

placed the seal of miracles on the intrepid confession of His servants; and a mind imbued with the spirit of faith sees nothing extraordinary therein, because our divine Saviour Himself said, "Amen, amen I say to you, he that believeth in Me, the works that I do, he also shall do, and greater than these shall he do" (*John*xiv. 12). In all the miraculous events wrought in and by the saints appears only the victorious omnipotent power of Jesus Christ, and the living faith in which His servants operated in virtue of this power. To obliterate the miracles that appear in the lives of the saints, or even to enfeeble their import by the manner of relating them, would rob these legends of their intrinsic value. If our age is no longer robust enough to acknowledge the effects of divine omnipotence and grace, it does not follow that they must be disavowed or denied.



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NOVENA AND STORIES OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS

Chapter 2

Legends



Legends

BEFORE proceeding to relate the lives of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, we deem it opportune to define the term usually applied to the narrative of the lives of the saints.

The histories of the saints are called Legends. This word is derived from the Latin, and signifies something that is to be read, a passage the reading of which is prescribed. The legends of the saints are the lives of the holy martyrs and confessors of the Faith. Some of them occur in the Roman Breviary which the Catholic clergy is obliged to read every day.

Joseph von Goerres, an illustrious champion of the Church during the first half of the nineteenth century, writes as follows concerning legends:

"The histories of the lives of the saints were gathered from the earliest times. A collection of such histories is found in 'The Golden Legend.' The Passionales, too, containing the life of a saint for every day in the year, belong to this sort of literature. In Germany these histories were at first translations from the Latin; later, they were written in the native idiom, and, in style, were of a charming simplicity. At that time, when the upper classes did not yet judge themselves too highly cultivated to share in the Faith, and not too privileged to join in the sentiments and affections of the people, and were therefore more in harmony with the lower ranks of society, these legends were in general circulation among all classes: among the wealthy in manuscript, among the poor orally and in the form in which they had become acquainted with them in church and elsewhere.

"In early times the science of criticism was unknown; therefore little care was exercised in separating the poetic additions from the authentic legends, especially as the Church had not yet spoken on the subject. Faith was yet of that robust sort which is not affected by miraculous occurrences. Nearly all Europe then still accepted the adage now current only in Spain, 'It is better sometimes to believe what can not be established as truth, than to lose a single truth by want of faith.'

But later the science of criticism came into its rights. The Church established canonical rules, according to which a strict investigation of all the facts submitted to her judgment was to be made, and rejected everything that could not stand the most rigid examination.

"Then Art devoted itself to that legendary lore which the Church, declaring it outside of her domain, permitted to be embellished at will. Thus poetic legends were multiplied, their authors being more or less convinced that the reader would be able to distinguish truth from poetical embellishment. The common people continued to make little distinction and did not permit criticism to influence their ancient beliefs. They regarded these legends as they regard the pictures of the saints; not as portraits of the persons depicted—for in the very next church the same saint might be represented in a quite different manner— but as illustrations, more or less apt, whose object was to attract the attention by their artistic character and thus to draw the mind to the contemplation of their original, and by it to God, and thereby serve the purpose of edification."

If we are not devoid of all sentiments of piety, the history of the combats and victories of the saints and martyrs, and the narrative of the miracles wrought through their intercession before and after their death, will always be a source of joy and consolation to us, and will tend to animate us with similar fortitude and love of virtue.

The legends of the Fourteen Holy Helpers are replete with the most glorious examples of heroic firmness and invincible courage in the profession of the Faith, which ought to incite us to imitate their fidelity in the performance of the Christian and social duties. If they, with the aid of God's grace, achieved such victories, why should not we, by the same aid, be able to accomplish the little desired of us? God rewarded His victorious champions with eternal bliss; the same crown is prepared for us, if we but render ourselves worthy of it. God