The Jesuits

By J. W. Wylie

Protestantism had marshaled its spiritual forces a second time, and placing itself at the heart of Christendom—at a point where three great empires met—it was laboring with redoubled vigor to propagate itself on all sides. It was expelling from the air of the world that ancient superstition, born of Paganism and Judaism, which, like an opaque veil, had darkened the human mind: a new light was breaking on the eyes and a new life stirring in the souls of men: schools of learning, pure Churches, and free nations were springing up in different parts of Europe; while hundreds of thousands of disciples were ready, by their holy lives or heroic deaths, to serve that great cause which, having broken their ancient fetters, had made them the heirs of a new liberty and the citizens of a new world. It was clear that if let alone, for only a few years, Protestantism would achieve a victory so complete that it would be vain for any opposing power to think of renewing the contest. If that power which was seated in Geneva was to be withstood, and the tide of victory which was bearing it to dominion rolled back, there must be no longer delay in the measures necessary for achieving such a result.

It was further clear that armies would never effect the overthrow of Protestantism. The serried strength of Popish Europe had been put forth to crush it, but all in vain: Protestantism had risen only the stronger from the blows which, it was hoped, would overwhelm it. It was plain that other weapons must be forged, and other armies mustered, than those which Charles and Francis had been accustomed to lead into the field. It was now that the Jesuit corps was embodied. And it must be confessed that these new soldiers did more than all the armies of France and Spain to stem the tide of Protestant success, and bid victory once more to the banners of Rome.

We have seen Protestantism renew its energies: Rome, too, will show what she is capable of doing. As the tribes of Israel were approaching the frontier of the Promised Land, a Wizard-prophet was summoned from the East to bar their entrance by his divinations and enchantments. As the armies of Protestantism neared their final victory, there started up the Jesuit host, with a subtler casuistry and a darker divination than Balaam's, to dispute with the Reformed the possession of Christendom. We shall consider that host in its rise, its equipments, its discipline, its diffusion, and its successes.

Don Inigo Lopez de Recalde, the Ignatius Loyola of history, was the founder of the Order of Jesus, or the Jesuits. His birth was nearly contemporaneous with that of Luther. He was the youngest son of one of the highest Spanish grandees, and was born in his father's Castle of Loyola, in the province of Guipuzcoa, in 1491. His youth was passed at the splendid and luxurious court of Ferdinand the Catholic. Spain at that time was fighting to expel the Moors, whose presence on her soil she accounted at once an insult to her independence and an affront to her faith. She was ending the conflict in Spain, but continuing it in Africa. The naturally ardent soul of Ignatius was set on fire by the religious fervor around him. He grew weary of the gaieties and frivolities of the court; nor could even the dalliances and adventures of knight-errantry satisfy him. He thirsted to earn renown on the field of arms. Embarking in the war which at that time engaged the religious enthusiasm and military chivalry of his countrymen, he soon distinguished

himself by his feats of daring. Ignatius was bidding fair to take a high place among warriors, and transmit to posterity a name encompassed with the halo of military glory—but with that halo only. At this stage of his career an incident befell him which cut short his exploits on the battle-field, and transferred his enthusiasm and chivalry to another sphere.

It was the year 1521. Luther was uttering his famous "No!" before the emperor and his princes, and summoning, as with trumpet-peal, Christendom to arms. It is at this moment that young Ignatius, the intrepid soldier of Spain, and about to become the yet more intrepid soldier of Rome, appears before us. He is shut up in the town of Pampeluna, which the French are besieging. The garrison are hard pressed: and after some whispered consultations they openly propose to surrender. Ignatius deems the very thought of such a thing dishonor; he denounces the proposed act of his comrades as cowardice, and re-entering the citadel with a few companions as courageous as himself, swears to defend it to the last drop of his blood. By-and-by famine leaves him no alternative save to die within the walls, or to cut his way sword in hand through the host of the besiegers. He goes forth and joins battle with the French. As he is fighting desperately he is struck by a musket-ball, wounded dangerously in both legs, and laid senseless on the field. Ignatius had ended the last campaign he was ever to fight with the sword: his valor he was yet to display on other fields, but he would mingle no more on those which resound with the clash of arms and the roar of artillery.

Thus bravery of the fallen warrior had won the respect of the foe. Raising him from the ground, where he was fast bleeding to death, they carried him to the hospital of Pampeluna, and tended him with care, till he was able to be conveyed in a litter to his father's castle. Thrice had he to undergo the agony of having his wounds opened. Clenching his teeth and closing his fists he bade defiance to pain. Not a groan escaped him while under the torture of the surgeon's knife. But the tardy passage of the weeks and months during which he waited the slow healing of his wounds, inflicted on his ardent spirit a keener pain than had the probing-knife on his quivering limbs. Fettered to his couch he chafed at the inactivity to which he was doomed. Romances of chivalry and tales of war were brought him to beguile the hours. These exhausted, other books were produced, but of a somewhat different character. This time it was the legends of the saints that were brought the bed-rid knight. The tragedy of the early Christian martyrs passed before him as he read. Next came the monks and hermits of the Thebaic deserts and the Sinaitic mountains. With an imagination on fire he perused the story of the hunger and cold they had braved; of the self-conquests they had achieved; of the battles they had waged with evil spirits; of the glorious visions that had been vouchsafed them; and the brilliant rewards they had gained in the lasting reverence of earth and the felicities and dignities of heaven. He panted to rival these heroes, whose glory was of a kind so bright and pure, that compared with it the renown of the battlefield was dim and sordid. His enthusiasm and ambition were as boundless as ever, but now they were directed into a new channel. Henceforward the current of his live was changed. He had laid down "a knight of the burning sword"—to use the words of h is biographer, Vieyra—he rose up from it "a saint of the burning torch."

The change was a sudden and violent one, and drew after it vast consequences not to Ignatius only, and the men of his own age, but to millions of the human race in all countries of the world, and in all the ages that have elapsed since. He who lay down on his bed the fiery soldier of the emperor, rose from it the yet more fiery soldier of the Pope. The weakness occasioned by

loss of blood, the mobidity produced by long seclusion, the irritation of acute and protracted suffering, joined to a temperament highly excitable, and a mind that had fed on miracles and visions till its enthusiasm had grown into fanaticism, accounts in part for the transformation which Ignatius had undergone. Though the balance of his intellect was now sadly disturbed, his shrewdness, his tenacity, and his daring remained. Set free from the fetters of calm reason, these qualities had freer scope than ever. The wing of his earthly ambition was broken, but he could take his flight heavenward. If earth was forbidden him, the celestial domains stood open, and there worthier exploits and more brilliant rewards awaited his prowess.

The heart of a soldier plucked out, and that of a monk given him, Ignatius vowed, before leaving his sick-chamber, to be the slave, the champion, the knight-errant of Mary. She was the lady of his soul, and after the manner of dutiful knights he immediately repaired to her shrine at Montserrat, hung up his arms before her image, and spent the night in watching them. But reflecting that he was a soldier of Christ, that great Monarch who had gone forth to subjugate all the earth, he resolved to eat no other food, wear no other raiment than his King had done, and endure the same hardships and vigils. Laying aside his plume, his coat of mail, his shield and sword, he donned the cloak of the mendicant. 'Wrapped in sordid rags,' says Duller, 'an iron chain and prickly girdle pressing on his naked body, covered with filth, with uncombed hair and untrimmed nails,' he retired to a dark mountain in the vicinity of Manressa, where was a gloomy cave, in which he made his abode for some time. There he subjected himself to all the penances and mortifications of the early anchorites whose holiness he emulated. He wrestled with the evil spirit, talked to voices audible to no ear but his own, fasted for days on end, till his weakness was such that he fell into a swoon, and one day was found at the entrance of his cave, lying on the ground, half dead.

The cave at Manressa recalls vividly to our memory the cell at Erfurt. The same austerities, vigils, mortifications, and mental efforts and agonies which were undergone by Ignatius Loyola, had but a few years before this been passed through by Martin Luther. So far the career of the founder of the Jesuits and that of the champion of Protestantism were the same. Both had set before them a high standard of holiness, and both had all but sacrificed life to reach it. But at the point to which we have come the courses of the two men widely diverge. Both hitherto in their pursuit of truth and holiness had traveled by the same road; but now we see Luther turning to the Bible, 'the light that shineth in a dark place,' 'the sure Word of Prophecy.' Ignatius Loyola, on the other hand, surrenders himself to visions and revelations. As Luther went onward the light grew only the brighter around him. He had turned his face to the sun. Ignatius had turned his gaze inward upon his own beclouded mind, and verified the saying of the wise man, 'He who wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.'

Finding him half exanimate at the mouth of his cave, sympathizing friends carried Ignatius to the town of Manressa. Continuing there the same course of penances and self-mortifications which he had pursued in solitude, his bodily weakness greatly increased, but he was more than recompensed by the greater frequency of those heavenly visions with which he now began to be favored. In Manressa he occupied a cell in the Dominican convent, and as he was then projecting a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he began to qualify himself for this holy journey

by a course of the severest penances. 'He scourged himself thrice a day,' says Ranke, 'he rose up to prayer at midnight and passed seven hours of each day on his knees.'[1]

It will hardly do to say that this marvelous case is merely an instance of an unstrung bodily condition, and of vicious mental stimulants abundantly supplied, where the thirst for adventure and distinction was still unquenched. A closer study of the case will show that there was in it an awakening of the conscience. There was a sense of sin—its awful demerit, and its fearful award. Loyola, too, would seem to have felt the 'terrors of death, and the pains of hell.' He had spent three days in Montserrat in confessing the sins of all his past life.[2] But on a more searching review of his life, finding that he had omitted many sins, he renewed and amplified his confession at Manressa. If he found peace it was only for a short while; again his sense of sin would return, and to such a pitch did his anguish rise, that thoughts of self-destruction came into his mind. Approaching the window of his cell, he was about to throw himself from it, when it suddenly flashed upon him that the act was abhorrent to the Almighty, and he withdrew, crying out, 'Lord, I will not do aught that my offend thee.'[3]

One day he awakened as from a dream. Now I know, said he to himself, that all these torments are from the assaults of Satan. I am tossed between the promptings of the good Spirit, who would have me be at peace, and the dark suggestions of the evil one, who seeks continually to terrify me. I will have done with this warfare. I will forget my past life; I will open these wounds not again. Luther in the midst of tempests as terrible had come to a similar resolution. Awaking as from a frightful dream, he lifted up his eyes and saw One who had borne his sins upon His cross: and like the mariner who clings amid the surging billows to the rock, Luther was at peace because he had anchored his soul on an Almighty foundation. But says Ranke, speaking of Loyola and the course he had now resolved to pursue, 'this was not so much the restoration of his peace as a resolution, it was an engagement entered into by the will rather than a conviction to which the submission of the will is inevitable. It required no aid from Scripture, it was based on the belief he entertained of an immediate connection between himself and the world of spirits. This would never have satisfied Luther. No inspirations—no visions would Luther admit; all were in his opinion alike injurious. He would have the simple, written, indubitable Word of God alone.'[4]

From the hour that Ignatius resolved to think no more of his sins his spiritual horizon began, as he believed, to clear up. All his gloomy terrors receded with the past which he had consigned to oblivion. His bitter tears were dried up, and his heavy sighs no longer resounded through the convent halls. He was taken, he felt, into more intimate communion with God. The heavens were opened that he might have a clearer insight into Divine mysteries. True, the Spirit had revealed these things in the morning of the world, through chosen and accredited channels, and inscribed them on the page of inspiration that all might learn them from that infallible source. But Ignatius did not search for these mysteries in the Bible; favored above the sons of men, he received them, as he thought, in revelations made specially to himself. Alas! His hour

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[1] Ranke, *History of the Popes,* Bk. ii., sec. 4, p. 138; London, 1874.
[2] *Ibid*., pp. 138, 139
[3] *Ibid*.
[4] Ranke, p. 140

had come and passed, and the gate that would have ushered him in amid celestial realities and joys was shut, and henceforward he must dwell amid fantasies and dreams.

It was intimated to him one day that he should yet see the Savior in person. He had not long to wait for the promised revelation. At mass his eyes were opened, and he saw the incarnate God in the Host. What farther proof did he need of transubstantiation, seeing the whole process had been shown to him? A short while thereafter, the Virgin revealed herself with equal plainness to h is bodily eyes. Not fewer than thirty visits did Loyola receive. One day as he sat on the steps of the Church of St. Dominic at Manressa, singing a hymn to Mary, he suddenly fell into a reverie, and had the symbol of the ineffable mystery of the Trinity shown to him, under the figure of 'three keys of a musical instrument.' He sobbed for very joy, and entering the church, began publishing the miracle. On another occasion, as he walked along the banks of the Llobregat, that waters Manressa, he sat down, and fixing his eyes intently on the stream, many Divine mysteries became apparent to him, such 'as other men,' says his biographer Maffei, 'can with great difficulty understand, after much reading, long vigils, and study.'

This narration places up beside the respective springs of Protestantism and Ultramontanism. The source from which the one is seen to issue is the Word of God. To it Luther swore fealty, and before it he hung up his sword, like a true knight, when he received ordination. The other is seen to be the product of a clouded yet proud and ambitious imagination, and a wayward will. And therewith have corresponded the fruits, as the past three centuries bear witness. The one principle has gathered round it a noble host clad in the panoply of purity and truth. In the wake of the other has come the dark army of the Jesuits[5]. ♦

[5] J. W. Wylie, *History of Protestantism* Originally published in 1878 (Carginagh, Kilkeel, Co. Down, N. Ireland: Mourne Missionary Trust, 1985) Vol. II, Book Fifteenth, Chapter 1, Ignatius Loyola.