

VENERABLE LOUIS OF GRANADA

Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain helped Columbus to discover this continent. These same sovereigns gave the deathblow to the well-nigh immortal foe of Christendom in the conquest of Granada by breaking the power of the Moor and expelling him from Europe. To populate the land vacated by the Moor they offered Spanish settlers many inducements and privileges. Among other adventurers enticed by such prospects came a young couple from the extreme northwestern Province of Galicia bearing the name of Sarriá. They were of ancient and honest Christian origin, but they were poor. Consequently when Sarriá, the head of the family, died, his wife and her tender child were dependent on charity. This little child was the future Louis of Granada and under these circumstances was he born in 1504, the year that records also the birth of the great Dominican Pope, St. Pius V.

Louis quarrelled with a playmate outside the Castle walls of the Duke, the governor of that territory. The Duke interfered and, greatly impressed by Louis' able defence of himself and by his winning disposition undertook the youth's education. Thus was he enabled to learn Latin with the Duke's own sons. Although worldly honors now loomed up before him, an interior light shone brighter, and Louis unhesitatingly followed the inspiration. It was a Dominican vocation. He felt keenly the separation from his poor mother, but he did not forget her. As a novice he daily set aside a half of his own meagre dinner and sent it to her.

The time for profession had come, and, leaving aside the name of Sarriá, Louis assumed the name of Granada. His heart was full of joy. He respected and loved and observed the Dominican rule, with its rigorous fast, and to it he added the frequent use of the discipline. All loved him for his modesty, cheerfulness and good sense. "He spoke little, reflected much and profited by everything for his advancement. He had many lovable qualities, and his spirit made him esteemed. He seemed insensible to honors."¹ Granada's clear, strong mind soon revealed itself to his teachers and superiors, and they conceived

¹ Tournon, O. P., *Histoire des Hommes Illustres de l'Orde de S. Dominique*. Livre 30, Louis de Grenade, ¶ III.

a most flattering future for him. Accordingly he was sent to an institution of higher education of the Order, the Convent of St. Gregory of Valladolid—that school of arts and sciences, where Medina, Banez and Francis Vittoria and many sculptors and painters distinguished themselves. His teacher was Astudillo, declared by Vittoria to be a more learned theologian than himself, while one of his fellow-novices was the renowned Melchior Cano. The classic and spiritual opportunities of the institution made greatest appeal to the young disciple. Louis of Granada, after having shown that his intellect penetrated the deepest subtleties of scholastic theology, found it more congenial to his nature to follow the study of humanities and of mystical Theology. This study was now to produce the most astounding results.

Having completed his course Louis returned to his mountainous birthplace in Granada where he began his active ministry. For forty years he was engaged in constant toil in the pulpit and the confessional and as adviser. Innumerable were the converts he brought over to the Church. His fame as a preacher rapidly spread over Spain and Portugal. Cardinal Henry of the latter country earnestly sought him as an adviser. Only when that prelate had appealed to the Master General and secured a command of obedience could Granada be induced to assume a position of so great honor and responsibility. Portugal soon learned his merits; the Queen Regent, Catherine, sister of Emperor Charles V, made him adviser in state affairs, and her own confessor.

As Prior at Badajoz, where he rebuilt the convent, Louis of Granada was chosen Provincial of that territory, despite a feeling that none other than a Portuguese should be chosen as Provincial. Upon his refusal to accept the post, the Portuguese Fathers appealed to Cardinal Henry, who induced him to take the office. About this time there was a vacancy in the time-honored See of Braga. Many ecclesiastics of social and political preferments sought the position and brought pressure to bear on the good Queen Regent. She was adamant in her policy of seeking the most worthy for every position and selected Granada. When he refused to accept, she laid it upon his conscience to secure a worthy successor to that See. The result was the selection of Bartholomew of the Martyrs, a Dominican

who shed a luster upon that See and who won from the Church the title of Blessed.

"The fame of Father Louis spread throughout all Europe and he was admired and consulted by men of the highest rank in Church and State. The king of Spain and many cardinals honored him with marks of great esteem."² Pope Gregory XIII writes to him: "Long and continued has been your labor among men both to deter them from vice and to lead them to the perfection of the Christian life, with which endeavor we have been infinitely pleased."³ Cardinal Michael Bonelli, nephew of Pope Pius V and Papal Legate to Portugal was much impressed by his virtues and works, and sent him money for the poor. Pope Sixtus V wished to enhance the glory of the Cardinalate by adding Granada to that august body, but Louis refused. Towards the close of his career the great Dominican received a certain token of the Order's affection, when the Master General bestowed on him the title of Master of Sacred Theology in recognition of his labors. History enshrines this great Spaniard for his preaching power, his writings and his saintliness, and an idea of his excellence in these fields is necessary.

From his boyhood Louis of Granada evinced a rare unmistakable talent for pulpit oratory. He attended the Lenten sermons with the Duke and his family, and in the evening of each day would repeat the words and imitate the gestures of the Dominican preacher. To his spirit of recollection, his many lovable qualities, his deep theological knowledge, his knowledge of the Fathers and the classics he united "all the external qualities required of a good preacher. He had a clear and ringing voice, clear enunciation, and commanding presence. He had a precious unction, great powers of persuasion, and above all the gift of placing himself at once, as if by instinct, on a level with his audience."⁴ He was successful in preaching to a variety of audiences. Now he would speak in some secluded village church and on the next occasion he would speak in the presence of the royalty and highest clergy in the cathedral. On one occasion the church being filled with a gathering of notables, he espied

² Bullarium, O. P., Tom. V, p. 410.

³ Lives of Some of the Sons of St. Dominic, by a Father of the same Order, p. 266.

⁴ ibid., p. 254.

his mother at the door looking for a seat. "I pray you," Granada said, "let that poor woman pass, she is my mother." At his word all made way for her and ladies of highest rank readily offered her their seats. Granada's success was unbounded, and because of his countless conversions he became known among many as the "Chrysostom of the Latin Church." Even today he is popularly styled the Cicero of Spain. In his later days, wishing to hand down to posterity the implements of his labors and the means of his success, he published a work entitled "The Christian Orator," wherein he crystallized the principles of pulpit oratory. Touron says of this work that "it cannot be recommended too insistently to those young religious, who are one day destined to preach the word of God."⁵

Posterity remembers a great man better by his writings than by his deeds. Great as Granada was as a preacher even greater did he reveal himself in his writings. The works attributed to him are for the most part theological and ascetical. Of his moral theology Father Prümmer says that it possesses great merit, especially when treating of the virtues and vices.⁶ Besides works such as "A Dialogue on the Incarnation," and a "Treatise on the Principal Mysteries of the Life of our Lord," Granada wrote one very extensive catechism and another in abridged form, which latter became very popular and a volume of which was presented by a Venetian nobleman to the king of Persia. Of his theology we need no better commentary than the words of St. Francis de Sales: "Have by you Louis of Granada entire. Let him be your second breviary. St. Charles Borromaeo had no other theology to preach but Louis of Granada, yet he preached very well."⁷

Concerning Granada's "Treatise on Prayer and Meditation" Touron says that the "work contains so great depth of doctrine and of religion, maxim so pure and sentiments so elevating that with good show of reason the learned French scholar Nicholas Antoine asserts that no writing of its kind in whatever language and of whatever age had he known that should be preferred to it."⁸ This was the first of his ascetical works.

⁵ Touron, O. P., op. cit. Livre 30, Louis de Grenade, ¶LX.

⁶ Manuale Theologiae moralis. Catalogus Auctorum Moralistarum.

⁷ Letter of June 3, 1603.

⁸ Touron, O. P., op. cit. Livre 30. Louis de Grenade, ¶ XIV:

Soon appeared "The Sinner's Guide" which has frequently been compared to the "Imitation of Christ" and which was perhaps modelled after that work since Granada translated it into Spanish. "The Memorial of a Christian Life" and treatises on prayer, the love of God, piety and other spiritual subjects appeared in rapid succession. His works, some twenty-seven in number, were translated into nearly all the languages. They are read in all parts of Europe, in Asia, Africa, the Indies, and on our own Continent, and have been published in many editions in the various countries of Europe. Only a few of his works have been translated into English. Of these "The Sinner's Guide" is most widely read. Today, in several dioceses in Spain, an indulgence is granted to those who read, or hear read, some portion of his works.

The present-day literature of Spain does not boast of writers more familiar with the genius of that language than was the great Dominican Friar of the sixteenth century. Owing to his idiomatic style many give him precedence to Cervantes, and consequently to all Spanish prose writers. The greatest critics of our day, notably Menendez y Pelaeo and Cejador are his admirers. His classical productions are carefully studied and imitated in many Spanish universities today for the purity and richness of their diction. That greatest of Spanish statesmen, who sways the minds and hearts of his people by a charming oratory and powerful thought, expresses the popular sentiment concerning the literary value of Granada's writings. "If," says Mella, "in the works of Cervantes the Castilian prose flows richly, abundantly and harmoniously, and in those of Saavedra Fejardo it appears severe, concise and energetic, and in those of Solis as florid and eloquent,—while having such marvellous writers in that age of glory in none as in Father Louis of Granada did the Castilian language attain so great majesty and grandeur."⁹ "The Christian Orator," "The Symbol of the Faith," and "The Sinner's Guide" are probably the most finished of his productions in Spanish, while his "Life of Bartholomew of the Martyrs" although uncompleted, ranks as a foremost classic of the Portuguese language.

The eloquence and learning of Granada was surpassed by his sanctity. His spirit was essentially Dominican and he mani-

⁹ "Rosas y Espinas" of Jan., 1920.

fested an unquenchable thirst to redeem souls. He was after the Divine Model a "zelator animarum." From the pulpit to the confessional; from the confessional to those in need of private spiritual advice; thence to his cell to write his great spiritual works,—every moment and in every way he strove to save souls. Those high in sanctity sought his advice. Among them was the great St. Teresa who writes in a letter: "Among the many persons who love in the Lord your reverence for having written such holy and profitable doctrine, and who thank His Majesty for having permitted you to be of so great and universal benefit to souls I am one."¹⁰ It has been well said that "among the hundreds of eminent ascetical writers of Spain Louis of Granada remains unsurpassed in the beauty and purity of his style, the solidity of his doctrine and the popularity and influence of his writings."¹¹ Moreover Touron testifies that Granada by his writings conducts a soul from the first stage of its conversion to the highest perfection of the Angelic life.¹² However high a degree of sanctity Louis of Granada had himself reached we are compelled to admire his singular persistency in rejecting honors, his intense charity, and his relentless mortification of self by discipline and fasts. Like St. Dominic too he was wont to keep watch before the tabernacle at night. Ever a perfect religious he kept the minutest details of the Rule to the advanced age of fourscore and four years. Indeed, the long Advent fast brought on his final illness. Death found this great man of God amidst his brethren, consoling them and saying with them the prayers of the Church for the expiring. His memory can be perhaps best eulogized in the words of Touron: "He was praised by all (in Spain) and in all countries where his works were known. And he merits these praises since he reflects, and in an eminent degree, all the virtues which make a Christian man, a religious man, a great man, and a perfect orator."¹³

¹⁰ Works of St. Teresa (ed. Apostolate of the Press), p. 41.

¹¹ Cath. Encyc., vol. 9, p. 385.

¹² Touron, O. P., op. cit. Livre 30. Louis de Grenade, ¶ LVII.

¹³ Touron, O. P., op. cit. Livre 30. Louis de Grenade, ¶ LXVI.

—Bro. Dionysius Mueller, O. P.