

OUR LADY'S PORTRAIT

by

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IN the Vatican Gardens, there exists a sculptured group which attracts the attention of visitors. It represents two personages. One of them is Archbishop Juan de Zúñiga kneeling before a picture of Mary hanging from the neck of an Indian of the Aztec race. Concerning the event recalled in this picture, the present Pontiff Pius XII expressed himself thus: "On the Cloak of humble Juan Diego, brushes which were not from here below, left painted a most appealing Image which the destructive work of the centuries was to respect."

This gesture, captured in the marble of the monument, was the combination of a series of events which had changed the destinies of a continent. This statue stands out as a record of the most famous intervention of Mary in favor of the peoples of the American continent.

Let us briefly recall the story. Ten years after the conquest of Mexico and once the war be-

tween the Indians and Spaniards was ended, there remained only the remnants of what was the imposing empire of the Aztecs. Then began to arise the foundations of a new nation. But the Indians preserved a silent rancor for the Spaniards. Most of them stubbornly followed their ancient superstitions. The work of the missionaries was extremely slow. The Spanish soldiers had the impression that they were treading on mined ground, which, at the least carelessness, would blow up. On December 9, 1531, a humble Indian of Cuautitlán, recently converted to Catholicism, was on his way to the Church of Saint James of Tlanelolco, where the Franciscans Fathers taught the Christian doctrine. On his way Juan Diego had to pass across the slopes of a mountain called Tepeyac. There he was walking briskly along, when suddenly it seemed to him that he heard a symphony of voices whose melodiousness resembled that of the birds. Moreover, after the singing stopped, he heard a voice which gently said to him: "Juanito, Juan Dieguito!"

The Indian approached the spot whence came the voice and he then saw a Lady of

heavenly beauty; the marvelous rays coming from her gave a fantastical beauty to the mountain cliffs.

"Juanito, the smallest of my sons, where are you going?"

And when Diego with great simplicity and respect revealed his intentions, Mary, for it was she who was talking, informed Juan Diego that she desired a temple, "to therein manifest and give all my love, compassion, aid and protection, for I am your merciful Mother, yours and that of all the inhabitants of these lands, and those of my friends who invoke me and place their trust in me; to listen, there, to their lamentations and to help them in their needs and sufferings. I desire that you go see the Archbishop of Mexico and that you inform him of all my desires. Go and rest assured that I will be grateful to you and will repay you, because you will be happy and will fully deserve that I recompense the work and fatigue with which you are about to obtain what I have recommended to your care..."

Juan Diego had an interview with the Bishop, but the latter did not believe him. The Indian, quite sad, did not know what to say to the Lady when he would meet her again. The Blessed Virgin Mary showed herself once more to Juan Diego that same evening. The Indian

begged of her, in order that her message be successful, to send someone worthier than he, someone who could accredit it better. But the Blessed Virgin insisted that he continue fulfilling his errand.

Once again, Juan Diego went to the Archbishop and then he was told that his word was not sufficient, that proof of the heavenly origin of his errand was necessary. Secret emissaries followed him in order to discover any deceit on his part, but they lost track of him in the mountain. Juan Diego presented himself to Mary and gave her the Archbishop's message. Thereupon Our Lady answered:

"It is well, little one, you will come back here tomorrow to take the sign requested of you to the Bishop."

The next day, however, Juan had to care for his dying uncle and when he came to return by the mountain road, in his simplicity, he believed that he could avoid Our Lady. But Mary appeared to him and reproached him tenderly: "Do not let your heart be troubled. Am I not your Mother now? Rest assured that your uncle is already cured."

Then the Lady ordered him to cut fresh roses there on the mountain where none had ever been grown. Juan Diego cut them and Mary blessed them. The roses were the given sign.

(Please turn to p. 14.)