

# VIERGE NOIRE DE NOTRE-DAME DU PUY

By MRS. C. W. CLIFFORD

ONE of the most interesting of the pilgrimages which we made was to the little village of du Puy situated high in the mountains of the Haute Loire.

Of the many wonderful things to be seen at Puy it was the ancient Cathedral which excited our liveliest interest. Tradition says that La Cathedral du Puy dates back to the first episodes of the history of St. George, who was one of the seventy-two disciples of Jesus Christ, and was sent by St. Peter into France.

We were anxious to go into the Cathedral, for it was here we should find the unusual object for which we were looking. Slowly and with a sort of awe, we approached the choir, and there—yes, there upon the Maitre-Autel (main altar) was the wonderful statue of the Black Virgin!

The origin of the original of the present statue is lost in the mists of antiquity; but it appears to be a pretty well-established fact that it was brought from the Holy Land by St. Louis in 1254. It was of ebony, and represented a black Virgin, sitting upon a stool, holding a black Infant Jesus on her knees. The bandages, tightly bound according to the fashion of the ancient Egyptian mummies, enveloped the body of the child and of the mother, leaving only their faces visible.

On the 19th of January, 1794, during the Revolution, the Vierge Noire, object of the veneration of so many centuries, was despoiled of her rich garments, dragged ignominiously through the streets and burned amid the howling of the mob, with all that was found precious in the archives of the Cathedral. "Thus disappeared this precious image, the treasure and the safeguard of Vilay, at whose feet had bowed the posterity of Popes and Kings of innumerable generations," says the record.

On June 8th, 1856, the present Vierge Noire, a faithful copy of the ancient one, was solemnly crowned. This was the signal for even greater honors than had been previously shown her, and thereafter on



THE BLACK VIRGIN

innumerable occasions she was carried in triumph through the streets, and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims came to worship at her shrine.

Dear Negro-American, can you believe it! Can you believe that there are people in this world worshipping a Black Virgin who holds a Black Child? That they place this figure on the main altar of one of their oldest Cathedrals, and that her marvelous history is chiseled on tablets of stone, and otherwise preserved in the archives of the diocese? And that the stories of her care, and protection of her people are scarcely equalled by those of any of the Virgins who figure in the church history of ancient Europe?

Notwithstanding all of the mythical and legendary romance of the past which is interwoven with the history of the Virgin (and which to our very practical Twentieth Century ears appears so superstitious and silly) the lesson remains,—that color is nothing. A Black Virgin, possessed of all the virtues, commands as much respect as a white one; that a white race of people trained to the ideal of a Vierge Noire can love her just as truly and reverence her just as devoutly.

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- To fight against terrorization and lynching.
- To fight against segregation in ghettos and schools
- To fight against Jim Crow regulations and laws which put colored women at the mercy of their despoilers
- To fight for an enormous extension of educational facilities for colored children
- To fight for equality of opportunity in agriculture and industry
- To fight for a preparedness program which will treat 10,000,000 native-born, English-speaking colored people as loyal American citizens and not as unassimilated foreigners

The N. A. A. C. P. publishes the CRISIS.

We have fifty-four branches, nine locals and four college chapters carrying on the work of self-emancipation.

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