeness to them and to any other whom they knew, he was now, clad in the pale robe of the Augustinians, their wonder and delight. He drew them irresistibly to the monastery, and their well-meant but ill-timed visitations were a distraction which he could not long endure.

Two years were enough, and more than enough, to assure him that at St. Vincent's, let him strive ever so bravely against such a fate, he was in danger of losing his vocation. He must seek security in solitude, in exile; and that without delay, if he would attain the perfec-

tion which was his aim in life. It was with no bitterness of spirit, no pride, no impatience, he turned from all who loved him most. It was an honest and an earnest effort on his part to reach that state of grace for which his heart was hungering night and day. At St. Vincent's he was neighbor to the world and the worldly life he cared not for. He must fly hence, at any cost to comfort, temporal or spiritual. He must steel his heart to the sweet assaults of earthly love; for the unity, peace and concord he sought found no abiding place under heaven save in cloistral seclusion.

The prior of St. Vincent's had, during the two years of Fernando's sojourn there, beheld with joy the fervor of the youth; and when that youth implored him to be allowed to depart into some other house of the Order—some house far removed from Lisbon and the voices that were constantly crying to him to return to them again—the prior was for a season loath to give him leave; but, as the old chronicler says: "Having at length, by tears and prayers, obtained the consent of his superior, he quitted not the army in which he was enlisted, but the scene of combat; not through caprice, but in a transport of fervor."