

SAINT JOHN CAPISTRAN

BY

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

THESE six volumes of the "Friar Saints" Series now published, which have received the warm approval of the authorities of both Orders in England, Ireland, and America, are earnestly recommended to Tertiaries, and to the Catholic public generally.

The Master-General of the Dominicans at Rome, sending his blessing to the writers and readers of the "Friar Saints" Series, says: "The Lives should teach their readers not only to know the Saints, but also to imitate them".

The Minister-General of the Franciscans, Fr. Denis Schuler, sends his blessing and best wishes for the success of the "Lives of the Friar Saints".

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PREFACE

IN the preparation of this biography, the author's aim has been to make a great Saint more widely known among English-speaking Catholics ; a Saint who is popularly venerated in the Church at large and especially in Italy, France, and Austria-Hungary, the scenes of his labours and triumphs.

That St. John Capistran is not held in such general regard among ourselves is due, no doubt, to the fact that no book hitherto has been written in English upon the subject of his life, although several works embodying a collection of lives of the Saints contain biographies longer or shorter, notably "The Lives of the Saints and Blessed of the Three Orders of St. Francis," translated from the "*Auréole Séraphique*" of Père Léon, O.F.M. Yet he deservedly ranks among the holiest men, the most apostolic preachers, and the noblest heroes whose lives adorn the annals of the Church.

A man of strong personality, of large ideas,

of versatile genius, with remarkable powers of organization and government joined to intrepid courage, he compels the admiration of all who learn to know him through the recorded incidents of his life; while to us who love the Saints and would follow them, even afar off, such episodes commend self-sacrifice, prayer, penance, an ardent zeal for God, His Church, and His creatures' souls.

To present a faithful narrative to the reader, who may thence judge for himself what manner of man was St. John Capistran, is, therefore, the scope of the present work, rather than to attempt any elaborate study of character.

Though use has been made of several biographies and other historical sources, chief reliance has been placed on the evidence of contemporary authorities, the most important of which have been edited by the Bollandists. The only later writer largely quoted is the great Irish Franciscan, Fr. Luke Wadding († 1657), whose monumental work, "*Annales Minorum*," contains many documents and letters written by or to the Saint; and it is to these that reference is generally made, since it has been the writer's endeavour throughout to admit no testimony that is not perfectly trustworthy.

The accounts of the victory of Belgrade and of the Saint's death are drawn principally from two long narratives by Fr. John Tagliocozzo, secretary to St John Capistran, and an eye-witness of what he relates. They were both drawn up shortly after the events they record, and were addressed as official reports to St. James della Marca, Vicar-General of the Observantine Franciscans.

One further point calls for explanation. The chronology of the life is variously stated by historians, but that adopted by the Bollandists seems to be the most reliable, and is adopted in this work. Many writers give 1385 as the date of the Saint's birth, on account of the inscription which was placed on his tomb and which read: "He lived 71 years, 3 months, 22 days". Since he certainly died on 23 October, 1456, this would give 2 July as his birthday, reckoning both the days of birth and death according to the custom of the time; but 2 July is evidently an error, for all agree that he was born on 24 June. The year stated is, therefore, open to question. The best authority is Capistran's own letter (*ap. Boll. Oct. X, p. 274*), written on 1 May, 1455, to Fr. Mark of Bergamo, wherein he says: "On the feast of the nativity of St. John I shall enter my seventieth year; on the

feast of our Blessed Father, St. Francis, I shall enter my fortieth in religion". Additional confirmation of this chronology is to be found in the Memoir of James of Franchis, quoted in the second chapter of this book.

In 1890 the feast of St. John Capistran, which has been observed since 1622 throughout the Franciscan Order on 23 October, was extended to the universal Church, and is celebrated on 28 March.

It is the earnest hope of the present writer, that this little work will promote in some degree devotion to a Saint thus commended to all Catholics by the Sovereign Pontiff.

V. F.

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THE Holy Father, through the Very Rev. Fr. Thomas Esser, O.P., has expressed his great pleasure and satisfaction that the "Friar Saints" Series has been undertaken; and wishes it every success. He bestows "most affectionately" His Apostolic Blessing upon the Editors, Writers, and Readers of the whole Series.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS.

THE little town of Capistrano in the Abruzzi, situated some twenty miles south-east of Aquila and in the diocese of Sulmona, formerly within the kingdom of Naples, has given its name to the great Saint whose life is sketched in the following pages, and from him has in turn received its one title to world-wide fame.

Hither, about the year 1384, a warrior came to dwell. It is doubtful whether he was of French or German nationality. Even his name cannot be stated with certainty, though it would seem to have been Ghez,¹ indicating German origin. The historians in general agree in stating that he was of noble birth, and that he had left his native land in 1382 to take part in the war which was then beginning between the rival claimants to the throne of Naples—a conflict that lasted many years. This man took to wife a lady of good family in Capis-

¹ Equivalent to the modern Goetz or Götz. The whole question is learnedly discussed by Father Michael Bihl in the "Archivum Franciscanum Historicum," III, 781, and by M. Léon de Kerval—"Un Frère Mineur d'Autrefois," Ed. 1908, App. I.

200000 ST. JOHN. CAPISTRAN.

trano ; and to them was born, on 24 June, 1386, a son whom they called John. This is all that is known of the father of a Saint who was in time to become renowned as an apostle and wonder-worker, but who inherited not a little of his father's military instinct.

Seeing that this child may be said to have been cradled in war, and that the events then in progress had much to do with shaping his career in the world, it may be well to outline the history of what was taking place in southern Italy.

The Schism of the West—one of the greatest calamities that ever befell the Church of God—had begun in 1378. Joan I of Naples had taken the part of the antipope, Clement VII, and had accordingly been deposed by the lawful Pope, Urban VI. This Pontiff, acting in his capacity of overlord of the kingdom, had bestowed the crown on Charles of Duras. Joan for her part resigned her personal claim, but called upon Louis, Duke of Anjou and brother of Charles V of France, to take up the cause of her party and reign in her stead. The antipope crowned him in France in 1382, upon which he marched with an army to Naples. The war was carried on from year to year without any decisive success on either side, though the French faction gradually became weaker. Louis died in 1384 and was succeeded by Louis II, who upheld his claim till 1412, when, seeing that his position was no longer tenable, he left Italy. Meanwhile Charles of Duras had died in 1386, leaving his crown to his son Ladislaus. This prince, in later

years, as undisputed ruler of Naples, became the friend and patron of Capistran.

John was only six years old when his father died, but his mother, who is known to have been a woman of great piety, attended carefully to his education, placing him under good tutors, and, ultimately, sending him at an early age to the University of Perugia. There he studied canon and civil law, and after ten years obtained the degree of doctor in both these branches of learning. He was a diligent and brilliant student. Christopher of Varese says that all sought his advice in difficult questions in preference to that of the professors; while the latter, according to Jerome of Udine, thought it not beneath their dignity to do the like.

Though these are striking testimonies to his intelligence, it is greatly to be regretted that so few details of his youthful history have been preserved to us. The biographers, even contemporaries who must have had access to much fuller information, appear to have been eager to reach the more striking events of his maturer years. Facts and characteristics that would have been of great value to us in studying the formation of a character so noble and so powerful, seem to have no importance in their estimation; or perhaps it may more fairly be said that they confine their narrative almost exclusively to what they themselves witnessed. In any case the loss is ours and cannot now be repaired.

One saying of the Saint which refers to this period

is, however, preserved to us by Jerome of Udine : "There were in me such inborn modesty, such reverence for my parents and such good habits, that if ever I observed anything unbecoming, I held it greatly in abhorrence ; and, through hatred of evil speaking, made my escape immediately ". It affords only a tiny glimpse at the moral character in youth of one who was to become so renowned for his own sanctity and for the reformation of morals in others ; but it so far indicates a love of virtue not common among university students of that time in southern Italy, and some strength of character as well, for there are circumstances in which flight requires considerable courage. The same writer also informs us that John in his early life was of handsome appearance, grave but pleasing manners, and of such remarkable learning that all who knew him felt confident that one day he would be a great man.¹

The events of the following years are known to us only in outline. He appears to have been appointed a magistrate very soon after leaving the university, and to have been favourably noticed by King Ladislaus. Promotion to various civil and military posts followed until he was made governor of Perugia. This, the highest dignity he attained in his worldly career, was conferred on him probably about the year 1412, when he would have been twenty-six years old.² Such rapid advancement seems to bear out the statements made by

¹ C, I. *ap.* Boll.

² Cf. Boll. X Oct. p. 275.

the biographers concerning his character and attainments, and to disprove any suspicion that in constructing an early portrait of the Saint they relied on their imagination and on their knowledge of his later life, for his father was long since dead and there is no indication of any powerful influence at work to accelerate the promotion won by his own abilities.

The governorship of a city so important as Perugia was a position of great responsibility for a young man, and all the more difficult from the fact that the country had not yet recovered from the state of disorder brought about by the long war. But we are told that his vigorous administration of the law and, especially, his personal integrity and impartiality in giving judgment, soon brought about a remarkable improvement in the general condition of the province. Brigandage was suppressed, tyranny and injustice in all its forms restrained, so that the inhabitants felt a sense of security that had long been unknown.¹ Here, at least, we perceive the existence of qualities that became strikingly apparent in later years, and helped to make the Capistran that is known to history.

One day, either at this time or during a previous magistracy, a person of high station offered him a large bribe if he would condemn to death a man who was then in prison, charged with a grave crime, at the same time threatening to kill him if he acted otherwise. Capistran, with a courage and honesty

¹ Christopher of Varese, I.

sufficiently rare in those corrupt and lawless times, tried the prisoner fairly, and, finding him innocent, set him free.¹

Another story told by Massoni, Catani and others, but not found among the earlier lives, belongs to this period. The Count of St. Agatha and his son were accused of treason and were tried by a commission of judges among whom was Capistran. The father was found guilty and condemned to death; but the son, a mere boy, was declared innocent. This sentence did not fully satisfy Ladislaus, who would have been better pleased if both had paid the penalty and so offered a more terrible example to disaffected subjects. By way of compromise it was agreed that both should be formally sentenced and taken to the place of execution; but that the son, after witnessing his father's death, should be set free. So it was done: the father was beheaded before his son's eyes. But terror did for Ladislaus what justice had denied. The boy fell dead from fright by the side of his father's body.

Capistran's regret at having been a party to this shameful affair is made by Massoni to have been the occasion of his abandoning his civil dignities and entering the Franciscan Order. But this seems to be an error; for the event must have occurred not later than 1414, the date of Ladislaus' death, whereas Capistran did not enter the Order until 1416, according to the most reliable accounts—

¹ Wadding, An. IX, 68.

including that found in Massoni's life. Yet this incident had, no doubt, its part in preparing his mind for the sacrifice he was afterwards to make. Catani's narrative indicates this and seems to explain the mistake made by Massoni, for he tells us that Capistran at this time actually resigned all the offices he held under Ladislaus, and was with difficulty persuaded by the king to resume them with the added dignity of supreme judge of the kingdom.¹

Joan II succeeded to the throne of Naples in 1414 and extended the same favour as her father had done to the governor of Perugia. His worldly career seemed to be a prosperous one in every way. His marriage with the daughter of one of the wealthiest citizens of Perugia had been arranged, and he was on the point of setting out for Capistrano, early in 1416,² to bring some money from his property there as part of the marriage settlement, when misfortune overtook him quite unexpectedly; and with misfortune came disillusionment, conversion and a new life.

Perugia formed part of the Papal States, but John XXIII had ceded it together with Ascoli, Viterbo, and Benevento to Ladislaus as security for a large loan. This had occurred in 1412, the year, probably, in which Capistran was appointed governor. But John XXIII was only one of three claimants to the Papal throne in the strife of the great schism, which was now, happily, nearing its end. He was declared deposed by the Council of

¹ Cf. Boll. X Oct. p. 276.

² "Memoir of James of Franchis," see *infra*, p. 8.

Constance on 29 May, 1415, and, on the following day, renounced his claims. Gregory XII resigned a few days later, and Benedict XIII, the third claimant, was quite discredited. Yet it was not until two years later that an end was put to the schism by the election of Martin V (11 November, 1417).

In these circumstances it is not surprising to find that disturbances broke out in the city and province of Perugia. The details are by no means clear, but from the account of Capistran himself, which we shall shortly quote, it is evident that the powerful family of Malatesta intervened in the conflict. This family, especially as represented by John of Malatesta, had been largely instrumental in bringing about the close of the schism, and had strongly opposed the party of John XXIII.

This discord brought about the downfall of the governor and so led to his adoption of the religious life. The biographers of the Saint all relate the story of this remarkable change and the events which accompanied it, but we can perhaps best let him tell it in his own words as recorded by James of Franchis.¹

"At that time," i.e. 1416,² "war had broken

¹ A personal friend of the Saint who admitted him and his wife to the Third Order. He took down in writing the substance of a conversation he had with Capistran in 1447 upon the subject of the latter's conversion. The document is embodied by Massoni in his life of the Saint, and is accepted as authentic by the Bollandists and other authorities.

² See *supra*, p. 6. Wadding (x. 358) places these events in the year 1414. But he had not, at the time, access to the

out between the Malatesta and the Perugians, and I was sent to arrange terms of peace. But, when I came to a certain tower¹ [I was taken prisoner and] my feet were fettered in irons of forty-two pounds weight, and no other nourishment was allowed me but bread and water. In this unfortunate situation I began to consider how I could escape death, and calculated the height of the tower. I happened to have a sash which I tore into strips with my teeth for want of a knife; and when I had tied these together and added my hood² they were still as high from the ground as St. Christopher's.³

"After fixing this rope to the top of the wall, I began to descend; but the hood broke. I fell to the ground, injured my foot, and could go no further. Moreover the guards were aroused by the irons clashing together. I was captured again and imprisoned in the basement of the tower where the water reached half-way up my legs. I was bound with a chain round my waist so that I was compelled to remain standing, and only a crust of bread was given me with a little water daily.

"After three days I fell asleep through weakness. As I slept it seemed to me that a great noise was

document of James of Franchis. Moreover the whole kingdom of Naples was at peace in 1414.

¹ At Brufa (Nicholas of Fara, I) a town in the province of Perugia, on the way to Assisi.

² The doctor's hood worn by the magistrates. It hung down over the left shoulder.

³ This refers to the convent of St. Christopher at Penna, in the garden of which the conversation took place.

made, and, awakening, I saw a beam of sunlight illuminating the whole tower. Then, as I raised my head to give thanks to God, I saw a Friar Minor, stigmatized in his feet, who disappeared when I tried to embrace him. Bending back my head I found myself shaven, just as you see me now.¹ I knew for certain that this Friar Minor was our Holy Father St. Francis. At last I perceived that it was the will of God that I should leave the world and serve him alone. Therefore I applied at once for my liberation, which I purchased at the price of four hundred ducats.

"At once I ordered all the books and clothing I possessed to be sold, and went back to Capistrano because of my betrothed. I made known my fixed purpose and determination to leave the world and serve God. At my entreaty she promised not to marry, but later on she married twice and was at length attacked by leprosy. I returned the dowry to her and to my mother, and when all was paid I gave what was left to the poor of Jesus Christ.

"Then, returning to Perugia, I put a cap on my head with all my sins written upon it, and rode backwards on an ass so as to overcome this miserable world.² As I rode thus through the streets

¹i.e. the head shaven in the form of a tonsure. Christopher of Varese says that the tonsure remained bare ever after. He also mentions three visions, and says that the tonsure appeared on the third occasion. In an earlier part of the conversation the Saint stated that he had been particularly vain on account of his beautiful hair.

² Wadding states that he did this by order of Father Mark of Bergomo, guardian of the friary called del Monte near

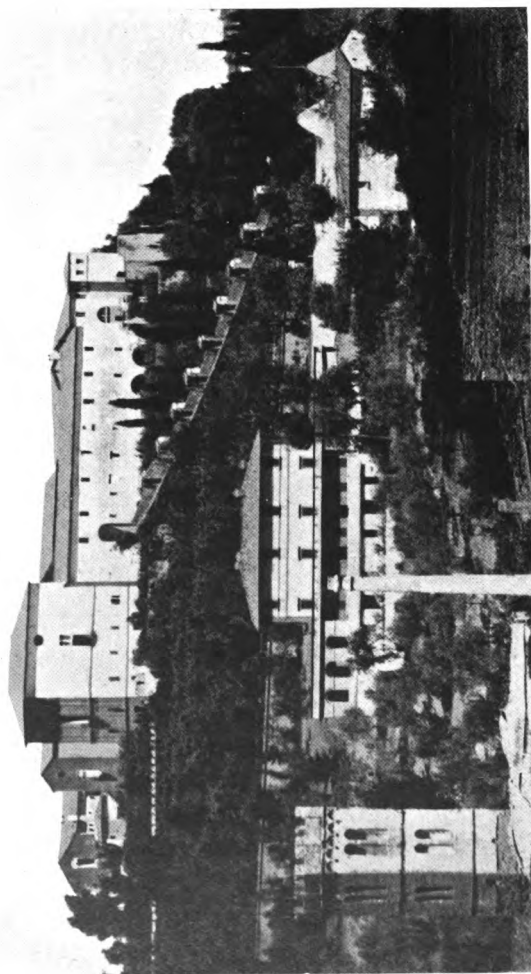


Photo. G. Tilti, Perugia.

FRIARY OF MONTE RIPIDO, PERUGIA.

of Perugia, the children came in crowds and threw mud at me. In this condition of reproach I went to the Friars and put on their habit. Blessed be that day! I believe I was thirty years old at the time, and now I have been a Minor thirty-one years. May God deign always to make us do His will." ¹

CHAPTER II.

RELIGIOUS LIFE.

ON the feast of St. Francis, 4 October, 1416, John Capistran received the Franciscan habit from Father Mark of Bergamo. Wadding, writing of this holy religious, calls him "a man famous while in the world for his wide erudition, who was received at the Friary of the Mount at Perugia, and who, by his example, attracted many students of that city to embrace the same life. He lived many years in this place, and at length died with the fame of miracles." ²

The novice-master, Onuphrius of Seggiano, a lay brother, is described by the same writer as a pious, austere, but very prudent man. Examples of his austere manner of acting will soon be given; and his prudence was justified by the fact that in Capistran he had a novice whose conversion seemed to need to be rigorously tested, while these very trials afforded to an ardent soul occasions of merit

Perugia, who wished thus to try the reality of his conversion. (An. IX, 359.)

¹ Boll. X Oct. p. 277 *seq.*

² An. IX, 60.

and of acquiring consummate virtue. He really loved and admired the young religious, and in turn earned his lasting affection and reverence. The Saint was sometimes heard to say: "I give thanks to God that He deigned to provide such a master for me, for had he not been so severe with me I should never have been able to acquire the virtues of humility and patience."¹ In 1451, when Capistran was on his way to Austria, he called at Cortona to visit Brother Onuphrius. He found the holy old man lying very ill, stayed with him as long as he could, and, on leaving, took away his tunic, which he afterwards wore.

The place in which Capistran spent his noviciate is sufficiently noteworthy to deserve some reference here. The Friary of St. Francis of the Mount, now called Monte Ripido, outside the St. Angelo gate of Perugia, stands in a commanding position above the town which is itself situated on a lofty hill. The views to be obtained from it over the whole Umbrian valley are hardly surpassed by any in Italy, not even by the grand prospect from Fiesole so well-known to travellers. On its site, at one time, was a mansion belonging to a nobleman of Perugia who made it over to a certain community of Fraticelli to be used as a friary. But, on the discovery being made that these men were heretical in their beliefs and disorderly in their lives, the pious donor, with the assistance of Father

¹ Christopher of Varese, I. Both Mark of Bergamo and Onuphrius of Seggiano are mentioned in the Menology of the Franciscan Order.

Paoluccio of Foligno, dispossessed them and gave the friary to the Franciscans in 1374.¹ This friary has always been known for strictness of observance and has been the home of many Saints.

In this holy house Capistran's virtue was tried and consolidated. Christopher of Varese says that Onuphrius studied by every means in his power to make him humble and patient, and train him in the virtues of the religious life. "Every day he chided him and imposed new penances on him, sometimes disciplines, sometimes fasts, sometimes only bread and water for meals; or, again, he would order him to take his food kneeling on the ground in the presence of his brethren who sat at table."²

People would come from time to time to visit the saintly novice and to ask his advice on questions of importance, for his learning and ability were well remembered by the citizens of Perugia. After such an interview Onuphrius would say: "Proud man! You still think you are something. Why did you not remain in the world if you wished to follow after vanities of this sort?"³

Once, when Capistran was suffering from a severe fever, the novice-master prepared a medicinal draught for him and told him to drink it at once. It was actually boiling; but, confiding in the virtue of obedience, he drained the vessel without a moment's hesitation. Wonderful to relate the draught

¹ See Wadding, VIII. 300. Paoluccio of Foligno is also called Paul of Trinci and was one of the first to embrace the Observantine Reform.

² C. I. *ap.* Boll.

³ *Ibid.*

did him no harm, and the fever at once left him. When asked whether he had not been afraid to drink it, he said: "I thought it would have scalded my mouth and throat very badly; but I took it, trusting in holy obedience, though it was much against my natural inclination."¹

On another occasion the novices were standing round a cauldron preparing to wash their tunics, but they dared not begin, for the water was still boiling. Brother Onuphrius arrived, and, without finding any fault with the rest, began to scold Capistran, calling him lazy, sleepy, and negligent. Then he took one of the tunics from the scalding water and threw it full in his face. The novice humbly knelt down before his master, not knowing but that even his eyesight might have been destroyed. But again no injury resulted.²

His constancy, like that of many other Saints, was tried by demons as well as by men. Among the duties imposed on him during his noviciate was that of assistant sacristian, and it was his custom to remain for some time in the sacristy at night, reciting the penitential psalms and scourging his body with the discipline. One night the devil appeared to him, and tried with hideous noises to drive him away in terror; but the holy novice remained unmoved. "Do to me," he said, "whatever God permits. You can have no power over me except in so far as it is pleasing to the Divine will."³

¹ C. I. *ap.* Boll.

² *Ibid.*

³ Nicholas of Fara. C. I. *ap.* Boll.

These incidents of Capistran's life in the noviciate are all related by men who were afterwards his intimate companions on his missionary journeys. They were men of prudence and sound judgment, and, in all probability, they received their knowledge from the lips of the Saint himself. In any case they are no more marvellous than the multitude of miracles they afterwards relate as eye-witnesses. For St. John Capistran was a saint of miracles. His vocation was to a great and apostolic work. He was to preach the Gospel to the heretics of his time in divers countries, to men of wild fanaticism, lawless and depraved, with hearts far more hardened to the truth than were ever the pagans of Greece and Rome or the idolaters of Egypt and India. To him therefore, as to the first Apostles, wondrous powers were given: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils: freely have you received; freely give".¹ It was fitting also that, even at this early stage of his career, events of an uncommon and striking character should give token of the mighty works soon to be wrought by him through the power of God.

Within the octave of the feast of St. Francis, in 1417, Capistran was admitted to his solemn profession. We are told by Christopher of Varese² that he begged this favour on his knees before the community, acknowledging his unworthiness with many tears. But the brethren knew his worth, and

¹ Mat. x. 8.

² C. II.

gladly enrolled in their company a religious of such brilliant promise.

According to custom, he then commenced the study of theology. St. Bernardine of Siena was his first teacher, and among his fellow-students was St. James della Marca, who had been professed a few months previously. Thus three of the greatest Saints of that epoch were brought together for the first time, one already a seasoned warrior in the good fight, the other two destined to aid him and to carry on the conflict with some of the direst agencies of evil ever arrayed against God's holy Church. Thus, too, a lasting friendship was begun between these great and noble souls, instances of which we shall see in the course of this history.

Under the tutorship of St. Bernardine, Capistran made remarkable progress. Indeed, his master is reported to have said of him : " John learns while sleeping what others could only do by working day and night."

We have already seen that in his youthful days he had shown evidence of extraordinary mental powers ; but his proficiency in sacred studies would seem to have been due to a miraculous intervention, according to Christopher of Varese. This writer relates that one night our Lady appeared to him in his sleep and gave him to drink from a silver vessel, symbolical of infused knowledge and eloquence.¹

Having to deal with a man of such uncommon

¹C. VI.

gifts and attainments, his superiors felt themselves justified in sanctioning a departure from the ordinary routine of studies in his case. Within a year he was ordained deacon and sent to accompany St. Bernardine on certain missionary journeys. Barberini in his life says that in one year Capistran had learned enough to be reputed a master. In 1420 he was raised to the priesthood.

We are not told any details as to his journeys with St. Bernardine, though it would appear from the account of Nicholas of Fara¹ that he took some part in the preaching. This writer informs us that he still continued his austere manner of living, using the discipline frequently, going barefoot for the first seven years of his religious life, and afterwards only wearing sandals. He travelled on foot in all his long journeys, excepting that he rode a horse for four months when he accompanied the Minister General on the business of the reform of the Order;² but no good resulted from this expedition, whereupon he definitely abandoned the practice. He was always meanly clothed; for a long time he wore a hair shirt and a girdle made of pieces of wood. Three lents a year he fasted, and until death would never admit any relaxation of this rule. But, while so severe with himself, he was kind and indulgent towards others. He slept three or four hours at most, oftener only two. Every day, in addition to the ordinary office of clerics, he recited the office of our Lady, that of

¹ C. II.

² *Infra*, p. 34.

the dead and the penitential psalms. All through life he contrived to find time for study and for writing numerous books and treatises. He never travelled without his books, however long and difficult the journey might be. At the most critical time in the siege of Belgrade he had them removed to the citadel for greater safety, and on his deathbed in Hungary made arrangements for their due transmission to the friary of Capistrano.¹

Although in later years he was employed in many important works for the Holy See, was the friend and counsellor of kings, the venerated apostle of divers countries and the defender of Christendom, he was always and before all things a Franciscan. The faithful observance of the rule in all its details, amidst so many distracting cares, made him the great Saint he was; and in return he loved the Order and laboured all through life most zealously for its welfare.

CHAPTER. III.

PREACHING IN ITALY.

WHATEVER preaching Capistran may have undertaken during the period from 1418 to 1425 has remained almost unrecorded by the historians; but a document addressed to him on 12 July in the latter year by Cardinal Jordan Orsini, Bishop of Albano, throws some light on this subject. Therein the Cardinal, after referring to the devoted

¹ *Infra*, p. III.

labours of the Saint which had brought penitents flocking to him from all parts, granted, in the name and by express command of Pope Martin V, to him and to one other priest of the Order whom he might select as companion, faculties to hear the confessions of all who might present themselves, and to absolve from sins, even in cases reserved to the Bishops.¹ From this it is evident that his missionary journeys as the companion of St. Bernardine in 1418 must have been followed by other preaching, and that he had already acquired some measure of fame.²

Still this papal recognition seems to mark the inauguration of his wonderful apostolate of preaching in the various provinces of Italy; and it may be well here to set forth briefly the state of society in his day, so as to appreciate the chief difficulties with which he had to grapple.

The Great Schism of the West, healed only a few years before, had, for the space of nigh forty years, left men in doubt as to who was the lawful Pontiff. This sense of insecurity, on the one hand, as to who was the one sure guide in faith and morals, and, on the other, the warring and intriguing of factions, supporting one or other claimant—often for merely selfish ends, and with unscrupulous methods—could not but lessen in men's minds the prestige of the Papacy. The weak were scandalized; the evil-minded were encouraged to

¹ The full text is preserved in Wadding, An. X, 91.

² He appears to have preached at Siena about 1420 (Boll. X Oct. p. 284).

lawlessness. A very flood of error and depravity, long held back by the unquestioned authority of the Holy See, burst over Western Christendom, on that authority being weakened through doubt as to its rightful holder.

The cause of these evils had by this time been removed, but the sad results long remained. Bishops indeed swore fidelity to the Sovereign Pontiff, but often they despised his laws and the canons of the Church, for which his authority was the sanction. Pluralities of benefices were unblushingly accepted and unscrupulously solicited. Diocesan chapters, as conferring dignity and power, became in time closed to all but men of wealth or noble birth. Imitating the residence of the Popes at Avignon, many of the Bishops left their dioceses as occasion or caprice served.

Among the priests and members of religious orders laxity of life, avarice, and simony were far too prevalent. Theologians there were in plenty who taught that the Pope was only first in honour among Bishops: that a General Council could overrule his decisions, so that it was quite lawful to appeal from him to a future Council. Had not the same been said at Constance as it was said later at Basle? Excommunication—the Church's most powerful weapon—had become blunted through too frequent use by rival claimants during the Schism. It had lost its terrors for many.

The laity learned these lessons but too thoroughly. The inspiring faith of the middle ages, the former chivalrous loyalty to the Church of Christ, yielded

to a querulous discontent, a degradation of moral principle, often to a frankly materialistic spirit.

The world was ripe for revolt; and we are not surprised to find each country interpreting the prevailing feeling in its own way. While Wickliffe with his itinerant preachers, calling themselves "Poor Priests," fomented civil and religious discord in England, John Hus and his followers promoted a similar movement in Bohemia.

But in Italy, perhaps, these principles attained their most advanced development. There Guelphs and Ghibellines—the former, nominally supporters of the Church, the latter, of the Emperor—provoked daily strife in cities and in families. Brothers shed brothers' blood in the open street; men thought it a duty to enlist in one or other faction and to work all the ill fierce hate could suggest upon their foes.

Meanwhile the Fraticelli supplied the religious corollary to this deplorable state of civil affairs. Originally disaffected and recalcitrant members of the Franciscan Order, they had for a long time been totally dissociated therefrom, and now included secular persons, men and women, in their ranks. They held that the Papacy had lost its claim to authority since John XXII had condemned them. Hence they had a pope and bishops of their own, and taught that priests and bishops lost the validity of their orders if they committed sin. They pretended to great austerity of life, but, like many other heretics of their time, they practised abominable and shameful vices. They recognized no laws

but their own—rights of property—marriage—such institutions had no binding force for them. They were a real menace to the security of the state as well as of the Church, gathering in adherents from every part of Italy, also from Greece and other places. Suppressed in one or another locality, they were always re-appearing more numerous elsewhere.

For the rest, the people who were not heretics or partisans in political feuds were for the greater part sensual, superstitious, dishonest, with little regard for Mass or sacraments, and no aim in life but self-gratification.

Into this arena of every iniquity came Capistran to do battle against vice and error, the very enormity of the evil making his success all the more admirable.

He was not alone, neither was he the first to win striking victories over the heresy and depravity of the age. St. Vincent Ferrer had already wrought wonders in Spain, France, and Italy, as Berthold had before in Germany and Tauler in the Netherlands ; while St. Bernardine, to name but one more, was already at the zenith of his fame as a preacher and reformer.

Still the harvest was great and the labourers few. There was work to be done worthy of all Capistran's energy, powers, and sanctity.

We shall not here attempt any chronological record, even in outline, of the Saint's missionary preaching in Italy. Only a few of the dates have been preserved. Moreover, seeing that this was his constant and life-long occupation, it would ap-

pear better to state in general terms the manner and results of his preaching, relying on the testimony of contemporary historians.

On 27 May, 1426, Pope Martin V sent a long letter to the Saint in which he praised the great work he had already done and appointed him inquisitor throughout Italy against the Fraticelli, giving him ample powers and authorizing him to extend the same powers to others whom he might select as helpers, also to withdraw these powers if he saw fit and confer them on substitutes.¹

But these special commissions from the Holy See, whereby he was made an apostolic preacher, confessor, and inquisitor, would of themselves have done little to attract men to him had not virtue gone out from him and power from on high accompanied his words and works. So it has ever been with apostolic men, these gifts and powers being only the outcome of much prayer and the mortification of human passions by penance.

Christopher of Varese says : ² "After he entered the religious state until his death he never ate but once a day, and that in such small quantity as would scarce suffice for a child of six years old. He never used meat except in urgent necessity and under obedience. At times the brethren, fearing he would die from weakness on account of his excessive labours, begged the Sovereign Pontiff to command him to eat meat ; and then he would take it in such small quantity and with such reluctance that it seemed

¹ *Ap. Wad.* X, 101.

² *C.* II.

rather a penance than nourishment. Therefore he made use of fasting on bread and water, frequent disciplines and other chastisements of the flesh, by which means he brought the interior enemy under the yoke of reason, and reduced his body to the servitude of the spirit. Fortified, then, by this endurance of abstinence and armed with these virtues, he proclaimed the word of God with all confidence, the Lord working with him and confirming his words with signs that followed."

Christopher then tells us how eagerly he was sought for to preach in various places, how those cities thought themselves blessed that were able to welcome him, how they strove to obtain this favour by recourse to the Pope or the Cardinal Protector of the Order, and of the many thousands who assembled to hear him when he preached. But of these things another author gives a fuller and more striking account.

Nicholas of Fara,¹ after mentioning several great preachers who evangelized Italy at this time, says: "But of all these no one was more esteemed by his brethren than John Capistran; no one more in favour at the Roman court; no one more learned in civil and canon law; no one more zealous for the conversion of heretics, schismatics, and Jews; no one more solicitous for the advancement of religion; no one more powerful in working miracles; no one more skilled in defending the faith; no one more desirous of martyrdom; no one more illustrious by the fame of sanctity.

¹ C. IV.

“So it came to pass that, against his will, he received the greatest and most striking marks of honour in many of the provinces of Italy; and so great was the concourse of people at his sermons that the times of the Apostles seemed to have come again. Cities and towns were put into commotion on his arrival; the people came together in crowds to hear him preach. Hither and thither he was summoned by letters or by messengers sent by the citizens; often he was commanded by the Holy See to preach at the request of noble and powerful men. For the word of the Lord was living and mighty in him; and, not in words of human wisdom, but in the power of the Holy Ghost, he proclaimed the kingdom of God to all, the Lord working with him and confirming his words with signs that followed.

“While he was everywhere renowned for his sanctity, and was exceedingly beloved by all the Italian people, yet by the inhabitants of Aquila, Siena, Arezzo, Florence, Venice, Padua, Treviso, Vicenza, Verona, Milan, Brescia, Mantua, and Udine, was he welcomed more than by the rest, and with an enthusiasm greater than can be imagined. These people and those that dwell in the kingdom of Sicily received him with such honour and were so eager to listen to him, that those who came to hear the word of God often filled the largest squares and broadest fields. Often there were twenty thousand, thirty thousand, sometimes over a hundred thousand persons present at his sermons.”

The same writer proceeds to tell how it was often impossible for him to go from one place to another on account of the throngs of people. At Brescia, during the last year he spent in Italy, he preached outside the gate of St. Appolonia to a hundred and twenty-six thousand people. Nicholas was present at this sermon and affirms that the number stated is not an exaggeration. They were not from that town alone : many had come in from Cremona, Bergamo, and Milan. All could not hear his voice, but it was enough for them to have seen or touched the man of God. Branches of trees broke under the weight of spectators but no one was hurt. Many miracles were wrought ; several at Vicenza and Verona being investigated and attested by the public notary. At Florence he could not walk in the town except with an armed guard, such was the concourse of people striving to be near him. Amidst all these honours, his greatest solicitude was to devise some means to avoid them, escaping by some artifice or departing at night. When these schemes failed, he would say with the Prophet : " Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy Name be glory ".

These contemporary accounts afford a striking view of Capistran's success as an apostolic preacher ; and, though they refer only to Italy where the writers dwelt, it will be seen in the following chapter that within this period he visited several other countries, where we may justly assume that he preached with similar effect.

CHAPTER IV.

LABOURS FOR THE CHURCH AND THE ORDER.

WE have now to relate some of the leading events of the Saint's laborious ministry, from the year 1426, when we find him already a famous preacher and a trusted servant of the Holy See, until his final departure from Italy in 1451.

During those twenty-five years he preached in every part of Italy, bringing about a great reformation of morals in that country, also, from time to time, in Germany, France, and Spain,¹ and, perhaps, England and Ireland as well.² He converted many thousands of heretics, schismatics, and Jews.³ In addition he worked incessantly for the good of the Franciscan Order and, especially, for the Observantine Reform.

Some account has been given already of his preaching, likewise of the heresies—notably that of the Fraticelli—with which he had to contend; but, before coming to the details of his labours, it is necessary that a brief survey should be made of the Order and its difficulties at that epoch, and a retrospective glance taken over its earlier history.

The first few years following 1209, when St. Francis obtained from Innocent III the approval of his first rule, may be regarded as the Order's childhood. The founder's high ideals and literal

¹ See his letter to the Hussites, *ap.* Boll. X Oct. p. 336.

² See *infra*, p. 39.

³ Christopher of Varese III.

observance of the Gospel counsels were, in the impulse of first fervour, accepted with eagerness by his disciples. Such zeal for higher things—especially for the most absolute and destitute poverty—was manifested that a rigid code of detailed rules was needless. The rule itself, as ultimately confirmed by Honorius III in 1216, left ample scope for varied interpretation, if that were sought, and very soon the need for more definite organization became apparent. The very increase in numbers called for this ; for, at best, personal influence can only affect those with whom it comes into close contact. Again, fervour, in the present state of human nature, is the exception, not the rule. The sublime ideals St. Francis carried out, and inculcated on his first disciples, were not feasible for a multitude.

Even during the holy founder's lifetime, this tendency was expressed by Brother Elias of Cortona, a shrewd and strong-minded man, but without enthusiasm. He strove to organize the Order on what appeared to him to be a practical basis, and to forestall those relaxations concerning poverty and the conveniences of daily life which he felt were bound to come in course of time. He and his followers were known as *Relaxati*, while those who adhered to the rigorous primitive observance were called *Spirituales*.

There were long disputes and much bitter feeling between the two parties, but a basis of agreement was gradually laid by three papal bulls (1230, 1245, and 1247) which aimed at reconciliation by

at once safeguarding the duties of poverty and securing that those duties could be practically carried out. The strong personality of St. Bonaventure (General, 1257-1274) brought about peace and unity such as the Order had not known since its earliest days.

Still, as time went on, there was a growing feeling of uneasiness among many of the friars, for it seemed to them that far too much had been conceded, in fact, that the successors of the old *Relaxati* had carried the day. About the year 1334, John of Vallées, a saintly religious of Foligno inaugurated that revival of the primitive ideal which is known as the Observantine Reform. Many holy and learned men gathered round him in sympathy with his aims. At his death, in 1351, Gentile of Spoleto, Paul of Trinci, and Angelo of Monte Leone carried on his work. They were joined by John of Stronconio in 1368, and, two years later, Gregory XI approved their efforts by a bull issued from Avignon.

Before long, however, this movement, so modestly taken up, received world-wide impetus and celebrity from a great Franciscan who was to the new reform what St. Bernard had been in his day to the Cistercian Order, at once its leading spirit, its chief support, and its propagator in every land. In 1421 St. Bernardine succeeded John of Stronconio in the government of the Observantines. Leo X in his bull "*Ite et vos*" (1517) thus refers to their work: "These religious, with the Blessed Bernardine—the standard-bearer of the Name of

Jesus—as their leader and head, and supported by the patronage of the holy Council of Constance, revived throughout the whole world the order which was languishing and almost dead”. In this work, as in the rest of his undertakings, St. Bernardine received valuable and unfailing support from his friend and disciple St. John Capistran, who in fact rivalled him in devotion to the cause.

One of the first notable events of Capistran's missionary life—though unconnected with the reform—identified him closely with his former master.

St. Bernardine had incurred the enmity of the followers of Manfred of Vercelli—a good man, but credulous—who taught that the end of the world was at hand. Bernardine had thought it necessary to preach and write against him, for, with his misplaced zeal he was leading many people astray, causing them to leave their homes and follow him about the country. The Pope, Martin V, had ordered these persons to disband and return to their own dwellings, but they persisted in their folly.

When Bernardine arrived at Vercelli in 1427, to preach the lenten sermons, he recommended, according to his custom, devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, exhibiting for their veneration a tablet with the sacred monogram, and encouraging the people to put it on their houses. This gave Manfred's disciples an opportunity for revenge. They sent representatives to the Pope, charging the Saint with teaching heresy and idolatry; and so plausibly did they present the accusation that

the Pope was deceived. There were many preachers of strange doctrine abroad at the time, and he was led to believe that Bernardine was one of them. The Saint was forthwith summoned to Rome, and, on his arrival, was coldly received by the Pope, ordered to desist from preaching and to remain in the city until the case had been tried.

Capistran was at Naples, whither he had gone, at the invitation of Joan II, to preach and to suppress the extortionate practices of the Jews. When news arrived of his master's trouble, he interrupted his preaching and started at once for Rome to defend Bernardine and the veneration of the Holy Name. He, too, in his sermons, had strongly advocated this devotion. He had the sacred monogram, surrounded with rays, painted after the pattern of the one used by Bernardine. At the entrance to the city, where he arrived on the day appointed for the trial, he raised it on a staff and carried it like a banner. Many persons followed him, for the devotion was not unknown to them, and, forming a procession, walked through the streets singing hymns in honour of the Holy Name.

When the Pope heard of this spontaneous outburst of piety on the part of the people, his prejudice was so far shaken that he put off the hearing to a later date and authorized Capistran to appear in his friend's defence.

The investigation took place in the basilica of St. Peter. There were no fewer than seventy-two accusers, many of them learned men. Bernardine

spoke in his own defence and Capistran followed with a speech so eloquent and closely reasoned that his master was completely exonerated. Next day the Pope received St. Bernardine in audience and blessed him ; and, in renewing his licence to preach, gave him the fullest encouragement to propagate the devotion. Moreover, to make his vindication as conspicuous as possible after the disgrace he had suffered, His Holiness ordered a public procession through the city, in which Capistran carried the standard of the Holy Name, followed by the secular and regular clergy and a vast number of the citizens of Rome.¹ The same Pontiff afterwards approved the foundation of a confraternity in honour of the Holy Name, and gave a church to be its centre. This was called the Gesù, and became in time the principal Church of the Society of Jesus. St. Bernardine of Siena, St. John Capistran, and St. James della Marca were the three great promoters of this devotion, which has ever since been practised in the Franciscan Order and in the Church at large.

In the year 1429, Capistran was able to render a signal service to his brethren of the Observance. They were accused before the Pope of introducing innovations dangerous to the Church. A hundred and fifty of them were summoned to Rome. They were in great anxiety and distress of mind, for their ordinary leaders were not with them, and they did not know what were the charges preferred against

¹ The feast of the Holy Name, now observed throughout the Church, was instituted in memory of this event.

them. While they were still in suspense and waiting to be brought to trial, Capistran rose and addressed the others. "Fathers and Brothers," he said, "You all know that we have been called hither by command of the Sovereign Pontiff. For what cause we have been summoned we know not. But, seeing that so many have been brought together, it seems to be no small matter, but something serious and dangerous, threatening our safety. My advice, then, is that we select some one among ourselves to answer, if necessary, for us all." They were all pleased with this proposal, and appointed Capistran to be their spokesman.

A few days later, they were brought into the presence of three Cardinals who had been appointed by the Pope to try the case. For three hours they listened to accusations of numberless and enormous crimes, and, especially, that of being, not heretics merely, but the promoters and sowers of all the heresies that had ever been known.

Then Capistran with his remarkable memory, having all the different charges in mind, begged leave to answer for the rest. The judges said: "It is time for dinner. Let us go." But he replied that it was no time to dine when such foul things were said of the innocent family of Christ. Then, being permitted to reply, he repeated all the accusations and arguments in order, exactly as they had been stated. After that he answered them, one by one, with wonderful ease and erudition, supporting his contentions by the Holy Scriptures. The judges were astonished at his

learning and eloquence. They dismissed the charges and imposed silence on the accusers.¹

The General Chapter held at Assisi in 1430² was one of the most important held at that epoch of the history of the Order. Both the Observantines and the Conventuals—as the others were called—were summoned to it by the Pope, for it was his desire to heal the division by a general reform. Cardinal John Cervantes presided, but Capistran was, without doubt, the leading spirit in the assembly. His words, more than all else, brought about unity of opinion and a common desire to eradicate abuses. The Minister General, Father Antony of Massa, on the ground that he had permitted too many relaxations, was deposed; but he was not disgraced, for very soon afterwards he was made a Bishop. William of Casali, a man revered and beloved by all, was elected in his place. Then, after the various questions at issue had been discussed and agreed upon, Capistran was appointed to draft statutes embodying these conclusions. When he read them to the Chapter at the Legate's command, they were received with general acclamation, and all swore to observe them. They are commonly known as the Martinian statutes, because they were confirmed by Pope Martin V.

Before its conclusion, the Chapter appointed Capistran as associate to the General, so that he might advise and assist in carrying out the reform. Unhappily the union did not last long, but the

¹ Nicholas of Fara, II.

² Decrees *ap.* Wadding, X. 147 *seq.*

Martinian statutes were widely observed and formed an important basis for future legislation. Capistran remained Apostolic Commissary for the Observance till 1438.

In the same year he was again appointed by the Pope inquisitor against the Fraticelli in the province of Rome, the Marches of Ancona, and the duchy of Spoleto. The same faculties were renewed, but extended to the whole world, by the subsequent Pontiffs, Eugenius IV, Nicholas V, and Calixtus III. To the end of his life his energies were largely devoted to the uprooting of heresies, and he was very severe in dealing with those who would not abandon their errors. But it must be remembered that the Fraticelli, like most other heretics of their day, were not men merely misguided in their religious beliefs and, otherwise, harming no one, but were a social and moral pest, as well as being a menace to the Church's faith.

Withal, Capistran was no respecter of persons. Riches and high station did not make him stay his hand. A lady of great influence in Rome, a member of the Colonna family, was found to be a supporter of the Fraticelli. Capistran had her imprisoned till she retracted her heresy.¹ Fearless himself, he was feared by the heretics. One day, while on a journey, he was walking a long way in advance of his companions when he was met by an armed band of sectaries who were in search of him to take his life. "Where is Brother John Capistran?"

¹ Christopher of Varese, III.

they asked fiercely. "I am he," the Saint replied with a firm voice. At this intrepid answer they all disappeared, being cowed by his commanding manner.¹

In 1437, he and St. Lawrence Justinian were appointed by Eugenius IV to hold an inquiry at Venice into sundry grave and scandalous accusations that had been made against the Jesuates.² They found that the charges were altogether groundless, and so were able to restore to these religious their good name.

Soon afterwards the Pope appointed Capistran Apostolic Commissary to visit the missions of his Order in the Holy Land and in the East generally, and to reform any abuses he might find there. But he was not able to carry out this commission till the following year. His services were required in connexion with the forthcoming Council of Ferrara; and, in any case, he would have been unable to depart at once, for about this time he was attacked by a severe illness at Verona, where he was preaching at the request of the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia. On account of this indisposition he could not preach, as had been arranged, at the opening of the Council, early in 1439.³ He attended soon afterwards, with St. Bernardine and St. James della Marca, and took part in some of the earlier discussions. Then he departed on his mission to the East.

¹ Christopher of Varese, III.

² A congregation of clerks regular, founded by St. John Colombini in 1367. It ceased to exist in 1668.

³ Letter from the Bishop of Ferrara, *ap. Wadd.* XI. 33.

Arriving at Jerusalem, he found a considerable amount of discord among the friars, especially with regard to their submission to Father Gandulph of Sicily, who had been sent by the Pope to be Custos or chief superior. Capistran decided that he must be obeyed, and sent back to Europe all who refused. He also corrected abuses in other places, especially at Caiffa, where intercourse with wealthy European merchants had led to relaxation of religious discipline.

Another important work which he did while in the East was to confer, on behalf of the Pope, with the heads of the Armenian Church concerning their projected union with Rome. He induced them to send delegates whom he accompanied to Europe in time to take part in the Council which was still sitting, but which had meanwhile removed to Florence.¹ The Armenians, like the Greeks, were re-united with the Catholic Church at this Council, and the document concerning the Church's teaching on the seven sacraments, drawn up for their acceptance and known as the "Instruction to the Armenians," is an authority often appealed to in Catholic theology.

But while the Council of Florence was bringing about such happy results, an unauthorized assembly, calling itself the Council of Basle, was fomenting discord within the Church. Under the patronage of Charles VII of France and the Dukes of Burgundy and Milan, it had unsuccessfully invited

¹ Documents *ap.* Wadd. XI. 71.

the Greek Emperor and Patriarch, who had come to Europe for the purpose of attending the legitimate Council, to enter into communion with it instead. More than this, it had elected an antipope, Amadeus of Savoy, under the title of Felix V.

Pope Eugenius IV wished to reason with the rebellious princes, but none of the Cardinals was willing to undertake so difficult a mission. The Pope, thereupon, sent William of Casali, the Franciscan General, who was well known and respected in France, to treat with the king, and Capistran was appointed to interview the two dukes. Both succeeded in their mission, and reconciled the princes with the Church. Capistran, especially was so highly esteemed that he was received by the people, while travelling, rather as an angel from heaven than as a Legate. The wife of the Duke of Burgundy made a long journey to meet him and obtain his blessing for her infant son.

The partisans of Felix were infuriated with the friars who had deprived them of their most powerful support. Twice they attempted to poison Capistran. But both Legates returned safely to Rome and were honourably received by the Pope, who thanked them and praised their work before an assembly of the Cardinals.¹

Capistran had ceased to be Commissary for the Observantines in 1438, the year in which he was summoned to the Council of Ferrara, and since then had been employed in important delegations

¹ Cf. Wadd. XI. 1 and 97.

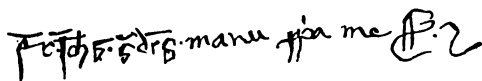
from the Holy See ; but the Order, and, especially, the Observantine family, wished to have the services of so able and holy a man. In addition to this St. Bernardine, who was at the time at the head of the reform party, with the title of Vicar-General,¹ was growing old. Capistran was, therefore, called upon to take up part of the burden of government, being made, in 1441, visitor and custodian of the Observantine houses in the provinces of Genoa, Milan, and Bologna.

Early in the following year, William of Casali, the General of the Order, died, and, about the same time, St. Bernardine retired altogether from office. A year elapsed before a full chapter was held, and meanwhile Albert of Sartiano was appointed Vicar-General of the whole Order. He at once named Capistran commissary, visitor, and reformer for the Observantines in Touraine, France, Burgundy, England, Ireland, and the other ultramontane provinces. This action was confirmed by the Pope in a brief addressed to Capistran, wherein he commanded him to use all endeavours to win over any of the friars who, through fear of princes, or by the misrepresentations of Basle, had been induced to give their adherence to the antipope Felix.²

In this document nothing was said concerning the Sisters of St. Clare, the Second Order of St. Francis, though among them a movement had been for some time in progress, similar to the reform of

¹ This title was maintained by the chief superiors of the Observantines until 1517, when the two families were constituted under distinct Generals. ² *Ap. Wadd. XI. 156 seq.*

the friars, the prime mover of which was St. Colette. The defect was soon made good by the Pope giving to Capistran jurisdiction over the reformed houses of the Second Order. Upon receipt of this he wrote to St. Colette confirming the privileges already granted to her sisters. The original letter, written by a secretary, but signed by the Saint, is extant in the Franciscan friary at Ghent.



Signature of St. John Capistran.
(Letter to St. Colette, A.D. 1442.)

The General Chapter was duly held in 1443, at Padua. The Pope ordained that the Observantines should be governed by two Vicars, chosen from their own brethren, and enjoying the same authority among them as the General had over the whole Order. To these offices he appointed Capistran for the cismontane, and John Maubert for the ultramontane provinces.¹

Capistran did not undertake this new duty without considerable reluctance. He feared that, owing to his many other occupations, he would not be able to satisfy all the claims it would have upon him. Nevertheless, when he did accept it, he set himself to work with characteristic diligence for the welfare of his brethren. He made journeys through all the provinces, correcting faults and encouraging virtue. Best of all, he led others on by his own shining example.

¹ Decrees *ap.* Wadd. XI. 176 *seq.*

In order to consolidate the good he was striving to effect, he retired for a while to Mount Alverna, and, at that sanctuary of the Order, wrote a series of constitutions for the government of the provinces committed to his care. It is noteworthy that, in these constitutions, he earnestly recommended the pursuit of sacred studies, commanding that in every province certain houses should be specially appointed for this purpose. A learned man himself, he knew the value and the necessity of learning for those who were engaged in the divine ministry and in preaching. In speech and in letters, he was unsparing in his condemnation of those who defended ignorance on the ground of its being holy simplicity.¹

On 20 May, 1444, St. Bernardine died at Aquila. Capistran was in Sicily, acting as Apostolic Nuncio, when he heard the news. Departing hastily for Aquila, he determined to take measures at once to promote the canonization of his revered master.

God was pleased to show by a sign His approval of this project. We have the Saint's own testimony of this in his life of St. Bernardine. He says that, on reaching Aquila, after his hurried journey from Sicily, he preached on the glories of our Lady to a great crowd in the square in front of St. Francis' church. In the course of the sermon, the people observed a star of extraordinary brilliance shining above his head, just as it had appeared at the same place, and at about the same hour—between three

¹ *Decrees ap. Waon, XI. 223.*

and six o'clock in the afternoon—over the head of St. Bernardine, when he was preaching on the same subject.¹ Up to that time he had had no trustworthy information concerning the former apparition, neither did he, at first, perceive the star on this occasion; but, noticing a commotion among his audience, he inquired the reason, and then, looking up, saw it clearly. Thereupon he gained fresh courage to persevere in the task he had undertaken. Departing next day for Rome, to lay his petition before the Pope, he again saw the star, accompanying him on his way; and it was likewise seen by the brethren who journeyed with him, some of whom, still living at the time, he names in his narrative.²

Soon a great number of miracles were wrought at the intercession of the departed Saint. Alphonso, King of Aragon and Sicily, and the citizens of Siena and Aquila, petitioned the Holy See for his canonization. Moved by these requests and by Capistran's urgent entreaties, Eugenius IV, in the April following, appointed a commission of three Cardinals to inquire into the miracles.

Meanwhile the duties of his office in the Order were causing him considerable anxiety. The Observantines were rapidly increasing in number, the result, in great measure, of his own exertions; but the compromise made in 1443,³ providing a dual authority of General and Vicars, was found to be unsatisfactory, leading to many misunderstandings

¹ In the year 1433.

² *Ap. Wadd.* XI. 202.

³ See *supra*, p. 40.

and disputes. Upon this, Capistran urged the Pope, in the interest of peace, to withdraw the Observantines from the direct control of the General. Eugenius IV agreed, and commissioned the Saint himself to draw up a bull to this effect, which was promulgated by the Holy See on 11 January, 1446. Moreover, when the General Chapter of the Order was held in the same year at Montpellier, the Pope commanded that there should be no interference with the affairs of the Observantines. That Capistran was not actuated in this matter by motives of personal ambition is proved by the fact that he resigned his office as soon as the new decree had come into effect.¹

During the following two or three years he was engaged upon a series of legations from the Pope to different countries, especially to France, where he had to treat with the king on matters of great importance. But, in 1449, he was again called upon to rule his brethren, this time in the capacity of Vicar-General of all the Observantines.

Amidst all these cares and occupations, he was yet able to pursue his apostolic career, converting heretics, Jews, and bad Catholics by his preaching and miracles—combining this ministry with the visitation of the friaries under his care.* In 1450, he held a public disputation at Rome with Gamaliel, the master of the Jewish Synagogue, with such success that he even converted him and forty of his followers to Christianity.² He continued,

¹ Decrees *ap.* Wadd. XI. 250 *seq.*

² Christopher of Varese, III, cf. Wadd. XII. 64.

likewise, with unabated zeal, the work he had so much at heart of procuring the canonization of St. Bernardine.

The process had been interrupted by the death of Eugenius IV, which occurred on 22 February, 1447; and it may be interesting to notice here that this event, like the appointment of the same Pope sixteen years before, had been foretold by Capistran. The details of these prophecies are given by Christopher of Varese.¹

Whilst Eugenius was Bishop of Siena he was on terms of cordial friendship with the Saint, and often invited him to his palace. Capistran was accustomed, on leaving, to kiss the Bishop's hand; but one day, when he was about to depart from Siena for a time, he knelt and kissed his feet instead. The Bishop, greatly surprised, asked why he did this; and Capistran replied: "I believe I shall not see you again until you are Pope".

The second prophecy relates to Pope Nicholas V, whose name before he was raised to the Papacy was Thomas Parentucelli. Two years previously he had been made Bishop of Bologna. On the day of his episcopal consecration Capistran said to him: "Now you are made Bishop of Bologna. I congratulate you. But you will go farther; you will be a Cardinal, and, afterwards, Pope." When the Bishop smiled and refused to believe him, he said: "You are Thomas, indeed, for Thomas was incredulous". When the event had come to

¹ C. VI,

pass as he had foretold it, Capistran wrote to the new Pope: "Now you know that you were a Thomas when you would not believe".

We learn from the same authority that the Saint knew of the death of Eugenius IV at the very time it occurred, though he was then at Aquila. He tells us that Capistran was reciting the office with another friar named Nicholas. According to custom they said the prayer for the Pope, and Nicholas naturally inserted the name "Eugenius". But the Saint interrupted. "Say Nicholas," he commanded. The other said, smilingly: "I shall never be Pope," and, when the prayer was finished, said, playfully: "If I am ever Pope I shall make you a Cardinal". Then Capistran told him that Eugenius was dead and that his successor would be called Nicholas.

The newly elected Pope, like his predecessor, appointed three Cardinals to inquire into the miracles wrought by St. Bernardine. Not satisfied with this, he named two Bishops to conduct an independent inquiry; and, lastly, another Bishop to investigate apart from the rest. The result of all these commissions was the same, namely, that the miracles alleged were declared authentic. In every case Capistran had a share in the proceedings, and persistently kept the matter before the minds of the Pope and Cardinals.

Still there was strong opposition from many quarters. St. Bernardine had made enemies during life, and these did not spare him now that he was dead. Evil reports of various kinds were

circulated. Capistran used to say, half playfully, but sadly: "Blessed Bernardine, pray for yourself!" He also said to the Pope, at a time when the objections raised seemed to threaten the indefinite postponement of the cause: "Take the body of Blessed Bernardine, and put it and me upon a fire. If we are burned, attribute it to my sins. If we are spared, acknowledge the Will of God."

At that time Blessed Thomas of Florence, a Franciscan lay brother of the Observance, had recently died and had become famous for miracles. Even this was used as an objection against the cause of St. Bernardine, for some said: "All the friars of the Observance want to work miracles". Capistran, therefore, went to his tomb and said: "Blessed Thomas, you were always obedient while living, and never resisted the commands of your superiors. I order you, therefore, in virtue of obedience, to cease working miracles, so as not to impede the canonization of Blessed Bernardine." It was an act of direct and simple faith which God was pleased to reward, for no more miracles occurred there till after Bernardine had been solemnly declared a saint.¹

One day, during the process, the Pope said to Capistran: "Who will work for your canonization, Brother John?" The Saint replied humbly: "I am a sinner, and such things are not for sinners". This opinion, however, was not shared by the

¹ Many years later Thomas of Florence was beatified by Clement XIV.

Bishops who were investigating the case, and who thus came to know him well, for they are reported to have said: "We should like to tell the Pope that he ought to canonize Brother John along with Blessed Bernardine".

At length, after six years of patient labour on the part of Capistran, after the most searching inquiry into the virtues and miracles brought forward by the proponents of the cause, and the hearing of every objection, the canonization took place at St. Peter's on Whit-Sunday, in 1450, the year of Jubilee. In the vast assembly of citizens and pilgrims present on this occasion there were 3800 friars, and among them, St. John Capistran and St. Didacus.¹

The completion of this long task marks the close of the Saint's apostolic work in Italy. Soon he was called to a new sphere of labour, which was, in its turn, to lead him on to the crowning episode of his life.

CHAPTER V.

GERMANY AND POLAND.

CAPISTRAN had become famous throughout Europe. Bishops and Cardinals, even beyond the Alps, had long vied with each other in their endeavours to secure his services as a preacher to evangelize and reform their people. But a new task now awaited him, one for which he was well fitted by previous experience, but of such magnitude as to call for

¹ Cf. Christopher of Varese VI.

the exercise of all his wisdom and sagacity, as well as for eloquence, learning, and zeal.

Frederick III, the reigning Emperor, saw all his dominions and dependencies being overrun by heresies, to the destruction of peace and good order. Hussites, Taborites, Adamites, and a number of other lawless sects, in addition to perverting men's minds from the truths of Catholic doctrine, attacked the very foundations of government and society. Anxious, no doubt, for the security of his throne, quite as much as for the spiritual welfare of his people, he resolved to call Capistran to his aid, feeling sure that he, more than any other man, was competent to cope with an evil so widespread and dangerous.

For this purpose, early in 1451, he sent a special embassy to the Pope, Nicholas V, headed by Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini,¹ asking that Capistran might be sent to adjust the disputes among the princes of the Empire and, especially, to bring back Bohemia and the neighbouring provinces to the unity of the Church. Albert, Duke of Austria, the Emperor's brother, also joined in making the request. To this the Pope willingly assented, appointing Capistran at the same time Pontifical commissary and general inquisitor.²

Accordingly after Easter he left Venice, where he had been preaching during Lent, and proceeded

¹ Formerly secretary to the Emperor, he was at this time Bishop of Siena. Afterwards he was made a Cardinal, and, finally, Pope (1458-1464) under the title of Pius II,

² Documents *ap.*, Wadd. XII. 78.

to Rome to confer with the Pope and receive his blessing. Then he went to Assisi, where he spent some days in prayer and in making more immediate preparations for the journey. He selected twelve companions from among the brethren of his Order—seven priests and five lay brothers. Among the former were Nicholas of Fara and Christopher of Varese. Their narratives, therefore, are, from this time, those of eyewitnesses.

It is interesting here to note the description given by Nicholas of the Saint's personal appearance at this time. He stood erect, but was of somewhat short stature; his hair was grey and curling, the crown of his head bald, his face handsome and of ruddy complexion, his whole aspect calm and venerable. His arms were long, reaching to the knees—a sign of great bodily strength.¹

The whole journey from Italy into the German Empire, as far as Vienna, was signalized by an extraordinary number of miracles. Christopher of Varese²—who merely gives a summary review of them, on the ground that they are more fully recorded at Venice and elsewhere—nevertheless presents a list quite bewildering in number and variety, but systematically noted, day by day, together with the names of the places where they occurred. The following is a very short extract: "On the road to Clemona on 11 May, a woman who had been deaf for twelve years; at the Franciscan friary in Clemona on 12 May, two men deaf and dumb from birth, twenty-

¹ C. I.² C. VIII.

six with gout, one almost totally blind, and one a lunatic and paralyzed in the legs; in the afternoon of the same day, six who were unable to walk without sticks, through gout or other diseases, one deaf and dumb from birth, one who could move neither head nor arms, a woman blind in one eye and one with a contracted hand; on 13 May, at the same place, three lame, seven deaf, one dumb and unable to walk without a stick, and one almost blind for twelve years, were miraculously cured."

When they arrived at Villak in Carinthia, and so entered the Emperor's territory, they found a pestilence raging there which had already carried off a great number of people with swift and sudden death. The victims were seized with a kind of paralysis in the streets, at work, or in their homes, always without warning. So they remained helpless and unable to move, and died within a few hours. Many of these were brought to the Saint. He cured them all, to the astonishment and delight of the beholders and victims; and the beds and chairs on which the latter had been carried still remained at the Franciscan church at the time Nicholas wrote the life of Capistran—deposited there as memorials of their owners' wonderful deliverance.¹

It is not surprising to learn that, with the rumours of these wondrous happenings spreading through the land, the journey of the little company of friars became a triumphal progress. Nicholas of Fara, writing from Vienna to the Provincial of Tuscany²

¹ Nicholas of Fara, C. VIII.

² *Ap. Wadd.* XII. 84.

told him that everywhere the clergy, magistrates, and people came out to meet them, singing hymns and crying joyfully; "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". Everywhere Capistran preached to the multitude, addressing in these sermons not the people of one particular town alone; for they followed him from place to place, and some made journeys of many miles to see and hear him. They would bear hunger and thirst and every hardship. They would sleep on the ground, so as to be near the place where he was to preach, and would deem all this toil well rewarded if they could but touch or kiss his habit.

On 30 May, they arrived at Wienerisch-Neustadt, whither the Emperor and his court had come to welcome the Saint and conduct him to Vienna. It was a striking spectacle—the most powerful sovereign of Christendom thus doing honour to the poor Franciscan Friar—but Frederick III, mighty Emperor though he was, knew well that he was still more highly honoured in receiving God's own ambassador into his realms.

Eight miles from the city they were met by the clergy and magistrates, doctors and bachelors of the university, the guilds, and a host of citizens who escorted them in triumph.

For fifty days the Saint preached in the Capital. Hungarians, Moravians, and Bavarians came to swell the throng of hearers. Many were heretics, but of these the greater number renounced their errors on beholding the wonders of the apostolic age renewed. For miracles were now more numer-

ous than before. Christopher of Varese still kept his daily account as faithfully as when on the journey, but now he had far more to record. The audience at a single sermon often numbered a hundred thousand, and Nicholas of Fara, in the letter already mentioned, stated that he often saw three or four thousand afflicted persons at one time, waiting to be cured.

On Whit-Sunday no miracles were wrought. The people wondered more at this than at the miracles they had already witnessed. His own brethren said that God wished to try his patience. But the Saint rebuked them. "O men of little faith," he said, "why do you doubt? To-morrow you shall see the glory of God." On the following day twenty miracles were witnessed.

On Trinity Sunday, among twenty-three miracles, the following occurred. A girl of seventeen years was lying so near death that her parents were already thinking more of her funeral than of anything that could be done to cure her, when the Saint exclaimed: "In the name of Jesus, arise and walk". The girl arose and walked as easily and naturally as though she had been roused from sleep, not recalled from the very jaws of death.¹

These are facts left on record by witnesses whose accounts were written at the time or very shortly afterwards,² when they could easily have been refuted had they been untrue; but, lest it may be

¹ Christopher of Varese VIII.

² Nicholas of Fara's letter was written twenty-eight days after their arrival at Vienna.

thought that the enthusiasm of the writers outran their discretion, it may be well to quote the words of Æneas Sylvius, one of the ablest and most scholarly men of the time.

He says in his "History of Frederick III": "At that time John Capistran came into Germany, and, passing through Carinthia and Styria, entered Austria. Priests and people came out to meet him, carrying the sacred relics. They received him as a legate of the Apostolic See, as a preacher of truth, as some great prophet sent by God. They came down from the mountains to greet John, as though Peter or Paul or one of the other Apostles were journeying there. They eagerly kissed the hem of his garment, brought their sick and afflicted to his feet; and it is reported that very many were cured. He remained a few days at Wienerisch-Neustadt, preparing the way of the Lord, and calling on all men to do penance. Meanwhile the fame of his miracles reached Vienna: a holy man had come, an apostle of God who banished diseases, who taught the way of God in truth, who despised money, fled from honours and lived frugally. The people came out to him in throngs. The elders of the city met him and conducted him to Vienna. . . . No square in the city could contain the crowds. . . . They looked on him as an angel of God."

One other miracle, more wonderful than the rest, is related by Christopher of Varese.¹ "At

¹ C. VIII.

Hofflein near Laab, a woman named Clare, wife of Peter, a tailor, was baking bread on a certain Saturday about midday. Meanwhile her daughter, Catherine, unnoticed by anyone, fell into a well in the middle of the village and was drowned; and her body remained there until Monday. When she was taken out her mother and her brother, Lawrence, carried her secretly to Vienna. When they came to where the Father was, they could not get near him on account of the crowd. The afflicted woman, therefore, approached as near as she could and, with the dead body, received his blessing. Then she quietly retired to the chapel of St. Bernardine. There, looking on the face of the child, she saw that she was alive. Still saying nothing, she returned to her home, and then related to everyone what had happened."

But Capistran had not yet reached the scene of the principal work for which he had come from Italy. Bohemia was the chief stronghold of the Hussites, and was the place of origin of wilder and more lawless sects whose extravagant and immoral practices¹ were made possible by the licence the Hussites allowed to all who were not of the Catholic faith. Thence the influence of heresy was constantly infecting the whole of northern Europe. Little permanent good, then, could result from evangelizing outlying districts while the central

¹ Especially the Taborites and Adamites, whose excesses were such as seem almost incredible at this day. It may suffice to mention that the Adamites were so called because they refused to wear clothing.

source of evil remained untouched. Therefore, towards the end of July, he obtained the Emperor's permission to leave the capital and proceed to Bohemia.

Here, however, he was met by new difficulties and obstacles so persistent that they were never really overcome.

George Podiebrad, an ardent supporter of the Hussites, had been named, in 1444, one of the two regents of Bohemia, to govern the country during the minority of Ladislaus V, of Hungary and Bohemia. In this year, 1451, after a long conflict with the Catholic party, he had succeeded in being recognized as sole regent.¹ In this capacity he upheld the claims of the notorious Rokyzana, the pseudo-bishop of Prague. The latter, while repudiating the grosser excesses of the Taborites and others, and professing to be a Catholic, still obstinately adhered to the four "Articles of Prague," namely: (1) That any person was free to preach. (2) That Communion must be given under both kinds. (3) That all the clergy were bound to live in poverty. (4) That all public mortal sins were to be punished by the state. These articles had been embodied in the "Compact" between the Bohemian heretics and the Council of Basle.

Little astuteness was needed on the part of these two men to perceive that if Capistran were to preach in Bohemia, especially, working miracles in proof of his doctrine, the people would follow him as

¹ He became King of Bohemia in 1459.

they had done elsewhere, and their own prestige would suffer accordingly. Podiebrad, therefore, issued orders that he should not be permitted to enter the kingdom, and this prohibition was all the more easily carried into effect on account of the bodyguard which the Emperor had sent for his protection, and which also served to make his presence conspicuous. Some of the principal nobles of the kingdom were, however, among Capistran's most ardent supporters, especially Ulrich Maynard of Rosenberg, the leader of the Catholic party, but their influence was unavailing at this juncture.

Since Bohemia was closed to him, Capistran found scope for his apostolic zeal by preaching in Moravia.¹ Brun, Olmütz, and other towns received him with an enthusiasm rivalling that of Austria. Miracles were as frequent, and thousands of heretics were received back into the Church. The Saint himself testified to this last-mentioned fact in a letter addressed to the University of Vienna.

"Most excellent masters and doctors : When I entered Moravia, I worked with all my might against the lying heresies of the Bohemians, as, indeed, I was in duty bound to do. Undeterred by threats or fear of violence, I spoke in public and to the best of my ability to confute that impious doctrine of theirs that it is necessary for salvation to communicate under both kinds. And so it came to pass that more than 4000 barons, nobles, and priests renounced the Hussite heresy in my hands,

¹ Moravia was at this time a subject state to Bohemia, but it enjoyed a considerable measure of independence.

besides many other persons who live under the rule of the said barons."

Wadding,¹ who has preserved the text of this letter, likewise states that he has had access to the archives of the friary at Capistrano, and has seen the register, kept from day to day by the Saint's secretary, containing the names and qualities of those who submitted, and noting the towns, places, and the witnesses of the abjurations. There are more than 11,000 entries from the end of July, 1451, to the following May.

News of this continued success necessarily penetrated into Bohemia. Capistran himself might be excluded by force; but the fame of such prodigies and the report of such numerous abjurations was bound to be injurious to the Hussite ascendancy. Podiebrad and Rokyzana saw that they must take some action if they were to maintain the popularity of their cause.

Rokyzana wrote a long letter to Capistran, addressing him in very friendly terms, and affecting surprise that he should preach against the compact of Basle. After greetings of the most flattering kind, and the expression of a long-felt desire to see him—a wish frustrated by the perils of travel and his own bodily infirmities—he proceeds: "What, beloved brother in Christ, what is this that I hear? Alas! that you, putting aside the fear of God, cease not to curse God's people, that is, the Bohemian nation, accusing and condemning them of heresy.

¹ XII, 88.

That you extinguish charity among the people and provoke strife, because of the most holy Communion of the Chalice which is given to the people in the Church of God. And yet the most holy Council of Basle—assembled in the Holy Spirit, and representing the universal Church of God—commanded, by the authority of Christ and the Church His spouse, that it should be so given to the people, as appears from the compact between the said Council and the Bohemians. . . .”

Capistran replied that he did condemn the Bohemians for many things, but, especially, because they taught that the Communion of the Chalice was necessary for salvation. He offered to discuss the question in any place his opponent pleased to appoint.

Several letters passed ; and, after various delays, it was agreed to hold the conference at Krummau, within the Bohemian territory, on 28 October. Podiebrad also wrote granting the Saint safe-conduct for the journey. But, although Capistran duly arrived at Krummau and actually stayed there, at least from 18 October to 14 November, as we learn from the journal kept by Christopher of Varese,¹ Rokyzana did not appear and, probably, had never intended to do so. Podiebrad, too, had acted treacherously, having given orders that the people of Krummau were not to receive Capistran in the event of his coming to their town, but were to treat him as an outlaw. It was due, largely,

¹ C. IX.

to the protection of Rosenberg that the Saint escaped molestation, for he preached fearlessly as he was wont to do and worked a number of miracles.

It would be tedious here to pursue the long correspondence that passed between Capistran and the Hussite leaders; to relate how the latter strove to incriminate him in the mind of Cardinal Nicholas Cusa, the Papal Legate; and how, at length, they descended to the grossest personal abuse and vituperation in their letters. All this can be seen in full in "Wadding's Annals".¹

The whole affair closed in a manner unsatisfactory to both parties. Podiebrad and Rokyzana did not succeed in discrediting Capistran, even when they employed men to spread evil reports about him;² and he had but little opportunity to preach in Bohemia. Still the moral effect of the incident was to the advantage of the Catholic cause; and, in the visits which Capistran was able to make at one time or another to the country, he converted no fewer than sixteen thousand Hussites.³

Nicholas V, hearing of the devoted labours of this new apostle of the German people, wrote him a letter of warm commendation in which he granted indulgences to all who should assist at his sermons or sacred functions, and gave him more ample powers of absolution from heresy. This letter was dated 28 October, 1451, the day on which the conference with Rokyzana should have been held.⁴

But, though baffled in one direction, and that

¹ Vol. XII.

² *Ibid.* p. 97.

³ Tagliocozzo.

⁴ Cf. Wadd. XII, 97.

one the most important of all, there was still a wide field left open for Capistran's apostolic labours. The Emperor's wish was that he should evangelize all the German states and provinces. Accordingly on referring to the journal of Christopher of Varese, with its daily account of miracles, we find him visiting successively, Wissenhoffen, Ratisbon, Eger, Hellinetz, Zwittau, Kamnitz, Freiburg, Meissen, Sayda, and Brück. This journey occupied the time from November, 1451, to Pentecost, 1452. Resuming his travels, he preached in many other places and was received everywhere with demonstrations of joy and veneration ; but instead of naming these, it may be well to mention three cities where he tarried longer than was his wont, and left a correspondingly deep and lasting impression upon the mind and conduct of the citizens.

He was at Nuremberg from 20 July to the middle of August, 1452. John Cochläus of this city wrote a description of the Saint and of his manner of life at that time :¹ " Those who saw him at Nuremberg describe him as a man small of body, withered, emaciated, nothing but skin and nerves and bones, but cheerful, strong, and strenuous in labour. . . . He slept in his habit, rose before dawn, recited matins, lauds, prime and terce, and then celebrated Mass. After that he preached, in Latin, a sermon which was afterwards explained to the people by an interpreter. When the sermon was concluded, he returned to the friary of his Order.

¹ *Ap. Wadd.* XII, 87.

Sext and none being finished, he visited the sick and stayed with them a long time. He laid his hands on them and prayed for them all, touching them with the cap of St. Bernardine and with a cloth stained with that Saint's blood. Then he took his meal, and afterwards received people who had come to see him. After vespers, he returned to the sick and remained with them till nightfall, when he recited compline and other prayers and retired to rest. But even then he scarcely slept at all, but occupied himself with the study of the Holy Scriptures. There was wondrous strength in that small body, maintained without doubt by divine grace, and unimpaired by age or fatigue. Such, too, was his manner of speaking, that even those who did not understand his words were moved nevertheless to tears and amendment of life."

At Leipzig, a solemn assembly of the doctors and students of the university was held to celebrate the Saint's arrival, and he was invited to address them. About seventy offered themselves as candidates for the Franciscan Order, and, before he left, this number had grown to a hundred and twenty.¹

He stayed at Breslau, the capital of Silesia, from 13 February to the end of August, 1453. In no other town of Germany did he stay so long. He won the esteem and admiration of the citizens at large who long revered his memory. But here he had to contend with obstinate and protracted op-

¹ Nicholas of Fara VII.

position from Jews and Hussites. Wadding relates an anecdote concerning the latter. Some of the sectaries, desiring to throw ridicule on the Saint's miracles, came to him, pretending to be Catholics, and bringing with them a bier adorned with funeral trappings. This was supposed to contain a dead body, but, in reality, a confederate of theirs, a young man, alive and well, was within. With feigned weeping and lamentation, and before a large crowd of people, they begged the Saint to raise the dead to life. Capistran cried aloud and with a stern aspect. "Let his portion be with the dead for ever!" and at once departed. But the pretended funeral party laughed at him. "See," they said, "What a holy and pious man he is. He runs away because he cannot raise the dead to life. Now you will see," they said to the people, "that we have holier men among ourselves. Go," said they to one. "You give him back life." And he called loudly: "Peter, I say to thee, arise!" But there was no movement nor reply. The man came nearer and whispered: "Get up. What are you doing? It is time to rise from the dead." Still there was no answer. They removed the pall and found the young man quite dead. It was a terrible lesson, but it converted many people, and, among them, the victim's accomplices. These men were truly penitent, and after becoming Catholics, sent two of their number to Rome to testify to the miracle.

But during all the time these labours were in progress within the Empire, urgent entreaties were

being made to the Saint to extend to Poland the blessings of his presence and doctrine.

In 1451, the year in which Capistran came to Germany, Casimir IV, King of Poland, wrote inviting him to preach in his country. In this letter, after lamenting the unhappy condition of Bohemia, and the infection of heresy that emanated therefrom to the injury of other peoples, he goes on to say : " But, Father, when you have completed your work in that country, do not disdain to come and visit our kingdom of Poland. Turn aside from your path, I beseech you, and by the mercy of God I pray, despise not us your devoted son. Consider our kingdom of Poland, always steadfast in its adherence to the Catholic faith. Here, too, is the duchy of Lithuania, whose people our illustrious ancestor, the most Christian king Ladislaus of Poland, won from the worship of idols to the knowledge and worship of the one true God. Both these peoples of our dominions are most desirous of seeing you, and earnestly pray you to come among them. . . ." He then alludes to his territories in Russia, where the people had, unfortunately, entered into communion with the Greek Church ; yet their secession was so recent that there was reasonable hope of converting them. Lastly there were the Ruthinians, simple and uncouth men, who, though in error, could be reclaimed far more easily than the Bohemians. " Undo all these evils," the king implores. " By your works and merits, make the light shine into their darkness. Remember the Apostles, whose footsteps and example you follow, who tra-

versed divers countries sowing the Gospel truths. You who are, in a manner, assured of the reward of your labours, delay not in coming to bring salvation to so many people whose conversion depends upon you. Bear in mind the great host you will lead to heaven if you come, how many you will permit Satan to enslave if you delay. Gird yourself then, mighty champion, to this work, to which the voice of many nations calls you, and we by our prayers invite you. . . . " ¹

In April of the following year, Cardinal Zbigniew Olesniski, Bishop of Cracow, wrote in similar terms, referring at the same time to former letters he had written with the same object, and to a promise received from Capistran that he would comply with his request.

Still Capistran tarried ; for his work in the various provinces of Germany seemed more important, just as the ravages of heresy were more serious, than the projected mission to Poland. However, the Cardinal persevered in his request. He sent another letter on 28 March, 1453, and soon after that commissioned John Dlugosz, his private secretary, to wait on Capistran and to remain with him, so as continually to press him to comply with the petition, and to accompany him whenever he should come.

At length the Saint felt he could no longer resist these urgent entreaties. He was preaching at Breslau and was anxious to consolidate the good

¹ *Ap. Wadd.* XII, 98.

work begun there, but was preparing to depart when a new circumstance arose to hinder him, and prevent his going until late in August. Strangely enough, it was connected with the interests of Poland.

It had been arranged to hold a meeting at Breslau between the representatives of Casimir IV of Poland and Ladislaus V the young King of Hungary, to negotiate the terms of a projected marriage between the former and Elizabeth, the sister of Ladislaus. Breslau had been chosen as the place of conference, and Capistran's intervention and advice had been asked. He accepted the commission readily, in view of the important bearing it would have upon the welfare of the two countries. The matter was settled to the satisfaction of both parties, and with the warm approval of the people of Breslau. Just before the departure of the envoys, Capistran preached a sermon on the words: "This is the day that the Lord hath made. Let us be glad and rejoice therein."

His entry into Cracow on 28 August, 1453, resembled his progress to Vienna two years before. Casimir himself, with Sophia, the Queen Mother, went out a distance of two miles to meet him, accompanied by the Cardinal and all the clergy, the senate and barons, with people of every rank and degree, escorting him to the city with psalms and hymns of joy.

A pulpit was erected outside the church of St. Adalbert. There he preached each day after Mass for two hours. Then for two hours more a Polish

priest explained the sermon to the people in their own tongue. Still they were not wearied of hearing him, but thronged about his pulpit every day until winter set in. Only then, on account of the extreme cold, was a change made, and the sermons preached in the church of our Lady. He remained at Cracow from August, 1453, to 15 May, 1454; and, during that time, cured a vast number of sick, blind, lame, and persons suffering from divers infirmities. Multitudes came to hear him from every part of Poland and from the neighbouring provinces, and more than a hundred entered the Franciscan Order.

Such is the testimony of John Dlugosz,¹ afterwards Bishop of Lemberg, a man of learning and authority and one of the principal historians of Poland. He had the best possible opportunity of being sure of its accuracy, seeing that he accompanied the Saint on his journey from Breslau, and was in attendance on him, by order of the Cardinal, during the whole period of his stay in Poland.

On 9 February, 1454, Elizabeth of Hungary, the royal bride, came to Cracow to be married and crowned on the following day. A difference of opinion arose as to whether the ceremony should be performed by Cardinal Zbigniew, the Bishop of Cracow, or by John Sprowski who was Archbishop of Gnesen. Both agreed to give way in favour of Capistran; but he declined the honour, giving as his reason the fact that he was ignorant of both

¹ *Ap. Boll.* X Oct. 345-6.

Polish and German. A compromise was accordingly arranged. The Cardinal performed the marriage ceremony; then the Archbishop celebrated Mass and crowned the queen; and afterwards Capistran solemnly blessed the royal couple.¹ The second son born of this marriage was St. Casimir.

In May the holy man left the capital, and began to preach in other parts of the kingdom; but an unhappy incident meanwhile threatened to mar the good effects of his apostolic work. Casimir invaded Prussia, and made war on the Teutonic knights. It is not necessary for our purpose to discuss the claims of the contending parties. That which most of all pained Capistran was the lamentable folly of Christian princes warring with each other at a time when all Europe was in peril of being subjected to the yoke of the infidel. Constantinople had fallen less than a year before, and no man could foretell how far-reaching might be the consequences of that calamity.

His duty was plain and he did it fearlessly. "It is not the part," he wrote to the king, "of a faithful servant, nor of a loving friend, to withhold good advice from king or prince. So then will I, your Majesty's most faithful follower, refrain not from giving wholesome and salutary counsel" He then exhorted him to withdraw from a project inspired only by greed of glory—a thing which God disposes as he wills—and to turn his energies to

¹ Cf. *Ap. Boll.* X Oct. 345-6,

the overthrow of the enemies of the Christian faith. This was in April, 1454.¹

Notwithstanding this, there were men, envious, no doubt, of Capistran's prestige with the king, and influential enough to circulate a widespread report that it was he who had urged on the war at this most inopportune moment. So persistent was this rumour that he found it necessary even to write to the Pope to clear himself of the calumny. In this letter he declared that the truth was quite contrary to these statements, for in the presence of the Cardinal of Cracow, two Archbishops, two Bishops, and other counsellors of the king, he had advised the latter to leave the whole question to the judgment of His Holiness, and the king had promised to do so.²

Details were added to this story, so fantastic and improbable that we should scarcely credit their utterance but for a letter that Capistran wrote at this time to the Archbishop of Maintz. He said that the rumour had gone abroad, and had been heeded by several princes, that he had been suspended and imprisoned by the Archbishop for inciting Casimir to this war. He added that he had been easily able to dispose of this slander in his own neighbourhood, but asked the Archbishop also to contradict it whenever it came to his notice.

About this time Cardinal Nicholas Cusa, the Papal Legate, wrote to Capistran. It is evident from the letter that he was fully cognizant of the

¹ Letter *ap.* Wadd. XII, 196.

² *Ibid.* 197.

facts and of the false charges ; yet he begs him to come to Ratisbon and aid in counselling peace, and addresses him in terms of such esteem and confidence as entirely to disprove the accusations made against him.

Cardinal Zbigniew of Cracow likewise wrote him a long and detailed letter upon the progress of the war in Prussia, and upon the need of co-operation against the Turks, such as no man in his position and with his intimate knowledge could write to one who had been a false friend to the king.

But all this was a small and passing episode in the accomplishment of the last great task of Capistran's career, the one that was to wear out his strength in labour and to close his mortal life, but was likewise to win for him a claim upon the undying gratitude of Christian Europe.

CHAPTER VI.

DEFENCE OF CHRISTENDOM.

THE last years of Capistran's life were those which embraced a crisis in the history of Europe more threatening than any that had occurred since the breaking up of the Roman Empire and the consequent adjustment of the nations. Islam had indeed long ruled part of Spain ; but it had been kept within bounds, and, even now, its strength was failing. The same power held sway over most of nearer Asia and Africa ; yet, in the ages of the

Crusades, it had never seriously threatened the security of Europe. But a new and more warlike race had arisen out of the Moslem hordes, and, during a hundred and fifty years, had grown strong, and had passed from conquest to conquest till now it threatened the very existence of Christian Europe.

Towards the end of the thirteenth century a small Turkish tribe was driven by the Mongols from its home in Central Asia, and, passing through Persia and Armenia, settled down on the Byzantine frontier. From Osman, their third prince after the migration, these men received the name of "Osmanli"—corrupted by Europeans into "Ottoman".

Fierce, restless, and uncivilized, they procured the necessities of life by war and pillage; neither did they lose their distinctive character by becoming merged in the Seljukian Turkish Empire. On the contrary, when, in 1300, that power fell to pieces under the onslaughts of the Mongols, and out of its ruins ten separate dynasties arose, this youthful race soon gained an ascendancy over them all, and that to such an extent as at once to absorb them into itself, and impart to them a new vigour out of its own exuberant and indomitable energy.

Thus the Ottoman Empire came into being, and opened a career of conquest so rapid and widespread as to strike terror into the older nations. Nicomedia, Nicæa with many other towns, Bithynia and the Asiatic principality of the Byzantines, soon passed into their hands.

Under the rule of Amurat, or Murad I, the

third Sultan (1360-1389), they crossed the Hellespont, and invaded Europe. Nearly all Roumelia was annexed ; and, though the princes of Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Servia combined to check the growing Moslem power, their resistance was worn down ; little by little they were compelled to give way, till the disastrous defeat of Kossovo (1389) left them discomfited and crushed.

Murad, indeed, was slain, by a wounded Christian it is said, as he rode over the field in the joy of victory. But his death brought no respite to the Christians, for his successor was the terrible Bajezet I, called also Yilderim—or “Lightning”—from the irresistible speed of his conquests. He completed the subjugation of Roumelia, extended his empire in Asia, and returned thence, in 1396, to inflict an overwhelming defeat upon the Christian armies which had assembled in his absence to besiege Nicopolis.

War with Timur, the Tartar conqueror, who gained a great victory in 1402, and internal strife, arrested for a while the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. During the reign of Murad II (1421-1451) the Christians, especially under Hunyady, were successful in several battles, and gradually recovered a considerable part of their lost territory ; but the fruit of this protracted strife was lost again at the battle of Varna (1444)—a defeat more complete and more fatal to the hopes of Christendom than Kossovo or Nicopolis.

Almost all South-Eastern Europe beyond the Balkans was now subject to the Turk, who ruled

at Adrianople. The remaining fragment of the once mighty Byzantine Empire was restricted to the precincts of Constantinople, and the hopes and fears of Christendom were bound up in the fate of that stronghold. For a few years longer it remained a relic of a glorious past. Murad seemed satisfied with his triumph at Varna. He was a man of little ambition; his sultanship, even, was distasteful to him, and twice he abdicated it.

His son, Mohammed II, who succeeded in 1451, was far more energetic and warlike. Gathering together an immense army, he set himself to realize the long-cherished dream of his ancestors—to make Constantinople the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

The siege was heroically sustained by the Greeks under the Emperor, Constantine Palæologos. The city, with its mighty fortifications, seemed impregnable from the landward side. Facing the Golden Horn the defences were weaker, but the Greeks, knowing this, had made the approach impossible for ships by means of a great boom. The Turks, however, constructed a road of planks for a distance of five miles, from the Bosphorus, where their vessels lay, to the upper part of the Golden Horn. Along this they dragged their ships, launched them afresh, and so were able to bombard the city on its weakest side. On 29 May, 1453, the final assault was made. Constantine died, fighting bravely to the last. The Turks entered in triumph. The Byzantine Empire, after

an existence of more than a thousand years, was at an end.

The key of Europe was now in the hands of the Turks; the chief obstacle to their progress had been removed. But the moral effect of this victory both in encouraging them and filling the nations of Europe with consternation at a catastrophe they had persuaded themselves could never be, was a factor still more favourable to the project of an Ottoman Empire over the whole Continent. Mohammed understood this quite well. With as little delay as possible after the great victory, he had his armies again in the field. Servia and Bosnia, which had recovered some measure of liberty, were overrun by the victorious troops, and their hopes of independence were completely crushed. Trebizond was then conquered and annexed, together with several islands of the Greek Archipelago which had belonged to the Venetians and Genoese.

Never since the invasions of Huns and Goths had Christendom been in such peril; and never were Christian princes more supine and inert in time of danger. Only the rulers of the Church seemed to realize the gravity of the crisis. A diet was held at Ratisbon to consider means of resistance, but it was scantily attended, and arrived at no definite conclusions. Another met at Frankfort on 29 September of the same year, and again nothing was agreed upon, except that a further meeting should be convened at Neustadt in the following February—this in spite of the strenuous zeal of

Æneas Sylvius, acting for the Pope, and the eloquent pleading of Capistran, who attended both assemblies.

To a man of Capistran's foresight and energy, such reckless folly was deplorable. Princes and kings were inviting him to preach in their countries—England, Scotland, Burgundy, Savoy, and Hungary, among others—but to these letters his invariable reply was to urge the rulers to prompt action in repelling the Turkish invasion.

In a letter to Henry VI of England,¹ he gives as his reason for declining an invitation, otherwise most acceptable, his own duty of labouring for the overthrow of the Turkish power, and the defence of the faith. Then, after consoling the king, and encouraging him to patience in his bodily afflictions, he commends his proposal to found friaries for the Franciscans of the Observance in England, and proceeds: "O King, give heed, I pray you. This is a time of crisis. The Christian faith is assailed by impious foes, and Christian blood is copiously shed, and will, we fear, be shed yet more and more. If help be not speedily forthcoming, the enemy will vanquish us all. I pray you, therefore, and, by the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech that you will lend your powerful aid. Join with the other princes who have been moved to take action, and of whom many have promised to go in person with their forces."² Your majesty has generals who

¹ *Ap. Wadd. XII, 210.*

² Such promises had been made but were never carried into effect.

are excellently qualified for such an expedition, likewise the bravest and most robust of men. With such a host, and your abundant wealth, your highness could with God's help, and if you were so minded, yourself crush this ferocious Mohammed. Set yourself, then, mighty ruler, with brave heart to this task ; and in this manner show your courage, your religion, your zeal for the faith, your love of God. Thus will all the world behold in you a truly Christian king, sparing not your gold nor life itself in the defence of the Christian faith."

This letter was written from Frankfort, before the close of the diet ; but no help was forthcoming from the English. Like the other nations they had their own interests and quarrels which engaged all their energies.¹ Philip Duke of Burgundy was the only one who gave anything more than a half-hearted support to the Christian cause. He was not present at the diet, but sent envoys and money, enlisted troops, and made active preparations to take part in the expedition. Capistran wrote him two letters, congratulating him on his generosity, and contrasting it with the inactivity of the rest.

From Frankfort, Capistran wrote also to the Pope on 28 October.² He told how he had come to the diet and had found Æneas Sylvius labouring most energetically to awaken in the princes a real and practical interest in the projected war ; how he himself had striven day by day, in public and

¹ England was at war with France, and the civil discord that led to the Wars of the Roses had already commenced.

² *Ap. Wadd.* XII, 203.

in private discourse to second these efforts ; how trivial pretexts had been seized upon as excuses—such as the fact that the Pope had sent as his representative a Bishop¹ who was not a Cardinal—and how, at length they had accepted from him copies of the papal bull of the Crusade. “I do not tell all this, Holy Father,” he proceeds, “to show that I have done anything important, for I am of no account ; but, that your Holiness may know my unswerving fidelity to you, and may be assured that I have set aside all other considerations so as to labour, feeble though I be, for the overthrow of the enemies of Christ and the faith. And, truly, Holy Father, all other things must be ignored, and all our energies directed against this mighty foe that has sworn utterly to efface the Christian name ; for, although many believe that great things have been accomplished in this diet, to me it seems that nothing, or almost nothing, has been done.”

Æneas Sylvius and St. John Capistran strove resolutely to secure that the diet of Neustadt should be more successful than those of Ratisbon and Frankfort. They had, indeed, done all in their power on the previous occasions, and now they thoroughly realized that the princes were indifferent and unreliable. Their sense of the difficulties they had to contend with, and their determination not to lose heart in spite of the apparent hopelessness of their task, are both evident from letters² that

¹ Æneas Sylvius, Bishop of Siena.

² *Ap. Wadd*, XII, 239 *seq.*

passed between them at the beginning of the year 1455, just before the time appointed for the diet. Æneas Sylvius was already at Neustadt, and Capistran was at Vienna, not far away—waiting at the capital so as to be able more easily to communicate with the different rulers.

Sylvius wrote that he did not know when the Emperor would come, though it was he that had convoked the diet. In any case he did not expect him before the middle of Lent. Albert, Marquis of Brandenburg, the most zealous of all, was ill at Breslau. Nothing was known as to the arrival of the governor of Bohemia. Nothing had been heard from Italy. He feared that the matter was being treated with general negligence.

Capistran replied that Ladislaus of Hungary had arrived at Vienna with Podiebrad, governor of Bohemia, and several barons. Others were expected, but it was not known when they would arrive. Podiebrad and his party were, however, willing to give their services only at a price, which was that the Emperor should write to the Pope, urging him to accept the heretical tenets of Rokyzana. This roused the anger of Capistran. "You," he wrote, "with your good sense and fairness, can judge how justly, honourably, nobly, and piously they intend to proceed. What, think you, can Catholic faith have to do with such bargaining? I will not bear such an indignity calmly and in silence."

In the course of a long letter Sylvius said he feared nothing would come of all their efforts at Frankfort. Many princes would, indeed, come

from Germany, Bohemia, and Hungary, some also from Italy and France; but all needed to be roused, urged, and inflamed to take action, for of themselves they gave heed to nothing but their personal gratification. He confided in Capistran to combat and conquer their sloth, their pride, and their avarice; for these, he said, were the three fatal pests that put our religion in peril of the Turk. But if they would be energetic, humble, and generous, they could bring together a host that would be able to vanquish, not only the Turks, but all the infidels.

At length the diet assembled, and it really seemed that some definite steps would be taken. Capistran's words of warning and exhortation had brought the princes to some sense of their duties, and promises of co-operation were being given from all quarters, when news arrived of the death of Nicholas V. This was readily accepted as a reason for dissolving the diet, leaving the whole question as open and undecided as before, and fixing the feast of the Ascension in the following year as the date of the next assembly.

There could no longer be any reasonable hope of an effective confederation of the rulers of Europe. Now that the Turks were already menacing their country, it would be useless for the Hungarians to let more than a year pass by, trusting that then a European diet would accomplish more than the three preceding ones had done. Their leaders, apparently, realized at last that they must rely upon their national resources, if they hoped to save their

native land from conquest by the infidel, and make it the bulwark of Christendom.

In this extremity of their fortunes, they could think of only one man capable of enrolling, out of the undisciplined men of their various tribes, an effective army, numerous and enthusiastic enough to achieve the all but hopeless task that was before them. This was St. John Capistran. Letters were sent to him by King Ladislaus, Hunyady, George, despot of Rhetia ; Denis, the Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom, and several other nobles asking his help.

It was impossible to refuse such an appeal ; but, before complying with their request, he wrote to the Pope describing the deplorable condition of the countries already overrun by the Turks, and pointing out the danger that threatened Europe, and Hungary in particular. He implored him to do all in his power to obtain assistance from the other kingdoms ; and then told him of the request just made to himself, adding that he proposed setting out for Buda in such time as to be there by Pentecost, unless he received, meanwhile, contrary instructions from His Holiness.

Callixtus III was most anxious to do all that was possible for the defence of Christendom. One of his first acts after his election had been to bind himself by oath that he would use all diligence and give every aid—even to the shedding of blood, if that should be necessary—for the recovery of Constantinople, for the liberation of Christian captives, and for the extirpation of the Turks in Eastern

Europe. Within the first few days he had sent Cardinals as Legates to the different courts of Europe to promote the Crusade, and had begun to fit out a fleet at the mouth of the Tiber, so that the war might be conducted by sea as well as by land. He still retained a mistaken confidence in the chivalry of the rulers of Europe. Hence, in his reply, while approving Capistran's resolution, and commanding him to carry it out as energetically as possible, he, nevertheless, expressed a firm hope that aid would be forthcoming from the other Christian princes.

By the time this answer reached him, Capistran was already in Hungary; for further letters had been written and envoys sent, urging him to come without delay.

The fact that this was to be his mission, and that it would cost his life, had been made known to him by supernatural revelation, according to John Tagliocozzo, his secretary, in the previous November, just after the diet of Frankfort. One day, when he was at Nuremberg, he was in great anxiety of mind as to what God willed him to do for the advancement of the Christian faith. No delight would have been greater than to give his life in its defence. During the night he prayed long and earnestly for the divine guidance; and then, as he slept a little after matins, it was made known to him that he was to die, not by shedding his blood, but by labour as painful as blood-shedding. On the morrow, as he celebrated Mass, he heard voices continually repeating: "To

Hungary! to Hungary!" and again, as he preached in the square before the church, he heard the same voices in the air, crying: "To Hungary!"

Before his departure from Austria, he had paid a last visit to his brethren in Vienna, at the friary of SS. Theobald and Bernardine which he had himself founded. After matins he began to discourse to them on the text of St. Paul (Heb. xii. 7.) "Persevere under discipline," exhorting them to the observance of their profession and rule. Morning dawned before he had ceased speaking. Like St. Paul at Miletus, he knew that they would see him no more; and like him, he gave them warning. "I know that after my death some men will come to you, bringing new doctrines, new constitutions, new ceremonies. Do not believe them." And he added: "If an angel from heaven should so come, let him be anathema". Then, kneeling, he kissed the feet of all, and so departed.¹

Tagliocozzo tells of his preaching in Hungary. Wherever he went, although he would often change his plans at the last moment so as to avoid the honours prepared for him, it seemed as though God made known what he strove to conceal; for he was always met by solemn processions in which, besides the ordinary clergy in their sacred vestments, Abbots, Bishops, and Cardinals did not disdain to take part. Often the relics of the Saints and even the Blessed Sacrament were carried in these processions, escorted by throngs of people

¹ Christopher of Varese XII.

carrying candles on branches of trees, while they sang hymns and the bells rang peals of joy. Princes and barons mingled with the common people, assembled to hear his sermons; and these were always preached in the open air, for no building could contain the vast audiences that came together from near and far. As in Germany and Poland, so, here in Hungary, miraculous cures gave testimony to the divine grace working in him, and excited among the people such an enthusiasm of admiration, love, and confidence in the Saint, as to make them ready to follow him wherever he might lead, and do and dare even what seemed impossible at his command.

He vigorously attacked the vices of the people, inflamed them with love of God, and showed them how to practise the virtues of a true Christian life; for he would have their fidelity and courage in the holy war to be based on the most sure of all foundations—the will to fight in the cause of their God, and to die, if need be, gladly, for His sake.

In this manner he traversed all Hungary, drawing men to follow him, not Catholics alone but heretics and schismatics, eleven thousand of whom abandoned their errors and made their submission to the Holy See.¹

This preaching occupied the time until he and Cardinal John Carvajal, the Papal Legate, succeeded in convening an effective council of war at Buda early in 1456.

¹ Tagliocozzo.

The long delay is explained by the fact, almost incredible in such circumstances, that the different governors of the kingdom, through jealousy or inactivity, could not easily be brought to take vigorous and concerted action. Worst of all the young King Ladislaus, always a weak and vacillating ruler, retired altogether from the contest and left the country on the pretext of hunting. The Bohemians, incited by Podiebrad and Rokyzana, aroused discord on religious grounds. Councils had been held at Győr and Buda, but had formed no definite plans. The Bishops only, as a body, had given loyal support to the Legate and Capistran.

But the people were by this time thoroughly roused, and the jealousies and interests of individual rulers could no longer stem the tide of popular enthusiasm. In December, 1455, the Legate recalled Capistran to Buda; there, soon afterwards, the council of the kingdom set themselves to form an army, and appointed John Corvinus Hunyady Commander-in-Chief.

This great Christian hero had spent nearly all his life fighting against the Turks. He had been rewarded by promotion to various posts of honour, being made regent of Hungary during the minority of Ladislaus. At this time he was governor of Transylvania, and was one of the first to welcome Capistran on his arrival into the kingdom. He had assisted at the earlier councils of war and had promised to provide ten thousand cavalry at his own expense. Disgusted at the discord among

the other nobles, and exasperated at their intrigues against himself, he had retired for a while into private life. But his spirit was too noble to remain long inactive at a time when his country was in peril. For the sake of Christendom he became reconciled with his enemies and accepted the honourable post of danger.

In an assembly of the council, held on 14 February, Capistran was presented by the Cardinal Legate with the cross which the Pope had sent, and was commissioned to bestow a similar cross on all who would join the Crusade. Writing to the Pope on 24 March, he said: "Many of the prelates and barons have received the cross, and a multitude of people. Every day we are giving more. I, myself, received, from the hands of the Cardinal Legate, the cross blessed by your Holiness; and now that I have received it, I shall wear it always, even to shedding my blood, if need be, a hundred times a day in its defence."¹

During the next few months, Hunyady and Capistran were busily occupied in enlisting troops. The former, as a famous general and a governor of the state, had better opportunities of procuring trained soldiers. Capistran went into the different provinces enlisting all who offered themselves, young and old, provided they seemed at all able to bear the fatigues of the campaign. To all of them he gave the cross, and promised victory for the Christian arms. Soon he had a following of many

¹ *Ap. Wadd.* XII, 323.

thousands, for the greater part inexperienced and indifferently armed men—clerics, students, artizans, and peasants, many of them members of the Third Order—a poor army as men estimate military strength, and unfit to be led against the mighty forces of the infidel.

This idea would seem to have been in the mind of the Cardinal Legate, for he wrote early in June just at the time when Capistran's organization was almost complete, asking him to go to Vienna and seek help from the Emperor.¹ But Capistran had learned by long and bitter experience that no help was to be expected from without, besides which to go away now would be the undoing of all his labours. He had the fullest confidence that God would conquer the infidel by means of the despised crusaders. Hunyady, too, strongly opposed this step, for he had learned to confide in the wisdom of the man of God as well as to admire his courage. In addition, he had just received a letter from the Pope, full of encouragement, exhorting him to proceed as he had begun in organizing the Crusade, and expressing unqualified approval of his plans. More than this, grave news had arrived concerning the enemy's approach. They had by this time completed the reduction of the provinces that had revolted against their rule, and were making immediate preparations for the invasion of Hungary. Heavy artillery had been cast and was now being transported. The army

¹ *Ap. Wadd.* XII. 331.

had been strongly reinforced and was now advancing in the direction of Belgrade under the command of the emperor, Mohammed II, in person.

The time for immediate action had arrived. Belgrade was to be the battle-ground. There must the foe be met, and, with God's help, conquered, if Europe were to be preserved.

Those who had hitherto regarded Capistran merely as an enthusiast, and even those who admired his sanctity, must have been astonished at the practical ability he showed in conducting this expedition. It is true he had one great advantage in the fact that his troops revered him as a Saint, and were eager to hear and obey his slightest commands; but to organize such a multitude into even the semblance of a disciplined army, to provision them and transport them, some by land, some in ships along the Danube, to Belgrade, called for powers of generalship of no mean order. All this, however, the holy friar accomplished, and entered the city with his forces on 2 July, 1456.

CHAPTER VII.

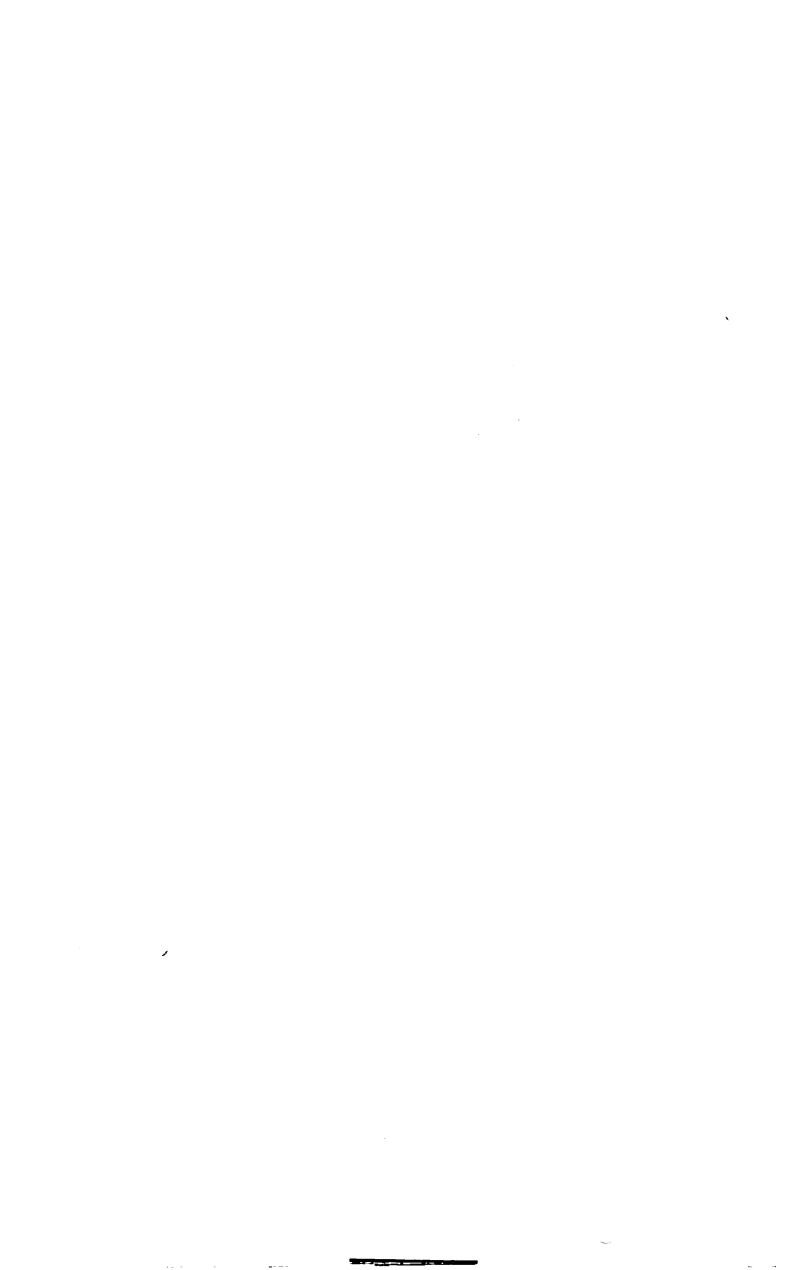
THE VICTORY OF BELGRADE.

THE city of Belgrade, owing to its situation between the Danube and the Save, at the confluence of these two rivers, and, being at that time the southern outpost of Hungary, was a place of great strategic importance and the natural gateway to the kingdom.



ST. JOHN CAPISTRAN.

(From a portrait by A. Rivalz, 1667-1735, painted for the Chapel of the Saint in the Cordelier Church, Toulouse, now in the Museum.)



In addition to these advantages it was very strongly fortified, so that, while it was a formidable menace to an invader, its occupation by an enemy would be a fatal blow to the security of the country. After Constantinople, nothing was more desirable in the estimation of Mohammed than the possession of this stronghold. It would open a way for his forces, not into northern Europe merely, but towards Italy as well.

If this fact was unperceived or ignored by the secular rulers of Europe, the Pope saw and appreciated it fully. He issued a bull on 29 June, addressed to all ecclesiastics throughout the Christian world, in which he commanded them to teach the people to amend their vicious ways, for these had brought the scourge upon them, and to betake themselves to prayer. In particular, he ordered all priests in their Masses to insert a collect for the overthrow of the infidels. Lastly, to the end that all might be kept in mind of this duty of prayer, and of the indulgences granted to those who fulfilled it, he ordained that a bell should be rung daily at every church, half an hour before vespers, three times, that is, after the manner of the "Angelus".¹

It was indeed a time when hope could be placed in the Divine aid alone. The garrison of Belgrade, even with its new reinforcements, was small when compared with the host of its besiegers, and its guns were of inferior calibre to the enormous cannons the Turks had prepared expressly for this

¹ *Ap. Boll.* X Oct. p. 362.

contest. In the event, itself improbable, of their success in repelling all assaults, there still remained every prospect of their being forced to surrender before the slower stress of starvation.

The Crusaders had reached the city only just in time to effect an entrance. Some of the foremost Turkish galleys were already on the Danube near the fortress ; but Capistran was successful in bringing into the city the Crusaders who had travelled by water, as well as those who had marched overland.

On the following day, 3 July, the first part of the Turkish army, which numbered altogether from a hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred thousand men, was seen before the city—all trained men, and well equipped with weapons and appliances needful for a siege. They were drawn up on the further bank of the Save, but immediately commenced operations for crossing the river above the city, and conveying their war material over a bridge of rafts or pontoons.

The Christians had never seen such formidable artillery. The guns seemed innumerable. Among them were found, after the siege, twenty-two of the extraordinary length, for that time, of twenty-seven feet, besides seven huge mortars capable of throwing great round stones high into the air, so as to fall within the fortress. In addition, there could be seen, throughout the vast expanse of the camp, forges and furnaces where artificers worked day and night, and long lines of camels bringing in food, fuel, and implements. Their supplies and

munitions were of enormous quantity, portending that preparations had been made, not for the siege of one fortress only, but for the conquest of all Hungary; and this omen was confirmed by certain Christian fugitives from the camp, who said it was commonly reported there, that the emperor had sworn by his prophet, to be lord of Hungary and to dine at Buda within a month. The emperor's camp was on a hill, surrounded by a mound and ditch, and round about it were the tents and standards of five thousand janissaries.

On the two rivers were sixty-four large galleys, carrying guns, and manned by sailors trained in marine warfare, besides a great number of smaller craft. Within a few days, too, their troops and earthworks extended from river to river above the city, closing it in from the landward side, so that no supplies could now come in by water or by land.

The greater number of the Crusaders had never been in battle before, and had not even been trained to bear arms. There was, besides, the civilian population who had learned from the fate of other nations to regard the Turks as invincible. It is not, then, difficult to imagine the dread with which they looked out upon that mighty host.

Meanwhile Hunyady had not arrived. So far as can be gathered from the different narratives, it would seem that he had sent forward some troops to strengthen the garrison and had appointed Michael Sylagy governor of the fortress. He was smarting under new injuries. According to Taglio-

cozzo, he had incurred the enmity of the king through false accusations, and was angry with the barons, who all stood aloof from the contest. Moreover, he had no great confidence in Capistran's Crusaders being able to withstand the Turks.

But the friar commander, though confident that God would give victory to the Christian arms, was yet unwilling to tempt providence by the neglect of such human means as were available. He admired the heroism of Hunyady, in spite of his waywardness, and knew that his presence would give confidence to the garrison. More troops, too, were urgently needed. Therefore he resolved to leave the city while it was still possible to do so, and to persuade Hunyady to take command in person.

On 4 July, after Mass, he preached a stirring sermon to the Crusaders, exhorting them to fight bravely, and, if need were, die as martyrs for Christ's sake. At the same time, he promised to bring back with him such a number of Crusaders as would astonish the Turks themselves, and foretold their ultimate triumph.

To his own brethren he said : " Hear confessions, soothe quarrels, take care of the sick and wounded, bury the dead, preach fortitude and courage. But those of you who are priests, beware not to attack any of the Turks, nor to provide or fashion stones, arrows, or other arms for the troops. Your weapons against the enemies of the Cross of Christ are prayers, Masses, works of mercy, and the administration of the sacraments. For the lay brothers I

make no rule, and have no commands for them, except that they act as God may inspire them."

Then, with four friars and a few of the Crusaders, he left the city and made his way, not without considerable danger, up the Danube to Peterwardein. Arrived there, he persuaded Hunyady to take command of the fortress and to enlist new troops. Urgent messages were sent to different parts, calling on those who had taken the cross to come without further delay. The Cardinal Legate, at Buda, sent assistance and provisions. Vessels of different kinds, principally small boats, but numbering about two hundred, were soon at his disposal, all laden with weapons, ammunition, and food. Rich and poor men answered the summons to fight under the Christian flag. Within ten days an army was collected, numerous enough to be a great accession of strength to the garrison, provided they could join forces with them.

Tagliocozzo tells what had occurred during the interval at Belgrade. The enemy had soon completed their entrenchments and mounted their artillery in three principal batteries. The leading gunners were renegade Christians—Italians, Germans, Hungarians, Bosnians, and Servians. The historian notes that the guns were so well mounted that a child could turn them. Though the city was strongly fortified with a double wall and two deep moats outside the citadel, the heavy bombardment soon wrought great havoc; before the ten days had expired the outer walls were in ruins, and the citadel itself had suffered considerable

damage. The mortars caused the greatest consternation of all among the people, throwing great stone balls, over the fortifications, into the town itself. One of these fell through the roof of the church where Tagliocozzo was saying Mass. Yet there was very little loss of life from this cause. A greater evil was a pestilence that broke out among the inhabitants. There was also a scarcity of provisions, since every approach to the city was closed.

On 14 July, the Crusaders forming the relief expedition under Capistran and Hunyady, made their way down the Danube in their fleet of boats, the one large ship they had occupying the leading position.

Both Turks and Christians soon learned of their approach, and the latter took steps to give aid in the naval battle which they saw was inevitable. They had forty vessels in their docks, none of large size ; and these they quickly prepared for action.

The great Turkish galleys advanced to intercept the Crusaders, taking up a position a little above the city. There they were tied together side by side so as to form a complete barrier across the river. Before meeting them, Hunyady landed some of his men to engage any of the enemy who might come to the aid of the fleet. Capistran also went ashore with a certain Peter, a nobleman, who carried his standard. Then the Christians, with their one warship, and many boats, advanced to the attack under a heavy fire from the guns ; and meantime the forty small craft from the city closed

in behind the enemy. It was a fight at close quarters. Fearlessly the Crusaders boarded the great galleys from their tiny vessels, and engaged the enemy hand to hand with swords, or fought at close range with pistols. During the five hours the conflict lasted, Capistran on the shore stood praying and calling on the Holy name of Jesus. Those in the city, too, were praying all the while. At last, the line of ships was broken, and the mosquito fleet of the Christians surrounded them and attacked in more deadly fashion than before. The victory was complete. Of the Turkish galleys some were sunk, others were captured, and those that escaped were so damaged as to be unserviceable to either party.

Thus the relieving force entered the city, having freed the passage of the Danube for the conveyance of provisions and of such other troops as might from time to time come in.

The whole defending army now numbered about sixty thousand men,¹ nearly all Hungarians, but a few were Germans, Poles, Slavs, and Bosnians. Among them, says Tagliocozzo, there was no idleness, drunkenness, nor immorality; no evil speaking, gambling, theft, nor quarrelling; but prayers, hearing Mass, and the reception of the sacraments. Each group had its own priest, and all were inspired by the words and example of their saintly leader. They were wonderfully peaceful, patient, and devout; but were, at the same time, ready to face any peril at a word from Capistran.

¹ Nicholas of Fara VIII.

Day by day, during the week that followed the naval victory, the bombardment of the city was maintained. Many times, parties of Christians made sorties from the city, provoked by the near approach of the Turks. Fighting furiously, they slew many of the enemy, but, in general, they were overcome by force of numbers, and with their lives paid the price of their temerity. The object of the Turks, in so frequently approaching close to the walls, was to fill up the outer moat with wood, earth, and rubbish of all kinds, so as to prepare a way for the general assault by which they confidently expected to capture the fortress.

Capistran's own activity during these days was most remarkable. He scarce ate or slept, and, though seventy years old, he had all the endurance of a robust youth. He was to be seen everywhere, consoling the timid, providing for the needs of the sick and wounded, exhorting the soldiers to bravery, inspiring all with his own unbounded trust in God. So unremitting were his exertions that no one could accompany him for long without being overcome by fatigue. Even a powerful horse, that Hunyady gave him to lighten his toil, was worn out, and died within a few days. Yet he appeared to grow stronger as the days passed by. Each morning he celebrated Mass, and addressed to the people words of hope and of encouragement to perseverance in prayer and piety.

John Hunyady and Michael, the governor of the fortress, laboured strenuously to maintain the defence works in repair, and to resist the enemy as

long as possible ; but, on 20 July, it was seen by the Christians that the decisive engagement could not be long delayed. The outer walls had been useless for several days, and now they were levelled to the ground, their ruins helping to fill up the moat beyond, and so making the approach less difficult for the besiegers. It was no longer possible, even by incessant toil, to keep the interior walls in repair as often as they were breached by the fire of the guns. The great tower of the citadel showed a wide fissure from top to bottom and threatened to fall at any moment.

Even Hunyady gave up hope when he saw the fortress practically a ruin, for he had little confidence in the unskilled Crusaders being able to repel so formidable an army in a hand to hand engagement. That same night he said to Capistran : "We are conquered, and are at the mercy of the Turks. I have often beaten them, and that, not by the greater number or superiority of the forces at my command, but by perseverance, and by skill in strategy ; and I understand all their manœuvres. But now all my efforts have come to nought. I have no means of attack or defence. I have done all I could, but my resources are at an end. The defences cannot be made good ; the walls and towers are destroyed ; the way for the Turks lies open. Against such a host we are but few ; and our men are untrained, badly armed, poor, weak, and timid. The barons have not come. What more can we do ?"

It was the despair of a brave man but an honest soldier : ready to fight till death, but unwilling to

encourage hopes which his experience assured him were vain.

Capistran's trust in God was still unshaken, "Fear not," he said, "God is able with a few weak men to overthrow the Turkish power, to defend the city, and put our enemies to shame." But Hunyady was unconvinced. "To-morrow," he said, "the fortress will no longer be ours." The Saint's reply was: "Do not fear. It will be ours indeed! We are fighting in God's cause. We are defending the name of Christ. I am confident God will protect His own."

Then Capistran, seeing that the work of defence must depend more than ever on himself, selected 4000 of the best fighting men, and posted them in position to meet the expected assault. The sick and wounded he sent into the more distant part of the town. The women for greater safety, were located in the citadel, with the exception of some whose brave offer to help the soldiers was accepted, and who, in fact, did help nobly in the fight.

Towards evening on the 21st, the Turks were seen to be in prayer. Soon the loud blare of trumpets and the shouts of the entire host were heard as they made ready for the assault. The Christians, too, lining the ruins of the outer wall, prayed and called aloud upon the name of Jesus. Then the infidels advanced and, with renewed shouts, hurled themselves furiously upon the defenders. Many carried fagots and bundles of straw which they threw into the trench. Then they

swarmed thick as ants up the bank and used their swords. Others from behind fired pistols, flung javelins, or hurled stones from slings ; while arrows sped in such dense flight as seemed to fill the air. Still the Christians on the higher ground held their own. The stones from the ruined walls wrought havoc when hurled upon the assailants below. Great numbers of the Turks were slain, and with their bodies helped to fill the chasm.

More and more numerous the besiegers strove to storm the mound ; but the Christians, gaining confidence, fought more resolutely than ever. Their battle-cry was the holy name of Jesus, taken up from Capistran who stood and prayed like another Moses all through the fight. They were themselves like an impenetrable wall, gaps made by dead or wounded being instantly filled up.

So the struggle went on till about an hour after sunset, when the Turks showed signs of being demoralized by the terrible losses they had sustained ; their attack lost its vehemence ; they wavered ; they retreated from the fatal ditch and mound.

At midnight they returned to the attack, with more ladders and appliances for scaling the defences, and still further enraged at their humiliation and losses. Not hate alone but vengeance now inspired them. Just as the Christians gladly gave their lives in the holy cause, they, too, in their fury had no fear of death.

The conflict lasted longer than before ; and was, if possible, more stubbornly contested. The Christian women helped the Crusaders, handing them

arrows and stones, carrying off and tending the wounded. At last, after heroic resistance, the Christians were forced back by weight of overwhelming numbers. The Turks were masters of the first part of the fortress.

Still there was no disorderly rout. The Crusaders retired, with severe losses, but in solid ranks to reinforce the troops posted on the second wall, which, like the first, was protected by a moat.

Again the horde of Turks came on. Again they tried to fill the trench with brushwood, straw, and such material as was light enough to carry. But it was their persistence in this endeavour that most of all brought about their undoing. There was one bridge across this moat. There the fight was waged most furiously; but the moat itself was densely packed with men struggling to scale the mound and half-ruined walls.

It was just before the dawn when the Christians thought of a new plan. Those in the rear prepared some hundreds of bundles of twigs and thorns with sulphur. They lighted these and passed them to the men in front who cast them all at once on to the enemy. They blazed rapidly and, setting fire to the inflammable material thrown down already by the Turks, made a fierce fire through the whole length of the trench.

It was a fearful spectacle as seen and described by Tagliocozzo. Suffocated by the sulphurous fumes, and consumed by the raging fire, nearly all the Turks who were below the walls perished; and those who had not gone down fled terror-stricken,

crying: "Let us flee. The God of the Christians is fighting for them." The same writer, after witnessing the awful sight, could only compare it with fire from heaven, so great was the destruction it wrought.

It was the morning of St. Mary Magdalene's day. Among the Christians there was great joy and thanksgiving; but from the enemy's camp no sound was heard. There silence, sorrow, and fear held sway. In the full daylight the charred bodies of the Turks were seen, piled up within the trench from end to end. Of the Christians, not more than sixty were killed outright in the final assault, though many more were wounded. These losses seemed remarkably light to those who saw the ground covered with arrows and spears—relics of the fight, which the women and children gathered into sheaves like corn in harvest time.

This was the second battle won by the Christians. The third and crowning victory was gained on that same day, 22 July.

Rejoiced at such unexpected success, but fearing that the Crusaders might rashly expose themselves to danger and so lose all the advantage they had gained, Hunyady had given orders that no one should leave the camp. His plan, doubtless the most prudent one, judged by the methods of ordinary warfare, was to await the next attack, for the enemy still far outnumbered the Christian forces. But the Crusaders were too much elated at their victory to brook any such restraint. They despised the power of the Turks. One party after another

advanced towards the enemy's lines shouting their battle-cry of "Jesus". Their arrows fell within the camp but provoked no reply. Capistran saw that they were not to be held back, so went forth to them himself, that they might not be without a leader. Others joined him, making in all a band of about two thousand, on the open ground between their own fortress and the enemy. The Turks seemed terrified, for they made no resistance, but fled confusedly while the Christians, rushing on, occupied the nearer batteries and spiked the guns. Soon there were four thousand Christians or more, and their numbers were momentarily increasing, when at last the Turks began to rally and to oppose the impetuous onslaught of their foes.

A few of the Crusaders seemed to realize that they had acted rashly and cried out to check the others, saying that the Turks were like lions waiting to devour them; but the holy leader knew that the supreme moment had come: "Let him flee who is afraid," he cried. "For forty years I have waited for this hour." Then, standing on an eminence, exposing himself to imminent danger of death from the arrows and spears that sped through the air, he called aloud to the Christians that the time of glorious victory had come and that God had delivered the enemy into their hands. He ordered Peter, his standard-bearer, to raise the cross and turn it towards the foe.

The fight was hotly contested for a while; but before long the Turkish lines were broken, and

soon the engagement was less a battle than a rout. The cries of "Jesus" filling the air seemed to have more than human terrors for the infidels. All their courage died away.

Some of the cavalry made a last effort to turn the tide of victory. They rode with lances at rest and with fierce shouts towards the place where Capistran stood; but, again, the name of Jesus seemed to fill them with a supernatural fear, for they, too, fell into confusion, turned and fled.

By this time the whole Christian army was charging the enemy, wounding and slaying as they pressed on, irresistible as though they were beings mightier than men. The Turks were driven from their camp, and soon were in full retreat across the Save. Many lives were lost at this dangerous point, for their confusion was increased by the Crusaders turning upon them such of their own guns as were still serviceable. Even on the other side Christians still pursued them, no longer meeting with resistance.

Michael rode joyfully up to Capistran, who asked him whether the Turks were now utterly defeated. He replied that Hungary had never won so great a victory. On hearing this the Saint gave orders to have the troops recalled from pursuit; for, although for years he had been desirous of defeating and routing the enemies of Christianity, he had no love for butchery.

On the morrow Capistran and the other commanders viewed the scene of the conflict. There they saw the guns which had dealt such destruction

during the past three weeks, and among them the twenty-two great guns before mentioned which were believed to be the largest ever made up to that time.¹ Chariots of brass, iron, and wood were seen, and a church was found to be filled with gun-powder, cords, arrows, and wooden and steel bows. There were standards, shields, pistols, vessels of different kinds, hand-mills for corn, clothing and ornaments in the greatest abundance, also sheep and oxen, camels and buffaloes—all testifying to the frantic haste with which the enemy had departed. The dead were lying everywhere, but the wounded had been carried off in carts.

Capistran sent the good news to the Pope on the very day of victory: "Glory be to God in the highest, from whose mercy it is that we are not consumed.

"We were so harassed and in such dire straits, that all thought we could no longer withstand the mighty power of the Turks. Even Hunyady, the governor, who is in truth the terror of the Moslem, and a most valiant Christian hero, thought it better to abandon the fortress of Belgrade. For the Mohammedans attacked so strongly and incessantly, broke down our walls with their artillery, and fought so fiercely against us that our strength was failing and our military leaders were in fear. But in the midst of our afflictions the Lord has raised us up.

"They had been repulsed, but were returning to

¹ They are said to have been cast from the metal of the bells of Constantinople.

lie in ambush for our men who went forth ; for although Hunyady had given orders that no one should leave the fortress, the Crusaders gave no heed to his command, but rushed upon the enemy and put themselves in great peril. Then I, your poor servant, seeing I could not recall them, went forward also, and hurrying from place to place, restrained some, encouraged others, and, again, so posted them that they might not be surrounded by the enemy.

"At length God, who can save as easily by few as by many, mercifully gave us victory and put to flight that ferocious Turkish army. We captured all the guns and implements by means of which they hoped to subjugate all Christendom.

"Rejoice, therefore, in the Lord, Holy Father ; and bid men give Him praise, glory, and honour, because He alone has wrought great wonders. For neither I, your feeble and useless servant, nor the poor uncouth Crusaders, your devoted clients, could have done this by any strength of ours. The Lord God of armies has done it all. To Him be glory for ever.

"I write this briefly and in haste, having just returned, fatigued from the battle. I shall shortly report more clearly and in detail what has occurred.

"From Belgrade, on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, the day of the glorious victory."¹

On 17 August, he wrote again giving further information and recommending that steps should be

¹ *Ap. Wadd.* XII. 371.

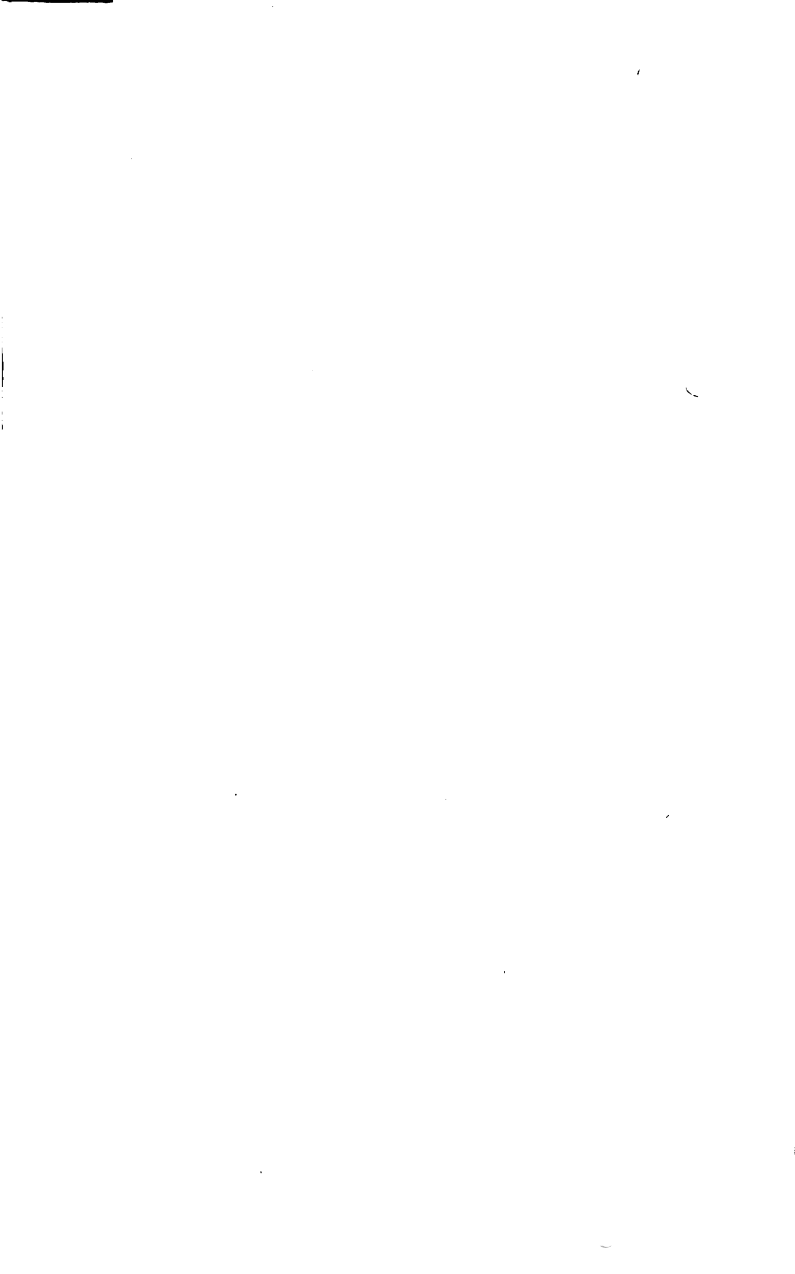
taken to organize a general campaign against the Turks. He thought that if this were done before they had recovered from their losses at Belgrade, it might be possible to expel them altogether from Turkey and Greece.

The Pope was of this mind also, as appears from his replies, wherein, while warmly thanking Capistran, he commanded him to persevere in the task of driving the Turks out of Europe. He also wrote in the same sense to Charles VII of France. No triumph was too great to expect after the wonderful victory of Belgrade.

The joyful news spread rapidly throughout Europe, dissipating the fears and anxieties of years past. As a lasting memorial of the great event, the Pope ordained that the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord should be celebrated throughout the Christian world every year on 6 August, the day on which the news of victory reached Rome.¹

Capistran and Hunyady were hailed as the saviours of Europe; and, in truth, they merited that title, for they had led a forlorn hope, had fought and won a crowning victory, while all the rest had stood aside. They had offered a noble example of deeds accomplished in face of obstacles overwhelming to human strength, but made possible by heroic self-sacrifice and sublime trust in God. Each of them attributed the victory solely to the

¹ This festival had already been observed in various places, and on different dates—generally on the second Sunday of Lent.





CIBORIUM OF GOLD AND SILVER.

*Made in 1456 for St. John Capistran, and used by him at the
siege of Belgrade. It is now preserved at Budapest.*

divine power of which they were merely the instruments.¹

Their work was done. Companions in the fight for God's glory on earth, both were shortly called by God to a reward greater than this world could give. It was left to others to carry on the war which would last many more years before Europe was freed from fear of Ottoman dominion. But the victory of Belgrade had stemmed the flowing tide of conquest at the time when most of all it seemed irresistible. The spirit of Europe was roused from lethargy. Other great victories followed in later years, but they perhaps had not been possible but for the glorious achievement of Capistran and Hunyady.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH.

ONLY three months of life on earth remained to Capistran after the crowning work of his life was done ; and during this time he tended his noble friend Hunyady, and prepared him for his passage into eternity. The story of this hero's death is told by Bonfini in his History of Hungary, and may be briefly told here with corrections and details by other historians.²

¹ Letter of Hunyady to King Ladislaus, *ap.* Boll. X Oct. p. 382.

² See Boll. X Oct. p. 385, *seq.*

A few days after the battle, a pestilence broke out in the town, caused by the vast number of decomposing bodies that surrounded it. Hunyady, worn out by excessive labours, was one of the first victims. By order of the physicians he was removed to Semlin, a short distance away, and near the scene of the naval victory. They hoped that the purer air there would aid his recovery. But it was soon evident that he must die. His two sons, Ladislaus and Mathias—the latter afterwards King of Hungary—were with him. Capistran too was there, and remained with him till he died.

Admonished by the Saint to arrange his temporal affairs and dispose his soul for death, he smiled and said that it was good advice, but he had done all this long ago, for he thought it folly to put off such important matters to the very end of life. Then he made a noble profession of his faith and trust in God, for whose glory he had always fought, and not for earthly rewards.

At his own request he was carried into the church of our Lady close by, where he received the Holy Viaticum and the other rites of the Church at the hands of Capistran, and so expired on 11 August, 1456. The Saint's parting words to him were that he envied him his death, coming, as it did, so soon after his victory over the Turks, and crowning him with eternal glory before inconstant men could tarnish his renown and spoil his happiness here. "Would it were given me to follow you," he said, "so that we who have together

served the King of Heaven, might in that heaven together be rewarded."

In this spirit he mourned his departed friend. He was no longer seen to smile. He would take no part in joyful celebrations arranged in honour of the victory. During weary days and sleepless nights, his thoughts were fixed upon the unchanging joys of heaven.

The death he so greatly desired was not long delayed. Forty of his seventy years had been passed in severe and exacting toil; arduous and unremitted penance had taken its toll of his strength; his extraordinary exertions in promoting the Crusade had, without doubt, shortened his life; while the fatigues of the past few weeks had been too great for human nature to sustain. Before the death of Hunyady he was already quite infirm, and could only walk with the help of a stick. He lost all appetite for food, and became so emaciated that his skin seemed to adhere to his bones.

Semlin, the place where he dwelt, was not so far from Belgrade as altogether to be free from the pestilential atmosphere that still emanated from the field of battle. It had been all but destroyed by the Turks. The house he occupied was in a ruinous condition, infested with lizards and mice, and without a bed or other furniture. The Cardinal Legate wished him to be removed to some more salubrious place. The Saint consented to this, not so much on his own account, for he had no desire to live, as for the good of his companions, several of whom were in bad health.

He therefore went to Villak,¹ a town in Hungary, but lower down the Danube and close to the Turkish frontier. Among the friars who went with him was John Tagliocozzo, the same who had been his companion during the siege, and from whom we have the details of these last days. It was at the Saint's special request that he went, for Capistran said: "Do not desert me, my son. I am lonely, and have no one who is an Italian but you to assist me if I am to die, to close my eyes, and to take care of the books that have been allowed to me, so that they may be taken back to the province. But bear patiently with me and help me. If I get well, we shall go together to Buda to collect men." He said this, for, although he knew he was to die in Hungary, the time of his departure had not yet been made known to him.

He still had strength sufficient to make the journey on foot. On the way he was met by Nicholas, the governor of Villak, a renowned general who had often fought against the Turks. Capistran admired this man very greatly, and, in one of his letters to the Pope, compared him with Hunyady. He in turn loved and venerated the Saint and rejoiced on finding that he intended to visit his town. He ordered Lawrence, his second in command, to attend to all that was needful for the Saint's comfort, for he was engaged with his soldiers in the protection of the country. The citizens, like the governor, were glad, and re-

¹ Not the Villak in Carinthia, where he had cured the victims of plague (p. 50).

ceived their holy guest with great respect and honour.

He took up his abode with the Friars of the Observance. On some days he was able to celebrate Mass, and at other times he would go to the church to receive holy Communion, even if he had to be supported on the arm of another. During his illness he always recited his Office until, towards the end, this became impossible. Then he would listen attentively while it was read by one of his companions. If any complaint escaped him, it was that his sojourn in this world was so prolonged, and that he had not been allowed to give his blood for Christ. On the feast of our Lady's Nativity it was made known to him that he was to die of this illness.

King Ladislaus went twice to visit him. On the first occasion he was able to go out and greet the king; but the next time he could not rise from his bed of straw, and so received the royal visitor in his cell, exhorting him to defend the faith and to lead a good life. When the king and the Cardinal Legate ordered the best physicians in the country to attend him, he said: "Do what you will. Say what you please. I shall obey you so far as I am able; but this is my last illness. I shall die of it without doubt." Barons, nobles, and prelates visited him from all parts of the kingdom. Delicate and exquisite foods were sent to him, but these he either refused or distributed to others.

The fever grew more violent, pains racked all his

body, and frequent hæmorrhage increased his weakness, yet his peace of mind and fervour of devotion remained unchanged. He still showed himself as zealous as ever for the glory of God, the salvation of souls and the spread of the Christian religion. The sick were brought to him and many were cured. Tagliocozzo tells of one instance in particular. A certain friar named Ambrose, one of his own companions, was lying unconscious and at the point of death at a place five miles away. On Capistran being informed of this at night, he rose in his bed, and, kneeling, prayed for him. At the same hour the sick man began to speak and was found to be cured. Tagliocozzo testifies to this from his own knowledge, for in the morning he went to the place with another friar, and found the man whom they thought to see dead, eating and quite well.

Concerning his own illness, some said that he must die from loss of blood. Others declared that he would recover, for his mind was as clear as ever and his faculties quite unimpaired. Hearing this, he distributed among all who were present, including some who were in poor health, the dishes and confections that had been sent to him, saying: "This shall be a sign to you, that while you shall all be well, I alone am shortly to die".

On the Feast of St. Luke, 18 October, he ordered all the friars to be brought to him; and, after exhorting them to honour and fear God and to observe the rule, he knelt as well as he could upon

his bed, declared with tears that he was a sinner, and asked for the prayers of the brethren and penance from the guardian. When the others had gone out, he spoke to the guardian and vicar in private, telling them he wished to receive the last sacraments next day, lying on the bare ground, and in the presence of all the brethren. After that he made a general confession of his whole life to Tagliocozzo.

Next day an altar was prepared in his cell. He was laid on the ground as he had desired. The guardian came, followed by all the community, and carrying the Blessed Sacrament. Again he acknowledged himself to be a sinful man, and asked pardon and prayers from all. After devoutly receiving the sacraments, he asked that the prayer for the dying might be recited as far as the words: "Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, etc.," adding that he would call them when the time came to say the rest.

Afterwards, lying on his bed, he exclaimed joyfully: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, in peace, etc.," repeating the words many times and in a voice so clear as to make it seem he could not be a dying man. In fact, his companions would not have believed it but for his own frequent assertion, his inability to take food, and the great loss of blood. He gave away his Bible, sandals, and other small articles. The papers concerning the Bohemian heresy he ordered to be taken to Vienna, and the books he had from the Order, together with faculties, bulls, apostolic

briefs, and his own works to be sent to the friary at Capistrano.

On the day before he died, when his sight was already failing, he solemnly invoked a blessing on all Christendom, and especially on Hungary, Austria, Bohemia, and Poland. He blessed all his Franciscan brethren throughout the world, present and future, and all benefactors of the Order; likewise the Sisters of St. Clare and the members of the Third Order—all this in great detail, and mentioning many persons by name.

On the last day of his life he said to Tagliocozzo: "Tell the Father Guardian to have the refectory bell rung, so that the brethren may come and finish the prayers for the dying". They came, though they thought he had yet several days to live. When all were assembled, he commended himself again to their prayers, and then said: "Father Guardian and brothers, Brother John,¹ my companion, would like to have the habit I wear, to take it back to Italy. I have refused him; and I ask you to have me buried in it when I am dead. For this habit was sent to me from Italy. On it is the cross which His Holiness Pope Callixtus sent me, which the Cardinal Legate placed thereon with his own hands, with which I preached the Crusade, and with which and the standard of the holy cross, the power of the Turks was crushed by the mighty hand of God. Go on now with the commendation of my soul." The brethren replied:

¹ i.e. Tagliocozzo.

"We know you are not dying, Father, but we shall do as you wish." So they stood round the bed with candles lighted, and the guardian began : "Go forth, O Christian soul, etc.". But he did not recite the exact words, whereupon the dying Saint said : "Take my breviary. There you will find the office quite correctly." The guardian read the prayers from the breviary, and Capistran made the responses with the rest.

The only secular person in the room was Lawrence, the vice-governor ; and he was there by order of Nicholas to take possession of the body after death, so that it should not be sent away from the town. He had also brought several other men into the friary, to make sure of carrying out the governor's commands.

For some hours the Saint lay quiet but conscious, often raising his eyes to the crucifix or towards heaven, and sometimes crossing his arms. After a time he tried to speak, but in a voice too feeble and broken for the listeners to follow him. He made signs with his hands, and at last was understood to mean that the end was near. The candles were lighted again, and the prayers for the dying repeated. Then, in the presence of the brethren and of the vice-governor, he joined his hands, and with eyes opened and gazing heavenwards, he expired. It was three o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday, 23 October, 1456.

Lawrence immediately called his men into the room to take charge of the body. He was unwilling at first to allow the brethren to wash it, so great

was his haste. Then it was carried by a private passage into the Church, and sixty-four men posted round it as a guard. The doors were locked; but the citizens clamoured to get in, and threatened to force an entrance, for the news of the Saint's death had quickly spread. The funeral rites lasted seven days; but the body was not carried through the streets as had been intended, for it was feared that the people would tear it to pieces in their eagerness to obtain relics, or that some might be killed among the excited crowd.

Nicholas, the governor, arrived on the day of the funeral. He was glad to have possession of the body, but was displeased at the humble grave in which it was laid. Soon afterwards he had it removed, encased in a strong casket of iron with seven locks, and placed in a beautiful shrine in the Franciscan church of St. Mary. On the tomb he had the following lines inscribed:—

Hic tumulus servat præclara laude Joannem,
 Gente Capistrana. Fidei defensor et auctor,
 Ecclesiæ tutor, Christi tuba, tum Ordinis ardens
 Fautor, in Orbe decus, tum veri cultor et æqui,
 Et vitæ speculum, doctrinæ maximus index:
 Laudibus innumeris jam possidet astra beatus.
 Vixit annos XXXCI. M.III. D.XXII.

Which may be rendered: "This tomb holds John, by birth of Capistrano, a man worthy of all praise. Defender and promoter of the faith, guardian of the Church, herald of Christ, zealous protector of his Order, an ornament to all the world, lover of truth and justice, mirror of life, surest guide in doctrine:

praised by countless tongues, he reigns blessed in Heaven. He lived seventy-one years, three months, twenty-two days." ¹

In life revered by men, and glorified by God who wrought such wondrous works in him, honours greater still were reserved for the Saint after death. Countless miracles were witnessed, and many of them were investigated by St. James della Marcha, his successor in Hungary, and by the episcopal and civil courts of the kingdom. Several princes and civic bodies formally petitioned for his canonization, and among them were Mathias, the young king of Hungary, in 1460, and the Emperor Frederick III in 1462.

The process was a protracted one, and it was not until 1724 that the Church conferred on him the highest honour she can bestow by enrolling him among her canonized Saints. Yet this very delay gives indication of the searching character of the inquiries made by that severest of all tribunals, the Sacred Congregation of Rites ; and the ultimate and weighty verdict will be endorsed, we feel assured, by those who have read the details here recorded of the heroic and saintly life of God's glorious confessor St. John Capistran.

¹ The age is erroneously stated. See Preface.