



THE APPEALS
OF OUR LADY
APPARITIONS
AND
MARIAN SHRINES
IN THE WORLD

Apparition of the Virgin Mary at WALSINGHAM



ENGLAND, XI Century



A manuscript of the XV Century traces the origins of the Shrine to 1061. After becoming a widow, Lady Richeldis de Faverches of Walsingham decided to dedicate her life to the Virgin Mary. She appeared to Lady Richeldis in a dream and transported her in spirit to Nazareth, to show her the Holy House where the Angel Gabriel had announced the Incarnation of the Word. The Virgin Mary ordered Lady Richeldis to take its measurements in order to be able to rebuild it on her property. Our Lady said: "Here people must celebrate the Annunciation, the root of the gratuitous redemption of humanity; Here they will recall the great joy that I had when I was greeted by the Archangel Gabriel, who said to me that for my humility I would be Mother of God. Here the pilgrims will find solace for their needs. All those who will invoke me with faith will not leave empty handed". This dream recurred even three times. The pious woman immediately summoned carpenters and masons and built a first chapel in wood, replaced a little later by another one in brick that was donated to the Abbey of Downside. Upon the death of Lady Richeldis, her son Lord Geoffrey took hold of the property. Many people who could not go to the Holy Land began to go to the Holy House of Walsingham to venerate there the Virgin Mary like in Nazareth. The Shrine soon became a center of pilgrimage, rivaling the Holy Land, Rome and Santiago de Compostela. The miracles began to multiply. King Edward I himself was saved from mortal danger after invoking Our Lady of Walsingham. Starting from Richard I the Lionheart (1157-1199), all the Kings and Queens of England have prayed at Walsingham. Edward I even went there 11 times. In 1340 another chapel called Slipper Chapel was built one mile away, where the pilgrims left their shoes to walk barefoot the last stretch.

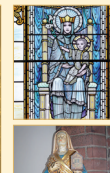
With the assertion of the Protestant Pseudo-reformation, Marian devotion in England suffered a setback. In 1534 the Canons Regular of Walsingham were among the first to bend to the tyranny of Henry VIII, signing the Act of Supremacy that recognized him as Head of the Church. In 1538 the troops of the King destroyed the convent and razed the Shrine to the ground, not before stripping it of all its riches. The vice prior Nicholas Milcham, opposed to the agreement with the Protestants, was killed and his body was hung to the façade. The image of Our Lady was brought to London and burned in the square "to wipe out the idolatry", as John Stowe wrote in 1538. Great was the dismay of the Catholics in seeing the destruction of the very beloved Shrine, yet the English Catholics never forgot Our Lady of Walsingham, and more than a few went secretly to pray near the Slipper Chapel, at first transformed into a residential house, then a forge, a barn and lastly a stable. In 1863 Charlotte Boyd, a wealthy lady converted to Catholicism, purchased the property of the Slipper Chapel, with the intention of restoring its devotion. She entrusted the restoration to the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom. A wooden statue was carved, faithful copy of the original, following the model of an old seal of the Shrine, today preserved in the British Museum. In 1897, recognizing its attribute of Marian Shrine, Pope Leo XIII authorized again the pilgrimages. The first public pilgrimage took place on August 20, 1897, but for almost an entire generation this devotion elicited little enthusiasm. The reason was clear. Subjected for more than 300 years to the brutal persecution of the Protestants, the English Catholics were by then accustomed to a discreet and almost domestic style of devotion. When, on the wave of the Oxford Movement, Cardinal Manning and others tried to restore the processions, the pilgrimages and other forms of public devotion, their efforts were not appreciated by everyone. Consequently, the restoration of the Shrine of Walsingham initially had little impact on English Catholicism. We must wait until 1934 in order that the Chapel be built as National Shrine by the Bishop of Northampton, together with the other Bishops of England and Wales. On August 15, the first Holy Mass was celebrated there, after 400 years. Two days later, Cardinal Bourne accompanied 10,000 pilgrims there. In 1954, the Pontifical Delegate Mons. O'Hara canonically crowned Our Lady. The devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham thus regained its traditional place in the piety of the English. The custody of the Shrine is currently entrusted to the Marist Fathers.



Image illustrating the apparition of the Virgin Mary showing Lady Richeldis the Holy House where she had the apparition of the Angel Gabriel, who announced to her that she had been chosen among all women to be the Mother of God



Stained glass windows depicting Our Lady of Walsingham



Stained glass windows illustrating the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Lady Richeldis de Faverches



Facade of the Slipper Chapel



The ruins of the ancient Shrine



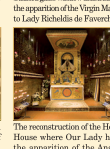
Wooden statue representing Lady Richeldis



Interior of the 'Slipper Chapel'



Crowds of pilgrims who go in procession to the Chapel of Reconciliation of Walsingham



The reconstruction of the Holy House where Our Lady had the apparition of the Angel located in the Anglican Shrine of Walsingham



The Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham



Interior of the Shrine



View of the 'Slipper Chapel' that is located one mile from the Shrine. It was built in 1340 and here the pilgrims were accustomed in ancient times to leave their shoes to walk barefoot the last stretch that led to the Shrine