

# First biography of St John of God

by Francisco de Castro

## TO THE CHRISTIAN READER

When the authentic biography comes to light, the main difficulty presenting itself is how to revive and verify the truth, which through the passage of time has been buried and forgotten. This is precisely what happened to me as I prepared this work, notwithstanding the short period of time since John of God left this world and that there are still plenty of people living today who remember him. It is brought about not by writing down the essential matters in his life. There are many things in his biography which elude us, for he was a very reserved man and did not speak much about matters which were not closely concerned with charity and the care of the poor.[1](#)

Those who knew him find many points that give rise to conjecture after his conversion to God. Besides, there are some accounts that are uncertain and one may not write about those.[2](#) But as they say, there are many notable things that have been observed in his life that have yet to turn up; (those already observed permit us to write about them).[3](#) Such is the frailty of time! However, what appears here is truly known and its certainty has been carefully proven.

We have principally made use of a notebook which one who accompanied him on all his journeys has left us. He was a man very much like himself in spirit. He fully and clearly wrote down in a good hand what he saw as an eyewitness as well as what was said by credible persons who knew and did business with him.[4](#)

What cannot be verified we have omitted, but the prudent reader should be able to read between the lines, for it is better that we leave something out now which could be said later, than to talk about it now without certainty.[5](#)

# **THE FIRST BIOGRAPHY OF ST. JOHN OF GOD by FRANCISCO DE CASTRO**

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**TRANSLATED AND NOTES BY BENEDICT O'GRADY, O.H.**

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BIRTH AND NATIONALITY OF JOHN OF GOD.**

1:1. In the year of Our Lord one thousand five hundred and thirty eight, with the Emperor Carlos V reigning in Spain, the valiant, prudent and kindly prelate, don Gaspar de Avalos being Archbishop of the city of Granada, who in his day had the joy of seeing remarkable, faithful and virtuous men flourish in his diocese.

Amongst these there was one who was poor, humble and looked down upon in the eyes of men, but was well known and esteemed in God's sight, for he deserved to be called by the surname, John of God. He was born in a village called Montemor O Novo which lies within the diocese of Evora in the Kingdom of Portugal. Born of middle-class parents who were neither very rich nor poor, he grew up with them until he was eight years old, then without their knowledge he was abducted by a cleric and taken to the town of Oropesa. He lived here for a long time in the home of a good man called El Mayoral.

1.2. Since he was old enough, he was sent out with the workers to take care of the sheep in the pastures. His particular job was to fetch supplies and other things that the shepherds needed. He did this very well and although he was without parents and at such a tender age, he endeavoured as a shepherd to please the good man just mentioned, for as long as he remained in his house. His employers were very fond of him and he was loved by all.

1.3. As he was a young twenty-two years old bachelor, he willingly set out to go to war by enlisting in an infantry company commanded by Captain Juan Ferruz. In due time they were sent into the Emperor's service by the Count of Oropesa to relieve Fonterrabia which the king of France had invaded. John's motive was really a desire to see the world and enjoy the freedom that those who set off to war seek by rushing headlong along the wide (although arduous) way of dissolution. here he met with many hardships and fell into many dangers.

1.4. While at the front one day, he and his companions ran out of provisions. Some distance away stood some scattered farm buildings and barns, so being a brash and foolhardy young man, he volunteered to go there and look for food. They had captured a mare from the French , so he mounted it in order to ride there and back. once he had gone about two leagues from where he mounted, the mare recognised her usual surroundings and bolted forward to her familiar territory.

He tried to bring her to a stop, but he had no other means save the halter which he had used to guide her. She raced straight at the foothills and threw him amongst some rocks with such force that he lay unconscious for over two hours. Nobody was able to go over and

save him from such danger and to all appearances he seemed to be dead for blood was pouring from his mouth and nostrils.

Once he had regained consciousness, the agony from the fall made him realise his peril from being captured by the enemy. rising from the ground as best he could, he fell down upon his knees and fixed his gaze upon heaven and in a voice barely audible, he called upon the name of Our Lady the Virgin Mary to whom he had always been devoted, saying : "Mother of God, come to my help. pray to your holy Son for me so that he may save me from this peril in which I find myself, and that he may not allow my enemies to capture me."

1.5. Taking hold of a stick that he found, he forced himself to walk once more and slowly made his way back to where his companions were waiting for him. When they saw what a sorry state he was in, they thought that the enemy had found him, but when they asked how he came to be like this, he related the story of the mare. they put him to bed and heaped blankets upon him to make him perspire and as a result, he felt well and was healed within a few days.

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SOMETHING ELSE WHICH HAPPENED TO JOHN DURING THE WAR AND WHICH CAUSED HIM TO LEAVE IT.**

2.1. Only a few days passed by when John found himself in even a worse predicament. It so happened that his captain had placed him on guard over some items of clothing that had been taken from some French soldiers. He neglected to guard them properly and because of his carelessness they were stolen. Once the captain heard about it he became furious and would not listen to any of the soldiers who wanted to speak up for John whom he sentenced to be hung from a tree. It so happened that a kind person respected by the captain passed by, and when he found out what was going on, he pleaded that the order not be put into effect. Once he had made his opinion known to the captain, he immediately left the camp.

2.2. John determined to return to the home of his foster father Mayoral at Oropesa, because he was aware of the danger threatening his life and he had come to experience the shabby way that the world rewards those who seek to follow its ways. It seemed to him that the quiet life which he had previously experienced as a shepherd was far safer than going to war.

2.3. His master had faithfully and diligently brought John up in his home and because he loved him like a son, he was overjoyed to have him serve again in his house. He stayed for four years this second time, but his youthfulness got the better of him, as it so often does with young men who have tasted life's experiences and find it hard to settle down again.

John was out in the fields with his companions when the Count of Oropesa rode by with his men. they were off to serve the Emperor in Hungary where he was repelling the Turkish invasion at Vienna. Once John knew about this he made up his mind to enlist with the Count and indeed he did so. It seemed as if he had forgotten what happened to him at Fuenterrabia.

- 2.4. John diligently served the Count all the time that he was in Hungary and he did it so well that everyone liked him. Once the war was over and the Turks on the retreat, John accompanied the Count when he returned to Oropesa. They set sail for La Coruña where they disembarked together.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HOW JOHN OF GOD RETURNED TO HIS NATIVE LAND AND WHAT TOOK PLACE THERE.**

- 3.1. Once the Count had disembarked, John felt a great urge to visit his native country, since it seemed to him to be an easy walk from where he was. Besides, he wanted to find out about his parents and relations since he had never been back there since he left as a child.

He therefore set out and arrived at Montemor O Novo. There he asked after his parents, but his relatives did not know him on account of being so little when he left the country. Nor could they give an account of his parents since he had forgotten their names. He went about from one to another and finally came across a respected old uncle. As he spoke with John and heard him describe his parents, he recognised him and wanted to know what had befallen him since leaving the country.

- 3.2. John of God told his uncle everything that had happened to him since he had been taken away from his parents' home. They spent most of the day in conversation and questioning one another. The uncle said to him:

"My son, this you must know. Only a few days after you were taken away from this country, your mother died. It was due to the pain and sorrow that she felt for your absence. You were so little and she had no idea who it was that had taken you. All of us know that it was this heartbreak that cut her days short and bought about her death. Then some days later, since he was widowed and childless, your father went to Lisbon and entered a monastery, taking the habit of the great saint Francis. He finished his days in great holiness. Son, if you wish to stay on here, I would deem myself very happy indeed should you care to remain with me for as long as you wish."

- 3.3. John of God showed such great remorse and sorrow for having been the cause of his parents' death that his uncle began to weep. John stayed a little time, then profusely thanked his uncle for everything that he had done for him. And since he really did not know his relatives, he said:

"Kind uncle, since God saw fit to take my parents to himself, I no longer wish to stay in this country; but rather to go in search of a way to serve Our Lord beyond my native place, just as my father did. He gave me a good example by doing that. I have been so wicked and sinful and since the Lord has given me life, it is fitting that I should use it to serve him and do penance. I therefore put my trust in my Lord Jesus Christ that he may give me the grace to carry out this desire. Bless me then and pray to God that he will keep me in his hands. May Our Lord reward you for your kindness and for welcoming me into your home." Then fixing his eyes up to heaven, the uncle gave him his blessing saying: "John,

go in peace and I pray that Our Lord will truly bless your good intentions. May the prayers of your good parents aid you and may you join them some day".

Then, tearfully embracing, they took their leave of one another.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE NEXT THING THAT HAPPENED TO JOHN OF GOD.**

4.1. After John's uncle blessed him, he took leave of him and set off for Andalusia. Near Sevilla he found work caring for a lady's flocks and he stayed at this job for a few days. it was the work that suited him best of all since he had been brought up doing it. it seemed to him that Our Lord wanted him to try out the two occupations, that of soldiering and that of shepherding. It was very appropriate that he did try them for a while, especially the experience as a soldier since it had prepared him for the spiritual life. never again would he wish to take up the arms of evil, but instead to do battle with the world, the flesh and the Devil, and this he did very well.

4.2. As a shepherd he was able to lead so many poor wretched people by procuring both spiritual and temporal nourishment for them and curing their bodily ills by his labours. When he sadly remembered how well fed, protected and healthy the horses in the Count of Oropesa's stables were, whilst the poor were so badly off, ragged and hungry, he said to himself:

"John, would it not be better if you learned how to feed and care for the poor people of Jesus Christ rather than farm animals?" Then sighing he added: "Please God that some day I may be able to do that."

However, for the time being he was not able to see where Our Lord wanted him to serve him (although he had given him the will to do it). So after spending some days working for this lady, he became restless and ill at ease, for he was not keen to go on caring for sheep, so he left her. Then he got the urge to go and see something of Africa and to spend some time in that country.

4.3. That precisely is what he did. Taking leave of his employer, he set off for Gibraltar which faces Ceuta where Our Lord was leading him and where he would give him some heroic works of charity to fulfil. By chance a Portuguese knight who was crossing over to Ceuta with his wife and four maiden daughters. Because he had committed a crime, he was been sent into exile by the King of Portugal. On account of this he had to leave all his belongings behind and go off to fend for himself for some time in that far-flung place.

John spoke with him and learned all that had occurred. Offering him his service, John said that he would take care of him and see to his welfare. agreeing, the two joined together and set sail, arriving later at Ceuta.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **WHAT HAPPENED TO JOHN OF GOD WHEN HE RETURNED TO SPAIN.**

- 5.1. It is not difficult to believe that once this gentleman and his family arrived at that terrible place Ceuta, they found everything that they had brought with them gone and they were left destitute. The gentleman was constrained to beg John of God to help them in their great necessity because they had all fallen ill. It was all that he could do given the time, place and circumstances, and even John had lost weight as well.

The gentleman therefore made up his mind to go quietly to John and explain all their needs to him. He reminded John of his own strength and how he was capable of protecting those poor honest young ladies who had been brought up in plenty. he implored him to seek employment on the King's works which were then been carried out upon the fortifications of Ceuta's ramparts, so that by doing so they all might have enough to eat.

- 5.2. John listened to this reasoning (which greatly moved him with compassion, for he was prepared to do any work that the Lord wanted him to do in his service) and their persuasiveness let him see the way of fulfilling his desire. without hesitation he volunteered to do as they bid him.

And so off he went to work, willingly handing over the daily pay which he had earned. this enabled him to maintain those poor maidens and their parents. Nobody else cared for them at all. should John miss out on work for some reason or another, they all had to be patient and go hungry. Sometimes John reflected that his kindness to them was pleasing to Our Lord who had allowed him to come here at this time so that he might merit some of the mercy that would be shown to himself later on.

- 5.3. Seeing the results that this good work was producing, both for the ones benefiting from it and the one doing it, our enemy the Devil used his malice in an endeavour to impede it. It came about that those men who sought work there were abused and badly treated by the King's officers just as if they were slaves. Being at the frontier, they were not at liberty to flee to some other Christian land. Some of them suffered so much, and one has to believe that they were so badly treated that they fled to become Moslems at Tituan which is quite close.

One such person was one of John's companions whom he had befriended. without gaining anything at all, the Devil actually tricked him into fleeing away to become a Moslem. So great was John's feeling of loss over this, that all he could do was groan and cry out:

"O wretched me! If it only were me instead of my brother who had tried to run away from the protection of holy Mother Church. Just because he could not put up with a little hardship, he denied the truth of her faith."

The Devil persuaded John to blame himself for not restraining him. this almost made John despair of salvation and emulate his companion. However, he turned to the good Lord (as he usually did), who was watching over him and keeping him for greater things. he opened the eyes of John's soul so that he could see the danger in which he stood and he provided him with the necessary remedy. this was to guide him to a spiritual physician, one to whom he had already appealed with many tears and sighs. He called upon the help of Our Lady the Virgin.

5.4. John went to a Franciscan monastery at Ceuta and was led by Our Lord to a good and learned friar. He made an attentive confession, telling him everything that was tormenting him. Amongst other matters, he presented John with the remedy which seemed appropriate. Such a remedy should be put into effect and forever kill off the diabolical temptation. He started to make arrangements to return to Spain.

John saw that those whom he served would miss him (and this upset him), yet he knew that this was necessary and had to be given consideration over everything else. He went to them and told them that the time had come when he must leave them for the good of his own soul. He begged their pardon and wished that they could have the same service that he had so freely given them up to then. For surely Our Lord was sending him away and like a good father he would take care of them by sending them help just as he had done before.

It is impossible to say how the parents and their daughters took the news. However they put their faith in Our Lord and said that he should go. They saw that he had made up his mind, so weeping they wished him God's blessing in all that he would be undertaking and they thanked him for all that he had done for them. Bidding them farewell, he embarked and set off for Gibraltar.

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO JOHN OF GOD UP TO THE TIME OF HIS FINAL CONVERSION.**

6.1. No sooner had John of God disembarked at Gibraltar, than he went in to a church and knelt before a crucifix, profoundly thanking Our Lord saying:

"Lord be blessed for in your great kindness to me who am such a great sinner having done so many wicked things, yet you see fit to set me free from such a tremendous temptation and deception which I fell into through my own sinfulness. You have brought me into a safe harbour where I shall endeavour to serve you with all my strength. My Lord, I beg you with all my might, give me the strength of your grace and always let me see your clemency. I want to be your slave, so kindly show me what I should do. Give peace and quiet to my soul which greatly desires this. O most worthy Lord, may this creature of yours serve and praise you. May I give my whole heart and mind to you."

6.2. John stayed a few days there preparing himself to make a general confession. Once he had made this he went about visiting the churches to pray and wherever he went he tearfully implored Our Lord from the depths of his heart to forgive him his sins and to let him know in some way how he could serve him. He was always ready to undertake whatever work that was being offered and he was satisfied to live frugally and save his wages.

6.3. He came across a market where books and religious pictures were displayed for sale at the stalls. He bought some of these and went about selling them in the neighbouring districts. It seemed to John that he was more attracted to this sort of life because it was more peaceful and virtuous than the way that he used to be living. He could help all sorts of people to utilise what he was offering. He had also bought a few secular books and when

anyone approached him about them, he tried to talk them out of buying them and take a devotional one instead.

By doing that he was advising and persuading them that they should read good books. He also handed out leaflets, especially to the children. Using this pious sales pitch, he urged them on to better things and he gave bargain prices for the devotional books so that they might be bought in preference to others. This manner in which he used temporal merchandise in order to sell a spiritual one, soon became well known for he made no pretence about how he was more concerned with eternal matters.

6.4. John did the same thing with religious pictures, telling everyone that they should never be without them because they awaken an awareness to what they represent and so devotion is enlivened. the same went for the pamphlets, so that these could be used to teach children Christian doctrine.

He was so honest, gentle and friendly, that many people bought things that they had no intention of buying, because they were persuaded by his kind and charitable sales talk. In that way he increased both his spiritual and temporal stock, because besides the good he did in letting people read good books (which is obvious from all the good that came from it), he was also able to increase his stock of books.

6.5. John found it very tedious going about from place to place with his bundle strapped to his back, so he decided to go to Granada and settle down there. That is precisely what he did, arriving there at the age of forty-six. He took lodgings and set up shop at the Elvira Gate. He stayed in business here until the time arrived when Our Lord was to call him to his service in another way.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### JOHN OF GOD'S CONVERSION TO THE LORD.

7.1. Good John of God was busy at his trade and quite unaware that the Lord was about to remind him of the charitable work that he was about to undertake. He set his merciful eyes upon John and elevated him to a different state of life. >From being a great sinner he turned him into a great penitent, a man of justice and a champion of the poor.

7.2. The feast day of that courageous martyr Saint Sebastian came around. At that time the City of Granada held the solemn festivities at the Hermitage of Los Martires which is on the heights facing the Alhambra. That excellent and outstanding doctor of theology Master Avila was to be the preacher.

He was a man resplendent in holiness and the latest studies in those days. His example was so great throughout Spain that he was able to bring the very best out of people from all walks of life. He did this so very well that its story really needs telling in its own particular place. His sermons were so famous that it is no wonder that he had such a great following.

7.3. Well, the day arrived and amongst those going up to hear him was John of God. We have already spoken about the charitable works which John had been practising and added to

these, there was his confession which well prepared soil of his soul to allow the word of God to germinate once it fell upon it. The preacher expounded the reward which Our Lord bestowed upon his holy martyr for having suffered such tremendous torments and the pain of a thousand deaths out of love for him and how he receives such a Christian to bestow upon him his reward.

7.4. Helped by the grace of God, he held everyone's attention fixed by his lively words. Very soon their force and virtue were to be demonstrated. No sooner had the sermon ended when John rushed out of the place imploring and shouting for God's mercy. He despised himself (actually he esteemed himself as he always did), and began rolling about the ground hitting his head upon walls. He tugged at his beard and eyebrows and did things like that, so small wonder that everyone suspected that he had lost his reason. Leaping up again, he ran about urged on by the shouting of the mob, especially the young men following him down into the city shouting out "a crazy lunatic!"

7.5. He carried on like that until he reached his lodgings where he also kept his shop and the stock. Once he got inside he began ripping into shreds the chivalric novels and other profane books in his stock. Those of sound doctrine and the lives of the saints he gave away free to anyone asking for the for the love of God. He did likewise with the pictures and everything else that he had in his apartment. since he did not lack takers, all his stock disappeared in a very short time. Not only satisfied with stripping himself of all his worldly good, he even began to take off his clothing to give it away as well. Stripping himself of everything and giving it away, all he was left with was a shirt and breeches which he kept to cover his nakedness.

7.6. John once more ran out into the streets of Granada. He was dishevelled and shouting out that he wanted to be stripped so that he could follow the naked Jesus Christ, who although he was the richest of all creatures, made himself poor to show us the way to humility. So that is how John went about the streets begging the Lord's mercy. Many people followed to see what he would do next. entering the principal church, he knelt down and loudly shouted out:

"Mercy! Mercy, Lord God, on this tremendous sinner who has so offended you!"

Then he threw his body upon the ground and rolled about without stopping, shouting out for Our Lord to forgive him his sins.

7.7. Some decent folk saw what a great fuss he was causing and they felt sorry for him because they did not consider him to be insane as everyone else did. Lifting him up from the ground, they gently spoke with him and took him to where Father Avila was staying. Then they explained to him everything that had occurred since his sermon, because it was the sermon which had caused such a change in John.

Taking John aside from the people, he took him into a room where he was alone with him. John of God fell upon his knees and gave him a brief account of his life and showing great sorrow and contrition, he confessed his sins to him. He asked if he would be his spiritual director, because it was through him that our Lord had begun to bestow such tremendous grace upon him. From. from that moment on, John was able to take him as his father confessor and counsellor. He was prepared to stay obedient to him even to the point of death.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT TO JOHN AND HOW HE WAS TAKEN TO BE INSANE

8.1. Master Avila was pleased to see such a tremendous demonstration of contrition for having offended Our Lord in his new penitent. The father then decided that he would accept him as his spiritual son and wisely take care in counselling him in all that he should know. He said:

"Brother John, take great strength from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in his mercy because he has begun to operate in you and he will finish it. Be faithful and constant in what you have started to do. Do not turn back nor give yourself over to the Devil. Know that those who fight in the Lord's army like good cavaliers, shall enjoy the glory with him. Those who turn back like cowards will fall into the enemy's hands and perish forever. When you feel depressed and upset by troubles and temptations (and that is sure to happen), come to me. This all usually happens to those who first start to go into combat for the Lord. I understand the blows and wounds which hurt you and also the traps that the enemy sets for you. By the grace of Our Lord you will be given saving medicine to cure your soul and strengthen you to fight against your enemies. I believe that the Lord is not going to deny you his mercy, so go now in peace and with my blessing, and the blessing of God as well."

8.2. John of God was so relieved and buoyed up by that holy man's words of advice that once more he was overcome by a great urge to despise himself further and to mortify his body. He wanted everybody to take him for a madman, an evil man worthy only of contempt and being despised so that he could serve Jesus Christ all the better so as to live in his sight. This holy cunning was really only a cover-up for the grace which he had received from his hands, so that is precisely what he did once he had left Father Avila. Going into the Plaza Bibarrambla, he threw himself into a mud hole and rolled about in it. He put the slime into his mouth and shouted to everybody who stared at him (and there were plenty of people about) the sins that he remembered having committed.

"I have sinned greatly against my God by offending him in this and that. What does such a traitor deserve for having done that? Above all he should be struck down, defiled and scorned as the vilest upon the earth. He should be chucked into the mud and slime where only filth is dumped."

The ordinary folk who witnessed all this did not believe a word of it, but rather that he had lost his senses. But really, he was inflamed by the Lord's grace and in fact he wanted to die for him trampled underfoot and despised by all. So to put this into effect, he came out of the mud hole and just as he did before, began jumping and running about.

8.3. As soon as the louts and hooligans saw him they began following him, egging him on and throwing mud and all sorts of filth at him. He took it all very patiently and happily just as if it were a fiesta. He put up with it because it seems to him that he was getting what he set out to achieve, for without causing any harm to anyone, he was still able to suffer for the One whom he loved.

8.4 He made a cross out of a stick and lifted it up and passed it around for everyone to kiss. should anyone, even a child, tell him to kiss the ground for the love of Jesus, he immediately obeyed taking no notice of all the mud. He went on doing this for a few days, often falling exhausted and bruised from the screams, shoves and blows heaped upon him. He was so convincing at feigning madness (for indeed everybody believed him to be mad), that he could no longer stand up straight on account of his exhaustion from the continuous torments being heaped upon him. In spite of it all, he was not satisfied with the bad treatment and he cheerfully (without murmur or complaint) let the louts kick him and deal blows to his body.

8.5. Two respectable gentlemen of the city took pity upon John when they saw all this. They took him by the hand and led him away from the rabble and brought him to the Royal Hospital where the city's insane are put away for treatment. the requested the chief warder to treat him with kindness and to put him into a room where he might recuperate without people gazing upon him. It was in this way that they hoped he might be cured of the madness which had possessed him.

However, the chief warder had already seen John going about the city, so he handed him over to a warder to be locked away. They observed the poor state that he was in, his clothing in shreds and he black and blue all over from the blows and stones that had been hurled at him. they quickly took him in hand and although they used the latest methods to try to bring him to his senses, he resisted.

The cures they used for such cases like his consisted of flogging and placing the afflicted person into a dismal dungeon. They used other similar methods as well, so that by means of inflicting pain and punishment, the patients might shed their madness and regain their sanity. So they stripped him naked and tying him up by the hands and feet, they flayed him with a doubly knotted whip.

8.6. Because John's illness was caused through being wounded out of love for Jesus Christ, they increased their lashes all the more. he turned to them and said:

"O you traitors, you enemies of virtue! Why is it that you so cruelly treat these poor people, my brothers and sisters, my companions in his house of God? would it not be better if you had pity for them in their sufferings and started to clean them up and feed them with plenty of love and charity, since the Catholic Monarchs have bequeathed a full endowment for that."

Well, once the warders heard this, they not only took him to be mad, but also a trouble maker as well. So for both of these reasons they started to hit him all the harder and much more than the others whom they simply regarded as being insane. But John would not give up rebuking them for their lack of caring and because of this they intensified their blows causing him unspeakable sufferings. He offered all this up in his heart to the One whom he loved and for whom he was undergoing this experience.

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## CHAPTER NINE

## **FATHER AVILA SENDS SOMEONE TO VISIT AND CONSOLE JOHN OF GOD IN THE HOSPITAL**

9.1. Master Avila was aware that John of God was believed to be insane and that he had been put into the Royal Hospital. Because he well knew the cause of his mental breakdown, he sent a disciple to visit him and see if he was happy about it all, since he was now beginning to suffer something for the love of Jesus Christ. He urged him to pray to the same Lord so that he might act like a good soldier, giving his life for his Lord and King. That he should humbly and patiently accept all the trials that his Majesty might send him. Also, if he were to consider what our Redeemer suffered upon the cross, then any torment he now suffered would seem trivial. He went on to say:

"Brother John, whilst you have time, start testing yourself for the time when you will go out into the world to fight the three enemies. trust in the Lord for he will never forsake you."

9.2. Brother John was so grateful and consoled that his good father Master Avila should have remembered him and sent him a visitor in that prison where he was forgotten by all. That after Our Lord, he alone should remember him in his trials. When he heard of this favour which the Lord had given him, he burst into tears of joy and said to him:

"Tell my good father, may Jesus Christ stay with him and may he be pleased with the good help which he always give to me. I have been conquered in fair combat, so here I am his slave. Although I am a wicked and useless servant, I hope through the love of our Lord, that he will not forget to commend me in his prayers to his Majesty, for then I will live happily knowing that he is never going to let me down."

9.3. The two understood each other well and kept on meeting secretly and carrying on conversations like this one. John was becoming to be noticed in the wards of the hospital and in order to bring him to his senses (as already mentioned) they kept up the previous treatment. He took it all cheerfully saying:

"Go ahead brothers this treacherous flesh which is the enemy of goodness, has been the cause of all my wickedness, because I obeyed it and so it is fitting that both of us pay for it since we both sinned."

Looking about at the insane patients being punished along with him, he said :

"May Jesus Christ eventually give me the grace to run a hospice where the abandoned poor and those suffering from mental disorders might have refuge and that I may be able to serve them as I wish."

9.4. John of God kept what he had in mind quiet and put up with more suffering for some days so that he could put his plan into effect. He yearned to serve Our Lord in the poor so he thought the time was ripe to show how calm and collected he really was. with tears and sighs he thanked God saying:

"Blessed be Our Lord for freeing me now and healing me of the pain and anguish which I felt in my heart in the time just gone by. It is more than I deserve."

The chief warder and officers were so pleased to see John quiet and telling them how much better he felt, that they removed his shackles leaving him free to move about the place. John did not wait for anyone to tell him what to do. he started at once to serve the poor, showing them great love in every task he undertook, such as washing, sweeping and cleaning the wards. The warders were pleased to see how he had gotten over his illness so well and had recovered his senses. He showed them that the poor should be served diligently and charitably and Our Lord would be pleased by that.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### HOW JOHN OF GOD WENT ON A PILGRIMAGE TO OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE.

10.1 As already mentioned, John of God was kept busy. one day he was sitting by the main entrance to the hospital thinking about how Our Lord had pitied him in his troubles. It was the day of the Eleven Hundred Virgins and as he gazed out over the countryside, he saw many people on horseback and crowds of clergy and religious accompanying a hearse which carried the body of the Empress, wife of the Emperor Carlos V, who had departed this present world and was to be interred in the Royal Chapel at Granada.

10.2. When he had discovered what the spectacle was all about, John wanted to leave the hospital immediately and put his good resolution into action. At that time the city lacked a hospice to house itinerants and the abandoned (for the territory had just been won back).

10.3. Having made up his mind John went to the senior warder and said:

"Brother, may Our Lord Jesus Christ repay you for the expense and charity that you have extended to me during my illness here. Thanks be to God I now feel well and healthy enough to go back to work. therefore, for the love of God, give me a certificate of release so that I may leave here and do what he wants me to do."

The senior warder replied:

"I would prefer you to stay on here for a few more days to rest up and gather your strength since you are so worn out and thin from the hardships you suffered in the past. However, since you want to go, do so and go with god's blessing. Here is a certificate from myself, just in case anyone seeing you should think that you have not gotten over your past sufferings and they want to bring you back here to the hospital. Go freely now wherever you wish."

John humbly took this but he did not care whether people might still think him mad or not.

10.4. John of God bid farewell to everyone in the place who liked him so much. Dressed in his tattered and torn clothing, bareheaded and barefooted, he set off immediately to go to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He wanted to give thanks to Our Lady the Virgin for the help and mercy that she had given him in the past and to pray for her assistance in the new life that he was contemplating. He was always conscious of her presence and help in all his troubles and needs.

10.5. It was a harsh winter and he suffered much on the journey from hunger, cold and insufficient clothing. He went barefooted and as he had no money he had to beg for his food. He kept himself busy collecting firewood which he bundled upon his shoulders to give to those who gave him food and lodging. If there was a hospital about, he went straight there and handed it over for the use of the poor. Afterwards he would go and ask for just enough to fulfil his own frugal needs.

When he arrived at Guadalupe, he fell upon his knees tearfully and with and great devotion he thanked Our Lord for all that he had received and he recommended all his needs to him. He made his confession, received communion and after spending some time in prayer there, he thought it about time to return.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### JOHN OF GOD RETURNS TO GRANADA AND GETS SOME ADVICE.

11.1. When John's pilgrimage was over, he set out to return to Granada. He stopped over at Baeza because he had heard that his good director Father Avila was staying staying there and preaching as he usually did in the other cities and towns. So no sooner had he heard about this, then off he went on his way. He was delighted to see John who stayed a few days with him there. Then finally he advised him what he should do.

"Brother John, you should return to Granada where Our Lord is calling you at the moment. He knows your desire and intention and is going to show you the way how to serve him. Remember, he sees you, so act accordingly as you would in the presence of such a great Lord. As soon as you get to Granada go immediately to the confessor I spoke to you about. He shall be your spiritual director and you should not undertake anything of importance without first consulting him about it. Should you have something that you wish to confide to me, write to me regardless of where I should be. With Our Lord's help I will in all charity try and see what I can do about it."

11.2. Morning was breaking when he arrived at the city. After assisting at Mass he set off for the hillside to gather a bundle of firewood. As he was returning he felt so embarrassed that he could not even get himself to go in through the Molinos Gate, which is a good distance from the commercial centre of the city. Coming across a poor widow he gave it to her because he thought she would have a good use for it.

11.3. The next day he began to feel guilty about his cowardice the day before. He arose early, went to Mass and then set off for the hills to gather another bundle of firewood. Then on his way back to the city he once more began to feel ashamed like the previous day, but he goaded himself on saying to his body:

"Don Ass, you do not want to go into Granada loaded with firewood because you feel it shames your honour. You have lost out, so now go and carry it into the Plaza Mayor. There everybody who knows you is going to see you and you will then forget your touchiness and pride."

He went into the plaza and everyone saw him loaded with his firewood. They had not seen him since his madness so a good many people began gathering about him in wonder. When some of his friends saw him they began to laugh and poke fun at him saying:

"What is this brother John, have you turned into a woodsman now? What was it like in the Royal Hospital amongst the patients? When are you ever going to learn, the way you go about your life and business?"

The lay-abouts poked fun at him and teased him with words like those, but he took it all in good humour and was not annoyed with any of them. On the contrary, he was glad of the opportunity to join in their fun and laughingly he answered them saying:

"Brothers, this is a game of Birlimbao, three galleys and a ship, which meanwhile (the more) you see, the less you know."

11.4. He said these things and others just like them as well to those who enquired about his life. He did not let them know about the favours which the Lord had given him, for it amused him to let them go on thinking that he was rather useless. He did this so well that the ordinary people seeing him going on like that thought that he was rather crazy. It would not be too long before they were to see the grain buried, decompose and then bring forth an abundance of fruit. And what fruit that was going to be!

11.5. Over the next few days he kept himself busy gathering firewood upon the hillside. What he had to spare he gave to the poor. He went looking for them as they were turned away from doorways, frozen, ragged and covered with sores. He was so moved with compassion at having seen so much of all this, that he decided to do something about it as soon as possible.

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## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **JOHN OF GOD OPENS HIS FIRST HOSPITAL.**

12.1. John of God really wanted to do something practical to make the poor well and happy. so he went and spoke to some devout people who had helped him before. With their help and his own enthusiasm, he was able to rent a house near the fish market close to the Plaza Bibarrambla. Here he bought all the abandoned sick and cripples he found. He bought some second-hand blankets and rush mats for them to sleep upon and since he had nothing left over to buy medicines, he said:

"Brethren, God wants you to do penance, so think about how greatly you have offended him, so now give him thanks. That is why I wish to give you spiritual medicine for the cure of your souls. Afterwards a cure for the body will be found. trust in the Lord who will provide everything (as he usually does to those who try to do their part)."

Then he would go and get a priest to hear their confessions. No matter what priest he would ask, they all willingly came along to perform this good deed.

- 12.2. After that he would cheerfully and lively step outside and go down the streets carrying a large bag over his shoulders and in his hands, two pots held together by string. As he went about his rounds he used to shout out:

"My brothers and sisters, who wants to do well for themselves? Who wants to do well for the love of God?"

He would go out at dusk as people were gathered in their homes at that time and it made no difference even if it were raining. When they heard this novel method of begging, they would rush to their windows and doors to gaze out in wonder. they saw what virtue the Lord had bestowed upon him and his voice had such an appealing tone that everyone's heart was moved upon hearing it.

Many others were so impressed when they saw how austere, rough and tough his lifestyle was, that they came outside to give him alms. They all willingly and generously gave what they could manage, some with cash, others with pieces of bread, even whole loaves. Others gave meat and leftovers from their meals and this he put into the pots which he carried for that purpose.

- 12.3. When he thought that he had collected enough alms, John went back to his poor people. Upon arrival he would say:

"God bless you brethren. Pray to the Lord for those who have been good to you."

Then heating up what he had bought back, he shared it out between them all. After the meal and prayers for their benefactors were over, alone he did the washing up of the dishes and bowls, cleaned the pots and swept and dusted the house. When that was done he wearily went and carried back two pitchers of water from the fountain. There were still many people who remembered when he was mad and treated so cruelly and for that reason they did not want to help him. So until that position was made clear, he was left to do all the work single-handed. Afterwards when it was seen how kindly he cared for the poor, many came along to help him.

- 12.4. As John of God's fame spread, many people came to the house, so many in fact that there was barely standing room, because he used to go out searching for those who were turned away from other hospitals. he kindly persuaded them to go to his place. Aware of their needs, he rented another much larger house and filled it with cripples and all sorts of sick people.

If they were unable to walk, he carried them upon his back. he also carried the bedding so that they and the itinerants going there, could sleep upon it. he was able to manage and keep this place in better order. he set up some beds for those who were in greater suffering. Our Lord provided some nurses to help him serve them whilst he went out searching for alms, medicines and other means for curing the.

- 12.5. As John of God's charitable work increased, so too did the recourses and needs of the house. Many important people both at Granada and beyond, began to take notice of it. They particularly noticed John's perseverance and his good management which kept on growing from good to better. they noticed that not only was he giving shelter to itinerants and the homeless, he also set beds apart for the sick to be nursed. He was given credit to

buy necessities for the poor and alms began to flow in far more than before. These took the form of blankets, sheets, pillows, clothing and other items.

- 12.6. All manner of poor and needy folk came to him. There were widows, innocent orphans, the genteel poor, people with lawsuits, wounded soldiers and poor out of work farm labourers on account of the disastrous drought that year.

Many others came along too and he helped them all according as they had need. he never once sent anyone away disappointed. He gladly gave at once what he could, others he cheered up by his words telling them to have confidence in God's providence.

As if all that was not enough to keep him busy, his concern took him off to seek out the genteel poor; lonely spinsters, impoverished holy nuns and housewives who suffered in silence because of their necessities. He took care of them all with tremendous kindness and he begged from wealthy ladies to help these people. He himself saw to the buying of bread, meat, fish, charcoal and all the other necessities for their sustenance. because he did this they did not have to go out in search of these items, but could quietly go about their good lives and as a result their privacy was respected.

- 12.7. Once John had taken care of their bodily needs, he found work for them to do in their homes (to avoid idleness and to let them make their own clothing). As well as spinning wool, flax and hemp, he bought them silk from the market to spin as well. Then he used to sit down with them for a while and chat about spiritual things. He persuaded them to grow in virtue and to shun vice. he would go on lively explaining (although in a simple way), matters which even to this day are remembered by many who listened to him. He gave them the hope that if they acted like that and helped by the Lord's grace, they would want for nothing. He promised them that the ones who worked the hardest would gain the most and that is the way he spurred them on to live virtuously and serve the Lord. In this work, just like the other ones he undertook, John did not lack opposition. Both Satan and those who serve him never sleep in their battle against those whom they see slipping away from their control and making their way towards the Lord's service.

- 12.8. It so happened that some people started spread rumours and gossip saying that all this had something to do with his madness. They said it had not quite left him since the time he went raving about the streets and that all he was doing now would collapse for want of a solid basis. If that were not enough, they spied upon him from hidden places to see what he said when he went into the houses.

They got the shock of their lives when they saw with their own eyes what a good example he was giving, his honesty, edifying conversation and the good deeds that he was performing. All this puzzled them and they were forced to keep their mouths shut.

Unbeknown to John, some actually began to praise him and when they bumped into him they gave him alms. above all, he never forgot the poor, for they were his main concern. He comforted them with his words and before leaving the house, he saw to it that they had enough provisions for the following day. He set everything up just right so that they could all get on with their work. Once he had seen to the arrangements that he had made for each individual as well as their companions in the scheme, he would then go out and keep himself busy begging up until as late as ten or eleven o'clock at night.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### OTHER DEEDS PERFORMED BY THE SERVANT OF GOD

13.1. Brother John of God had a great devotion to the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. he found it delightful and helpful, since after all, it is the main source of all help. because he so loved Our Lord, he wanted those about him to gain from this same experience of his. So, out of devotion for the day in which our salvation was wrought, he set out every Friday to visit the brothels to see if he could snatch some soul away from the claws of the Devil who has such a close grip on such ones.

13.2. Upon entering, he headed straight for the most abandoned soul, because he thought that she would have the least chance of getting out of the place. he would say to her:

"My child, I will pay you what others give you and more besides. I beg you to listen to a few words here in your room."

Then going into her room he bade her to be seated whilst he fell upon the grown on his knees. he would hold up a small crucifix which he carried for this purpose and then would start accusing himself of his own sins. With bitter tears he begged Our Lord to pardon them. Such was the effect upon her that she also began to feel repentance and sorrow for her own sins. Having achieved her attention to what he had to tell her, he began relating the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ to her and he did it so devoutly that she broke up into tears. Then he said to her:

"My child, look how much you cost Our Lord. Look how he suffered for you. you do not want to be the cause of your own loss. See what an eternal reward awaits the good and what an eternal punishment there is for those who like you are living in sin. Do not provoke him any further in case he should leave you totally as your sins deserve and then you would plunge like a heavy stone into the depths of hell."

The Lord showed him what to say with these words and others like them.

13.3. Although there were a few so hardened in vice that they did not care, others were helped by God's grace to be moved to repentance and penance. These ones said to him:

"God knows Brother, I would go and help you with the poor at the hospital, but I am bonded here and the wont let me go away with you."

With joy he replied:

"Trust in the Lord child, for he who has enlightened our soul will take care of your body. Listen carefully to what I am telling you and don't offend him. Make a firm resolution to prefer death rather than return to sinning. Trust me now and I shall come back to you soon."

Then off he would go to the leading society ladies whom he knew in the city and he asked them to help him saying: "My sisters in Jesus Christ. Let me tell you about someone whom

the Devil has enslaved. for the love of God help me to ransom her and take her away from such a miserable captivity."

- 13.4. John had made similar requests to these persons before and they were so charitable that it was very seldom that he ever left them without their aid. When he was unable to get the necessary means to pay off some pimp when his woman wanted to quit, he gave a promissory note for the amount required.

Then he would take them away to the hospital and place them in the infirmary which cared for other women like themselves. they were able to see just how the world rewards those who persist in that sort of life. some of them had maggots crawling out of their putrid heads. others had parts of their bodies cauterised by fire and others were left hideously mutilated after undergoing painful amputations.

- 13.5. In that way he found out the intentions of each one and whether she was sincere or not. As it turned out, some of them were greatly enlightened by Our Lord and they quickly recognised the consequences of the way they were living and they wanted to get out of it and do penance. Then he took them to the monastery of the Recogida Nuns and provided for all that they needed.

For those who were not so inclined, but preferred marriage, he found dowries and husbands so that they could get married, which in fact many did. After returning from his visit to the Court, he was able to see sixteen of them all married at once. There are many widows living chaste honest lives today who can bear testimony to that.

- 13.6. In undertaking this charitable work John of God suffered mortification and problems. He clearly demonstrated the patience and heroism which Our Lord had imbued into his soul, because (since the greater part of these women were so lapsed, obstinate and hardened in sin, for that very reason many of God's servants shunned them and would have nothing to do with them, even though they were sorry to see their perdition).

When he took one away from them, the others would hurl abuse at him and defile him by saying that his motives were wicked. He never replied a single word to all this nor did he return evil for evil. instead he suffered it all with tremendous patience. anyone else would have said:

"Why are you so wicked and rude to one who has been so good to you?"

But his reply was:

"Leave them alone and say nothing to them, otherwise you will deprive me of my glory. really, they know and understand me and that is why they treat me as I deserve."

- 13.7. Something truly remarkable happened about this subject. It is really more for our wonder than imitation. it illustrates the truth of his burning charity in winning over souls which he knew were redeemed at such an inestimable price.

This is what happened. as was his custom, he went into the brothel to persuade some women to leave their evil way of life. four of them got together and decided that they wanted to make amends for the past. they told him that they were from Toledo and that

they could not leave their evil life behind unless he took them there so that they could settle important matters that concerned the.

They promised to leave their past behind them if he would take them. When he heard this he saw his wishes coming true, and four woman at one, so he agreed. His mind was made up. He hired the necessary animals and gear. he took with him a co-worker at the hospital named Juan de Avila. This prudent and good-living man died only a little while ago. He praiseworthy served the house for many years and it was he who recorded everything that happened on the journey at the time.

- 13.8. Passers-by and others who saw the two men dressed as they were, and with those four women who looked just what they were, provoked them with obscenities and ridicule. They called them pimps and that sort of thing. John of God, with great patience remained silent and let it all pass. But not so Juan de Avila, who provoked by what he had to listen to also reproached him saying:

"I rue the day we set out with these ruined women. Having to put up with such insults, and especially, when I saw one of them drop out as we passed through Almagro."

When they arrived at Toledo another two fled away from him and that was just too much for the co-worker who was quite fed up and said:

"What madness this has all been! Didn't I tell you that is all you could expect from wretches like that? They are all the same, so let us leave them to it and go home."

John very patiently replied to all this:

"Brother John, what would you think if you had to go down to Motril for four loads of fish and on the way back three of them became rotten and only one stayed fresh? Would you throw the good one away with the others? Well now, out of the four that we bought along, one is showing a right intention by staying. For goodness sake just be patient and soon we will go home to Granada. Let us hope in God that the one remaining stays and then our journey would not have been in vain and what we have achieved will by no means be small."

And so he did return to Granada with the one whom our Lord had given him and there he found a good man to marry her. She is here still, a widow now. She has since lived and is still living, a very praiseworthy and exemplary Christian life. Which just goes to show the mysterious way bought about by Our Lord so that she might know him.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### BROTHER JOHN OF GOD'S GREAT CHARITY

- 14.1. So great was the charity which Our Lord bought about in his servant and the remarkable things that sprang forth from this; that it even caused some people to rashly judge him to be some sort of eccentric spendthrift. they were not aware that our Lord had sent him into the wine cellar to have access to his charity and therefore become inebriated with his love.

He never refused anything to anyone asking him for something. Many was the time when he had nothing to give but the very clothes that he was wearing. this left him naked and a pitiful sight for all to see. Besides, it was very rough on himself. He considered that since it was God who obviously gave him everything, then what he himself gave away was very little indeed.

He lived just like the saint, longing to spend himself in a thousand different ways, so abundant was the generosity he demonstrated That is the way spiritual men are enriched by spiritual good and out of their own prosperity and wealth they give to others. For them it is far sweeter to give than to receive.

- 14.2. John's charitable work kept him busy all day long. At night when the house had settled quietly down and in spite of the fact that he felt worn out; he would not retire until he had gone around to visit each and every patient. he consoled them with his kind words, giving them both spiritual and temporal comfort. He used to ask them where they came from and whether they needed anything.

Once he had made his rounds of the house, he used to meet with those poor genteel folk who were waiting to see him. he never sent any of them away without some sort of satisfaction, nor did he hesitate to give them alms should they have asked for it out of the love of God. If anyone were to say to him: "Now look here, that person has no need of that, he would reply: "if I am tricked that is their business. all I know is that I am giving it to them for the love of God."

When he was unable to give them anything, for he generally never refused what they asked (which explains the time he was found wrapped in a blanket after giving his clothes away), he would give them a letter to take to some gentlefolk or kind person who might help them in their needs.

- 14.3 The following is a case well worth elating. Don Pedro Enriquez, Marquis de Tarifa, happened to be staying at Granada. So John of God went to where he was residing in order to request alms from him. when he arrived don Pedro was gambling with some other gentlemen, so they all dipped in and gave him twenty-five ducats.

The Marquis had heard a good deal about his charity and so he wanted to test it out with a little trick. He disguised himself (since John of God had already seen him) and then went outside to meet him as he returned in the darkness to his hospital. He bumped into him saying:

"Brother John, I am an honourable man but a stranger and poor. I came here to contest a lawsuit and am suffering tremendously to maintain my dignity. I was told about your charity and I beg you to help me so that I might not offend God."

Brother John took notice of the man's appearance and what he had said and replied:

"O my goodness (he had a habit of saying that), let me give you what I have on me."

Digging into his bag he handed over the twenty-five ducats which I have just mentioned he had already received. Taking them, he thanked John and moved away. When he got back to where the other gentlemen were waiting for him, he told them about the amazing episode. everyone admired such tremendous charity, for in spite of having so many poor people to look after, he trusted in God's providence and was so very generous towards only one.

- 14.4. John's trust did not disappoint him because the Marquis had been touched by what had occurred. the next morning he sent word around to John not to leave the house because he wanted to come and see the hospital.

When he arrived he started to joke with him saying: "Brother John, what is all this I hear about you being robbed last night?" He replied: "O my goodness, I was not robbed." Then they both broke out laughing and carried on a jovial conversation. The Marquis said to him:

"Now Brother, God has proven your genuineness to me since you did not refuse the swindle we put over you. take back your twenty-five ducats and here is a hundred and fifty gold escudos more which I am giving to you as a donation. watch out for another day like that one."

He then arranged for a hundred and fifty loaves of bread, four sheep and eight fowls to be sent around to him. For as long as he remained at Granada he saw to it that this ration was delivered daily. He was tremendously edified to see this being used for so many poor people of all types who were so charitably being cared for there.

- 14:5. Another incident occurred highlighting his charity which went as far as even to the point of risking his own life for his brethren. This took place at the Royal Hospital which the Catholic Monarchs don Fernando and Doña Isabel had founded and endowed. One day a fire suddenly burst out and furiously burnt through most of the hospital. then as soon as he heard about it, John of God arrived upon the scene and started to rescue the poor inmates. He summed up the situation and ignored the tremendous danger facing him and almost single handed saved all those poor men and women by carrying them out upon his shoulders.

Using superhuman strength, he next began hurling all the beds and bedding out from the windows. When he placed those poor people in safety, he rushed back upstairs to where the fire was raging most dangerously and helped to put it out. All of a sudden a great sheet of flame engulfed him and huge billows of smoke issued out over the people below as they looked on. They all thought that without doubt he had been consumed by the flames.

The crowd shouted out that John of God had perished the fire. Then all of a sudden without warning he emerged from it completely free of lesions other than only having his eyebrows singed by the flames. This just goes to show the marvels which Our Lord worked through him. The Corregidor who was staying in the city at the time, gave testimony to this. Besides, very many other people in authority were there and saw it all as well.

- 14.6. All this is easy to prove, just like all the other incidents in his past life. However, for the sake of brevity these are omitted here. All I want to add is that should anyone go into his hospital, they can easily see this man's tremendous charity. there they will be able to see poor people suffering from all sorts of diseases and being cared for without any discrimination at all (just as they do today). there are people with fevers, skin diseases and wounds, the homeless and children suffering the effects of malnutrition. then there are also the fondlings left on the doorstep, the insane and the mentally retarded. and that does not count the poor students he helped out and the genteel poor whom I have already mentioned.
- 14.7. In order to help the beggars and itinerants, he set up a night shelter where they could sleep at night and shelter from the cold. This had its own kitchen and was so large and well appointed that it could comfortably shelter two hundred people. they all enjoyed the warmth of its hearth and there were stretchers to sleep upon. others used mattresses or palliasses and when it was necessary, some slept upon mats. All this is going on this day at the hospital. He took care to see that those given shelter did not offend our Lord, so he separated the men from the women, putting the women in a place of their own. In that way he kept the place respectable and free from undesirables.

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## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **THE PATIENCE AND GREAT HUMILITY OF JOHN OF GOD**

- 15.1. Patience is the crowning perfection in a gentleman of Jesus Christ and the soul of this holy man who underwent so much suffering, possessed that patience. Nothing ever perturbed him nor did a cross word ever pass his lips. Furthermore, even faced with the greatest affronts and injuries, he still remained peaceful and happy. He was just like one who had no other will other than that of Jesus Christ in whose cross alone he gloried. This can be seen in many of the incidents that happened to him, so let us now speak about some of them.
- 15.2. One morning whilst he was out searching for food to feed the poor, a gentleman came down the street called 'Los Gomeles'. There were plenty of people in the city at that time and especially so in that particular street at the foot of the Alhambra. John inadvertently bumped into him and his basket had caught hold of the man's cloak disarranging it from his shoulders. The man angrily turned upon him saying: "Ah, you vile scoundrel, why don't you look where you are going?"

John replied with great patience: "Will you pardon me brother, for I was not watching where I was going." Hearing himself addressed as 'you' and 'brother'(as was John's custom with everyone), he became infuriated and slapped him on the face. And since he kept on referring to him as 'you'. the man called to his servants saying:

"Lay into this ill bred villain!" Just then a respected local gentleman named Juan de la Torre came upon the scene and exclaimed: "Brother John of God, what is going on?" No sooner had the one who had insulted him heard his name mentioned, he cast himself down saying: "Is this John of God whom everyone is talking about?" he said that he would not get up until he had kissed his feet. Lifting him up from the ground, John of God embraced him and the emotionally begged mutual forgiveness. the gentleman wanted him to dine with him, but John declined. later on he sent him fifty gold escudos for the poor.

15.3. Another incident illustrating his steadfast patience was when he went out begging for the poor at the old Inquisition Palace. In the centre of its patio is a fountain and a mischievous page boy ran up to him and shoved him into the water, (even then there were some who still thought that he was mad even after his discharge from hospital). As he got out he showed tremendous patience, speaking and treating the page with kindness. All who saw the incident admired him and from then on he was held in greater esteem by everyone.

15.4. A certain woman whom he had taken away from a brothel and had arranged to be married, was an impatient nuisance. If she needed anything she immediately went to him for it and he would then give it to her just to make her happy. The result of that was she kept on coming back for more. On one of these occasions she went to John of God, but he had nothing to give to her. he had already given his own cloak away and was wrapped in a blanket. He told her to come back another day, but when she heard that she became infuriated and flew into a rage saying: "You wicked man, you sanctimonious hypocrite!"

He answered her saying: "Here, take these two reales and run over to the plaza and shout that out aloud." she continued to shout abuse at him, but he looked at her and said: "I am going to have to pardon you sooner or later, so I forgive you right now." At his funeral, this same woman joined with all the others whom he had rescued from an evil live. They all extolled John of God's goodness and lamented and bewailed their own sinfulness. She said that once she had been very wicked, but because of his holy admonitions and his good example, she had left her sinful life behind. Many people wept when they heard that and other things like it.

15.5. John was so humble that he preferred people to remember and talk about his faults rather than the praiseworthy things that he did. He always directed the conversation to his more humiliating and minor achievements. He edified everybody and fled from vainglory as if it were some sort of noxious moth eating into the fabric of his spiritual life.

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## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **HOW A HOUSE WAS BOUGHT FOR JOHN OF GOD'S HOSPITAL AND OTHER THINGS THAT FOLLOWED.**

16.1. As already mentioned, John of God's charity had become so famous that the house could no longer accommodate the great number of poor people arriving there. So some respectable leading citizens approached him about purchasing a larger house to accommodate them all. They bought a place in the Calle de los Gomeles which used to be a monastery for nuns. Everything was taken care of and some excellent extensions allowed

everyone to be accommodated . All the poor people moved in and now he was able to charitably take care of them all with decency and dignity.

16.2. So great were the numbers of people turning up for help that at times there was barely standing room in the place. patiently he used to sit down with each one whilst they told him their needs. he never sent anyone away disappointed without alms or good counselling.

16.3. He came out of his little room at dawn and called out to everyone in the house: "Brothers and sisters, let us give thanks to Our Lord just like the little birds are doing."

Then he recited the four prayers for them. Next came the sacristan who stood at a window so that all could hear him as he explained Christian doctrine to them and some would ask him questions. Another person did the same in the kitchen for the itinerants. John would go down there to see them before they left and hand out clothing which had been bequeathed to those who needed it.

He would say to those young men whom he thought were healthy enough: "Hey brothers, let us start serving Christ's poor people!" Then off he would take them to the hills to fetch firewood. Charitably they undertook this chore, each one bringing back a bundle of firewood for the poor.

16.4. The alms from the city were insufficient for all that we have been saying and so great was his charity that he was forced to incur debts amounting to about three or four hundred ducats. Knowing the great needs of the city and not wanting to overburden Granada's citizens by bothering them with his begging by day and night, he gave them a spell for a time. He set out to plead for alms from certain Andalusian gentlemen who had a reputation for their good works. They freely helped him (because his reputation had spread throughout all Castile) to dissolve his debts.

16.5. It was the Duke de Sessa above all the gentry of Andalusia and Castile, who helped him in his necessities the most. he had shown concern for John's poor people and his hospital since his younger days and had often helped him to meet his debts at Granada. On top of all that, he saw to it that on the main feastsdays of the year , shoes and shirts were sent for the poor to wear.

His wife the Duchess did the same, often giving him donations and tremendous help in many ways. she had a great concern for him and his poor people for whom she prayed to Our Lord for their eternal salvation and consolation in the trials of this life.

Even all that was insufficient to satisfy his creditors, so he made up his mind to seek help from the King and the nobility at Court (which at that time was at Valladolid). While he was away he left the management of the hospital to his companion Anton Martin who shared in his work.

16.6. As soon as John of God arrived at Court, the Count de Tendilla and the other nobles who knew him, notified the King telling him all about him. When he was admitted to the court he said: "My Lord, I usually call everyone my brother in Jesus Christ. since you are my Lord and King I have to obey you, so how do you command me to address you?"

The King replied: "John, address me as you wish." Then because he was the prince and not the King at that time, John of God said: "Then I shall call you good Prince. May God give you a good reign and skilful governing good prince. May you end your days well and save your soul and gain heaven." they conversed for some time then he gave an order that alms be given to John. The Infantas his sisters and their ladies-in waiting came to see him every day and also gave him some. They presented him with a good quantity of jewels and alms which he distributed to the needy poor there at Valladolid.

- 16.7. Doña Maria de Mendoza, one of those ladies-in-waiting, was the wife of don Francisco de los Cobos the Commander-in Chief. In her widowhood our Lord blessed her with an exemplary life of charity. her wealthy patrimony is still being distributed very liberally to the poor. She endowed hospitals and supported monasteries of poor nuns. It would need a very long time to relate all the alms she gave and the good that she did.

This lady (such a kind and charitable person that she was) gave him lodgings in her home, gave him meals and with loving kindness saw that he wanted for nothing as long as he remained at Valladolid. She also gave him a good deal of alms which he distributed to the genteel poor. He did this exceedingly well, going to look for these poor men and women in their own dwellings and giving them food just like he used to do at Granada.

Seeing him going about Valladolid distributing food and alms, someone who knew him said to him: "Brother John of God, why don't you save the money and take it back to your own poor folk at Granada?" To this he replied: "Brother, giving it away here or giving it away at Granada, the same good is done for God who is everywhere."

- 16.8. He returned to Granada after spending nine months away at the Court. He bought back with him some promissory notes from Doña Maria de Mendoza, the Marquis de Mondejar and other nobles who had given him alms to pay off his debts and maintain the poor.

He travelled in his bare feet, suffering tremendously from the rough and torturous roads which cracked and cut his feet in many places as he stumbled over stones. He wore no shirt and this caused him a great deal of discomfort because his coarse bulky habit clung to his skin. As he wore no hat his face, neck and entire head were so sunburnt that they were peeling. But it was worth the trouble to be back once more at Granada and seeing to the needs of his own poor people.

When he arrived back, the citizens of Granada received him with tremendous jubilation. They were relieved to see him because they esteemed him greatly. But those who missed him most were the poor, especially the genteel poor and the women for whom he had arranged marriages, for they never had a father who cared for them as much as he did.

- 16.9. Once John had settled his debts with the money he had brought back from the Court, he soon found that he had to repay new ones which had been incurred during his absence. This mainly concerned those poor women for whom he had arranged marriages. Consequently fell into even greater debt since now he owed more than four- hundred ducats. the reason for falling into debt once more was because it made his heart bleed to see any poor person in want. Being in debt really grieved him, but then on the other hand he just could not pass by any needy cause without feeling sorry for it.
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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### JOHN OF GOD'S PENANCE AND THE ORIGIN OF HIS HABIT.

- 17.1. As if the usual tasks of collecting alms and caring for the poor were not enough penance and mortification of the flesh for him, John of God had everyone at his beck and call. Humanly speaking, that would have been bad enough for anyone to put up with, no matter how fit and robust they might be. But John of God was not satisfied even with all that. He subjected his flesh to the spirit through rigorous mortifications and penances, never letting up even when he could have done so.

When he was away from home and those with whom he was staying invited him to dine, he always chose the least preferred portions. Usually he ate baked onions or some other common sort of food. On prescribed fast days he skipped breakfast and ate less later. On Fridays all he took was bread and water. Throughout the year on that day he disciplined himself with a knotted whip, even to the point of drawing blood. he did this even when he was overcome with tiredness and sleep. His bed was a coarse mat upon the floor, his pillow a stone and his covering a tattered old blanket. Sometimes he slept in a trolley left by a cripple in a small alcove beneath the staircase.

- 17.2. When ever he went about the city or on a journey he never covered his head nor wore shoes. He used an open razor to keep his hair and beard closely cropped. He wore neither shirt nor any other garment beneath the coarse smock tied up on the outside of his rough woollen breeches. He never rode a beast on his journeys nor at any other place, even when he was footsore and weary.

>From the day that he began serving Our Lord until he called him to himself, he never covered his head but went about both bareheaded and barefooted, even in rain and snow storms. Added to all that, he put up with the little cares of all those about him. he cheered them up and made them happy.

- 17.3. Once he was returning laden with his basket of provisions to his hospital on a dark rainy wintry night along the Calle de los Gomeles, when he came upon a poor man in the Plaza Nueva. He picked him up and placed him upon his shoulder, but because of the heavy downpour, he slipped and fell to the ground. A man whose testimony is reliable, maintained that even in spite of the rain, he heard from his overhanging window, John remonstrating and beating himself saying:

"So don Ass, haven't you eaten today? You stubborn, feeble, shirking loafer. Well then, if you have eaten why aren't you working? Can't you see that those dear poor folk for whom you work, have need of food too? can't you see that this man I'm carrying is dying? so why then have you stopped?"

Saying this he raised himself up with a terrific effort because he had been kneeling in water which was half covering his legs. The person hearing all this has truthfully related it, because it was all so spontaneously said and he was not aware that anyone was hidden behind the window at the spot it all happened. That poor man was never expecting any help at all, but as soon as John saw him, he picked him up and put him on his shoulders to carry him back to his hospital in spite of his own weakness and illness. The next day he

was asked how he got along after his fall, but he changed the subject, brushing it aside as he usually did in similar circumstances.

- 17.4. The suit of clothing worn by John of God, as well as the name that he was known by, are not without some curiosity and are well worth telling. This holy man never held himself in high regard, but others certainly did. soon we shall see how Our Lord wished to enhance this esteem.

Once while dining with the Bishop of Tuy (who happened to be staying at Granada at the time), he was asked to give his name. "John" he replied. Then the Bishop added that he should be called John of God. "If God so wills it," he replied, and from that time forth everyone called him John of God.

- 17.5. John of God had the custom of exchanging his own clothing with those of any poor man. After bestowing upon him his name, the Bishop noticed how and badly dressed he was.

"Brother John of God, now that you have a new name to bear throughout your life, you must be more suitably dressed. what you are now wearing is disgusting and loathsome to anyone kind enough to sit you at their table and entertain you. So now you are to dress yourself in underwear, serge trousers and a flannel jacket. take these three items in the name of the Most Holy Trinity."

He willingly agreed to this and so the Bishop immediately sent someone out to buy these items and with his own hands he clothed him with them. He wore this habit to the day he died.

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## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

### **HIS CONTINUOUS PRAYER, PERSECUTION BY THE DEVIL AND HIDDEN MATTERS WHICH HE PREDICTED.**

- 18.1. Even though John of God had been called by Our Lord to perform the works of Martha (which took up most of his time), those of Mary should not be overlooked. Any spare time he had left over he used for prayer and meditation. He did this so much that on many occasions he spent the entire night weeping and sighing in supplication to Our Lord for pardon and to relieve the necessities facing him.

By such profound groaning and sighing he clearly let it be known that he knew prayer was the anchor and basis of the spiritual life. It brings forth good results in the things done for God, because without it, nothing else really matters.

- 18.2. He always emerged victorious from the many seen and unseen battles he waged in his relentless war with the Devil. I will tell you of a few so that Our Lord might honour his servant.

It so happened that one night whilst praying in his little room, one of the co-workers who happened to sleep close by, overheard him groaning loudly and appearing to be fighting somebody. Going in to investigate the noise, he found him sweating and exhausted upon

his knees saying: "Jesus save me from Satan. Jesus be with me." The co-worker looked towards the window and saw a horrible figure which he imagined to be the devil. Calling the rest of the staff in the house, he said: "Didn't any of you see the Devil standing over there by the window spitting out fire from his mouth?" But when they looked about there was nothing here since it had disappeared immediately. they picked Brother John of God up and placed him in a bed in one of the wards. he had to remain there for eight days to recover from the bad experience and exhaustion he had suffered. he made no mention at all about what had happened save to bless himself once in a while saying: "Oh you traitor, do you think that I am going to give up what I have started?"

- 18.3. Only a few days after this incident whilst he was kneeling in prayer in his little room, a beautiful woman stood before him. As the door was shut, he asked her how did she manage to get in. She answered: "I have no need of doors for I can enter wherever I like. "He said to her: "Unless you are some sort of demon it is impossible for you to come in here." He got up and went over to check if the door was locked. he found it was, but no sooner had he turned his head away, she disappeared. Crying, he went out to the wards where the patients were and said: "Brothers, why aren't you praying to God for me so that he will keep me in his hands?"
- 18.4. On another occasion as he was leaving the home of one of Granada's leading citizens, a pig ran down the street and went right between his legs, knocking him over and then not letting him get up again. For about a hour it kept nuzzling him. Finally he was released by some people who came out of the nearby house of the physician Doctor Beltran. they asked him what had happened, but all he could answer was that he had been pushed over and fell into the mud. They wanted to take him into the doctor's house, but he wished to go home to his poor people. They therefore carried him back, but his face took more than a month to heal of the mauling and bites.
- 18.5. Once whilst he was going out through the door of one of the upper storeys, he was given a shove which sent him sprawling down the stairs to the patio below. The people in the house all heard the commotion and listened to cry out: "Jesus be with me!" picking himself up, he went into his little room and taking up a crucifix in his hands, he remembered what had happened to him and started to pray.
- 18.6. On another occasion, as he was passing through the plaza at night (he usually begged at night), a man blocked his pathway and said: "Give me some alms". John of God replied: "In whose name do you ask?" But he said nothing then disappeared. He returned a bit later in another street and asked why he had been refused alms. he was told that unless one were to ask for it out of love for Jesus Christ, he could not give it. When he said that the man punched him in the stomach which made him stagger some paces backwards. the man then disappeared.
- 18.7. Once there was a time when he was praying in his little room when was heard to cry out: "Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, help me!" When they heard this they all came to him and flinging the door open, found him with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross before a picture of the Incarnation. When they asked him what had occurred, he said that he had been lifted up into the air and moved about the room. Then he was dropped to the ground from on high with a great bump. They quickly took him out and put him in a ward with the sick poor.

It so happened that they put him next to a man who was very ill and had been lingering on for eight days. Next morning he turned to the sick man (who had his wits about him) and said: "Give in you traitor, why not confess the truth? Can't you see that the devil is here right now to take your soul away?" The patient asked him how did he know that. "I just know it," was his reply; "and I will convince you that I know it, for you are a bigamist and your two wives are still living. Furthermore, you have committed the sin of sodomy which you have not confessed because of your shame. God knows all about it, so go on and confess it and save your soul."

This patient was greatly astonished that he knew all about this, since had never told anyone about it. He asked for a confessor immediately and a friar of St. Francis was brought to him, hearing his confession and giving him the Most Holy sacrament. showing great devotion and repentance, the man died soon afterwards.

Thus it was that he was able to reveal other hidden matters which Our Lord manifested to him for the welfare and benefit of the souls of the poor people entrusted to him. it seems from the case just mentioned, and others just like it, that Our Lord was drawing them away from sin through his prayers, just like what one reads in the lives of the saints.

18.8. I will tell you about another case and this is substantiated by reliable witnesses. there was a female patient in the hospital who never ceased from screaming out about. Although she had her full faculties about her, she wanted to be dragged into the Plaza Bibarrambla. hearing her go on like that one night, John of God went up and said to her: "Why are you shouting out so?" She answered; "because I want them to drag me away." He replied to her saying: "Send the Devil out of your heart, then you wont be dragged about." I know for a fact that you have been living in a 'de facto' relationship for ten years." she replied that this was quite true and that she had not made a valid confession for a further ten years. then John of God's kind words persuaded her to take courage and confess her sins and ask God's pardon. She did that and she died a very Christian death.

18.9. There was one occasion when he was confined to bed in one of the wards at the hospital. He called a nurse over to him and said he should go upstairs to the floor above and place a candle into the hand of a little boy who was dying up there. The nurse did as he was bid and found that it was quite so. It puzzled him how John of God knew all about this since he had not been made aware of the sick child's presence.

18.10 He told a person who was very close to him, that he was going to die between a Friday and a Saturday. It happened just like he said, for he died at half past midnight. Likewise, he predicted that many who wore the habit like his own, would be found ministering to poor people all over the world. And so it came to be, just as he predicted.

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## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

### **HIS FERVENT ZEAL FOR THE HONOUR OF GOD AND HIS NEIGHBOUR'S SALVATION.**

19.1. Stemming from John of God's great love for Our lord, was his fervent desire to serve him in all his creatures. Therefore the principal end of his endeavour was to render glory and

honour to Our Lord by caring for the body as a means of caring for the soul. He never undertook any temporal business for anybody unless it brought about some service for the soul. When the need arose, he gave holy and wise counsel as best he could, so as to put people on the right track.

His preaching was by example, not words, and it was about taking up the cross of Jesus Christ. he endured sorrow and hurt with tremendous patience and this cost him very much (just like a good merchant). Nevertheless, he gained a lot of profit from this and attributed it all to the honour of God. That was the merchandise he traded in. I could go on relating many such incidents, but I will limit myself to telling you just one and there are reliable witness to prove it.

- 19.2. This is how it goes. there was a certain beautiful but poor woman who came to Granada from another part of the country in order to undertake a lawsuit. John of God met her whilst she was in the lawyer's office. taking her aside he enquired about the way she was living, because he thought she was acting strangely and that she stood in danger of offending God.

She told him all about herself and where she stood. He then said: "Madam, I beg you for the love of Our Lord to carry out what I have mentioned to you. Do that and you will see that your lawsuit will turn out well. I can put you in touch with some respectable ladies who are able to give you a private room. You will be able to stay with them in the comfort you are used to for as long as you like. I shall see about your meals and attend to your lawsuit for you. As long as you remain indoors and do not venture outside you will be safe."

The woman was delighted to hear all this and as he said, he placed her in a respectable home and saw to her needs and the lawsuit. Sometimes he would call in to see her, bringing her supplies and keeping her informed about how the lawsuit was progressing. He always went upon his knees before her and pleaded with her not to venture outdoors and to guard her honour so as not to offend God. Then he gave her the provisions and news about the lawsuit.

- 19.3. Well it so happened that he was out one night begging and decided to call into the house and see how she was. He had come, like he usually did, bringing supplies and found her alone in the room. Seeing her dressed up as she was and he alone with her at that hour, he severely reprimanded her and the telling off he gave her made her cry. As it appeared, this woman had little fear of Our Lord, for as it eventuated, she intended to sin with a young man who was hiding under the bed. He overheard everything that was said.

John of God's words and his tremendous love in seeking the honour of God and the welfare of that soul, made a tremendous impression upon him. The fire of passion and concupiscence which he had set out to satisfy died down within him. Tears streaming from his eyes, he crawled out from his hiding place and started to tell the woman to be chaste and not to so wickedly repay God and this holy man who had been supporting her. He tried to let her know the true and proper thing for her to do. He then left the house immediately determined never to offend Our Lord but rather to serve him. he did exactly that, for from that day forth his life turned for the better and he ended his days a good man of exemplary Christian life.

19.4. From all this we can understand something of Our Lord's great kindness and magnificence, because he did not permit the results of his servant's endeavours to be fruitless. As it turned out, the woman did not profit from this tremendous kindness offered to her and the grace which His Majesty bestows (which the majority of those like her would have done). That is why, in chapter 55, his prophet Isaiah says: "The word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carried out my good pleasure."

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THE DEATH OF JOHN OF GOD.

20.1. So great were the troubles that John of God tried to straighten out for everybody, his journeys, the terrible cold that he suffered when he went outdoors and the ordinary tasks that he did about the city, that it all bore down upon him and wore him out. He became ill and suffered terrible pains (which hardly ever let up on him). He tried to shrug it off as best he could so as not to let the poor folk know anything about it, because they would worry should they know that he was ill. However, he became so thin, weak and worn out that he could no longer conceal it from them.

20.2. It so happened that the River Genil had risen very high due to the heavy rains that year. They told John of God that the swollen river was bringing down plenty of logs and wood in it torrent. since that was a freezing and snowy winter, he decided to take along some of the hardier men in the place and go there to collect some of it so that the poor people could warm themselves by fires.

He was already ill and he aggravated this by wading into the freezing river. This made his painful condition even worse and leaving him very weak. The reason he happened to be in the river was because he went in to save a poor boy from the group accompanying him, who had fallen in over his depth and was swept away. Even though John of God plunged in to rescue him, he was unable to do so and the boy drowned. As a result of that effort his health daily deteriorated.

20.3. He was now confined to his bed. The time had arrived when Our Lord wanted to place upon him a prized garland for his suffering. there were some indiscreet persons whom he shunned. These did not understand the high principals which motivated John of God. they went off to report to Archbishop Pedro Guerrero who happened to be staying at Granada then. They said that John of God's hospital was full of malingerers who were quite capable of doing work and they should not be staying there but rather get out and find jobs for themselves. They added that there were some scheming women in the place as well and they too should be told to get out. That would soon put an end to the whole business he had started.

20.3. the Archbishop (like the good pastor he was in caring for his flock) listened to them. He sent for John of God because he was unaware that he was ill. When he heard this, he got out of bed and went to comply with the summons. Coming before him he kissed his hand and received his blessing.

"My Prelate," he said, "what is it that you command me to do?" The Archbishop replied: "Brother John of God, I have been led to understand that due to your bad management there are men and women living scandalously in your hospital. They are trouble makers and cause a lot of problems, so get rid of them at once. people of that sort should be cleared out of the hospital. then you wont have to put up with their abuse and the poor people can go on living in peace and quiet."

John of God listened attentively to what the prelate was saying, then replied to him with tremendous humility and mildness saying:

"My Father, good Prelate, it is I alone who am the wicked, incorrigible and useless one. I alone deserve to be thrown out of the House of God. Those poor folk staying at the hospital are good and I know of no vice in them. There is no reason at all to throw the abandoned and afflicted out of their house, because God lets his sun shine daily on both the good and bad."

The Archbishop was delighted with John of God's reply. he recognised his paternal love and tender affection for his poor people, even going so far as to take upon himself the faults inputted to them. being a wise and spiritual man it seemed to him that such a man was well capable of handling this business and even much more besides. Then blessing him he said: "Blessed of God, Brother John, go in peace. I give you permission to do exactly as you wish in your hospital, just as if it were you own home." thus dismissed he returned to his hospital.

- 20.5. His illness became far worse (because have gone outside he had caught a chill and he suspected what that entailed) so he forced himself to keep going as best he could with what energy the Lord gave him. taking up a ledger and some writing materials, he called for a man to write for him. Then having made out a list of those whom he owed debts, he went out into the city and visited the hose of each one of them.

He calculated the amount of each debt and how much was still owing and he put this down in a notebook. some of his creditors had even forgotten about the debts. He put all his debts in order this way. he copied everything down from the original notebook into another one, in that way he had two copies. He kept one in his habit pocket and the other was to be kept in the hospital until the time that god called him. In that way one would be in safe keeping should the other become lost. It was his testament and it clearly stated that all his debts had to be liquidated.

- 20.6. When that was all done he went back to his little room to lie down. he was utterly worn out and unable to carry on any further. As he could no longer move about, he wrote promissory notes so as to provide for the poor people he had gathered together there. Our Lord saw to it that ordinary citizens and the gentry alike all fully supplied everything. it was just as if he was still going about on his rounds. Everyone had heard of John of God's illness and they being kept informed about it by Anton Martin his companion and deputy when he was absent.

- 20.7. Doña Ana Osorio the wife of Garcia de Pisa of the Council of Twenty-four, happened to hear about his illness. This very exemplary Christian lady ( who or that very reason cared greatly for John of God), went to visit him. When she saw that he was not getting any rest from the poor folk who surrounded and pestered him (since he never refused anyone anything), she very forcibly pleaded with him to consent to go to her house where he could be put to bed and given everything he needed. Here he was just lying where they had put him down upon some boards with his basket for a pillow.

He protested very strongly, telling them that they should not take him away from his poor folk because he wanted to die and be buried amongst them. However, eventually they won him around by imploring him for the love of God. They reminded him that because he had preached obedience to everyone else, for that very good reason he should obey now.

20.8. They then brought a chair in to transport him, but no sooner had he got into it, the poor folk realised that he was been taken away from them. Everyone who could got up and surrounded him as they wanted to keep him there. However, as they had their own burdens and miseries to contend with, all they were able to do was cry and moan. He tried to restrain himself, but he could not stop himself from bursting into tears when he saw these men and women so distraught.

When he heard their sobbing and saw how upset they were, he lifted his gaze to heaven and said with a sigh: "My brothers and sisters, God knows that I want to die here amongst you. However, God is better served if I do his will and die out of your sight."

Then he blessed each and every one of them saying: "Remain in peace my children. Should we never meet again, pray to Our Lord for me." When they heard these words they started to cry and lament once more. Their crying cut John of God to the heart and he slumped unconscious into the chair. When he regained consciousness once more and to avoid causing him any further suffering, they carried him down to the lady's home.

He had never changed his poor rough habit until the time of his illness. Now he willingly did what they told him to do so as to give an example of obedience. Next they dressed him in a night-shirt and arranged for him to have doctors, medicines and everything else that he needed. He did not care for this attention, but he appreciated the kindness that motivated it. But the hardest thing for him was being denied visits from his poor people. The porter had been given instructions not to let any of them in because seeing them would upset him and make him weep.

20.9. Once the Archbishop got to hear of his condition, he went straight to him. He encouraged him on his journey with devout and consoling words. Above all, he told him that if anything was worrying him to let him know about it because he would set it right. He replied saying:

"Yes my father and good Pastor, there are three things that are causing me some concern. Firstly, I have served Our Lord so little since he has given me so very much. The next thing is my concern for the poor folk whom he has entrusted to me; the ones who have abandoned a life of wickedness and sin and the ones who are too embarrassed to beg. Another one is the debts that I have incurred on behalf of Jesus Christ."

Then he put the ledger in which all these things had been written, into his hands. The Archbishop replied:

"My Brother, in regards to what you are saying about not having served Our Lord; be confident of his mercy. His Passion makes up for everything that you lack. As for the poor folk, I accept than because I am under an obligation to take them into my charge. As for the debts you owe; I will quickly take care that they are all paid up. I promise you that I will handle everything just as if it were yourself doing it. Now the, nobody is going to worry you except to nurse you and commend you to God."

The prelate's visit and the promises that he made, were a tremendous consolation to him. Then after saying a few more consoling words to him, John of God kissed his hand and received his blessing before he left him to go and visit the hospital.

20.10. John of God's condition deteriorated further and he received the sacrament of Reconciliation (even though he frequently did so). His condition did not permit him to receive communion, but nevertheless he could still adore Our Lord because they brought him to him.

20.11. He called for his companion Anton Martin and entrusted the care of the poor, the orphans and those whom he secretly supported to him. He knew that the time had come when he was to be called away from them. with enlightened words he outlined what was to be done for them.

Then feeling that his time had come, he lifted himself out of the bed and embracing a crucifix, knelt upon the floor where he remained for a short while in silence. then remaining in that position he said. "Jesus, Jesus, into your hands I commend my soul." Then he gave his soul back to his Creator. He was fifty-five years of age and he had spent twelve of these serving the poor in his hospital at Granada.

20.12. Then something really remarkable happened. One never reads of this in the lives of the saints, except in that of St. Paul the first hermit. He remained kneeling for a quarter of an hour after his death and had they not have moved him, he would still be like that now. When those present saw this, they thought it best to lay him out rather than let him grow cold upon his knees. It was difficult to straighten him out of that kneeling position so as to lay him out. Present at his death were some important ladies and four priests. all were tremendously impressed by it and thanked Our Lord for such a death that was in such keeping with his life. This occurred in the early hours of Saturday, half and hour after Matins on the eighth of March in the year one thousand and five hundred.

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## **CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE**

### **JOHN OF GOD'S FUNERAL AND OBSEQUIES**

21.1. In the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, Our Redeemer says that anyone who humbles himself shall be exalted. This applies very well to the death of John of God. All the while he was serving Our Lord he was wearing himself out although his humble self-depreciation. He humbly sought the lowest place when ever he could and this is clearly illustrated by his life.

And so Our Lord's words were fulfilled in him, for since he looked after him during his lifetime; he now took him to himself and arranged that his remains would be honoured with a most sumptuous funeral excelling that of a prince, emperor or any earthy monarch. the reason for that is, since the funerals of some princes might attract great and important people, their motives for being there differ from one to another. Some could be present out of real respect, others out of duty or to curry favour with the successor. Others (such being worldly obligations), would be forced to attend.

21.2. This one was very different. Here was one who was poor, scorned and having no earthly possessions, so we are left with not the slightest doubt that they all came to render him homage. He had nothing to do whatsoever with the three items that St. John mentions which entice mankind. When dawn broke it was learnt that John of God had died. A

tremendous throng of people from all walks of life spontaneously began to gather. it was a really wonderful thing to see. His body was laid out upon an ornate and richly decorated bed in a grand hall. Three altars were set up and very many Masses were celebrated by the clergy and friars of the city. This continued right up to the time of the interment because everyone wanted to pay their respects to the deceased.

- 21.3. By nine o'clock in the morning so many people had turned up that they could not all fit into the house or even the street outside. Then the pallbearers, who were the Marquis de Tarifa, the Marquis de Cerralvo, don Pedro de Bobadilla and Juan de Guevara, lifted the deceased upon their shoulders and carried him as far as the street below. A dispute then broke out as to who was to carry him next, but the holy and venerable Father Carcamo of the Order of Friars Minor, stepped forward with eight of his friars and said: "His body should rightfully be carried by us, because during his lifetime he was such a great imitator of St. Francis's poverty, patience and detachment." They were then allowed to carry it for a while and then it was passed on to the religious of other orders who took turns in carrying it until they arrived at the Church of Our Lady of the Victory. the Chief Magistrates and the civic officials took control of the people and the proceedings. It was just as well that they did since the crowd was so huge.
- 21.4. This was the order of the procession: Leading were the poor people from his hospital and most of the women for whom he had arranged marriages. With them were the poor servant girls and widows. Each held a candle in the hand and sadly wept and loudly proclaimed the goodness and generosity that he had lavished upon them. Following came the city's many confraternities in their order of precedence, all carrying candles, crosses and banners. Then came the clergy of the city and the different orders of friars, all carrying candles and the parish clergy followed behind their cross. Last of all came the dignitaries of the Church. the Cathedral Chapter, the canons with their cross and then came the Archbishop with the chaplains of the Royal Chapel walking directly in front of the bier. following it came the council of Twenty-four and the Justices of the city with their ladies and the knights and gentlemen with their ladies. Following them came the officials and lawyers of the Royal Tribunal and last of all a multitude of people all grieving for him.
- 21.5. Not only was he mourned by the Old Christians, but by the Moriscos as well. They came along speaking of his kindness, generosity and good example which gave to everybody. speaking in Arabic, they showered a thousand blessing upon him. Every bell tower from the Cathedral to the parish churches and monasteries, all rang out as if they had a mind of their own in proclaiming sentiments that belied the sound they made.

Te cortege stopped once they had arrived at the entrance to Our Lady of the Victory. the crowd pushed in so tightly that they had to wait for some considerable time before it was possible to move inside. So greatly did the people love him, that once they realised that they would never see him again in this life, their restraint could not be held in check. They all pushed in to look at the body and touch it with their rosary beads, prayer books and things like that so as to take away some relic for their consolation.

- 21.6. At last the remains were taken into the church and placed upon a decorated catafalque set up for the purpose. Those friars who had remained at home now came forward with their general (who at the time was staying at Granada) to take over the proceedings for the Office of the Dead and the celebration of the Mass. Another friar of the same order preached an excellent sermon in which he spoke about how Our Lord raises up the humble

and scorned of this world to be his very own. Many Masses were celebrated that day and many votive candles lit.

They buried him in the chapel where the Garcia de Pisa family vault situated. It was the one belonging to the lady in whose house he had died. Similar solemnities of Mass and sermons continued for the two days of Sunday and Monday with huge crowds of people attending. For more than a year afterwards hardly a sermon was preached at Granada that did not mention John of God and his life. that just goes to prove how greatly his example affected the people.

21.7. Twenty years to that very day some gentlemen opened the vault to examine the body and they found that it was still intact. Only the tip of his nose had deteriorated a little. This astonished them because the remains had not been in any way embalmed. That is the normal procedure when they are to be preserved.

Because of his works and great kindness, we can rest assured that through the Great mercy of Our Lord, who himself tells us he prepares for such a one, that he now enjoys glory in the presence of His Majesty.

May His Majesty direct our lives and our deeds along a similar path, so that we too, might deserve to live with him forever. AMEN.

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## **CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

### **WHAT OCCURRED AFTER JOHN OF GOD'S DEATH.**

22.1. As already mentioned, John of God before he passed away from this life, handed over the administration of the hospital to his companion Anton Martin to run just as he himself used to do. He was well taught by his master in the charitable caring of the poor. For some days he carefully began taking over his office.

22.2. Motivated by the fact that the house was in need of many things, he thought he would make a visit to the Court (just as John of God did) to ask aid from those lords and grandees there. That would help to keep the work already started going ahead.

Some benevolent and influential people persuaded him to found a hospital of his Order at Madrid, because there was a great need to charitably and professionally care for the sick who were poor. they gave him a good deal of help which he accepted in order to go ahead and make a start there.

22.3. He established what is now called as Anton Martin's hospital which everyone knows on account of its importance in caring for so many poor people. There are also many Brothers of the same Order running it, but they wear a darker coloured serge habit than the ones at Granada. They also carry their baskets below their arm instead of over the shoulders so as to avoid bumping into the gentlefolk and important people they come across, and there are plenty of them up there.

22.4. Once the work at Madrid got underway, Anton Martin returned to Granada, bringing with him a good supply of blankets, linen and clothing as well as donations for the hospital. Once he had given Archbishop Pedro Guerra an account of the new hospital that he had established, he sought and was given his permission to go back there. He kept himself busy there with many good works of hospitality and penance (because he was a very great penitent and gave tremendous example by his good life) until he died. All the nobility and grandees of the court went to his funeral. the solemn interment took place in the main chapel of the monastery of San Francisco in the town of Madrid where he now reposes in the Lord.

22.5. But let us return to our story now. When Anton Martin left, other brothers stayed on at the hospital and I intend mentioning them later on (because being disciples of the holy man they went forth doing as he did, so their lives and works are well worth knowing).

They carried on running the Order's hospital just as their leader did. They have a senior Brother who directs the entire community and all the others obey him.

It came to pass that so very many poor people suffering all sorts of complaints began arriving at the hospital. The policy then, as it still is today, was that nobody was ever turned away from its doors. the place became so overcrowded that there was hardly enough room to move about. there was a great need to start looking for another house that would comfortably accommodate them all.

22.6. They went to see Don Pedro about the matter and the Archbishop wasted no time in using every means at his disposal to remedy the situation. So off they went looking for a suitable site outside the city where the air was fresh and it would be convenient for everybody.

There was a property quite close to the city which they thought would suit them admirably. The hospital is standing there today. The property belonged to the city and adjoined that of the Friars of St. Jerome on the site, so they say, where old St. Jerome's stood.

Negotiations for building the hospital were made with the city authorities and the Friars as there was a dispute as to who actually owned the land. being such a necessary public work, both of them handed over the land they claimed was theirs and so the hospital was able to go ahead. While that facilitated the work to go ahead, they still had to ask the faithful for alms to make up the remainder of the cost. They also were the beneficiaries of a will left by don Antonio de Guevara y Avellaneda who was Bishop of Guadix. This was some property administered by the friars. It was to be used for the poor and other pious works in the city. As there was no better pious work than this one, they were able to make good use of it.

22.7. Everybody joined in and the work got underway. The Archbishop gave immediate help by donating one thousand and six hundred ducats. Father Avila who was staying here at the time, gave the project a boost by appealing to the people from the pulpit for funds. It was through that good man's efforts that a start was made on the building, embellishing the tabernacle of God (just as Moses did in ancient times).

Some generously gave gifts of money, others building materials, labour and other useful items. Women gave all sorts of jewellery like bracelets, earrings and rings. The work went ahead rapidly due to the generous and zealous way the funds were collected. Three wards

were already completed and the Archbishop donated the money to put the doors and windows in so that the poor were able to move in at once to take up residence there even before the whole work was completed.

- 22.8. Since the Devil never sleeps but goes around spreading discord, he started to meddle in the work when he saw it prospering. so using his usual tricks he started quarrels between the friars and the brothers. I am ashamed to say that these are still going on so I have no intention of meddling in that matter here. It is something that is quite questionable, so I leave it with God. It would be embarrassing should word about it get lose because many good works might cease. So let the matter rest at that and let us go back to speaking about the Brother's Order.

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## **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

### **THE ORDER OF HOSPITALLER BROTHERS OF JOHN OF GOD AND THE FRUIT IT HAS PRODUCED EVERYWHERE.**

- 23.1. Everybody was pleased with the example left by John of God and many men were inspired to imitate him and to follow in his footsteps in serving the poor. They sought to serve God alone in the way of hospitality. They had no need of learning and studies for they were well endowed with the love of God, charity, humility and worldly detachment. Because they lacked education they were unacceptable to other orders which nevertheless encouraged them and also encouraged others to join up with them.
- 23.2. This is how they were received. Upon entering the hospital they were examined to see whether they had come with the right intention to serve Our Lord. If that were the case they were accepted and given a simple dark habit. then they were sent to serve the poor for some time, some did this for two, three or even up to six months. It was to test their humility and sincerity.

If they came through all that, they had to humbly apply to be given the habit which was bestowed by the Senior Brother and the chaplain. he had to remain like this for a few more years until he was found worthy of making profession. In that way he went ahead living under the Constitution of the Order. I will say something about that later on so I wont mention it here.

- 23.3. Usually here at Granada eighteen or twenty brothers are caring for the poor people in the wards of the hospital. Some are employed in running the house while others go out begging for alms about the city. There are others as well who go out into the countryside and thereabouts to beg for wheat, barley, cheese, oil, dried fruits and other necessities of life. All this activity is enough to keep the hospital going.

What little income they may lack is provided for by Our Lord. that is how a hundred and twenty beds are kept going with a staff of thirty, not counting the brothers as well. Sometimes it is necessary to put up three or four hundred beds and to the amazement of all, Our Lord's providence takes care of them all. It was always like that from the moment that blessed John left us his hospital.

- 23.4 So as to take care of everybody without turning anyone away, make-shift stretchers would be set up when the beds ran out. That is how they cared for them. Once they had been given the sacraments nobody died on the floor.
- 23.5. All the helpers here are unpaid volunteers. they give the best service in the world because they are working to save their souls through charitable works. Everybody does their bit without having to be reprimanded for anything. The fruits of the mother house can be seen in those exemplary brothers who have gone from here to open up hospitals in other places. thus the tiny seed which Our Lord planted in John of God, has sprung forth into many great works born out of his imitation and example.
- 23.6. Martin de Dios set out from here to found the Brothers' hospital in the city of Cordova. This was the former hospital of San Lazaro which the King gave to this brother. He built it up to become a very fine edifice containing many beds. Already it is being supported with a regular income of money and grain. He was a very holy and penitential brother, always getting about barefooted until he died a holy death.
- 23.7. A Brother named Frutos de San Pedro founded a hospital for the care of poor people in the Duke de Segorbe's Andalusian town of Lucena.
- 23..8. Brother Pedro Pecedor founded the hospital known as De Las Tablas in the city of Sevilla. He went there especially to open a night shelter for itinerants and the homeless. The reason why it is called De Las Tablas is because the great number of people who turn up there, sleep fully clothed upon boards. Later on he was able to extend it to include an infirmary where those of them who were ill could be given treatment.

This hospital moved later to the little Plaza San Salvador where it is known today as Neustra Señora de la Paz. It has sixty beds for the incurably ill.

The other place, De Las Tablas, is now used solely as a night shelter and is conducted very religiously and competently by twelve brothers from another hospital. I wont go on saying anything more here about this Brother, because we will have a complete chapter about him.

- 23.9. This is how the Order also opened hospitals at Naples and Rome. During the reign of the Supreme pontiff Pius V, of happy memory, some brothers from the house at Granada went there to defend charges brought against them by the friars of St. Jerome.

As they had plenty of time on their hands, one of their number, Brother Sebastian Arias, set up a hospital at Rome. After all, their main business was hospitality not lawsuits. So glad was the Supreme Pontiff to see them always going about giving charitable service to the poor, curing and caring for them, that he gave his approbation to the Institute.

- 23.10. Not only was it his enthusiasm in seeing the work that they had already started (within only five months they had set up sixty beds as well as other helping services), but he also showed them his favour by seeing that they were formed into a religious order. Amongst other matters, this obliged them to follow the Rule of the Order of St. Augustine. They agreed to this and therefore had to make their profession according to what was laid out in the Bull. I shall say more about this later on.

The Holy Father Gregory XIII, now happily reigning over the Church of Rome, has shown them his favour by giving them a protector to defend them and champion their cause in the person of his Vicar the Most reverend Cardinal Gavelo (Sabello). He now does this with great kindness and goodwill.

- 23.11. The Order founded other hospitals in Spain, but for the sake of brevity I will not be mentioning them here. All I want to say is that the fame of John of God has recently spread to the West Indies where his Order is fulfilling a great need in the administration of its hospitals.

Letters have been sent from Peru, Panama and Nombre de Dios to this house here at Granada requesting the foundation of hospitals in those places. these would then be subject in obedience and discipline of the rules and decrees of this house. They enthusiastically insist that the statutes and the Constitution be sent to them. In that way the charity of such a lifestyle would benefit the poor people there.

- 23.12. It was only last year, one thousand five hundred and eighty-one, that they were sent out there as they had been requested. To my way of thinking I feel that it is quite reasonable that Christian princes should consider them and see that they make progress by helping them with donations and houses. After all, it is for the common and universal good to have such a charitable Order serving the poor, the wounded and the destitute within their dominions. They should do this without any ulterior motives for the people they bring in are given concerned and attentive service.

- 23.13. Naturally, what they are doing horrifies most men, but they are doing this for no other motive other than charity. Nobody could do it otherwise. Since Our Lord has raised up this unique and compassionate Order and letting it do the things it does out of love for him, then it is only right that many graces be bestowed upon it. Everyone who knows it should want it to be glorified and wish it well. Furthermore, the brothers are virtuous and very exemplary men. they have men of great holiness in their ranks.

I shall give a brief account of one of them who has since passed away. I could go on mentioning many others but time will not permit it. Besides, some of them are still living and those who have since died are already well known to everybody, so I do not think that it is necessary for me to go any further into their story.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### THE LIFE OF PEDRO PECADOR

1. The prudence and wisdom of the children of God clearly appears to differ from that of the children of the world who are full of hypocrisy, seeking titles and security. This to them seems they are not virtuous people but wish to appear so, they use these to cover up their failings. On the other hand there are those who have a good name for they hold on to what is true. They prefer to receive their treasures from the Lord so they therefore seek the lowest place and give Him honour by being witnesses to His clemency here, and because He is who He is, He bestows His grace upon them. This holy man used the insight given to him by His Majesty, and understood his own position very well and that is why he undertook to call himself Pedro Pecador. The more he loved God the more he humbled himself realising his own miserable inferiority and that was why he called himself Pedro Pecador, since he could carry no better coat of arms for such a high endeavour. That spoke well of the school from which he learned how to model his life along the lines of those valiant men whom Our Lord wished to keep anonymous, for neither their names nor what they did previously are known. That is well the case here, for if all the guesses were put together we would have a book full of his great virtues, penances and perfect love of God and neighbour as well as the life of solitude which he led as a hermit in the mountains. But really we know very little about him except when God called him to come down to live in the city. That is when we got to know him better and we shall speak about him from there on.

2. We do not know exactly where Pedro Pecador came from other than that he a native of Andalusia. Nor do we know when he began to follow Our Lord or how his conversion came about, except we do know that he spent his youth and early manhood as a manual labourer in the city of Jaen. That is how he supported himself and (just like the apostle Saint Paul) his lifestyle was such that he always earned his keep and never imposed himself upon those whom he stayed with. He earned his living by washing the streets with two catering cans slung across his shoulders. If he had anything over from his very frugal and abstemious meal he gave it to the poor, then off he would go to his humble lodgings to pray and he was not distracted by any delicious supper or soft bed (because he slept upon the floor). Although they looked like those of anybody else as he went about the town, his clothes were always of the roughest serge. He went about for many years in his bare feet, until in his old age he was obliged by obedience to wear shoes.

3. He left Jaen to go to a hermitage situated upon a rough and lonely

mountain near Malaga. There he spent many years supporting himself (so they say), by making and selling spoons, baskets and other wickerwork items. He did a good many things there, but because he was a taciturn man and never spoke unless it was to give glory to Our Lord or to edify his neighbour, we know nothing about them. Suffice to say that when he set out to go into nearby towns he was ablaze with the love of Our Lord. That was very clear to everybody and I shall tell about this shortly.

4. At this time he decided to go to Rome to visit the holy places and relics associated with the Apostles, Saint Peter and Saint Paul. So off he went, suffering great hardships in both going and coming, because he travelled in bare feet with this head uncovered. He went hungry and suffered badly from the cold due to his scanty

clothing. Then as he approached those places he so longed to see, he devoutly fell upon his knees once he reached them to kiss the stones that had been sprinkled with the blood of so many martyrs. Whenever he could he spoke with anyone he met about any subject that was helpful and profitable, such as the creature's way to the Creator. There were other things as well as I will mention these. One day he came across a young Jew whose modesty, good demeanour and keen intellect appealed to him. He spoke with him about his salvation and how he was in error to follow the law that had ceased with the advent of the Messiah, God's Promised One, who all the prophets spoke of and whom he was still irrationally waiting. Our Lord aided him to go ahead and speak many things like that and the Jew was so impressed that he was converted to believe in the truth. He requested and was granted baptism at Rome and it was an occasion of great joy. To avoid other Jews from trying to drag him back, Pedro succeeded in persuading him to return with him to Spain, which he did, thus leaving those problems behind him.

5. As soon as he arrived back from Rome he went immediately to Sevilla. So keen was his enthusiasm that he went about the streets clad in rags, barefooted and with a rope about his waist doing public penance and calling upon everyone else to do likewise. He said things that moved many who listened to his admonitions for it seemed that what he said came forth with the fire of the Holy Spirit since it had such an effect upon so many. They gave up worldly lives so as to follow Christ our Redeemer along different paths. Some entered religion and others chose to follow his way of life, as I shall soon mention. It seemed more like someone else moving his tongue when he spoke. He went about the plazas so enraptured and detached that it seemed as if he neither saw nor hear anyone, but was just as he used to be when he was back upon the mountainside. He did not speak very much, but what he had to say was quite vital since it concerned the things of God and what pertained to them. Even today they're praised when people remember them.
6. That was how he went about doing good in the district of Sevilla. As I have already mentioned, it was here that he founded the Las Tablas Hospital and spent quite some time there with the Brothers who joined up with him to serve and care for the poor. He would go out into the streets, and instead of directly begging, he spoke about the truths of religion, so in that way he was spontaneously given alms for the poor. In order that the Brothers might all profit from what he had learned from his life of prayer upon the mountainside, he gathered them together periodically to give them lectures. When they gathered together for prayers, he would admonish them when he deemed it necessary so as to strengthen them in virtue, because in bustling Sevilla one could easily slip into bad ways.
7. So, leaving one of them in charge of the hospital, he returned with the others to the hills of Ronda where he picked out a rugged spot with a cave where they settled down for some time in prayer and meditation. He taught his followers to learn what he, the master, had learned from his own experience. He also taught them to avoid idleness and to get what they needed by supporting themselves with manual labour. Sometimes he would return to city life after only a short stay, other times after even a year. That is how he sustained one way of life with the other, while at the same time training the Brothers in a high degree of virtue, holiness and penance. The example he gave them was in itself enough admonition, since his own lifestyle was so abstemious and austere. Going about in bare feet stumbling over crags did not worry him at all, in

spite of giving him terrible corns which he took care of by gouging them out with an awl and sewing up the cracks with cobbler's thread.

8. One day he and a companion, who is still living today, were out upon the mountainside looking for wood to make into spoons and castanets. They were feeling a bit weak since they had not eaten anything along the way. Then they remembered that there was nothing to eat back at the cave. When they arrived at the cave, Pedro Pecador saw a large loaf of white bread placed upon a stone bench and next to it was a cruet full of olive oil. With tears in his eyes he turned to his companion and said; "Look Brother, see how our merciful Lord has taken care to provide for us without us deserving it". Falling upon their knees they both spent some time in prayer thanking Our Lord for filling their souls with devotion at seeing such a wonder and for providing their bodies with their necessary food.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

# PEDRO PECADOR'S ARRIVAL AT JOHN OF GOD'S HOSPITAL AND HIS DEATH

1. Although good Pedro Pecador felt at times like giving his service to Jesus Christ in his poor people, nevertheless he sense his first calling and his happiness lay in a life of peace and solitude. The more his reputation grew in Sevilla, the more he became aware that he was being shown far too much deference, and this was too much for his humility and detachment to take. So in spite of being so long at the hospital, he once more returned to the mountains, making up his mind never more to return. He had entrusted the hospital to a Brother named Pedro Pecador el Chico who was most virtuous, holy and pious man and held in very high esteem by everyone in Sevilla.[1](#)
2. He then set off for Granada to John of God's hospital where he did what he was bidden and used to go barefoot and bareheaded about the streets saying his usual admonitions to do good, just as he did at Sevilla. Seeing him with his long hair, rough serge habit extending to his feet and crucifix in his hand, was enough to move anyone to heed his words and profit from his message to mend their ways.[2](#)
3. Then again he returned, as was his custom, to the mountains. But some good people knew him well, persuaded him that he should go back to John of God's hospital and ask for the habit. Firstly he was quite old being almost seventy years of age and the hardships of the mountainside were too much for him. Secondly, he would bring benefit to both rich and poor in the city. He therefore presented himself and was given the habit. He made profession soon afterwards and gave great service to the house by his good life and example. He performed the same duties that he did previously and as a result donations came in for the poor and to the greater glory of God. He used to go down to the plaza and mix with the layabouts and loafers and give them such lively and excellent advice in such a spirit that many a learned man could not have achieved. He used to get up at dawn and go down to the plazas where farm labourers gathered, Pedro would get up on a platform, then falling to his knees devoutly explain Christian doctrine to them for many did not understand it very well; but they listened attentively to him and before long began learning it. When he went about the plazas, he usually carried a richly adorned image of the Infant Jesus with him and it was wonderful to see the reverence with which he presented it. He gazed upon it constantly never slacking despite its heavy weight not did he tire of holding it in one hand without changing it to the other. All who saw this were astonished because he was quite old.[3](#)
4. On Fridays he carried about a large cross upon which was painted the crucifix Christ. He was very devoted to this and spoke wonderful things in praise of it. He used to have a large cross-placed before his cave when he lived on the mountainside. When he was there he always knelt before the cross gently and tenderly praying every time he passed by. He was like Saint Andrew as he accepted his cross.[4](#)
5. When he was in the hospital he arose at midnight and went to pray upon his knees before the Blessed Sacrament in the church until morning. With a simplicity that was holy and devout he would say, "who can separate me from Christ

crucified? Neither the Devil nor any created thing". Then he would sing ballads about his love of Our Lord and accompany the song with a dance. After that he returned to praying through most of the night with its sweet melody in his soul. He did the same on certain feast days of the saints and the Church. He often kept vigils in the church, dancing before the altar and singing the praises of the feast being celebrated, then he would go back to praying upon his knees before dancing once more. Those who saw it were moved to the heart. It was said that he was so enraptured in what he was doing that he was completely oblivious of the presence of anyone else. I would not be at all surprised if he imagined that he was the only one in the world and that he did not belong with other men, because he walked so closely with God and was so imbued with His reverence and love. Just to be close to him and see him and see him so attentively composed in what he was doing seemed to give the impression that he did not belong with men, since he was no more distracted by them than if they had been mute stones. He was just the same as if he were enclosed in his cell when he was praying and working in the plaza. It was quite remarkable and something to think about. Those who saw it thanked the Lord for having given him such a grace to live like that.<sup>5</sup>

6. He had a great devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament and Our Lady. When he was at Granada during the feast of Corpus Christi he would put something over his habit and on his head, then go on singing and dancing before Our Lord for the whole procession and although he was very old he never tired. He did not know any other type of dance at all, yet he was so graceful and spiritual that everyone turned out on feastdays to see Pedro Pecedor. Religious people even said that they went along to see Pedro Pecedor so that they might soak up some of his devotion which moved one to tears. And that is exactly what happened, for it difficult to hold back tear upon hearing his devout words as he danced before Our Lord and the statue of His Mother.<sup>6</sup>
7. The time arrived when Our Lord wanted to reward His servant and let him rest from all his works and trials. But because he should fulfil the advice he had been given to end his days under obedience, it was obedience that obliged him to keep going. That took him to Madrid where he had to give an account of certain matters regarding the house to the King. Although he was not keen to do this, he obeyed without uttering a single word, although he could have had a good excuse in, firstly, being aged, which is in itself an infirmity; and secondly, because he disliked travelling about, and especially so to Courts. So bowing his head he set off on a donkey which the Senior Brother insisted he ride, although as we already know, he used to always walk without any need of that. He ate very frugal meals on his journey and as soon as he arrived at Madrid, he went straight away to the Brothers' Hospital where they treated him as a guest. He did not want to have his meals in the Brothers' refectory but was satisfied to just sit in a corner and eat some dry crusts which he had carried in his bag. Then once he had started the business he came to do, he caught a painful fever which held him up for some time. He believed that this sickness would be the end of him, so leaving the Court he went off to stay with the Court and Countess of Tendilla at Marquise of Montejár, and they, like their parents and grandparents have always been excellent Christians, giving very generous donations and tremendous support to the house of John of God here. For a long time they were the Captain Generals of the Kingdom of Granada and Mayors of the famous fortress of the Alhambra. They had always lived at Granada and knew Pedro Pecedor well, since he

was dying, they took him in. “I have come here to die”, he said as they met him at the door. They placed him in a comfortable bed and as his illness got worse, they took care of his every need, just as if he were one of their own. Unlike other sick men, he had no regrets, but began to sing lovely songs in praise of God in a voice far sweeter than the sound of the dying swan. Then the day of his expectation arrived when he went to see his beloved Jesus.[7](#)

8. The Marquis and Marquise stayed with him the night he devoutly and movingly received the holy Sacraments, and then died. They wanted to savour his last words to them. He then began to sing a hymn and moved his fingers as he swayed just as if he were dancing and already gazing upon the flowers, which the Spouse speaks of in the Songs of Songs. “Gather these flowers, gather these flowers!”, he repeated, the ones which he had made to blossom on the earth and which were soon to bear the fruit of the eternal bliss, which he was soon to enjoy. So with these words, he breathed his last breath and gave up his soul to its Creator. Everyone who witnessed his death was greatly consoled and gave thanks to Our Lord that such a death closed such a life (and indeed that was the case). Once word of it got about, people began to arrive to honour the holy man of God as they would a saint. And that is just what the Marquis and Marquise considered him to be as they carefully made suitable preparation for his obsequies. [8](#)

9. They laid him out in the church for some days so that everybody could come and pay their respects. Then the Marquis ordered a black leather embossed wooden coffin into which the remains were placed. But he did not want to deprive the Brothers and the hospital of the body of this holy man, so he made his servants transport it to them upon a beautifully decorated hearse. Eventually they arrived at Granada, a journey of seventy leagues and although the weather was very hot, there was no unpleasant odour, for it arrived just as intact as the day he died, even though that was a fortnight previously. It was midnight when they arrived with him at the hospital. The Senior Brother tells the anecdote that while he was waiting in his cell to be called to the door, the cell’s ceiling gave a great bump which made him think the room and the whole place was going to crash down. Leaving his cell to investigate what had happened, all the could hear was the quiet sounds of people sleeping. Next he heard a great bustling at the door so he called out to see what it was all about, and then they told him that the body of Pedro Pecedor had arrived. He realised then that the bumping was a premonition of what was coming to the house, so he quickly awakened the whole place at once. There and then they all went out with lighted candles to receive the remains and place them in the church for they wanted to give him a worthy funeral. However, the Archbishop thought differently and ordered his burial immediately, and so it was done with such secrecy that very few people attended. It had been a long time since he dies, so they all gave him a respectful burial and praised Our Lord whose saints honour him for evermore. Amen. [9](#)

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1. The translation into the Castilian language of the Bull of the Very Holy Father Pius V, of happy memory, for the foundation, institution, approbation and confirmation of the Hospital of John of God in this city of Granada; and its licensing and commissioning which was given to the senior brothers and the brother who quest alms for the poor at the said hospital. That they may make profession and invested in the habit and follow the rule of Saint Augustine and make a vow of obedience to the preplate.[1](#)
2. Bishop Pius, servant of the servants of God, in perpetual memory. Even though it is in conformity with the obligation of the Sovereign Pontiff that we have been entrusted with from on high, we deem it profitable for everyone that we pay attention to religious places no matter where they are. First of all this means observing the hospitals and their inmates, the pitiful poor and the sick who are cared for in them. We must be most solicitous and caring of those staying there looking into their needs and helping them in their poverty. [2](#)
3. A little time ago we were presented with a petition on behalf of our beloved son, Rodrigo de Siguenzo, the present Senior Brother of the hospitals, known as John of God in the city of Granada. The Royal Tribunal resides in the aforesaid city and it always longed for such a hospital, because so many strangers usually go there to settle their cases. At the present time it has a Senior Brother in charge and eighteen other Brothers who are subject to him. They are employed questing for alms to support the aforementioned hospital which cares for people suffering from very many different illnesses; caring for Christ's poor people, those who are incurable, the aged, mentally handicapped, cripples and the paralysed, all amounting to four hundred or even more. The costs of keeping them often exceeds sixteen thousand ducats which all comes from alms given by faithful Christians. This is generally given annually to the aforesaid Brothers who add to it what they have gained by their own charitable efforts which they have undertaken to collect for the upkeep of the poor.[3](#)
4. Since last year's war against the rebels in the Kingdom of Granada the number of Christ's poor has increased. As these Brothers fervently go about their praiseworthy work, they are not receiving the same amount of alms as they did previously, although the wonderful work they undertake never lets up. On top of all this, the wickedness of man increases, for there are some laymen who are so lacking in the fear of Our Lord God and who are so motivated by greed, that they are going about masquerading in the well known serge costume worn by the aforesaid Brothers and in the same places Brothers go. This is causing concern to their hospitals, such as the ones in the cities of Cordova, Madrid, the dioceses of Toledo, and the town of Lucena in the dioceses of Cordova, respectively; houses founded in the same manner as the hospital at Granada, where the same Brothers perform the same charitable works which are performed at the hospital in the city of Granada. These persons who have dared to go about begging alms, squander them upon themselves in wicked and harmful ways which greatly prejudices the necessary care of the poor patients in the above-mentioned hospitals. The above mentioned Rodrigo has humbly besought us in supplicating the aforesaid petition in order that these persons might easily be stopped and hindered from doing those things which cause so much anxiety to the aforesaid Brothers at Granada, Cordova, the town of Lucena and the other hospitals which are united to them.[4](#)

5. From henceforth it is decreed that, apart from their usual habit, the Brothers have to wear a scapular of the same material and this must fall to knee-length, thus they shall be more easily recognised by the faithful Christians who give alms. They will then be easily recognised from those who are not Brothers, and who go about falsely saying that they are from the above-mentioned hospitals and others that they might found, so that they can fraudulently and wickedly beg alms.[5](#)
6. Amongst the aforementioned Brothers there may be a priest whose habit and scapular are to be the same. He is to celebrate Mass, say the Divine Office and administer the Sacraments and preach and teach the Divine law to the aforesaid Brothers and Christ's poor patients in the hospital who desire them.[6](#)
7. This permits them to work and receive alms for the caring of the aforementioned poor in the same hospitals and not only in the cities and villages where these are situated but also in the entire district, diocese and province. He has begged us that we might favourably attend to his sincere wish in this matter and that we be aware of the utility of these hospitals and the welfare of the poor so that we might provide the correct remedy in accordance with the Apostolic benignity. We so greatly and wholesomely wish to help the poor and to console the aforementioned Rodrigo and the Brothers in their most praiseworthy and holy proposition; and we now absolve the aforesaid Rodrigo from all or any sentences, censures and penalties, 'a iure vel ab homine' which he may have incurred on any occasion or for any cause pronounced no mater in what manner it may have been incurred. Since he has been absolved he may freely go about his business.[7](#)
8. Ceding to the aforesaid petitions and with the Apostolic authority, we permit that the present petition be granted. We give permission and grant to the aforementioned Rodrigo, and to each and every Brother of the above mentioned hospitals already founded or yet to be founded in the future, that they live under the Rule of Saint Augustine. They must always wear the habit that they usually wear made of serge and the knee-length scapular of the same material.[8](#)
9. They may have a Brother priest in each of the aforementioned houses. He is to be a Brother and wear the same habit from the same cloth, but to show he is a priest it must be a little longer and wider. This first time only shall he be chosen by the Ordinary at his own discretion.[9](#)
10. They may seek alms from all faithful Christians for the hospitals and Christ's poor, the inmates. They can do this in whatever city, town or place they have a hospital as well as in the districts and provinces. They may freely accept, spend and convert the alms upon the aforesaid hospitals for Christ's poor people.[10](#)
11. At the same time we subject the above said priest, just as the nominated Senior Brother and all the rest of the Brothers, wheresoever they are so submit to the jurisdiction, visitation and obedience of the Ordinary. The aforesaid Senior Brother and all the rest of the Brothers, are obliged to give a good and faithful legitimate account of all the alms deposited in the aforementioned hospital during the period of administration to the Ordinary of the place and to no other person.[11](#)

12. In perpetuity we order that those Brother who are at present, or might be in the future, attached to the aforesaid hospitals, cannot be dispensed of the habit once they have received it. Nor can they be given any other one unless it is with the consent of al the Brothers of the aforementioned hospital where he had received the aforementioned habit. This is under pain of serious excommunication which they would incur 'ipso facto'.[12](#)
13. Under the same penalty we strictly forbid anyone – regardless of his state, station, order and condition whatsoever it may be unless he be the Ordinary of the place – who, without cause, reason or pretention interferes with the governing or administration of the aforesaid hospitals or with those which yet may be established. Should be contravene this, he will incur the same penalty.[13](#)
14. Those who go against the following also incur the same 'ipso facto'. Nobody whomsoever and regardless of his state, station, order and condition, may interfere, harass, or disturb the above mentioned Senior Brother or any other Brother regarding the administration, governing and running of the above mentioned hospitals now existing or yet to be founded. This applies even should they claim to have built these hospitals entirely or in part, or for whatsoever pious mandate or binding clause they may have made in their regard.[14](#)
15. This document cannot at any time be misinterpreted nor taken to mean anything other than what it states, nor to anything other than what we intend. No one may make petition against it nor can one be taken to civil court in lawsuits, nor is one obliged to prove a cause or causes before the Ordinary of the place or any other judge delegated by whatsoever faculty, because these emanate from us.[15](#)
16. That notwithstanding should it so happen that something be gained through withholding the truth, then the above mentioned Rodrigo is not obliged to give testimony. These documents may not be included in any other document or anything similar, even for different benefits received form us. This applies also to our successors, the Roman Pontiffs, regardless as whether any such clauses within them be tampered with to lessen or gain something or for any other extraordinary reason. This also applies to any further decrees which may be issued in the future, since their force remains without any doubt as to their full strength and vigour. Should they be ratified even though they might be issued again on another date, they will be in favour of the aforesaid Rodrigo or whomsoever may be the Senior Brother of the above mentioned hospital, because this is our immutable will and as such still holds regardless of what Judge or commission might judge or interpret in any other manner. Should anyone, regardless of his authority, knowingly and maliciously attempt to do this, then what he does has neither force not effect.[16](#)
17. For this reason we order our venerable Brother, the Archbishop of Granada and the Bishops of Amerinense and Cordova, that each of them immediately puts into effect what is required by our authority. It is on behalf of the aforementioned Rodrigo, or the same Senior Brother who would be at the same hospital, that this document be solemnly published and put into effect, safeguarding their contents in their entirety.[17](#)

18. We will not permit anyone whomsoever to contradict this, so that the aforementioned Rodrigo and those following him as Senior Brother, may enjoy in peace what is contained in this document and not be unduly troubled, worried, disquieted or silenced by them. Should any such person be so rebellious in obeying the above mentioned matters, or circumvent them by other methods of law without complying or safeguarding the form and tenor of what it states, he shall incur the ecclesiastic censures and punishments. If they are repeated, thus aggravating the matter the same censures and punishments apply and it may be necessary to invoke the secular arms.[18](#)
19. The constitutional ordinances of our predecessor, Pope Boniface VIII, of happy memory, still hold good as also those of the two-part General Council. So there is no need to add a third part to summons anyone to stand trial since its covered by the rest of the Apostolic statutes, general decrees or particular publications of the provincial councils or synods, confirmed statutes taken under oath, the apostolic authority or any other authority, statutes, customs, privileges, indulgences and Apostolic authority even though the Holy See itself may have conceded them to any Order whatsoever – or places and those who govern them, or to any other person whomsoever. All this subject to whatever tenor and form, clauses and decrees, even though they may be through *motu proprio*.[19](#)

Also certain knowledge with the full apostolic authority conceded to the contrary, invoked and confirmed, even though what they hold may specifically or expressly allude to some other matter. One should be on one's guard as if it was a matter of 'verbo ad verbum'. Nothing may be omitted or altered in any way as to change what has already been adequately referred to. Let this put an end to all which might be used against them for it now remains as it is its full force and vigour; even should something be withheld either specifically or generally from the Apostolic See, which might have escaped being placed under an injunction, suspension or declared to be excommunicated by apostolic letter because such an indulgence might not be entirely and expressly mentioned as 'verbo ad verbum'.

20. This is our letter of absolution, concession, permission subjection, ordering, statute and inhibition, decree, command and derogation which no man may dare break or rashly oppose. Let such a one know that should he attempt to do so, he will incur the indignation of Almighty God and his Apostles the Blessed Saints Peter and Paul.[20](#)
21. Given at Saint Peter's, Rome, in the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, one thousand five hundred and seventy-one on the first of January, in the sixth year of our Pontificate.[21](#)

[1](#) Some of the pretentious titles of Philip II (1578-1621), comprising the preamble to all official documents under royal patronage, similar to the 'OHMS' in the United Kingdom.

[2](#) These constitutions, or rather article of the first constitutions of the John of God Brothers, could not be published because they were not ratified by ecclesiastical authority until the following year. The constitution was written and presented to the Brothers at Granada in 1585 by Don Juan Mendez de Salvatierra, Archbishop of that city.

3 The license of the Inquisition was required for all books of a religious nature. The permission granted here was valid for ten years with an option for renewal.

4 This seems to indicate the constitution (2) may have been added as an appendage.

5 The parenthesis makes it a double ratification

6 Members of the ‘Consejo Real’ of the so-called Apostolic Inquisition

1 I am grateful to Rev. A Lehane, CSSp., of Blackrock College, Dublin for his assistance in translating this ode,

2After the Moorish rebellion led by Aben Humeya (Fernando Valor) at Granada in December 1569, the resulting damage and crop failure caused severe hardship. This refers to the Archbishop’s assistance in famine relief.

3 A pun on the name Salvatierra meaning ‘the country is saved’.

4 Parish clergy distributed diocesan alms.

5 Probably referring to this book and that of another widow.

6 Gregorio Silvestre a poet under the Archbishop’s patronage

7 Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).

8 Reference to Homer’s Nestor in the Iliad.

1 Pius V issued the Bull ‘Licet ex debito’ on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1572, thus raising the Institute of Hospitality (John of God Brothers) to the rank of Congregation. Sixtus V issued the brief ‘Esti pro debito’ on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1586 raising the Congregation to the status of Order.

2 cfr. Castro 7:1-6

3 St John of God’s *barculo*’ a staff like a shepherd’s crook and begging basket are conserved at the Order’s archives in the Casa de los Pisa, Granada. Article 3 of the Order’s first Constitution (1585), specifically commands the Brothers to carry such a staff and bag when collecting alms. The first Brothers were identified by these objects.

4 cfr. Castro 12:3

5 Two years after the death of John of God, hospitals were opened at Madrid 1552, Lucena 1565, Utrera 1567, Jerez de la Frontera 1568, Gibraltar 1569, Seville 1570, Cordoba 1570, Medina Sidonia 1579, Sanlucar 1585, Cabra 1586. cfr Castro 23:11.

6 The Brothers were called “of John of God” from the moment his first companions joined him. Cfr Castro 2: 1-2; 12:3.

7 A century later, the Order’s 1684 statistics showed the Order divided into two Congregations: the Spanish, with six Provinces, two in Spain, Peru, Columbia, Mexico and

Portugal; comprising 1,105 professed Brothers in 117 hospitals. The Italian with six Provinces in Italy, France, Poland and Germany; with a total of 2,156 professed Brothers in 225 hospitals. Cfr. G. Russotto, O.H.; SGD, vol.1, pg. 461 ff.

8 A title Castro often gives to Jesus Christ.

1 He was the author of the Brothers' first Constitution for the Granada community, published in 1585. this served as an interim Constitution and later model for the 1589 Constitution which the General Chapter of March that year promulgated for the entire Order.

3 cfr. Castro 6:2-4

1 In this remarkable preface, Castro candidly admits that his biography is incomplete. See note (5)

2 A Bull of Urban VII reserved to the Holy See the immemorial right of canonisation and beautification. It placed an embargo upon 'presupposing' sainthood in a subject under scrutiny, especially in publications.

3 Here and elsewhere Castro is inconsistent with his personal pronouns.

4 Gabrielle Russotto says this was a "good anonymous John of God Brother" (op.cit.21) and even nominates Domingo Benedito who succeeded Anton Martin as Senior Brother at Granada, (circa 1566), as a possibility. (cfr. Russotto, op. cit Vol. I,Prior General.21). Anton Martin can be eliminated because it was he took charge of the hospital while John of God made his journeys with his unknown companion. (cfr. Castro 16;5). My own hypothesis is that it was not one of the Brothers, but a married man named Juan de Avila (not to be confused with the Saint, Master Juan de Avila). John of God called him by the nickname 'Angulo' (cfr. O'Grady, COC. pp.123. 154-9). He accompanied John of God on most of his journeys and is named no less than a dozen times in the Saint's letters.

5 Further gaps were filled in by later biographers who had access to the documents pertaining to the beatification and canonisation. Principal amongst these was the Portuguese archbishop, Anton de Govea. This biography was translated into Italian by Bernardo Pandolfo in 1631. The Australian Provincial Archives of the Hospitaller Order conserve one of the few extant copies.

Castro often calls God, 'His Majesty'. His surname is unknown, he adopted the soubriquet 'Pecador' (sinner) as an act of humility. The city referred to here is Granada but it was at Sevilla that his fame because well known.

Santos says he was born in 1500 at Ubrique in the diocese of Cadiz. He was apprenticed to a sculptor at Malaga (Cfr. Op. cit. Vol 11, Prior General. 6).

A Mount rising up from the river Campanilla close to the city of Malaga.

The Jew was most likely Spanish, one of the thousands expelled by the Catholic monarchs. As a Christian the Jew could return to Spain.

There is no doubt that this enigmatic man had a charismatic attraction which inspired others. Amongst those who followed him in his penitential lifestyle were Antonio de Luna who was a Knight of San Diego, the highest Spanish order of chivalry, who had amassed a fortune in the Americas; Pedro de Ugarte had been the Governor of Malaga, he and his two sons, Ignacio and Fernando, all entered his brotherhood; Juan de Gariby had been an ambassador for Charles V. (Cfr. Santos, op. cit. Vol. II, Prior General. 9).

Pedro Pecador and a few Brothers went to Sevilla in 1543. They stayed with Pedro de Leon who joined his brotherhood taking the name, Diego.

Diego de Leon was born at Santander in 1513 and moved as a child with his parents, Pedro and Juana, to Madrid. At the age of eighteen he went to Sevilla and from there embarked for the Americas where he made a fortune. Returning some twenty years later, he settled down in Sevilla and lived a life of luxury. He was influential with the Holy Office (Inquisition). Meeting Pedro Pecador was the changing point of his life. He used his money to help Pedro Pecador found the Santa Cruz (Holy Cross) Hospital which was popularly known as Las Tablas (The Benches) because of the benches which the poor slept upon. Pedro Pecador returned to Ronda, and Diego managed the hospital for 29 years until the new hospital called Nuestra Senora de la Paz (Our Lady of Peace) was opened in the Plaza San Salvador in 1574. Diego de Leon suffered exile (Ronda) for a period because he reprimanded the Cardinal Archbishop of Sevilla, Rodrigo de Castro for his scandalous living, saying that he spent far more time on his hunting dogs and horses than he did on the poor. Diego returned to Sevilla in 1579 and shortly afterwards died at the age of 77 in 1579. (Cfr. Santos, op. cit. Vol II pp. 17-18).

They made wooden utensils, brooms and mats which they sold in the market at Ronda. Every Sunday a priest visited them to celebrate Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (Cfr. J.C. Gomez, op. cit. pp. 102-103).

Santos says this companion was Brother Juan de Garibay. (Ibid).

1 Pedro Pecador (1508-1588) was born at Jean of a humble family whose surname is unknown. Like so many early Hospitallers he preferred anonymity and as his name was Pedro and he wanted to be known, like his mentor, as Pecador, his confreres called him 'el Chico' (the little) to distinguish them. The soubriquet 'Pecador' was in frequent use and Blessed John Grande, O.H., a contemporary, was more familiarly known as Juan Pecador. Pedro Pecador el Chico joined the hermit-hospitallers of Pedro Pecador at Ronda when he was still a young man. He stayed three years in Sevilla at Las Tablas before returning to the hermitage. He and two other Brothers, founded the hospital at Utera in 1567. His life was extremely penitential and he died in the odour of sanctity. (Cfr. Santos, op. cit. Vol. II, pp. 32-33).

Pedro Pecador el Chico actually helped Brother Diego de Leon at Las Tablas, then the former stayed on to manage it while the latter went to the new hospital that Pedro Pecador had opened. (Ibid).

2 Pedro Pecador's Brothers were a loosely knit community without ecclesiastic approbation as an institute, they were in fact pious laymen living in community. The habit described here was not that of the John of God Brothers. Pedro Pecador was at this time a voluntary worker,

a member of the hospital auxiliary helping the John of God Brothers and wore his own 'Hermit habit'.

3 The good people were probably the ecclesiastic authority concerned that Health Services loosely knit brotherhood had not the stabilising solidarity of a recognised institute like that of John of God's. In this regard, it seems they anticipated the decree of Vatican Council II by some four centuries. (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 21).

The Senior Brother (the title then used for the Prior) at Granada was Rodrigo de Sigüenza, who received him and after a short period of trial (novitiate) accepted him into the Order of John of God. Pedro made his profession into the hands of Archbishop Pedro Guerrero in 1570. Pedro Pecedor had come into the Hospitaller Order at an advanced age, but he brought with him his entire brotherhood, some thirty or more Brothers. During his years as a hermit-hospitaller, he founded a hospital at Ronda which was a training base for his Brothers who went out to work in other hospitals that he established: Antonio de Luna; Arcos de la Frontera; Fernandode Ugarte. (Cfr. Santos op. cit Vol. II, Prior General 12).

Castro would certainly have known Pedro Pecedor personally and obviously this eccentric old holy man made a big impression upon him since he has written so much about him in conjunction with John of God.

4 The Apostle Andrew was martyred during the persecution of Nero by the Roman Governor, Aegeas at Patrae in Achaia (Greece) on 30<sup>th</sup> November, A.D. 60. He was crucified by being bound to a decussate cross.

5 Obviously the Senior Brother permitted him to follow his old lifestyle rather than rigorously enforcing the discipline of the house. This was because of his age, high esteem in his own brotherhood and his reputation of sanctity.

Cfr. Rom. 8:35.

A revival of liturgical dancing has come about since the reform of the liturgy after Vatican II. It is an expression of man's desire to communicate with the Deity through expressive graceful action. It played an important part in the Mozarabic liturgy which the Roman one supplanted in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is still celebrated periodically in Toledo Cathedral.

6 Castro says 'something', but Santos is more specific; he says he put a 'decent disguise on' – that is the traditional gown and hood of the 'confradias' (confraternities). (Cfr. C21:4; Santos, op. cit. Vol. II, Prior General. 13). In spite of the disguise it appears his anonymity was in vain. The statue of 'Nuestra Senora de las Angustias' (Our Lady of Sorrows) is a richly adorned 'pieta' of the blessed Virgin with the dead Christ. Today it is venerated in the Church of 'Las Angustias'.

7 To fulfil the advice, that is to amalgamate his Brothers to the Hospitallers. The journey was probably associated with this, although neither Castro nor Santos says: that is was anything other than 'house (Order) business'. (Cfr. *Ibid.* pg. 14).

Mondejar in Andalusia. (Cfr. C21:4). Captain Generals of the Kingdom of Granada – Governors of Andalusia. Mayors of Alhambra-Mayors of the city of Granada.

8 Cfr. S. of S. 2: 1-2, 12. He was eighty when he died in 1580. Santos says “he served in religion as a hermit and at Granada for 62 continuous years”. (Ibid. pg.15).

9 Monday is 255 km from Granada (old Spanish league = 4.24 km).

Rodrigo de Sigenza was the Senior Brother, Santos says “he heard a great noise which awoke him and it seemed that the cell had fallen in”. (Ibid. Prior General. 16)

The funeral was ‘private’ but Santos adds that “the greater part of the city’s most important people were there”. (Ibid).

1 This final chapter is Castro’s translation into Castilian (Spanish) of the Bull ‘Licet ex Debito’ by which St. Pius V elevated the brotherhood of John of God to the grade of Congregation.

(Sixtus V issued the Brief ‘Esti prop Debito, 1<sup>st</sup> October; 1586, elevating it to the status of a

religious Order, Clement VIII demoted it to Congregation with the Brief ‘Ex omnibus,’ giving

the Brothers only one vow, that of hospitality under the local bishop’s jurisdiction. The same

Pontiff issued another, Brief, ‘Romani Pontifici’ on 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1596, giving a partial

reintegration to the now divided Congregation’s Italian branch, restoring to it some of the

privileges granted by Pius V, such as having a Prior General, but still under the jurisdiction of

the local bishop. Paul V issued the Brief ‘Piorum virorum on the 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1608; giving the

same to the Spanish congregation. The same Pope issued the Brief ‘Romanus Pontifex’ on

13<sup>th</sup> February 1617, raising the Italian Congregation once more to Order. The Spanish

Congregation was raised to the status of Order again by Innocent X with the Brief ‘Exponi

Nobis’ of 26<sup>th</sup> January 1649’.

The following Bull clearly states certain privileges and dire threats to those who stand in the way of their implementation.

2 Pope Pius V (Michele Ghisleri), born at Bosco, Lombardy on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1504, elected Pope 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1566, died 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1572. He distributed alms to the poor and visited the sick and dying in hospitals; like his friend, St Charles Borromeo who helped him reform the clergy, he was noted for his charity. He was beatified by Clement X in 1672 and canonised by Clement XI in 1712.

3 Brother Rodrigo de Siguenza (Cfr. C., 23:9), according to his contemporary and biographer, Brother Luis Garcia, was Senior Brother at Granada for 22 years. He consolidated the work of charity started by John of God and promoted the charism that the founder bequeathed his brothers. (Cfr. Santos, op. cit. Vol I pg 622)

Santos comments on the incidental reference to the Royal tribunal (Inquisition).”..... In the city of Granada, the Cathedral, the Inquisition, the nobility and all the common people want

and assist it (the hospital), because they dearly wish to have it and give it all the help they can in order to keep it on its feet.”

Approximately the cost of running the hospital for one year. (Cfr. C. 14:3-4).

4 A little over a year previously the War of Alpujarrena, Sierra Morena of Andalusia was suppressed by the Marquis de Mondejar and Prince Don Juan of Austria. The two Brothers who received this Bull, Pedro Soriano and Sebastian Arias, along with the Senior Brother of Granada, Rodrigo de Siguenza, served as infirmarians in the Spanish Army against the Moors. The revolt led by the Moorish leaders, Aben Humeya and Aben Aboo was put down in 1568. There were many orphaned Moslem children and Brother Rodrigo arranged to have these bought back to Granada and placed in Christian homes to be brought up as Catholics. (Cfr. Santos, op. cit. Vol. I. pg 626. C. 23:9).

Apart from the damage done by these laymen referred to in the Bull, there were also widespread abuses within religious life. Some congregations and communities lived in community, wore habits but took no vows. In general their lives were scandalous. To overcome this, Pius V reformed religious life by issuing the Bull which was delivered to them by the Papal Delegate. Those congregations, where some members had not made profession, had one month to do so or be expelled. Russotto says that regulating the Hospitaller Order of St John of God commenced in 1568 to conform to this Bull and it was finalised with the issuing of ‘Licet ex debito.’ (Cfr. Risi, Bol. cit. op. pp. 35-36, Rusetto op.cit. Vol. I, pg.120).

The hospital at Toledo was established by John of God in 1549 and placed under the care of Brother Fernando. Little more is known of this foundation which seems to have been temporary. (Cfr. O’Grady, op. cit. pp. 162-164). A permanent foundation was made at Toledo in 1596. Cordoba, 1570; Madrid, 1552; and Lucena, 1565. (Cfr. C. 23:2,23).

5 The 1585 Constitution states: “In conformity with the Bull of His Holiness Pius V of happy memory, we command that our habit for the Brothers of this hospital be a gown of knee-length, except that of the Senior Brother which shall be a little longer, with a cowl at the neck, knitted to a point as in a pyramid. A scapular will cover anything. The habit will be woven in black and white serge.” (Crr. STC 1<sup>st</sup> Title, 1<sup>st</sup> Const). “They shall wear a cincture similar to that worn by the Augustinian Friars”. (Ibid. 2<sup>nd</sup> Const. Cfr. C. 13:8; 23:2).

The 1587 Constitution gives the ‘angeo’ gown to the postulants and describes the habit which the Brothers wear, as the same as the novices: “It is declared that the habit worn by the novice Brothers shall be gown coming to four inches above the ankle with a cowl attached, not pointed but rounded... and it shall be a palm and a half deep. They shall wear the cincture of our Father, Saint Augustine, and it shall not be less than two and half inches wide .... The scapular of the professed shall be different from the novices, being two inches shorter above the gown and without the cowl because this will be attached to the gown. As for the colour.....it is ordered that it be of the type and manner worn by our Father, John of God, which was one white thread and one black, woven into a cloth commonly called serge”. (Cfr. Ibid. 1587 Const. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Titles).

The 1612 Constitution added that the cassock had to be unopened (no buttons from the waist down). It restated the same as the previous Constitution but was more specific, saying that the cincture must be black leather, two inches wide and falling to four inches above the habit. The scapular had to be 16 inches wide. Novices were now forbidden to wear the scapular. (Ibid. art. 2.3).

The evolution of the habit grew as various Constitutions elaborated the subject. The Constitutions for the Italian Congregation of 1616 spoke of the habit being 'more black than white', a very dark grey. The same went for the Spanish Congregation's 1611 Constitution. However, the grey began to become darker and darker until it was black and this was made official with the 1640 Constitution. (Cfr. Russotto, op. cit. Vol. I pp. 222-235). It is interesting to note the iconography of the Hospitaller Order showing a great variation of habits originating from different provinces of the Order. A Spanish engraving of 1759 shows Alonso Ortega, the Spanish Prior General with St John of God, both wearing the habit with widened scapular at the shoulder and cowl coming half-way up the back of the head. A window in the Order's chapel at stillorgan, Dublin, shows St John of God similarly attired. In contrast was the Italian Congregation's habit, with barely a token cowl, pleated scapular which can be seen in a 1860 photograph of Prior General, Giovanni Alfieri (General Curia). In 1885 the Constitution for the reunited Order regulated the habit. The post World War II missionary expansion of the Order necessitated changing the habit to white in many climates. Today for reasons of hygiene and respect, the habit is now obsolete in the modern hospital scene and is worn on ceremonial and formal occasions only.

6 The Brief "Alias Felicis" of Urban VII on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1628, forbade the Brothers in Holy Orders from holding governing positions within the Order. The 1984 Constitution (Art. 52) clearly restates the traditional duties of the Brothers in Holy Orders. (Cfr. STC. 1585 Const. 5<sup>th</sup> Title, 2 Const. 6<sup>th</sup> Title, 1-6 Const.).

7 In his supplication to the Holy See, Rodrigo de Seguenza stressed the importance of sending Brothers out in quest of alms since this was the main source of income to run the hospitals. The absolution 'a iure.....' etc. (by law or man) cleared up outstanding and future controversies with authorities outside the Order. It specifically put an end to the long enduring Jeronymite affair at Granada. (Cfr.C. 22. 6:7-8; 23:9).

8 The Rule is stated in the form of making profession according to the 1585 Constitution: "I,N.N. promise to God and the Blessed Virgin, Saint Mary, and all the saints, to live all the time that remains in this hospital of John of God in this city of Granada, serving the poor under the Rule of the glorious confessor and doctor, St Augustine." (Cfr. STC. 1585 Const. 2<sup>nd</sup> Title 4 const.; C. 23:10). The 1587 Constitution has as its final chapter a summary entitled: 'In what is declared to be living under the Rule of St Augustine'. It is in fact a remarkable 'credo' of the hospitaller religious life, as valid now as it was four centuries ago. (Cfr. STC. 1587, Const. Ch. 35).

9 Later the Brothers were nominated for Holy Orders by the Senior Brothers. (Cfr. C. 26:6).

10 (Cfr. C. 26:7).

11 The Brother priest was subject to diocesan discipline and the Senior Brother had to give an annual report of the state of the hospital and community to the bishop. (Cfr. STC Const. 7<sup>th</sup> Title, 1-20 Const; 14<sup>th</sup> Title, 8 Const; 24<sup>th</sup> Title, 1 Const).

12 Profession consisted of taking only two vows – hospitality and obedience (chastity and poverty were intended by obedience). There was no period of temporary (simple) vows and since there was no specified time the profession was in fact tantamount to perpetual vows. (Cfr. C. 26:8; 1587 Const. 2<sup>nd</sup> Title 5<sup>th</sup> Const).

13 This was the clause which put an end to the Jeronymite affair. (Cfr. C. 26:7).

14 Cfr. *ibid.* A direct reference to the Jeronymites partial building of the new hospital at Granada and their interference in running it. (Cfr. C. 22: 6/8).

15 Papal prohibition of contestation of the Bull either before a civil or ecclesiastic court.

16 Rodrigo (and his successors) are safeguarded from deceitful tampering with the Bull.

17 Direction to the ordinaries where the Brothers are established, to put the Bull into immediate effect.

18 A restatement of the above (16) with the added threat of calling upon the Inquisition (secular arm) to deal with offenders.

19 Boniface VIII (1232-1303) was a skilled canon and civil lawyer who maintained the rights and privileges of the papacy as inviolate. His decrees and those of the Council of Trent (1545-1562) covered all the following which is couched in legal terms. The Spaniards called the Council of Trent the 'Two Part' or 'Two Diets' Council, since it was interrupted for a period of ten years. The first part issued decrees which were not implemented except by Philip II for all his dominations. So as to save face he brought pressure mainly through Pedro Guerrero the Archbishop of Granada (who was John of God's patron and guide in laying the foundations of the Order), not to formally close the first part (diet) and make a new council, but to continue it. This clause released the Brothers from all and every ecclesial or civil charge which was or could have been brought against them, thus effectively stopping any appeal from the Jeronymites or other interested parties.

20 The Bull adds the threat of displeasing God and the two Apostles to those who contravene the above.

21 Cfr. Risi, *Bolarium*, *op. cit.* pp. 30-34.