

## INGRID—SAINT OF OBLIVION

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My spirit that is in thee, and my words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed from henceforth and forever.

—Office of Saint Dominic.



INNUMERABLE as the stars, as the sands of the seashore, are the saints of the Church—not only the number of the faithful who have merited heaven, but even those who have been singled out for the honors of canonization. Who has ever drawn up a catalogue of the saints so as to include them all—saints of old Rome, saints of modern America, saints of Catholic Europe, saints of pagan Asia and Africa? Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Saint Therese, the Cure d'Ars, Saint John Bosco, these are the saints of today. But where are Saint Swithin, Saint Leodegard, Saint Sabina, Saint Olaf? They are the saints of past ages, forgotten, neglected, their once wide popularity now but a memory. They are like so many of the ancient desolated bishoprics, engulfed by time, remembered only as the sees of titular bishops.

Many saints, like comets that reappear after intervals of centuries, have returned to the modern world, as if to recall a forgotten truth, to teach an unlearned lesson, to preserve a new era from ancient perils. Albert the Great, philosopher, scientist, and the Master of the Angelic Doctor himself, was one of the most brilliant intellectuals of his age. Forgotten for seven hundred years, he was canonized, named Doctor of the Church and Patron of the Natural Sciences—a living testimony to the oft denied truth that there is no contradiction between science and religion. Martin de Porres, the sixteenth century negro lay brother of Peru, has tremendous appeal to twentieth century America, afflicted with its painful race problem. When the Asiatic Tartars threatened to overrun Hungary, the king and queen promised to dedicate their unborn child to the service of God

should He preserve their kingdom from destruction. Their offering was accepted, and thus Saint Margaret of Hungary for the first time saved her nation from the scourge of the barbarous horde. Cherished by her people for seven centuries, she has been canonized in our own day, in the course of a war in which her country has again been enslaved by an Eastern raider—a sign perhaps that she will once more deliver her people.

Perhaps most obscure of the obscure, most forgotten among the forgotten, unknown to the people of her own land, scarcely remembered even by her own Dominican family, is Saint Ingrid of Sweden.<sup>1</sup> Once popularly revered as a saint and as a patron of her country, she has receded into the quiet of oblivion, leaving behind vestiges so faint and imperceptible as to barely indicate her existence.

#### BLESSED INGRID

Ingrid Elovsdotter was born in the early part of the thirteenth century at Skänninge in the province of Götland, where the Goths had settled centuries before. She was of the blood of this race and her father Elov could boast of an illustrious and ancient lineage.<sup>2</sup> Her family was one of the most prominent in all Sweden and undoubtedly the most noble in the town of Skänninge. Besides Ingrid, there were in the family another sister, Christine, who was her associate most of her life, and two brothers, John Elovsson, who later became a Teutonic Knight, and Andrew Elovsson.

Like so many other saints, Ingrid even in her childhood gave indications of the sanctity she was later to attain. She was of a quiet and gentle disposition, marked by modesty, reserve and virtue. She had a strong and especial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Who could be a better model for a young maiden so earnest in her desire to be perfect and to be close to Jesus than she who was the most perfect, the closest of all human beings to the Divine Savior? Ingrid's meekness, her silent yet

<sup>1</sup> Ingrid is often given the title of "saint" (e.g. Catholic Encyclopedia, II, 782), more often than that of "blessed." These titles are not officially recognized by the Church in her case, but have been accorded to her by the devotion of the faithful. Any use of "saint" and "blessed" in the course of this article is in this sense.

<sup>2</sup> "genere nobilem . . . ex gothorum prosapia oriunda." *Antiqvarisk Tidskrift*, V, 471, cited by Jarl Gallen, "Les Causes de Sainte Ingrid et des Saints Suedois au Temps de la Reforme," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, VII, 30.

determined and energetic career, her submission to the dictates of Providence when she had thought some other path better for herself to follow, her love for the Passion of Christ, her life so wonderful in its simple pattern—are not these indications that Ingrid ever had the exemplar of the Blessed Mother before her?

Another favorite patron of Ingrid was Saint Dominic. His sons, the Friars Preachers, had recently arrived in Scandinavia and already enjoyed great popularity among the people. The first priory had been established in 1223 at Lund, and so rapid was the growth of the Order in the Northern countries that five years later the Province of Dacia was erected, comprising Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and parts of the Baltic states. The Dominicans came to Skänninge in 1233 where they founded the priory of Saint Olaf.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly, the arrival of an order so different in character from the older monastic institutions was a source of great interest to the townspeople. Elov, as one of the leading nobles of the neighborhood, may have aided the friars in their foundation. He and his wife soon learned to regard them with the greatest esteem and friendliness, and this spirit was naturally shared with their children, as John testified in later years.<sup>4</sup>

Ingrid, then, was reared in a Dominican atmosphere, perhaps praying or listening to sermons in the priory church, perhaps visiting the friars with her parents. From them she heard of the marvelous life of the great Dominic, of his zeal for souls, of his austerities and asceticism. Perhaps the friars communicated to her some of the fire they themselves had received from the Father; perhaps they were able to describe him to her, to lovingly unfold to her his grand, magnificent ideal. She probably heard of the dispersal of the brethren, nurtured in Truth by the Preacher of Grace, then sent to every corner of Europe much as a bursting ember scatters its sparks in all directions. But Ingrid did not visualize sparks; she saw a conflagration burning from Madrid to Stockholm, Paris to Naples, Oxford to the Urals, igniting the universities and the market place, palace and hovel, great pulpits and the forests of the heathens. Though such activity was not to be hers, she could be fuel for the fire by a life

<sup>3</sup> The founder was John of Poland, a disciple of Saint Hyacinth. The priory became the studium generale of the province.

<sup>4</sup> "A pro genitoribus meis specialem affectum ad ordinem fratrum predicatorum hereditavi . . ." *Scriptores latini mediæ ævi sueciani*, I, 236, ep. XLVI, cited by Gallen, *ibid.*, p. 11.

of ardent contemplation and prayer. Her first lessons in the way of penance and asceticism may have been learned from these enthusiastic preachers in black and white.

#### MARRIAGE

As Ingrid grew into womanhood her inner holiness seemed to reflect itself in her outward grace and comeliness. So rare was her beauty that, like Esther of old, she was renowned in all the kingdom. For this reason, and also because of the wealth and position of her family, many suitors were attracted to her. Her parents, anxious not only to provide for their daughter, but also to choose a fitting husband for her, scrutinized all the candidates and at length chose a young noble of good character and ample estate. Ingrid, however, surprised her parents by refusing to consider the proposal at all. How could she even think of marriage with all its preoccupations, and of union with an earthly spouse when her whole soul yearned to soar above the mundane and lose itself in love and thought of the only true Spouse? She stoutly resisted her parents' wish, but when her tears and entreaties had no effect she obediently submitted and was married.

Ingrid now took her place as one of the ladies of the kingdom; yet like Mary of Nazareth she spiritualized her daily life, converting her tasks and duties into prayers, excelling in the virtues, pouring out her love of God in the service of men. Living in the world she renounced the world and turned her gaze to heavenly things. Rejecting the amusements and delights that her social position offered her, she conducted herself soberly and piously, poor among riches, humble in grandeur. She devoted herself to penance and mortification, piety and good works, generously alleviating the ills of the poor and needy from the abundance of her wealth.

#### THE WIDOW

This pattern of life soon changed for Ingrid. Her husband died, and the young and beautiful widow was once again overwhelmed with the entreaties of numberless suitors. Her parents urged her to remarry, but this time Ingrid was adamant and refused to listen to any proposals. Freed from duties and responsibilities she redoubled her efforts in the life of virtue, living in fasts and abstinence, continuing her works of mercy, devoting herself more and more to vigils and prayer.

Ingrid's desire to lead the higher life now brought her into closer contact with the Dominicans and with other women of the same pious ambition. She made the acquaintance of Peter of Dacia, a friar who had arrived in Skänninge in 1271, to fill the office of lector at the Dominican priory.<sup>5</sup> Soon after, she and her companions placed themselves under his spiritual guidance. Ingrid and her sister Christine began to wear the Dominican habit—the first women in Sweden to do so—even though the others continued to wear secular garb or clothed themselves in that of the beguines. It was but natural that Ingrid should so ally herself with the Order of Preachers in view of her great attachment and love for it. Under Peter's tutelage she formed herself in the way of perfection, becoming deeply devoted to the Sacred Passion of Christ. In this she was but following the example of almost all the celebrated Dominican mystics and contemplatives. Peter singles her out for special praise in one of his letters, dated 1278:

"I have another daughter, who has received remarkable graces and many revelations from God; who continuously abstains from meat . . . who every Friday is in rapture from midnight until Vespers; who sometimes has the stigmata, and often bears the signs of the Passion of Christ upon her body; who continuously wears a hairshirt. . . . She devotes herself most frequently to prayer and contemplation, and is zealous in bestowing alms and in the service of the poor."<sup>6</sup>

Ingrid, then, had imbibed the essentials of the Dominican life, the two-fold ideal of Dominic, as indicated by her contemplative life of prayer and penance, and her active life of succoring the unfortunate. The high degree of sanctity to which she had attained is evident from the supernatural favors she was privileged to receive from the suffering Savior whom she loved so much.

#### THE PILGRIMAGE

Impelled by this burning devotion to Our Lord's Passion, Ingrid was restless until she should be able to see in actuality the setting of the Drama which she so often turned over in her

<sup>5</sup> Besides a few documents, the letters of Peter of Dacia to Christine de Stommeln, a German nun, are the sole sources of information on the life of Blessed Ingrid.

<sup>6</sup> *Scriptores latini mediæ ævi sueciani*, I, 222, ep. XXXVII, cited by Gallen, *ibid.*, p. 10.

mind. It was as if she were attracted by a powerful magnet, so strong that she could not be content until she allowed it to draw her to the Holy Land. Saint Louis of France had recently led the last great Crusade and perhaps Ingrid shared his holy enthusiasm, desiring to atone for the desecrations of the Moslems and the bickerings and petty strife of the Christian lords of Palestine. At length she made her decision and set out on the perilous pilgrimage with her companions. After many hardships and much fatigue the little party reached the Holy Land and there retraced the life and journeys of Our Lord and venerated the scenes of the Redeemer's sufferings and triumphs. Reluctantly they returned to Europe, stopping at Rome, however, to venerate the tombs of the holy Apostles, to visit the catacombs and the innumerable churches of the Eternal City. Their fervor still undiminished, the holy women journeyed to Spain and concluded their pilgrimage at the famous shrine of Saint James the Apostle at Compostella.

#### THE MONASTERY

Ever since she had taken the habit of Saint Dominic, and most likely from the time of her husband's death, Ingrid's great desire was to lay aside her wealth and worldly position and to consecrate herself entirely to God in some monastery. Indeed, it seems that from the time she clothed herself in the Dominican habit she cherished the hope of founding a monastery of Dominican nuns, as her brother John mentions.<sup>7</sup> At that time only one such monastery existed in Scandinavia, that of Saint Agnes at Roskilde, Denmark. Ingrid's desire became resolution when in a vision the place where she should found a monastery was revealed to her.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly she obtained the consent of the king, of the bishop of Linköping in whose diocese Skänninge was located, and of the Dominican Provincial, Augustine of Dacia.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> ". . . que ambe [Ingrid and her sister Christine] primitus habitum ordinis fratrum predicatorum in regno Swecie susceperunt et annis amplius quam decem sole de sexu muliebri portauerunt cum magno desiderio, quod sorores eius ordinis plures possunt adiungi." *Scriptores latini medii aevi sueciani*, I, 236, ep. XLVI, cited by Gallen, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> "Hinc est, quod locus, in quo monasterium et ecclesiam instauraret, sibi diuinitus est ostensus." *Antiquarisk Tidskrift*, V, 467-474, cited by Gallen, *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, during his first provincialate (1261-1266), had participated in the founding of the monastery of Saint Agnes at Roskilde by Princess Agnes of Denmark. He was provincial again from 1272-1285.

Ingrid certainly had the intention of founding a monastery before 1275, for a document reveals that she had ceded some land to her brothers under the condition that should she found a convent near the church of Saint Martin in Skänninge the land would be returned.<sup>10</sup> This transaction had taken place in the presence of King Valdemar, who died in 1275. Evidently, it had been revealed to her in the vision to erect the projected monastery near the church of Saint Martin.

Permission having been granted, Ingrid began preparations for the foundation. She contributed her fortune to defray the necessary expenditures, while her brothers, John and Andrew, donated the land for the monastery. Her sister assisted her in her efforts, though Christine died before the monastery was finally founded; and undoubtedly Peter of Dacia gave invaluable advice and direction.

Notwithstanding, the project met many delays, such as the long deliberation of her own brothers, and firm opposition from various sources. Furthermore, since Ingrid was anxious to obtain the approval of the Holy See, she made repeated petitions and indeed undertook several trips to Rome on this account. Confirmation of the plan was at last granted by Pope Martin IV, who was elected in February, 1281. The many delays in securing papal approval were most likely due to the fact that in the six years between 1275 and 1281 six different popes occupied the Chair of Peter. It is possible that the pilgrimage to Palestine and Spain was made as an adjunct to one of these journeys to Rome.

#### THE FOUNDATION

The dream of Ingrid was now about to be realized. From her youth her only wish was to have the peace of communion with Jesus, but for years her desire had been thwarted—first by her marriage, then by the long unending preliminaries necessary for the foundation. Now she felt she was about to begin her true vocation in life. A building was erected next to the church of Saint Martin and the provincial sent four nuns from the monastery of Roskilde to institute the common life and religious observance.

Appropriately, the day appointed for the formal ceremony of foundation was the feast of the Assumption, August 15,

<sup>10</sup> *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, I, n. 885, cited by Gallen, *ibid.*, p. 12.

1281.<sup>11</sup> Not only had Ingrid had a strong and tender devotion to Our Lady, but the Dominicans too considered the Blessed Mother protectress of the Order in a special manner. Furthermore, this feast had always been the traditional date for the meeting of the Provincial Chapter of the Province of Dacia, as it marked, in a sense, the birth of the Order in Sweden.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the Provincial Chapter convened at the priory of Saint Olaf in Skänninge on August 14 and gave Ingrid the final approval of the Order. Bishop Henry, ordinary of the diocese of Linköping, presided the next day at the ceremony of dedication. The importance of the event can be judged from the presence of King Magnus Ladislas himself, accompanied no doubt by his court and by the magistrates and civic leaders of Skänninge. We can easily imagine the great throng of people who were present—friends who had known Ingrid all her life, her brothers, John and Andrew, together with other relatives, the townspeople of Skänninge, the poor and indigent who had benefited by her ministrations and bounty. In the monastery church Ingrid was clothed in the habit of the Second Order of Saint Dominic, pronounced her vows, and was installed as prioress of the first monastery of Dominican nuns in Sweden.<sup>13</sup>

On the same day the king ratified the land grant made to the monastery by Ingrid's brothers<sup>14</sup> and, in turn, bestowed on the new community a generous donation of money. A year later he exempted the monastery from royal taxes.<sup>15</sup>

#### TRUE UNION WITH CHRIST

Ingrid had now arrived at the goal for which she had labored so perseveringly. The focal point of her entire life had been the love and service of Christ, first by charity toward her fellowmen, later in the way of mysticism. Ever seeking closer union with her Friend, she had sought the solitude of the monastic life. Now

<sup>11</sup> *Scriptores latini mediæ ævi sueciani*, I, 225, ep. XXXVIII; Chronicle of Eric Olaf in *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum mediæ ævi*, II:1, 64; *Erikskrönikan* vv. 1208 ss., cited by Gallen, *La Province de Dacie de l'Ordre des Freres Precheurs*, XII of *Dissertationes Historicae*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> The first two Dominicans of Scandinavia, Simon of Sweden and Nicholas of Lund, received the habit in Bologna on the feast of the Assumption, 1219.

<sup>13</sup> Another monastery, under the title of Saint John the Baptist, was founded at Kalmar at the end of the century.

<sup>14</sup> *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, I, n. 886, cited by Gallen, *ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> August 21, 1282. *ibid.*, p. 128.

she was free to devote herself to the life for which she had always yearned—service toward mankind through prayer and penance, continual meditation without distraction, unhampered practice of the virtues and of austerity. With the foundation of the monastery, it seemed that her mission in life had come to an end. Like Saint Clare of Assisi, who died a few days after the approval of her Rule, Ingrid ruled her nuns but a year and died on September 2, 1282.<sup>16</sup> Her Spouse had given her the desire of her heart in the cloister of Saint Martin, and now He had crowned her work by taking her to the cloister where there is eternal union and eternal contemplation.

Blessed Ingrid's Dominican apostolate continued long after her death, however, in the notable rôle the Monastery of Saint Martin played in Swedish life. As the Dominicans enjoyed great prestige and wide popularity among the faithful, the nuns of Skänninge shared in this esteem. Generously patronized by royalty and nobility alike, the monastery in turn exerted a great influence on its benefactors and on the people. It became a most important center not only of mysticism and asceticism but also for the dissemination of Dominican thought. It was the most influential and active monastery in Sweden and foreshadowed the greatness of the Brigittine monastery of Vadstena.<sup>17</sup>

(To be continued.)

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<sup>16</sup> Joannes Messenius, *Scondia illustrata*, II, 60 cited by Gallen, "Les Causes de Sainte Ingrid et des Saints Suedois au Temps de la Reforme," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, VII, 15.

<sup>17</sup> In like manner Saint Ingrid might be considered the model of Saint Bridget. This is all the more probable as the general pattern of their lives are so identical and because of the family connection between them. Christine, daughter of Ingrid's own brother John, married Birger Petersson who remarried after her death. Bridget was the daughter of this second marriage.