

UBALDESCA.

A LADY OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM.

The Syrian campaign and much that pertains to it brings to mind curious analogies with olden times. Space does not permit us to direct attention to more than one or two, but we refer to them because they seem to bring a little nearer to our own that age in which lived Ubaldesca, a first Lady of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. Most of our readers are aware of the main facts in connection with the capitulation of Acre to Richard Coeur de Lion in the twelfth century. Until then the name of the city was Ptolemais but, by the great Plantagenet himself, it was changed to St. Jean d'Acree when the Order of St. John of Jerusalem was established there, not so very long after the fall of Jerusalem. It is interesting to compare methods of warfare then with those of the present time. We read of the "engines" of Coeur de Lion. One "engine" was named "The Bad Neighbour," much in the manner in which we give names to our tanks now. Another was called "The Cat" because it could be made to climb the city wall and cling to it while its occupant discharged his missiles into the town. But it is not methods of fighting alone that tempt us to seek analogies in the story of the third crusade, and the war in which we are engaged to-day. Rather it is the fragrance that clings about the name of an early medieval saint, and penetrates through the centuries from those days of old.

"Following a saint" is not a matter free from difficulty, and after referring to many authoritative writings in the libraries we failed to unearth the story of Ubaldesca. Then, in spite of a consciousness that the demands upon the Headquarters of St. John of Jerusalem at Clerkenwell must be great at the present time, we had the temerity to "ring up," and ask for information, and as a result found ourselves at St. John's Gate, a place imbued at all times with that old world courtesy and kindness to strangers which has characterised the Order throughout its history. We were received by Mr. Veevers-Thompson, Assistant Librarian to the Order. On the table in the library lay a huge volume (one of three) written in medieval Italian. It has never been translated into English in its entirety, and Mr. Veevers-Thompson has, with some courage, set himself the task of doing so. The author of the work was Giacomo Bosio, and its title is "Dell' Istoria della sacra Religione." Buried in this great tome lies the story of Ubaldesca, and, with wonderful generosity, Mr. Veevers-Thompson placed at our disposal that part of his translation

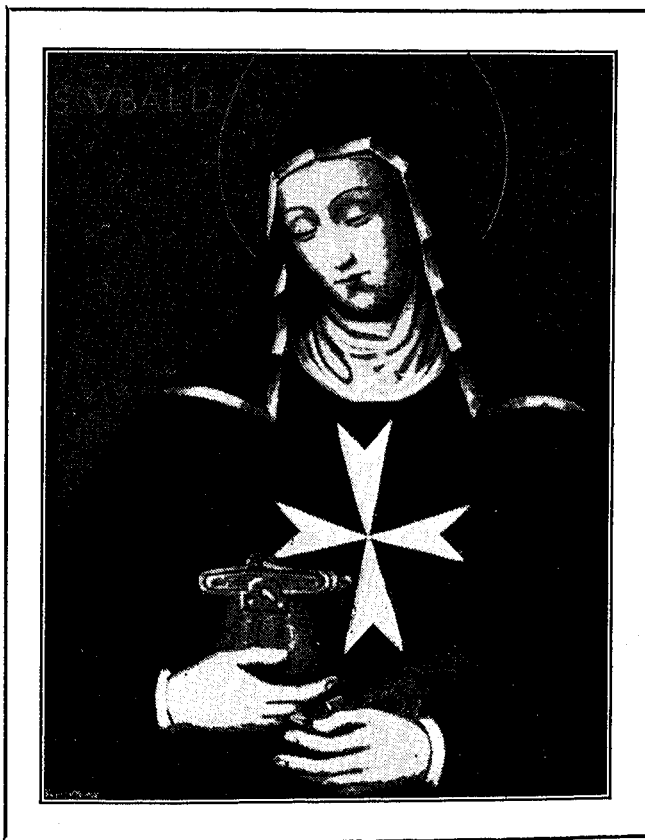
which has reference to her. Thus we have the honour to place before our readers the story of the saint as it occurs in medieval religious history. The following is Mr. Veevers-Thompson's translation:—

The Life of that Holy Virgin, Saint Ubaldesca :
Nun of the Order of St. John.

The Blessed and Holy Virgin, St. Ubaldesca, was born in the Castle of Calcinaja, which is in the County of Pisa. Being most prudent and full of the grace of the Holy Spirit, she began very early to give alms to the poor and prayers to God to guide her in the way of holiness, and that she might do nothing displeasing to Him. Consequently, she earned the distinction of an angelic instruction to consecrate her virginity to God, the Glorious Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, under the habit and profession of St. John of Jerusalem, in which Order she took the veil in the Convent of St. John of the Temple of Carraja in Pisa. Here the nuns of the Order dwelt, as they do to-day, in an atmosphere of purity and sanctity. Here in the fulness of piety, humility and subjection, she devoted herself to the service of God, and mortified the flesh with hair shirts, discipline, abstinences, fasts, and continual prayers. By this method she rendered herself so pleasing to God that, whilst still living, she was favoured by the high privilege of working several miracles, as we may learn more fully from the account recently written by Abbé Don Sylvanus Razzi of the Order of Camaldoli. It is printed in Florence, and to it I commend the reader, to avoid repetition.

For the present it is sufficient to relate her praises. As Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Infallible Truth, has said, whosoever believes in Him may perform the same miracles as He did—and even greater.

So this holy maid changed water into wine by means of the Sign of the Cross. One Good Friday, while drawing water from the Convent well for the use of the nuns, some devout women who had come on foot to gain the Indulgences attached to Stations which were in the Chapels of St. Martin in Chiazica and St. Peter in Grado; having the good fortune to meet her, exhausted as they were and parched with thirst from the heat and the length of the journey, they begged her to give them some water, and the Holy Virgin, aflame with love and charity, gladly consented. She drew some water in a pitcher which she had in her hand, from which she used to fill the water jars she had brought from the Convent. Then the good women, who had an especial reverence for her known sanctity, before drinking, begged her to bless the water by making the Sign of the Cross over it, this she had no sooner done than they



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