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"ST. JAMES AND SPAIN TO BATTLE!"

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IN OCTOBER twelfth of this year the famous shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar in Saragossa, Spain, will be the scene of unusual rejoicing. For this year that day will mark not only the annual *fiesta* of a shrine dear to the heart of Spain but will also be the nineteenth centenary of a place of pilgrimage which is among the oldest in Christendom.

While honoring Our Lady, Spain will not forget to praise the glories of the Apostle, St. James the Greater. It was this patron of the Spanish people who was responsible, together with the Blessed Mother herself, for the beginnings of the shrine in the first few years of the Christian era. That has been the firm belief of Spain for centuries.

The account given of St. James in the Acts of the Apostles lends little, if any, support to the Spanish tradition. There we learn that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost, the disciples separated to bring the Gospel to the four quarters of the earth. Tradition tells us further that it fell to his lot to preach Christ in Judea and Samaria. His death in Palestine in the reign of Herod Agrippa is recorded by St. Luke in the Acts in the following words: "And at the same time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to afflict some of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword."¹ There is no word in the New Testament of an apostolic journey to distant Spain.

But a venerable oral tradition, transmitted from father to son for generations, affirms that all the fruitful years of St.

¹ Acts, XII: 1-2.

James' apostolate were not spent in Palestine. We are told that he travelled to Spain, as did the great Doctor of the Gentiles, St. Paul, and preached the Gospel there to a hard-hearted, obstinate people who refused to give ear to his message of salvation. The story goes on to relate how he journeyed through the country in search of souls to hear him but found everywhere the same lack of interest. But one night while he was praying near the banks of the Ebro, the river on which Saragossa now stands, he was favored with a visit from the holy Mother of God. Lifting his eyes, he beheld Our Lady before him, surrounded by choirs of Angels and flooded in heavenly light. From the remote shores of Asia Minor, where she was then living in the care of his brother, St. John, she had come to console and encourage the herald of Christ and to tell him that this country which he found so blind to the truth was to be after a time a great Catholic nation. So closely would Spain be attached to Christ, she would never forget or betray the faith she was to receive. Then the Blessed Mother of Christ commanded the Apostle to erect a shrine at the spot in her honor. And she left there a marble pillar, the work of Angels, before she departed for her Eastern home.

Greatly cheered by the visit of his Queen, St. James began immediately to build a humble shrine at the place where Spain kneels today to venerate Our Lady of the Pillar. This done, he joyfully resumed his journey. Two or three years later, about 43 or 44 A. D., he set the seal of martyrdom on his doctrine at Jerusalem, the first of the Apostles to shed his blood as a witness to Jesus Christ.

This journey of St. James to Spain, like many another ancient tradition, has in recent centuries been the target of the severest attack of the critics. But the faith of the Spanish people in their patron has weathered these storms of doubt and denial; and with good reason too, apart from any motives of piety and devotion. Despite the critical dynamiting the foundation is still solid. It will be the purpose of this paper to examine the strength of this foundation and to show that, while the tradition may lack much in the way of desirable corroboration, the arguments advanced against it are neither cogent nor conclusive.²

² "Not all the data which have been transmitted to us by pious tradition regarding the apparition of Our Blessed Lady have always been considered as trustworthy. Some of them were admitted by the Congregation of Rites; others were rejected." Villada, *Historia Ecclesiastica de Espana* (Madrid, 1929), I, pp. 70-71.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Archbishop of Toledo, Garcia de Loaisa, called into doubt the tradition which had been recognized as true by the common agreement of the whole nation and by historians in and outside of Spain, to such an extent that Cornelius a Lapide could term it a "universal and immemorial tradition . . . which no one can deny." Loaisa had read three old manuscripts in the archives of his Cathedral, in which he found a fabulous story devised in the thirteenth century with the object of protecting the rights of the See of Toledo against those of Santiago. The Archbishop considered the parchments an argument to show the primacy of his See. According to the manuscripts' story, D. Rodrigo, Archbishop of Toledo in the first half of the thirteenth century, declared that the common tradition so far admitted by all Spain was a myth. This declaration is supposed to have been made at the Council of the Lateran, the Acts of which the manuscripts pretend to record. The story of the Archbishop's denial appears in almost identical terms in two of the papers, both of which were written after his death.

These manuscripts are generally recognized as spurious. They reflect very little credit on their authors or on Archbishop Loaisa, who gave the tale circulation again three centuries later. It is practically certain that D. Rodrigo was never present at the Council of the Lateran. At that time, moreover, the Breviary of the See of Toledo included an account of the journey of St. James of Spain. It is very difficult to understand why D. Rodrigo would have denied the tradition approved in his own See.

Among the historians, Baronius, in his *Ecclesiastical Annals*, also maintained the opinion denying the Apostle's journey. Bellarmine followed the lead of Baronius, asserting in a manuscript found in the library of Vallicelana of Rome that St. James could not have preached in Spain. In confirmation of this he adduces all the proofs he had at hand, some of them rather forceful. Unfortunately, the opinion of these renowned authors had great weight in the reform of the Roman Breviary which was being undertaken by Clement VIII at the time these disputations were taking place. The Pontiff was persuaded to change the phrases in the Breviary lessons which clearly expressed the Spanish tradition. Philip III, then King of Spain, manifested his resentment through the Spanish Ambassador at Rome, the Duke of Sessa. The protests were at first unsuccessful, but finally, in the pontificate of Urban VIII, the defenders of the tradition

triumphed. Urban left the following phrase in the fifth lesson of the Office of St. James:

Soon he set out for Spain, where he converted some to Christ, among whom were the seven men afterwards ordained Bishops by St. Peter and who were the first sent by him to Spain.

This controversy has its roots in the surprising silence of early writers about the Apostle's journey. The history of the Spanish Church in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries is very well known. But the many Spanish writers who treated in those days of events more or less intimately connected with the one we are here discussing preserved a complete silence about the visit of the Apostle.

Prudentius, for example, composed the *Book of Crowns*, in which he does homage to the victory achieved by the martyrs of Saragossa over their tyrants. Here he had an opportunity to speak of St. James, who had preached the Gospel in that city. Yet there is no word of him. Orosius, another famous Spanish historian of the fifth century, likewise omits all mention of the Apostle. St. Martin, Bishop of Dumio and afterwards of Braga, wrote in the sixth century several books in which he might have referred to the preaching of St. James in Galicia or made mention of the tomb of the Apostle at Compostela in the same province. But he too is silent.

In the following century, the Spanish Church had many saints and scholars, some of whom have left an indelible mark on history, such as St. Leander, St. Isidore, St. Braulius, St. Julian, and St. Ildefonsus. Of this group, St. Isidore, Bishop of Seville, affirms the tradition; St. Julian, Bishop of Toledo, denies it.

Before attempting to reply to this formidable objection, it will be well to recall that every negative argument—the argument from silence—requires two conditions for its validity. First of all, the author must be writing of matters more or less closely connected with the matter on which he is silent. Secondly, it must be clear that he could have known about the matter on which he is silent and also that he should have included it in his writings. In the present case we cannot but say that the above-mentioned writers must have known of the Apostle's journey to Spain. But we can also affirm that the nature of their works was such that it was unnecessary for them to speak of the Apostle.³

It might seem that Prudentius should have inserted the

name of St. James in one of his hymns to the martyrs of Saragossa. But he was not bound to do so by reason of the end he had in mind. His purpose was to enumerate the martyrs of Saragossa who will be present before God on the day of judgment. The Apostle preached in Saragossa, but he was not put to death there, nor even in Spain, but in far-off Palestine. Consequently he held no claim to a place among those honored by Prudentius.

Orosius in his history intended to continue the argument of St. Augustine's *City of God*, wherein the perpetual struggle between good and evil is so ably depicted. His object, therefore, was to prove that the tribulations endured by humanity before God became man, were greater and more numerous than those experienced after the coming of Christ; and that, consequently, Christianity could not be blamed for them. And so Orosius found no opportunity to speak of the Apostles in particular, preferring to treat of general aspects of history.

The silence of the other authors cannot by any manner of means add force to the negative argument. Their writings were not historical and therefore do not deal with the journey of the Apostle to Spain.⁴

With regard to the opinion of St. Julian, it can be said that it is not historically certain that he desired to enumerate in his work *De Sexta Aetate* the places where the twelve Apostles preached. He simply says that St. James preached in Jerusalem, without making any distinction between the two Apostles of that name. Besides, he does not point out the nations evangelized by some of the other Apostles. What he had in mind was to prove to the Jews that the Messiah had already come into this world, and to strengthen his arguments he recounts some of the deeds of those Apostles who brought the Gospel to the Jewish people.

And now, having treated some of the arguments offered against the historical truth of the Apostle's visits, we may turn to the older and far more trustworthy evidence in favor of the Spanish tradition.

First of all, we have the words of a hymn in the Gothic Office which clearly affirm the coming of St. James to Spain: "John ruled Asia alone, and his brother ruled Spain." The real value of this stanza was rejected by two historians, Alexander

³ Villada, *op. cit.*, p. 41 seq.

⁴ Villada, *ibid.*

Natalis and Cajetan Cieni. The former asserted that the Gothic Office was not approved by the Church. Besides being false, this declaration means nothing, for even if it were not approved by the Church, the hymn would still retain its full authority from the historian's point of view. Cieni said that the Council of Braga forbade sacred hymns, and consequently this also was forbidden. But studying carefully the canons of this Council, we must conclude that the Fathers of Braga had no intention of prohibiting Latin hymns which already had the full approval of the ecclesiastical authorities, but only those written in the vernacular which were the work of private persons.⁵

In the biography of St. Clement written by Esichius, Bishop of Salonica and friend of St. Jerome, we find another valuable testimony on behalf of the tradition. Esichius tells us that the story of the coming of St. James to Spain was well known and accepted in the Church of Sirmio from Apostolic times. From him we learn that Andronicus, one of the disciples of Christ and first Bishop of Salonica, left behind him a written account stating that St. Peter sent the Apostle James to Spain the same year that St. Clement arrived in Caesarea. Andronicus also said that St. James was the first to preach the Gospel in Spain, that he erected churches there and consecrated bishops, and that finally he returned to Palestine after having visited the principal cities of Spain and converted innumerable souls. This testimony is precious not only because of its antiquity and its richness in details but especially because the author would have had little interest in extolling the glories of the far-distant Spanish Church.

St. Jerome, a disciple of Didymus the Blind, adds another proof to those already given. Explaining the sixteenth and seventeenth verses of the thirty-fourth chapter of Isaias, he compares the Apostles with deer because of their speed in propagating the Gospel, and proceeding, he says: "(The Apostles) came together in Jerusalem, saw one another, left the city, and travelled to divers provinces, for the Lord commanded them: 'Going therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' (Matt. XXVIII, 20). His Spirit gathered them together, cast their lots for them, and separated them, so that one went to India, another to Spain, another to Illyricum, another to Greece, and each rested in the province where he taught the Gospel."

⁵ La Fuente, *Historia Ecclesiastica de Espana*, (Madrid, 1873), p. 48.

As in the case with the words of Didymus cited above, the phrase, "another to Spain," might be applied to St. Paul, if it were taken apart from its setting in the commentary on Isaias. St. Jerome is there speaking only of those Apostles who beheld the Ascension of Our Lord and who were together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem before they set out to preach the Gospel. Obviously, then, St. Paul must be excluded from this text. Moreover, St. Jerome says at the very end that each of them rests in the province he evangelized. This excludes St. Paul once again for he was beheaded in Rome and buried there. But these final words fit the facts perfectly if the previous phrase is referred to St. James, since his body was borne to Spain by his disciples and buried at Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia.

Shortly afterwards in the same work, commenting on the tenth verse of the forty-second chapter, St. Jerome says: "For Jesus, seeing the Apostles mending their nets on the shore near the Sea of Genesareth, called them and sent them into the Great Sea, that he might make of these fishermen, fishers of men. They preached the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum and Spain, obtaining in a short time the very power of the city of Rome." The Apostles who were called by Jesus at the Sea of Genesareth were Peter, Andrew, John, and James. Taken in their strict sense, the words of St. Jerome cannot but favor our thesis. Yet there are some authors who say that the passage must apply also to St. Paul and the other Apostles, because St. John and St. Andrew did not preach in Illyricum. But further inquiry shows that these two "fishers of men" could have preached in that country. St. Andrew spread the Gospel in Greece, in those days a Roman province. Illyricum was very near, and therefore nothing would have prevented the brother of St. Peter from reaching this place. St. John lived for many years in Asia Minor, not far from Greece, and furthermore, as Eusebius tells us, he preached in the neighboring provinces after his release from his exile in Patmos.

Our final testimony in favor of the tradition comes from St. Isidore, celebrated in the Middle Ages for his sanctity and learning. In his work, *De Vita et Morte Sanctorum*, we read: "James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John, fourth in order, wrote (an Epistle) to the twelve tribes dispersed among the Gentiles, preached the Gospel to the peoples of Spain and the West, and in the twilight of the world poured forth the light

of his preaching. He fell by the sword under Herod the Tetrarch, and was laid to rest in a marble tomb."

Because it contains three errors which they consider unworthy of the erudite St. Isidore, this argument is judged very poor by the opponents of the Spanish tradition. First, he attributes to St. James the Greater the Epistle written by St. James the Less; secondly, he confuses the two Herods, assigning to the earlier monarch an event which took place under the later king; lastly, he says that the Apostle was buried in *Arca Carmarica* (according to some, a city in North Africa), which clearly denies the opinion not only of those who declare that the Apostle was interred in Jerusalem, but also of those who maintain that his body was brought to Iria Flavia (the ancient name of Compostela) by his disciples. But it is now commonly admitted that the words *Arca Carmarica* should read *arca mar-morica*, that is, St. James was buried in a marble tomb, not in some unidentified city. The other two errors were common mistakes into which other good historians of the same period fell.⁶

There is another argument, no less strong, to support the tradition. The body of the Apostle rests in Spanish soil. The fact cannot safely be denied since Leo XIII issued his solemn Bull, *Omnipotens Deus*, of November 1, 1881, confirming the identity of the body at Compostela. Now what motives would have urged the disciples of St. James to transport the sacred relics from Jerusalem to such a distant place? There must have been a very compelling reason for the journey. There cannot be any doubt that the Apostle was bound to Spain by the closest and most intimate ties. Otherwise his followers would have spared themselves the labor and peril of charting a stormy course to Spain.

The veneration paid to the Apostle's relics was very great until the invasion of Spain by hordes of northern barbarians. Then even the memory of the place where he rests was erased from the Spanish mind, as chaos and calamity overwhelmed the country. For more than four centuries weeds and brush grew up around the sepulchre. But in the ninth century, in the reign of Alfonso II el Casto, heavenly lights pointed out to the Spanish people the spot which their misfortunes had made them forget. The sacred remains were found without much effort. In

⁶ Villada, *op. cit.*, I, p. 63 Florez, *Espana Sagrada* (Spain, 1747-1879), III, C. III. No. 9.

order to avoid a recurrence of past oblivion, the Asturian monarch erected a magnificent building over the tomb of the Apostle.

In the latter half of the last century, fears and doubts about the authenticity of the relics at Santiago de Compostela disturbed the minds of many Spaniards. But their suspicions were proved to be unfounded. It being necessary to make some repairs in the shrine, the relics of the Apostle, together with those of two of his followers who were entombed with him, were found in the sepulchre. All the evidence discovered within proved the remains to be those of the Apostle. Inscriptions, stones, bricks, and other materials were unearthed which go back as far as the days of Roman domination in Spain. It was these findings which were confirmed by Leo XIII in the Bull, *Omnipotens Deus*, mentioned above.

Spain has enjoyed for centuries the special intercession of St. James. Countless miracles at Compostela testify to his power and to his love of Spain. Frequently, too, he has lent visible help to the armies of Spain. In the long campaigns against the Moors, he would suddenly appear in the Spanish ranks, mounted on a white charger, a banner in his left hand and a drawn sword in his right, and under his leadership Spain would press ahead to victory. Before joining battle the soldiers always invoked the aid of the Apostle with the well-known cry, *Santiago y cierra Espana!* (St. James and Spain to battle!).

When the Apostle fulfilled the command of Our Lady and raised up her shrine on the banks of the Ebro, he left to his children in Christ another shining star to which Spaniards have lifted their eyes in times of sorrow and tribulation. In the recent civil war the officers and men who fought so valiantly against the Reds used to kneel at this shrine and implore the help of Mary in their struggle to preserve their religion and their fatherland. This year Spain will show at Saragossa her gratitude to the Mother of God for the most recent sign of her patronage and care, the victory of the Nationalist armies, and so testify to Spain's love of the faith received nineteen centuries ago through the ministry of St. James and kept through the protection of Our Blessed Lady of the Pillar.