

THE LIFE OF
ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

1491-1556

BY

F. A. FORBES

Nihil Obstat

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Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur

Edmund Canon Surmont,
Vicarius Generalis

Westminster
1 August, 1913

Originally published in 1919 by R. & T. Washbourne, Limited, London,
in the series *Standard-bearers of the Faith: A Series of Lives of the Saints
for Young and Old.*



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Printed on 10 August 2024

SKU: 129

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About the Author

F. A. Forbes (16 March 1869 – 1936) was the nom de plume of Mother Frances Alice Monica Forbes, RSCJ, a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart from Scotland and a religious author.

She was born in 1869 as Alice Forbes into a Presbyterian family. Her mother died when she was a child. In 1900 she became a Roman Catholic. Only a few months later, she entered the Society of the Sacred Heart, as a 31-year-old postulant.

She wrote numerous books, including brief biographies of Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint John Bosco, Saint Teresa of Ávila, Saint Columba, Saint Monica, Saint Athanasius, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Benedict, Saint Hugh of Lincoln, Saint Vincent de Paul, and, most famously, Pope Saint Pius X. She died in 1936.

Introduction

We know with what enthusiasm children read and ponder over the lives of those whose characters and deeds have won their admiration. They have even a way of identifying themselves with the personalities of their heroes, and of repeating in imagination their achievements; nor is it so infrequent for this early cultivation of ideals to exercise a determining influence on the shaping of their after-lives. It is thus, in fact, that in no small measure the great men and women of a nation are fashioned to their future calling.

Very similar, in the spiritual sphere, is the influence exercised on young people religiously brought up by the Lives of the Saints. Catholic children are particularly fond of this kind of reading. They realize vividly that the Saints are now reigning in heaven, and can watch over them and guide them; just as, according to the Psalmist, do their guardian angels. Hence they make them their mental companions, put trust in their intercessions, seek to assimilate their special spirit, cherish their favourite maxims, and strive in their humbler way to imitate some of their actions. Children are not all alike, and, save for a few chosen souls, their imitation necessarily falls far short of the pattern set. Still the practice is at all times elevating and sustaining, and is a powerful instrument for their spiritual education.

But that Lives of the Saints may appeal thus to the young, they must be written in a special style. They must not

be too complex or subjective, and even the attempt to be complete in giving all the facts, and tracing analytically the growth of purpose and achievement, may be overdone. What young people like best, and what is best for them, is to have the human interest and spiritual beauty of the Saint's life brought out in their relation to a succession of its most salient incidents, these being told in simple but pictorial language. It is on these principles that the short lives which are to form the present series have been undertaken by a writer who knows the tastes of Catholic youth.

The Life which stands at the head of the projected list, and occupies these pages, is one that lends itself well to this mode of treatment. For it is the life of the Soldier-Saint who, through meditation on the life of his Divine Master, was led to exchange an earthly for a heavenly warfare, and became, in Newman's words, the "St. George of modern history," of the Father of a long line of spiritual posterity, whose zeal in the Church's service is acknowledged, and whose methods and motives, though often misunderstood, are conformed to the pattern of their Founder.

Sydney F. Smith, S.J.

September 1913

Chapter 1

PAMPLONA—AND AFTER

The grey morning was breaking mistily over the little town of Pamplona in Navarre. To many of those within the citadel it seemed as if the greyness of the morning had found its way into their very hearts, so unpromising was the outlook that lay before them. The little garrison had been weakened by the retreat of many of the Spanish officers; their fortifications were incomplete; ammunition was scarce; and encamped at their very gates lay the French army. The attack might begin at any moment, and unless the expected reinforcements arrived, nothing could save the citadel.¹

The idea of surrender had suggested itself to many minds, and would certainly have been put into execution had it not been for the efforts of a young Spanish officer, Iñigo or Ignatius de Loyola. For days he had been exhorting the weak, encouraging the faint-hearted, and putting something of his own high courage and hopefulness into every heart.

The Viceroy would certainly come to their relief, he urged, the conditions offered by the French were most humiliating

¹ In the year 1512 Navarre was annexed by Ferdinand of Spain. Nine years later Jean d'Albret the rightful heir, assisted by the French, made an attempt to regain it. The sympathies of the Navarrese were entirely with the invading army, which advanced without hindrance to the walls of Pamplona, the capital, which had been hurriedly and partially fortified by the Spaniards. The French made their entrance into the citadel on May 20, 1521.

to the Spanish pride. For the honour of their country let them hold out a little longer and all would be well.

It was hardly to be wondered at that young Loyola, endowed as he was with a marvellous gift of influencing others, was the darling of his men and a favourite with all. His family was one of the noblest in Spain; he had already distinguished himself on the field of battle, but it was not only as a soldier that he excelled. An expert in all the many sports of the time, he could write a love-sonnet or a religious poem with equal ease, and illuminate them skillfully when written. He was a good dancer in a country where men and women are born with rhythm and music in their feet. But he was above and beyond all these things a man of war. His dearest aspiration was to win honour and glory as a soldier, to make for himself a name which should live in the history of his country.

We shall see later how this aspiration was realized, but the battlefield and the manner of the warfare were hidden for the present in the secret counsels of God.

Ignatius' hope of a speedy reinforcement was vain; the Viceroy did not come; and the attack began that day. The assault was desperate; the young Spaniard fought like a hero of old. Wherever the fire was hottest he was to be seen on the ramparts, a figure in shining armour, fighting with the strength of ten. Assailant after assailant fell dead at his feet, or was hurled backwards over the ramparts; but the citadel was doomed. A cannon-ball struck the battlements where Loyola stood sword in hand like a young Achilles,

and rebounded, shattering his right leg and grazing the left. Ignatius fell, and with him fell Pamplona.

When the wounded man recovered consciousness, he was lying in a tent in the French camp, and one of the most distinguished of the French officers sat beside his bed. Slowly the truth began to dawn on his weary brain: he was a prisoner, and Pamplona was taken. Then his eyes fell upon his sword, and he began to wonder.

“I am your prisoner,” he said, turning to the Frenchman, “and yet they have left me my arms.”

The officer bowed with a chivalrous courtesy. “All brave men can appreciate true valour, Don Iñigo,” he replied, “you are our guest; is there anything that I can do for you? I am at your service.”

The young Spaniard thought for a moment.

“My uncle, the Duke of Najera, is on his way to Pamplona,” he replied, “I should be grateful if you would let him know that I did my best.”

As soon as he was able to bear the journey Ignatius was conveyed to the castle of Loyola, where he was received by his elder brother, Don Martin. There the leg, owing to the unskillful setting of the bone, had to be broken afresh, and for several days his life was in danger.

Long weeks of weary suffering followed, not the least part of which, to the active spirit of the young soldier, was the enforced inaction, for every movement caused him pain. At

last the wound healed and the doctors examined the injured leg carefully.

There was just one thing they thought perhaps they ought to mention. The right leg would be a trifle shorter than the left, and a little less shapely. The vanity of the invalid took alarm. Owing to the dress of the period, with its long tightly fitting hose, any peculiarity in gait was very noticeable. Ignatius was not a little proud of his good looks and his graceful carriage.

Was there no remedy, he asked anxiously, could nothing be done?

The doctors looked at each other gravely.

There was one remedy, they said, but they would hardly advise it.

The wound would have to be reopened, part of the bone sawn off, and the leg stretched with an iron machine, then possibly all might be well.

“Do it,” replied Ignatius promptly.

The doctors still hesitated. The operation would be a very painful one, they objected, and would be followed by many weeks of suffering during which the patient would have to remain perfectly still.

“Do it,” repeated Ignatius doggedly.

In those days the modern inventions for deadening pain were unknown. The patient was firmly tied down, and, fully conscious of all that was going on, endured as best he might. Ignatius, like the gallant soldier he was, set his

teeth and bore the pain without flinching. But when all was over, and the anguish of the tortured limb was a little easier, the thought of the weary days before him was almost more than he could bear.

“Bring me a book, a story, a romance, anything to pass away the time!” he cried. Books were scarce in the castle of Loyola, for printing had but lately been invented. They brought him what they had, and Ignatius read. Now the things that happen on this earth seem often to fall out of chance, and men are apt to forget that the will of God is behind them, ordering and directing all. One of the books that fell into Ignatius’ hands was a story that has ever moved the hearts of men to the noblest thoughts and actions. It was the “Life of Christ,” written by a Carthusian monk of Saxony, who had brought to his task a mind enlightened by the loving study of the Scriptures, and a heart purified by long hours of prayer.

Not in soft speech is told the earthly story,
Love of all loves! that showed Thee for an hour:
Shame was Thy kingdom, and reproach Thy glory,
Death Thine eternity, the Cross Thy power.

The heart of the young soldier flamed within him as he read. Surely here was the Master of whom he had always dreamed, a hero-king whom it would be indeed an honour to serve; a leader of men, whom it would be truly worthwhile to follow. He prayed as he lay on his bed of suffering, and learnt to make a friend of the Lord whom he was beginning to know. In spirit he followed him through the towns and

cities of Galilee, rejoicing, as a heart that has at last found its ideal, in His noble and gracious presence. It was to be a lifelong friendship for Ignatius, and one that was to grow in strength as the years rolled on.

But the change was not effected in a moment. The day-dreams of his early life came back persistently. Why should he give up all that was so attractive to his youth and ambition? For to take service under this new Master meant the renunciation of all that was pleasant to nature. What would his friends say? Would they not laugh at him at court? But the voice of the Divine leader sounded above the tumult of the flesh, calling the young Loyola to His service. One night when the desire to do what was best was strong in his soul, prostrating himself before a statue of the Blessed Virgin, he bound himself in true soldier's language to follow her Divine Son to the death. At that moment a shock like that of an earthquake shook the castle of Loyola, breaking the windows and cracking the wall of his room from top to bottom.

Ignatius now thought of nothing but a life of penance. The idea of going on pilgrimage to the holy Land, barefoot and a beggar, appealed to his fancy. Afterwards he might perhaps enter the monastery of the Carthusians. He even sent a servant to the Charterhouse of Burgos to make inquiries about the rule of life of its inmates. Though strict secrecy was enjoined on the messenger, it is probable that it was not kept, for Don Martin began about this time to show anxiety.

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