

St. Gerard Majella.

Our blessed brother Gerard Majella was canonized in the basilica of St. Peter in Rome, on the 11th December last.

This great servant of God is already very popular throughout Christendom, and especially in Canada. The instances of his powerful protection granted to mothers and children are many, particularly in procuring for the latter the grace of holy baptism.

We will give a short sketch of the brief but fruitful career of that heroic lover of Jesus suffering.

Gerard Majella, the son of a tailor, was born at Muro in Italy on the 6th April, 1726. From his earliest years, through divine grace, he sought no other amusement than devotional practices proper to childhood.

At the age of five he frequently went to pray in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; on many occasions the statue of the Madonna would move and place the divine Child in the arms of little Gerard who would play with Him as with a companion of childhood.

At the age of seven this favorite of Jesus already hungered for the eucharistic bread. One day, while at mass, he went with the faithful to the holy table to receive the sacred host, but the priest, seeing him so young, passed on. The child withdrew weeping, but on the following night the Archangel Saint Michael brought him Holy Communion.

Notwithstanding his youth, he was already favored with the gift of miracles. He was entrusted with the care of a lamb, which some thieves stole and killed. When the child saw that his parents were greatly afflicted at the loss, because the animal did not belong to them, he said to them: "Be reassured, the lamb will come back." He at once began to pray and soon, through a miracle of divine grace, the little lamb came back to life and was restored to its owner.

At the age of sixteen Gerard hired himself as a servant to the Bishop of Lacedona. Notwithstanding the work he had to do, he practised extraordinary mortifications. One day the physician, observing how pale he was, asked him if he was ill. Gerard replied that he was quite well. The physician felt his chest and found that he was wearing a rough cilice. The holy young man allowed himself only a little bread as food, rarely some vegetables, and kept the food allotted to him for the poor and sick.

One day Gerard accidentally let the key of his master's room fall into a well. In his perplexity he began to pray. Suddenly, full of confidence, he ran for a statue of the Infant Jesus and let it down into the well, saying: "Get me back the key, that my master may not be troubled." In the sight of a great many spectators, Gerard drew up the statue of the Infant Jesus with the lost key in its hand.

Gerard loved to spend whole nights in contemplation before the holy tabernacle. He had an incomparable devotion for the Queen of Heaven. Whenever he came to an image of her, he could not tear himself away. He loved to say: "The Madonna has ravished my heart, and I have made her a present of it."

At the age of 22 he was admitted as a lay brother into the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and made his profession on the 16th July, 1750. His fervor increased from that day. A disciple of the crucified Saviour, he wore cilices and small iron fetters. The bare earth served him for a bed. His flagellations were frequent and covered him with blood. His life was one perpetual fast. He strove in every way to make his body a victim of penance.

Like all the saints, Gerard had to pass through the trials of tribulation, anguish and terror. One shudder at the thought of the struggles he had to sustain against the fury of hell, of the bitterness he felt when the most atrocious calumnies were uttered against him, and on the continual violence he had to do himself to lead so penitential and so mortified a life to the end. But, confident in God, he never gave way to discouragement, and would say with Saint Paul: "I am capable of all things in Him who gives me strength."

Yes, that soul so pure, so rich in heavenly gifts, so favored with ecstasies and seraphic ardors, had to sustain a terrible struggle against despair and against the dread of being abandoned by God. "Divine justice," he wrote, "so torments me that I do not think anybody suffers more. Blessed eternally be the will

of God! What causes me most to tremble and to fear is the thought that I may not persevere. I see myself completely cast down, plunged in an ocean of confusion and as if suspended over the abyss of despair. I am nailed to the cross. Have compassion on my agony. My sufferings are so bitter that they make me feel the paroxysms of death."

The blessed Gerard was wont to say that nothing is impossible to those who hope in God. Hence the miracles of cures he so frequently performed. A poor consumptive of Iliceto was in a desperate condition. The physician said his lung was entirely gone and that he could not give him another. Gerard went to him and gave him to understand that he would recover his health. The physician said it was impossible because the lung was too far gone. "But," replied the holy brother, "is not God powerful enough to give him another? Well, may God be pleased to work that miracle to invite the faithful to place their confidence in Him and in Him only!" After uttering those words the brother went away promising the sick man that he would pray for him. A few days afterward the latter was completely cured.

In his seraphic love for God, he could not understand how man could offend against His infinite majesty. Consequently he vowed an implacable hatred against sin, which he looked upon as the executioner of Jesus, his beloved; hence his ardent zeal to extirpate it from souls. A sinner, addicted to the most criminal habits, was sent to Iliceto for the retreat. Gerard met him and asked him about his soul. "All goes well," replied the hypocrite, "I have not fallen back into my past sins." The brother, who read the contrary in that wretched soul, took a crucifix and cried out to him in an indignant tone: "What! you have the courage to thus offend your God! You say you have not again fallen into sin! Look at this crucifix. Who caused those wounds to Jesus Christ? And who else but you has caused that blood to flow from the Saviour's veins?" At the same moment blood flowed from the hands and feet of the figure on the cross.

"What harm then has your God done to you?" pursued Gerard. "For you He was pleased to be born a little child in the manger; for you He slept on straw." At these words the Infant Jesus appeared in the hands of God's servant, who concluded by saying: "What! you dare to mock at your God? Know that I cannot be done with impunity. He is patient, but in the end He punishes." At once there appeared a hideous demon who strove to carry away the wretched sinner to hell. "Away, vile beast," exclaimed Gerard, and the devil hastened to disappear. It is needless to add that the sinner was sincerely converted and became a model of penitence.

Gerard had vowed all the tenderness of his heart to Mary. The name of Mary alone sufficed to throw him into ecstasy. The sight of her image caused him the sweetest transports. He wished to belong entirely to Mary as he wished to belong wholly to Jesus so as to reach Jesus through her. He formulated the intention to offer her as many acts of love as will ever be offered her by all the just on earth and all the blessed dwellers in heaven. Whenever he went he would speak of his good Mother with such zeal that he inflamed the hearts of all.

The holy brother may be called the saint of obedience. As he sought to reproduce in himself the Passion of Our Lord, so did he seek to become a perfect copy of Him who was obedient unto death, unto the death of the cross. "My Jesus," he would say, "through love for you, I will obey my superiors as I would obey Thee in Thy divine person, wert thou visible. Give me courage, Lord, to faithfully observe Thy law. Alas, if I should have the misfortune to deviate from it in the slightest degree, I should soon deviate greatly. Thou permittest that he who allows himself a slight falling away will end by allowing himself to fall away to a terrible extent." The Holy Ghost has said that he who is obedient shall celebrate his victories. In fact, obedience, instead of weakening the will's energies, multiplies them in an admirable manner. The Blessed Gerard attributed his miraculous power over the elements to obedience. While passing one day through Senarchia, he found the inhabitants in great perplexity. They were sorry because they could not get down from the mountain several large chestnut trees which were to be used in building their parish

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WESTMINSTER ABBEY, Romance and Secret Places of This Famous Church.

To the man who thinks he knows every nook and cranny of Westminster Abbey it will probably be a surprise to learn that there are many of its most ancient and interesting parts of which he has never even caught a glimpse.

For instance, in the eastern cloister is an ancient double door so guarded against unauthorized intrusion that it can only be opened by seven keys, which are in the jealous custody of as many government officials. Five of the keyholes of this wonderful door, which, by the way, is covered with human skins, are concealed from view by a stout iron bar which traverses it.

This door gives access to a vaulted chamber known as the chapel of the Pyx, the walls of which were standing, as they stand to-day, before ever the Norman conqueror landed on the shore of Sussex. This chamber was once the treasury of England, to which were brought "the most cherished possessions of the state." The regalia of the Scottish kings and the Holy Cross of Holyrood were deposited here; for many a year it served as a mint for coining silver and gold; it was, centuries ago, the scene of a daring robbery, when treasure valued at £100,000 (equal to two millions of present day English money) was taken from it, and to-day it contains, in addition to a stone altar, some old chests, one of which is said to have held the jewels of Norman kings.

Not far away is a passage leading to the little cloister, the arches of which were built under the eyes of Edward the Confessor nearly eight and a half centuries ago, and which has echoed to the footfall of the first William and his mailed attendants. Hidden from view under the pavement are the bases of the original columns of the abbey, which have also stood since before the conquest, and adjoining the little cloister is a garden, shut off by high walls from the outside world, in which monks meditated and walked and prayed eight centuries ago.

At the southeast corner of the little cloister are the remains of St. Catherine's chapel, which was probably built with living memory of the conquest. The beautiful doorway which once gave access to it now serves as the entrance to one of the official residences, and in its walls are still to be seen traces of the high altar and a fireplace. Not far from this interesting relic of ancient days is a square gray tower which once served the grim purpose of a monastic prison and has also been the repository of the royal jewels (for many years it was known as the "king's jewel house") and acts of parliament. After all these centuries of existence it still has its uses, for in it are kept the standards of weights and measures.

Few who have explored the abbey have been privileged to inspect the chapter library, with its treasures of books and manuscripts many centuries old, or perhaps know that under the passage leading to the chapter house lies the dust of the first abbot of Westminster, who had his day when the confessor was King of England. The chapter house, which is open to the public, has, of course, centuries of interesting memories. It was originally the chamber where the abbot and monks used to transact their monastic business; for many generations the Commons sat and legislated here before moving to the chapel of St. Stephen in Westminster palace, and in later years it was used as a storehouse for the public records, including the original Domesday Book. Beneath the chapter house is a crypt, the entrance to which is kept jealously locked and which seems to have served the purpose of a strong room to the Plantagenet kings, and not far from the chapter house is St. Faith's chapel, at one time the vestry of the abbey and in which the ancient and priceless altar plate of the abbey is kept.

Of peculiar interest is the Jerusalem chamber, which was built more than 500 years ago, and was probably at one time the abbot's withdrawing room. It was in this chamber that Henry IV. died, in curious fulfillment of a prophecy that he should die in Jerusalem.

It hath been prophesied me many a year
I shall not die but in Jerusalem,
Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land.
But bear me to that chamber; there
I'll lie.
In that Jerusalem shall Harry die.
And in the same chamber Addison,
Congreve and Prior lay in state
before their splendid interment in the abbey.



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DISTRESS IN IRELAND.

Writing from Kiltimagh, a special reporter of the Dublin Freeman's Journal gives a distressing account of the prevailing poverty:

"On reaching Kiltimagh Railway station," he says, "a few days ago I was astonished to find the platform crowded with people of all ages and both sexes. It reminded me of the spectacle of the crowds seeing emigrants off to America, but the signs of sadness and of waiting were absent, which told me at once this was not such a scene. No; it was the migratory laborers' return. Numbers of the laborers held on this season in England up to the last in the hope of gathering up something to bring home for Christmas. Every laborer from the West regards it as a sacred duty to return home for the holidays. Father Denis O'Hara, the parish priest of Kiltimagh, assured me that he regarded it as a matter of the highest importance that these poor fellows renewed their home ties regularly and came to their religious duties at the Christmas season. The home coming of the migratory laborer has not this year been what it was in former years. The reception and welcome, however, was as warm, nay, warmer, than when his pockets were better lined with money. Some of them, indeed, were worse than penniless, as their own people in different parts of Mayo had to raise the money to pay their fares back. Still, they were right heartily and royally received. The men returning at Christmas were not the worst off by any means. Hundreds returned last August completely baffled and defeated in their efforts to get work. To crown their misery and wretchedness they turned up from the boggy potato plots tubers the size of marbles, and of these a creel could not be obtained in a day. The little pits in which some of the farmers have their stock preserved, are not larger than beer barrels. Sometimes the yield has been a fifth, sometimes a sixth or seventh of former years, but always the quality was the worst experienced for twenty years. Most people hold that the character of the potatoes is worse now than it was in 1879. It is next to impossible for those living in cities and towns and urban districts to realize what this means, or to appreciate its true significance. Take any father of a family or the head of a household, and say to him: 'You consume so much provisions every week. Your supplies from now until the end of the spring must be reduced to one-half, to one-third, to one-fourth.' What the reply would be is better imagined than described. Yet that is what is happening all over the West of Ireland to-day, with this difference, that the supplies of the chief article of diet are at this moment reduced to one-fourth, and in a few weeks hence none at all will be left. Priests and laymen are throwing up their hands in alarm and despair. 'Will the Government do anything?' they ask. 'What is the meaning of the delay? Must the people starve?' These are the exclamations I have heard on all sides. They are, I regret to say, but too well founded.

In Kiltimagh parish the congestion is something awful. In about two English miles round the village there are nine hundred families, or, roughly, 4500 persons. In the village of Cleregh 55 families are "dumped" down upon about as much land as one English farmer would require for himself. In the village of Culthrasney there were 14 tenants occupying 140 different patches between them. Latterly the Congested Districts Board has pieced these together, and allotted to each holder an integral portion. Some few small estates in the neighborhood of Kiltimagh have been purchased by the Board, and here many signs of improvement are shown. I spoke with a man named Michael Kenny, who was busily engaged with his sons building stone fences. I would be afraid to venture on an estimation of the quantity of stones upon his farm. Since he purchased, and is no longer afraid of being rented on his improvement, he has turned all the attention he can spare to the removal of the stones. What he cannot use in fences he will bury. He hopes to clear the holding in the course of three or four years. By that time he will have utilized or buried under the sod between 800 and 1000 tons weight of stones. He pointed me a field of turnips. Two years ago it was a field of rocks and stones. They had "gone under," and now vegetables are blooming where they stood."

THE DONCASTER RACES AND THE DONKEY.

On one of his periodical visits to the monastery the Superior of the Franciscans told him that they wanted more help for their large farm, but that donkeys would do, and be nearly as useful as horses in reclaiming the land. So the Bishop wrote to a wealthy Catholic in his diocese, Mr. Middleton of Stockhead, and asked him to give him a couple of a famous brand of donkeys for his farm. The great horse races at Doncaster were about to take place, and as Mr. Middleton wrote to say that he would send him one then, and the other a little later on, the Bishop's servant, Mike, who was a well known character in York and used to carry the episcopal vestments on his shoulder through the streets whenever Dr. Briggs was going to officiate anywhere outside his own private chapel, was at the station to receive Mr. Middleton's donkey. It happened to be the evening of the day on which the famous Doncaster races had come off and all the sporting world was present to see the horse that had won the cup. There was but one horse box connected with the cars and everyone was clustered around the door of the box waiting for it to be opened. But the winner of the cup was not there, and the donkey, smelling the air of liberty, thrust forth his long nose and saluted the crowd with a portentous bray, at the same time exhibiting an enormous placard which hung around his neck. On the placard were painted the words, "The Rt. Rev. Bishop Briggs, Mickle-gate Bar, York." Mike pushed the disappointed crowd of sportsmen right and left and shouting "Come, you fellows, make room for your betters," led the donkey triumphantly through the streets as far as the convent garden, where he would be tended and fed until his journey could be prolonged to the Monastery.—Rev. L. C. P. Fox, O.M.I., in Donahoe's for February.

SHE CORNERED HIM.

The city editor was troubled, not to say angry.

"Hang it all," he exclaimed, as he read the letter addressed to his department, "my wife has been asking me that question for the last week, and I have refused to be bothered"—He looked at the letter again and jumped out of his chair. "Thunder and guns," he cried, "is her handwriting too! Now that she has learned the trick she'll make me settle every social, household and historical question that comes up, and I'll be right on hand to take the blame if I make a mistake."

For a long time he remained buried in thought. Then he resigned.—Brooklyn Eagle.

THE CATHOLIC PRESS.

That ever vital question, "The Catholic Press," has been deservedly to the front lately. Tertiaries in conference have been seized by the seriousness of matters its success or failure involves, and have resolved to devote their energy to its welfare, which is also that of every Catholic; and last month the many-voiced Apostleship of Prayer daily begged the Sacred Heart to bless it. Thinkers may give the question thought, but it is pre-eminently a practical matter. We have just to look around us and help those who are striving to build up for us, a worthy Catholic paper. Give them support and the means, and they will not only supply us with pure and healthy reading about things that matter, which will educate our Christian minds and hearts and help us to think thoughts we would not blush to speak about, but will also give us the whole truth of what goes on, instead of the broken scraps a subsidizing Masonry allows a servile lay Press to serve up to us. There is a real apostolate here open to every one of us.—Franciscan Review and St. Antony's Record.

FATHER HIGGINS OF SOUTH AFRICA

A Dr. Matthews, of Kimberley, South Africa, gives the following incident which came under his own personal notice:

Father Higgins was the first Catholic priest on the diamond fields. He was always on hand to attend to the wants of all, irrespective of creed or color. Not long before he was stricken himself with fever an unfortunate man, a perfect fever wreck, covered with frightful sores, and merely a living skeleton, came to him for relief. The Father took charge of him, and several times a day washed his ulcerous wounds with his own hands. In the first stage of fever, until weakness compelled him to take to his bed, he continued to relieve, as far as he could, the sufferings of the afflicted creature. As the ravages of the disease, however, made increasing strides, and the visits of the priest grew fewer and fewer, it was pitiable to hear this unfortunate fellow, who was lying in a small bell tent, make the air resound with his appeals for the good Father's help. Thus he continued to beg and implore him to come to his side, until he was told that the parting spirit of his good Samaritan comforter had gone to the land of the hereafter, whether he himself followed in a few hours.

It is easier to give counsel than to take it.

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