



LEGENDS.

THE term legend, now applied to ecclesiastical history, originally referred to a book containing the lessons to be read in the service of the old Romish Church; later on, to the accounts of the lives of the saints. They are said to have originated in this way:—

Before colleges were established, in the monasteries where the schools were held the teachers of rhetoric frequently gave the pupils the life of some saint as a test of their intellectual powers. The students, at a loss to fill up their pages, invented most wonderful adventures. The monks were so delighted with those flowers of rhetoric that they were induced to make a collection of these marvellous compositions, never imagining that at some distant time they would become matters of faith. Yet, when James de Voragine and others wrote the lives of the saints, they sought for their materials in the libraries of the monasteries, and, finding in the dust these manuscripts, imagined that they were making the world a valuable present in placing before it these voluminous absurdities. The people received these pious fictions with all imaginable simplicity, and, as they were illustrated with numerous cuts, the miracles were perfectly intelligible to them. The "Golden Legend," by James de Voragine, was received into the church with great applause, which it maintained for two hundred years, but it is so full of ridiculous and romantic accounts that the Romanists themselves are now generally ashamed of it. In the life of St. Francis, among

other grotesque miracles, we read that he preached a sermon in a desert and soon collected an immense audience, and the birds shrilly warbled to every sentence, and stretched out their necks, opened their beaks and, when he had finished, dispersed with holy rapture into four companies to report his sermon to all the birds of the universe. At one time, when attacked by a wolf, with only the sign-manual of the cross, he held a long dialogue with his rabid assailant, till the wolf, meek as a lap-dog, stretched his paws in the hands of the saint and became his follower, and was afterwards converted to half a Christian. Lillemont and Fleury, French writers of the seventeenth century, cleared away much of this rubbish, and legends in general fell into disrepute, and the word "legend" began to signify falsehood, although many of them contained unquestionable facts.

MABEL S.

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