

IGNATIANA v

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THIS word is meant to imply that I cannot write here even a skeleton outline of the Saint's life or of the history of the Society he founded; still, I must say something of the Saint if we are to judge whether his 'Company' has continued to live by his spirit.

The preface to the Saint's life is medieval—a talented, versatile courtier-soldier, he fences, dances, writes and vividly illuminates love-lyrics but professes himself the devotee of some *princesse lointaine* . . . possibly as distant as an ideal in the skies? During the siege of Pamplona the garrison is for surrendering: Iñigo remembers Aeneas—he was a dastard for abandoning Troy! They stay: but a cannon-ball dislodges a stone which injures Iñigo's left leg and, ricocheting, smashes the right. The courteous French send him home to Loyola: the bone is set, but badly. 'Break it again!' Iñigo becomes delirious and is anointed, but a dream of St Peter cures him. Alas, a bit of bone still protrudes—how can he now wear silk stockings? 'Saw it off!' His brother, aghast, watches, and sees that Iñigo must spend weeks racked on an iron frame. He asks for romances to distract him: but the grim castle has only some Lives of Saints. He thinks—'What they could do, could not you?' and forthwith dreams of what dress he shall wear when he meets his mistress; of the secret code in which they would correspond. But the Saints have won. Off he goes to Montserrat, makes a three days' confession, and inspired (says he) by Amadis of Gaul, stands in night-long vigil before our Lady.

After four months' tendance of the sick, the divine assault begins. He crawls into a cave four foot by nine at Manresa, and his soul is torn to shreds. 'How shall I stand this life for forty years? . . . If I had to go to a dog's whelp to cure me, I would do it.' Violently tempted to suicide, he vows not to eat or drink till he has conquered: after a week his confessor refuses him absolution if he will not eat. He obeys; peace returns; then for another week he lies, to human eyes, unconscious. On recovering, he can but repeat the Name of Jesus. Afterwards, he would cut argument short by saying: 'Thus I saw it at Manresa'. Yet he asserted that

for a long time he found no one spiritual enough to help him save one old woman who exclaimed: 'Oh that Christ our Lord would someday appear to you!'

Feeling that he is destined to an apostolate, he starts stumbling towards it; off he goes to Jerusalem, to convert the Jews and Turks. But diplomats and ecclesiasts propel him out of Palestine with the help of a stick. Back home, he soon sees he must be no errant 'hot gospeller', but be officially 'educated'. He turns his back on inquisitorial Spain and goes to Paris. Despite his almost squalid poverty (he begs for sustenance in Flanders and twice in England) he attracts others to himself, notably the fastidious athlete, Francis Xavier, bent on securing his titles to aristocracy, of whom Ignatius was to say he was the stiffest clay he had ever handled. Their little group of nine took vows on August 15, 1534, resolving to reunite in January 1537. In June, they were ordained, though not for eighteen months did Ignatius offer his first Mass. Meanwhile, he constantly prayed our Lady to associate him with her Son; and indeed, in November, 1537, in a little chapel, La Storta, near Rome he had a vision which determined all his future. 'He felt *such a change in his soul* that he would never have the courage to doubt of this—that God the Father was setting him with his Son.' That, he insisted, was the essential—hence the motto: 'To the greater glory of God'; and the words: 'Company of Jesus', 'Companions of Jesus' had not primarily the militarist connotation usually taken for granted, but date from the vision in which God set him and his 'with' his Son.

And almost without a break we see him as what first made me feel uncomfortable with him—the head of an Organization papally approved (1540) though at first limited to sixty members; governing inflexibly, originating a score of enterprises—scholastic, charitable, missionary. True, one might feel sorry for a man so bullied by business, nailed to his desk—some thirty letters a day, always re-read, sometimes thrice re-written. Nor can we be too relieved by touches of 'humanity' noted almost by accident, as when he dances (limping leg and all) to cheer up a melancholic Canon in retreat, or rules that a sick man must have some 'greenery' in his room to console him. Yet, this rigidly reasonable Saint is constantly *crying*. Part of his diary survives: in it he notes down when, where and how abundantly he cried and sobbed: between February 2 and March 12, 1544, he mentions his tears

175 times; he feared he would lose his eyesight: his ecstasies interfered with Office and even Mass—the Pope allowed him to say some *Paters* and *Aves* instead of his Breviary, and he might say these in bed before rising. He knew that this gift ‘neither proved that charity existed nor augmented it’, and possibly he wept less as he grew old, or attended less to his tears. But his ecstasies continued to shatter an already exhausted man. Now Ignatius was the least ‘poetically imaginative’ of men. He said of his earliest vision of the Holy Trinity at Manresa that it was ‘like’ three ‘keys’ (of some musical instrument). When he saw our Lord or our Lady, it was ‘without distinction of parts or members’. He usually spoke of a ‘whiteness’, or a light or rays. And since the Blessed Trinity was—as truly as in Carmel—his supreme ‘devotion’, he made no effort to describe the Indescribable. In ranking him among the very great mystics, I am more impressed by his acknowledgment that he could ‘find God’ in the midst even of the most smothering business than by his shattering ecstasies. It is normal that as a saint-in-the-making becomes more perfectly integrated within himself, the lightning-flashes become a calm continuous glow. St John of the Cross compares ecstasies to ‘dislocations of the bones’ and knocked his knuckles on the wall to prevent himself being captured by them. We take it, then, for granted that the highest graces are given directly to the apex or core of the soul (use what metaphor you will) and then were expressed by the recipient (to himself or, when desirable, to others) in such ideas, images and words as he had at his disposal. So, when death approached Ignatius, it came very quietly. His health gave way in 1554. In 1556 (July 30) he sent in the evening for his secretary Polanco, said he was dying, and told him to seek the papal blessing: but he looked well; Polanco had letters to write . . . would not tomorrow do? Ignatius said ‘the sooner the better’, but left him free. He talked till midnight and then grew quieter. During the night, he was heard to say, simply: ‘O God, O God!’ Next morning he still looked well, but suddenly the change came. Polanco rushed to the Vatican, but returned too late. We may assume that Ignatius was anointed, but perhaps, after all, he died like Xavier without any sacrament, his life being already transferred *in caelestia*.

Ignatius was no ‘intellectual’, but he saw his world clearly—the pagan Renaissance at home, the corruption of society, the

ignorance and anguish of the people. He ordered that his sons should be genuinely poor and accept no dignities save at the Pope's express command. But he decreed their fullest education and staffed the Roman College, initiated by St Francis Borgia, only with men who had graduated at Paris. The turbid anarchic revolution in Germany might disgust his Spanish mind, but he sent his best men there; and when Laynez went sick at Trent, the Council said it would sit only when he was well again. But it is idle to catalogue the places, from Ireland to the Far East, to which the hardly un-cradled Company was told to travel.

To my mind, it is not the galaxy of Saints who appeared in the Church's extreme necessity which astonishes me so much as the multitude of young men of all 'classes' who, fired by the ideal of poverty, chastity and obedience, and not least by the vision of martyrdom, appeared in every land. As for the Society, not for nothing does the altar of St Aloysius in Sant' Ignazio—the young prince, brought up among adulteries and assassinations and who knew himself to be a piece of 'twisted iron' and who entered religion 'to get twisted straight' even though his abdication upset the whole imperial society—stand opposite that of the shoemaker's son, John Berchmans. The former had longed for the foreign missions, but died through carrying about the plague-stricken in Rome; the latter had wished to be a military chaplain in Flanders. Inevitably the freshness of this high adventure would wear off, especially as Ignatius reluctantly had composed a Rule: he had wished to rely on the 'interior law of charity'. But the observance of any Rule may turn into a half-mechanical regularity. And towards the end he admitted that the 'Exercises' might be made more than once, though at first he had intended them to enable a man to make one definite choice regarding his whole way of life: when they became an annual affair for all Jesuits, their flexible adaptability might not always be realized. And when a centralized body becomes very large, it is ever harder for its head to know, or rather, to imagine the vast differences of conditions of its members' life, and government becomes ever more delicate.¹

1 The title *Praepositus Generalis* (especially when abbreviated to 'The General') may acquire a militarist flavour quite alien to it. Even a 'militant' institution suggests that it is primarily 'against' something: 'active service' is a truer ideal; we too speak of the 'Services'; and the immemorial practice of unquestioning obedience is, in its way, proper to them too. At least, all apathy is excluded: 'Ecce ego! mitte me!'

Now Spain felt itself somewhat the special heir of Ignatius, and displayed tendencies towards a life more technically 'contemplative' than he had intended. And in proportion as Illuminism, Quietism and the like developed, the Jesuits became identified with anti-mysticism and 'asceticism'—they were even accused of inventing Free Will. The dispute about 'pure love' issued into an all-round massacre of charity, and so did the Jansenist campaign. Most tragic of all, I think, were the clashes between religious Orders, at home and especially in the eastern Missions where there was also an ill-fated 'Europeanism' which, at the time, must have seemed quite natural. But far more important than the rage of royal mistresses or the jealousy of Universities was the long-standing opposition of the Jesuits to royal absolutism. Already Bellarmine had had his books burnt. Not so much the Bourbon cousin-kings as their Ministers were responsible for the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773, to say nothing of the destruction of whole civilizations as in Paraguay. Read, for example, the Lives of Pombal side by side with that of the dearest of men, St Joseph Pignatelli, who survived the period of suppression! Does one however detect any decline in Jesuit spirituality in this later period? I own to an intense dislike of the eighteenth century, the shoddiness of the 'Enlightenment', and I seem to see a great output of the second-rate and second-hand, pious literature included, in all departments; but the heroic life continued especially among the poor, the sick, and over-seas: and actually it was creative, for when so soon after the suppression of the Jesuits the great Revolution broke out in France, so too were born half the great Foundresses whose work endures, and no less prolific were the first decades of the nineteenth century. Even during its suppression members of the Society directed many of these, and continued to do so when it was restored.

I would be as incompetent as reluctant to give any account of the work the Society is trying to do in so distracted a world as ours. Presumably it wishes to do such work as, in the circumstances, is called for and possible. I like to mention the immense leper colony and research centre at Fontilles (Valencia) and our own small leper asylum in British Guiana: also the huge modern University at Comillas in Spain, and the gigantic Workers' University in the industrial zone of the Asturias; the Wah Yan College (Hong Kong: 1,000 students); the University of St Joseph

at Beyrouth with its special Institute of Oriental Languages; the Baghdad College in Iraq; the two centres preparing for work in a future Russia (Rome and New York); the Catholic Social Institute at Poona; the Catholic University of Tokyo with its settlement in the Tokyo slums; or specialized work like that for gypsies in France. As long ago as 1940 the German-Hungarian College in Rome had begun the systematic 'colonization' and culture of its vast estates. Hundreds of families now live and work there in excellent economic, cultural and religious conditions. An enterprise called the 'Crusade *pro Mundo Meliore*' was originally housed in the old Mondragone college near Rome, but in 1952 it was decided to make its centre at Castel Gandolfo. It was intended to ensure the collaboration of all religious Orders and of the clergy of all ranks in the study of world conditions combined with prayer in common. The Holy Father again named Fr Lombardi, S.J., as 'apostle' of this 'crusade', but it is not, nor in his view was ever meant to be, a specifically Jesuit movement.

Work in England has been necessarily on a smaller scale, less imaginative, even humdrum: still, we trust that the C.S.G. and the Workers' College near Oxford may collaborate with all who are trying to speak to those of our people who are most open to the snare of Communism. And we hope that our retreat-houses spread that spirit of prayer which—wrote Fr General Ricci in February, 1773—'should it (God forbid) be lost, it would matter little if the Society were suppressed, since it would have become useless for the purpose for which it was founded'.

I can but thank BLACKFRIARS for expressing its wish to join in the fourth centenary-commemoration of St Ignatius, and for asking me to contribute an article about the Saint and his work.