

The Sparrow

HOLY Mary! How many charming legends are attached to the sweet name of Mary? Here is one, which is generally regarded as a pious tale or parable.

In the early ages of Christianity, a pious solitary, great in the sight of God, but little known to men (though St. Bernard twice preached his panegyric, and composed the office for his festival), lived on the borders of the Aube, in a forest of Champagne. The ancient Gauls had here worshiped one of their gloomy divinities, for whom the Romans had substituted Saturn. The spot was thence called Saturniacum, when the solitary, whose name was Victor de Plaucy, came there, and built a chapel and small hermitage.

Numerous miraculous events followed this work. Among the most surprising were conversions, by which souls sold to perdition were redeemed to heaven; and hearts once frozen by egotism, and corrupted by vicious practices, were inflamed with charity, and brought forth such flowers of virtue as even the world is constrained to admire, phenomena which perplex the mind, but are easily explained by faith.

The saint felt that the hours which he passed alone in his cell were sweetest of his life. The only living creature near him was a tame sparrow, which he fed and cherished, regarding him as the emblem of solitude. Tenderly devoted to the Blessed Virgin, the holy hermit invoked her incessantly, and the only words he uttered aloud were, Ave Maria!

Long accustomed to hear these words, and only these words, the sparrow learned to form them; and great (as may be imagined) was the joy of the recluse the first time the bird flew on his shoulder and cried in his ears Ave Maria!

At first imagining some holy spirit had come on a divine mission, the saint fell on his knees in reverence; but the bird continuing to chirp Ave Maria! Ave Maria! soon made him aware of the real source of those sweet sounds. The bird, from an innocent distraction, became a friend—almost a brother—a praying creature of God. He redoubled his care of him, and henceforth his solitude was agreeably enlivened.

The modest bird, to whom the people gave the name of "The Little Monk," seemed on his part to share in his master's joy. At dawn of day his first cry was, Ave Maria! When Victor threw him his crumbs, the little bird sang a grace of Ave Marias; and on the hermit kneeling to his devotions, the bird would perch on his shoulder and softly whisper, Ave Maria!

Victor cultivated a small garden. Could he for one instant have lost sight of the constant object of his thoughts, the faithful sparrow on a tree would have instantly recalled it by his Ave Maria!

The Christians of the country, who came to consult the holy hermit in their troubles and doubts, much esteemed the little bird; and on saluting them with his little prayer, they could not consider it to be otherwise than a miraculous favor accorded to the solitary by our Blessed Lady.

The sparrow, when free, took short flights into the country; and when the hermit, in his meditative walks had rambled further than his wont from his cell, he was sure to be reminded by the bird chirping an Ave Maria!

One day in spring, as Victor lay ill upon his mat, he opened the wicket of cell, and his little friend flew out, as was his custom. A few minutes afterwards, Victor was alarmed at seeing a sparrow-hawk pursuing his favorite. The bird of prey opened his beak and spread his talons to seize and devour the poor sparrow, when the little bird, almost the sharp claws of his enemy, screamed out, Ave Maria!

At this wonder, the hawk, startled and terrified, arrested his course; and the sparrow had time to reach the cell; and falling on the breast of Victor, faintly chirped Ave Maria! and died.