

SAINT DOMINIC, PATRON FOR CHILDREN

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CHILDREN should know Saint Dominic. There are in his history elements which appeal to the wide, hungry mind of the little one. The small eyes which see all things simply, if directed toward the virile Spanish youth who saw the world and its future as no man of his time had seen it, should envision God and life and man as he did, unclouded by error and evil, but clearly and splendidly in the light of truth.

Tradition has shaded the memory of Saint Dominic. The vague picture of him which is framed in the common mind is dark and slightly ominous. Perhaps the black cloak of penance which he wore, so very black against the white habit beneath, has in some degree biased the imagination. In no small part, Saint Dominic's work as an inquisitor and the brave services of his innumerable sons in that poorly understood capacity, so venomously and irresponsibly recorded by English Protestant tradition, has thrown a pall over his figure. Whatever be the causes of the fact, the fact has been that parents and teachers, their impressions uncorrected by the reading of his true story, have not been attracted by him. Consequently they have chosen other saints as the subjects of tales for their children, saints whose deeds and words, whose sanctity and sweetness, have appeared more suitable for little minds.

Intelligent reading of Saint Dominic's life would soon correct such an impression. For this reason the dearth of more popular lives of him is deplorable. The open field for the biographer is in clear view. Two kinds of biography may more emphatically be suggested: the one should appeal directly to the parent and teacher, the other, dressed in the language of childhood, should appeal directly to children. The latter type, obviously more direct, forceful and useful, is especially to be desired. It presents a work which, free from many difficulties of research and dispute, promises, by reason of its rich subject and lofty purpose, a success which is accorded to few books of its kind.

The true story of Saint Dominic need not be told to children diluted and clarified by explanation and commentary. Master of thought, of action, of sanctity, the features of his life are bold, broad and intelligible, while the setting in which he must necessarily be placed in one of the most dazzling and colorful pages of history. The glamour of old Spain surrounds him. In the close background, swords aloft to strike the retreating Moor, are Sancho the Great, Alphonso VI and Ruy Diaz whom the history-loving world calls "The Cid," and whose day was nearer to hero-worshipping boys of 1170 than Washington's or Lafayette's is to American children of today. Between the second and third Crusades, when men talked of battle in the Holy Land, of sweeping the Moor from Spanish soil, when Bernard of Clairvaux was too close to be yet a memory, while England seethed at the murder of Thomas à Becket and the great towns of Europe murmured, spread and rose to greatness with the rise of the universities, in such days of world-shaping and nation making, Dominic Guzman was born. What child will not thrill, hearing his noble pedigree, his father's chivalry, his mother's illustrious house? Descendant of Kings and warriors, child of heavenly predilection, integral part of that grand scene in which the greatest steps toward modern civilization were taken, the boy, Dominic, is a figure which gleams through time. Toward the boy who dwells on the far frontier of the north-west admiring children will turn, envious of his presence in a land of adventure and sympathetic of his hardships and pain. Toward the little Count of Calaroga, too, will they turn their open eyes when told of his proximity to those swift, Moorish marauders. They will hear again the distant hoof-beats of Arabian steeds and the ring of steel on helm and cuirass that sounded here and there in Spain in those days of faith and great fighting men.

Such is the back-ground of Saint Dominic's portrait, a stirring, mighty vista. But in the midst is the calm, fair-faced, "hallowed wrestler" who, born to greatness and nobility, lived for more than half his life in the mystery of cloistered walls, in study and in the love of God. His mother's dream of him, a puppy bearing a torch which illumined the world's dark face, the picture of his childish austerities as he crept from his bed to sleep on the floor, the episode at Palencia when he sold his books to buy bread for the poor are items in the story which children may be told with profit to their impressionable and lovable minds.

It is difficult to conceive an example of genuine sanctity which may be brought home more forcibly to the young than that of Dom-

inic who, living atop society and its opportunities, chose the romance, not of the sword or any other human thing, but of his own soul. The story of that boy, a tale of purity and sweetness, presented for interest and instruction, will go far to counteract the marshalled iniquities of the present age against which children must dash their brave little souls in mortal combat. In his life is the simple secret of victory: he turned his back on the world and looked on paradise, he closed his eyes to his own comeliness and saw the beauty of God.

The young Canon who travelled with Bishop Diego of Osma and came with him to Castelnau in 1205 gave no great promise of greatness. In the conference of legates met to subdue the Albigenses, not the young priest, but the bishop, took an active and principal part. But soon when, at Diego's word, all cast off the worldly trappings at which the heretics scoffed, when all had begun to compose their treatises and to dispute with the champions of the heresy, the superiority of Dominic asserted itself. Out-fasting the heretics, doing penitential violence to his body as no other dared, he out-thought them all and conquered the enemy in greater numbers than any. Then the substance of those quiet years at Osma became apparent. The seclusion of thirty-three years, the study, the prayer, by which he had hidden himself, began to blossom and bear fruit. Take the children with him along the road and they shall be taught the simple lesson of study. Let them follow him through Montpelier, Servian, Bezier, Carcassonne, Verfeuil and Fanjeaux where his manuscript was cast forth from the flames in the trial of fire; let them lie down with him on the stony floors of churches or along the road on a journey for God, and you have taught them the romance of God's invincible Word.

The accent of the age is on material things. The lowest material leaning is exalted above the loftiest things of the spirit. Novelists embellish it, business advertises it, the world desires and extols it. The child of today, let parents and pastors say and do what they will, is in a quandary. The universal badness about him presents no childish difficulty but an obstacle over which the wariest adult may trip. Let the child be shown in a simple way the relations of matter to spirit as the problem is presented in Saint Dominic's life and you have cut the Gordian knot which has entangled the upbringing of the young. The heretics, on one hand scoffed at material things. The negligent clergy and Catholics of Languedoc laid more emphasis on bodily comfort and pleasure than on the safety of the soul. The saint faced the turmoil with a steady gaze. No one of the heretics

was more appreciative of spiritual things than he; he fasted and prayed as did none of them. Yet material things, far from being the productions of an eternal evil principle, were to him, as to all thinking Christians, the tools of the soul. He saw no evil in wine, yet he abstained from it for ten years. Rest and comfort were necessities for good people, yet to temper his soul he slept on stones and scourged his tender body. His quick eye saw through the puzzle and his brave heart did not shrink from the execution of the solution by his own suffering, his own endurance and courage. Souls were to Dominic the most precious gems of creation. But he saw that material things of life were not hindrances, but helps to salvation, such as food, clothing, marriage and the Body and Blood of Our Blessed Lord.

The abstract principles which govern this great, perpetual problem may be explained and exemplified to children at any length, but no teaching will uncover the germ of the difficulty as will the story of how Saint Dominic came to grips with the foe on the battle-ground of doctrine and mortification seven hundred years ago in Languedoc. True, he faced a difficulty which was almost the direct contrary of the popular heresy of the day. But the contrast of the situation, the unusual character of the Albigensian errors as contrasted with the modern materialism, the sweet and reasonable attitude assumed by the saint during the long, heart-breaking struggle out of which the Order of Preachers emerged, will but add to the clarity of teaching and emphasize the sound doctrine of the Church in this regard.

The fifteenth of August, 1217 was a day of wonder for the little band of Friars Preachers who met at the house of Dominic in Prouille. With a swift stroke the saint announced his command. He dispersed them, some to Paris, some to Spain, to Toulouse, while he himself set out for Rome. The astonishment which greeted his words can be readily imagined by all who know of the still unsettled condition of Languedoc. But they knew their leader and the leader knew his men. As in this straightforward instance, so in all other things he governed with the direct, simple touch which men loved. "Young," as Father Jarrett says, "and ready for any adventure," the brethren set out to do his will with hopes high and staffs aswinging, confident not so much in their own ability as in his wisdom. He inspired men. His decisive judgments and swift movements caught the eyes of those who, ever like children, loved the action that signified quick strength. Eight times he crossed Europe on foot, and as he passed, men flocked to follow him, young men who saw their hero

beneath that black and white and old men to whom his fair fresh countenance and graceful vigor brought back the speed and fire of youth. Here was a troubadour whose song rang far, a minstrel whose melody was truth, a leader, a man for men. Yet, virile and strong, his chaste heart, had, too, a place for women. How sweet the story is of how he carried orange seeds in his tunic all the way from Spain that his daughters in Rome might have the golden fruit and cool shade of the Spanish tree.

Children are students of adventure. They are not attracted so much by the motionless oak, mighty in its immobility, as by the bird that wings over a distant hill. Their hero is more Galahad than Arthur. He must lead them over hills, through unbeaten tracks to new and unconquerable worlds. When such a hero is a saint, they are led to a heavenly world. Such was the stamp of Dominic, a questing hero whose dignity was not that of the silent mountain peak; it was the majesty of the tumbling billows. Always moving, the hound of God seeking the prey, he led the chase in those hallowed days and no other has matched his keenness for the scent nor his speed. Children will follow him on that heavenly hunt, if some one will tell them his story.

It is difficult to consider the heavenly penchant for leadership which Saint Dominic possessed without indicating his position as a great, and perhaps the first, internationalist. His bold idea for an organization of world-wide scope, coming at a time when nothing of its kind had been attempted, was the master-stroke of his life. The foundation of the Order of Preachers was a complete departure from the ecclesiastical tradition. It called for a body of preachers, strong men, educated to the last word of learning, capable of addressing themselves to all classes and ready to engage all enemies of the faith in combat, not in one town or country, but in any corner of the known world. This was indeed a new thing. Preaching, to begin with, was the office of the bishops. Religious, moreover, and monks were stable persons, attached to and remaining in one monastery. The radical proposal which the saint made to the Church does not seem novel to us. From our point of vantage there is nothing astonishing about it. We are accustomed to orders and congregations of that type. But a glance at the historical development of religious organization during the past fifteen hundred years will reveal Dominic as the prime influence in the movement, the innovator whom all subsequent founders have copied.

The internationalism which Saint Dominic begot has swept away the barriers of race and color, has brought Europe to the Orient and has flung wide the gates of the Antipodes to Europe. It has belted the world with the Word of God. In the prosecution of that grand idea, the Apostolic fire of Paul, Augustine, Patrick and Boniface, threatened by the stagnant waters of separation and heresy, was fanned to a leaping blaze. By it, the learning of the ancients has been diffused throughout the world. It has pierced and shattered, as no other force has done, and softened the grim walls of that dark and selfish thing which present-day thinkers admit to be the curse of nationalism.

The cumulative movement of the last century in the direction of world peace has not escaped the child of today. Histories tell about peace pacts, the leagues of nations, disarmament programmes and treaties to out-law war. The internationalism of the great leaders has become part of modern primary education. But the blatant optimism which invariably marks each step toward the elusive dove must puzzle the little mind as his eye catches a newspaper headline reporting another vague international difficulty about boundaries, tariff, battle-cruisers or some such thing.

The real internationalism, let the child be taught, does not consist in the union of national purses or the joint acceptance of national military or naval handicaps. It consists in the union of the hearts of men. This was the league of nations which Saint Dominic envisioned when he presented his plan to Innocent. His proposal was not to burden the strength of nations, but to teach all nations the truth, which being one, would make all nations one. In no better way can youngsters be given the principles which underlie all movements toward world harmony than by teaching them the master-idea of Saint Dominic. They will learn from him that men who chase different rainbows cannot run together, that men who think differently about their own souls will some day come to blows, and that all men are brothers only because the one, true God is their Father.

The ultimate modernity of Saint Dominic is demonstrated by his democratic genius. Although he founded and fathered his Order and was the force which held it together in those early days, he left to the members themselves the power of government. They governed themselves even while he lived as they govern themselves today. The right of suffrage which every friar enjoyed, the representative system which brought the most distant outposts of the organization into its supreme councils, these were the forerunners of the present govern-

mental economy. Much has been written about the great mind of Jefferson which effected the structure of the American Constitution. More might be written about the man who antedated him by five hundred years, Dominic Guzman.

The study of Saint Dominic's formation of the Order of Preachers is a study in elementary political economy. The formation of the Order was the formation of a democracy. These facts bring out, too, the humility of the man who was responsible for them. He was placed above his subjects by the force of his character, his position and other circumstances, yet he insisted that he rule only by their consent. He considered the authority which he exercised as a power which came from God through them. In this lesson the fundamental point of human government is laid bare. We may learn from him that no government may live solely on power. It must have humility to keep its feet on the ground. It must recognize the sovereignty of the people as well as its own sacrosanct capacity. The need of this lesson in our day is obvious.

Parents and teachers should study Saint Dominic. The usefulness which the knowledge of his life will have will be made manifest in the recurring inquiries which children make concerning many difficult problems. As a model, a great man, a student, a traveller, a philosopher, a leader, an internationalist and a democrat, he may be depicted to the little ones in colors that cannot glow too brightly.

Children should know Saint Dominic. Let them see his slender form and bright face. Let them follow his swift gait and listen to his ringing voice. Let them know the world that he touched and transformed and lit with the torch he bore. Their hands will reach out to him and their eyes shall be filled with a wonderful hope.

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