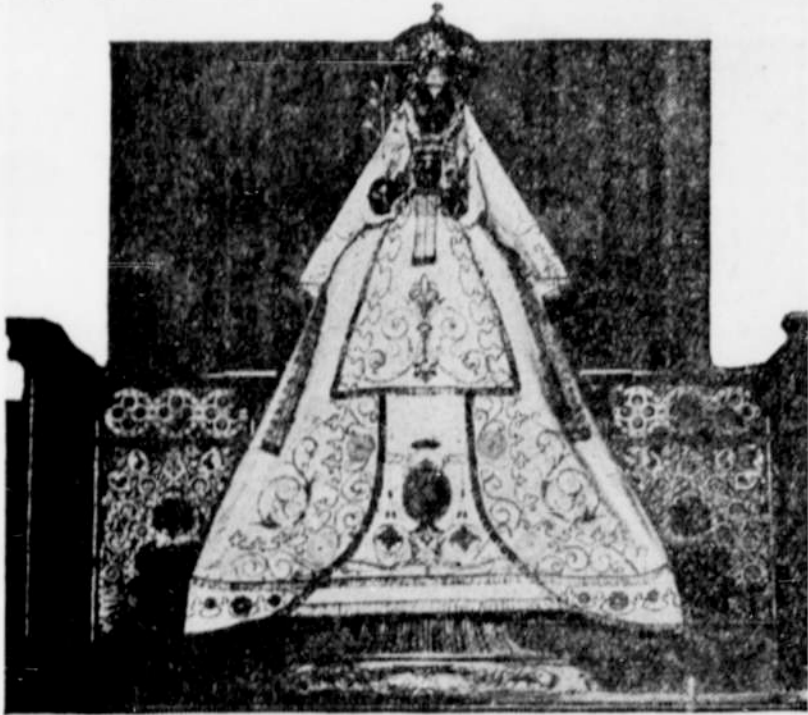


PAGE OF READING FOR THE FAMILY

Montserrat



The Black Virgin of Montserrat.

Prepared by National Geographic Society
Washington, D. C.—WNU Service.

HARDLY out of sight of the smoking factory chimneys and scarcely out of hearing of the noise and bustle of Barcelona, busiest and most restless city of Spain, a medieval Benedictine monastery clings to the face of a fantastic stone peak that rises boldly from the brown foothills of Catalonia (Catalonia). It is Montserrat, the nation's holiest shrine, to which thousands of the Spanish faithful make pilgrimage each year to pay homage to what is called the Black Virgin.

Montserrat is the name of the strange mountain, and also of the monastery, which clings like a swallow's nest halfway up its precipitous cliffs. The Black Virgin, a wooden image darkened by age, is not the only reason why it is a place of pilgrimage. Montserrat, in Catalan tradition, is the Monsalvatsh or Monsalvat of the Middle Ages, site of the castle of the Holy Grail. The Arabs called it Glastus, or the stone watchman. Here Ignatius of Loyola, a wounded soldier, knelt in prayer, and went away to found the Society of Jesus. In more recent years the Montserrat choir school has become celebrated.

"Ah, but señor," a hotel manager asked a traveler, "have you seen Montserrat? It is Spain's most sacred shrine. It is very quaint and old, and the Benedictine monks will let you live with them in the monastery for three days! It is not far from Barcelona. You should see the Black Virgin, and the view from the monastery is magnificent!"

Montserrat is accessible to Barcelona by both railway and road.

NOT IN CIRCULATION



Old Tightwad—You know, my dear, X is an unknown quantity.
Young Wife—I certainly do. I haven't seen one since I married you.

One way is as picturesque as the other; for, while the highway climbs to the monastery in a series of hairpin turns and horseshoe curves, the last few miles of the 35-mile railway journey may be made on a narrow-gauge rack-and-pinion line or in the bobbing cage of a new aerial cableway.

Trip There is Interesting.

Many, who are in no hurry, choose the railway and the rack-and-pinion route. Once clear of the spreading suburbs of Barcelona, the main-line railroad strikes boldly out into the beautiful plain of Sardanola. The countryside here resembles southern California! There are green fields with angular irrigation ditches; rocky river bottoms, rising at first gently and then abruptly, into brush-covered foothills; and scraggly and unkempt clumps of eucalyptus and pepper trees around the water holes.

Gradually the scenery changes, as it enters a region of irregular hills and rocky valleys, sparsely covered with vegetation. The line twists and turns, now hurdling a deep ravine on a stone viaduct, now plunging into a short tunnel. The cars sway drunkenly from side to side as they climb to the plateau.

Not until one is very close to Montserrat does the mountain come into view. The train emerges from a tunnel and suddenly a giant mass of rock seems to spring from the foothills, flinging a thousand cathedral pinnacles skyward! As the train swings closer, so that only a deep river valley separates it from the Brodingnagian mass, a fantastic stone forest of smoothly weathered domes, sugar loaves, minarets and organ pipes is silhouetted against the sky.

Of the monastery nothing is visible at first. Then, one catches a glimpse of tiny buildings which seem to be carved from the rocky cliffs themselves. The little buildings are rather extensive; but against the vast bulk of the mountain they seem no larger than wren houses.

The group of buildings snugly fills a notch or narrow ravine cut deep into the mountain side. A thousand feet above it, the topmost pinnacles of the mountains rise menacingly, but the notch is safe enough.

Thousand Years Old.

While most of the present buildings are comparatively new, the monastery itself dates from A. D. 976; and legend reports that a nunnery that preceded it was founded in 880. So faithfully have the monks followed the lines of the older parts of the monastery in making additions that even the new garage,

for modern pilgrims who come by motor, has an age-old air of permanence.

The archway emerges into a sunlit plaza or market place, filled with lowland peasants hawking their wares, and groups of pilgrims of all classes actively and noisily bargaining for food. Among city Spaniards dressed in modern garb, one sees farmers in red caps, or gorros, and sandals; working men in velvet knee breeches and faded scarlet sashes; wives with mantillas and shawls drawn closely over their heads; pairs of somatenes, the typical Catalan state police; monks in sable cloaks and children of all ages. A few pannier-laden donkeys nibble at the grass under the stunted trees. Except that the setting is undoubtedly Spain, it is all very much like a page out of "Canterbury Tales."

A traveler directed to a terraced arcade at the far side of the court, within which is the office, was given somewhat of a surprise. Over the desk of the father in charge of pilgrim registration was a shining electric light, and at his right hand was a telephone! He had not expected such innovations in a Benedictine monastery.

Had he been better acquainted with the rule of St. Benedict he would have known that the manner of life among Benedictine monks has never been austere.

The father takes your name and place of abode and informs you that you may remain for three days. You are then assigned to a room, given an armful of linen, and turned over to a lay brother. Solemnly the latter leads the way through the sepulchral corridors of one of the large dormitories, fitfully lighted here and there by a dim electric light bulb, to a small, plainly fur-

nished room overlooking one of the courts. It is clean and neat, with two iron beds, a table, a chair, a basin, an empty waterpot, and a candlestick without a candle. The lay brother hands you a key, informs you that meals can be taken in the restaurant of the monastery, accepts a small tip under protest, and withdraws.

The Black Virgin.

As the monk's echoing footsteps recede down the corridor, something of the blissful peace and quiet of the place steals over you. The clear sun pours through the window, dazzling bright against the white-washed walls. The keen mountain air is invigorating, conducive to meditation. The workaday world seems far away.

In order to see the sacred image which is shown at the 10 o'clock mass one hurries down to the courtyard. A steady stream of worshippers files through the carved doorway of the basilica. According to legend, La Moreneta, as the Black Virgin is called, was carved by St. Luke himself and brought to Barcelona A. D. 50 by St. Peter. During the Moorish invasion and occupation it was hidden by Christian monks in one of the caves of Montserrat near the site of the present monastery. Years later shepherds discovered it and told stories of strange music heard in the vicinity.

An effort was made to bring it down from the mountain, but, although the statue is not quite life-size, it could not be moved beyond the ledge where the monastery now stands. The basilica, accordingly, was erected to protect it, and the monastery built to care for the throngs of pilgrims who climbed the mountain to worship at the Virgin's shrine. Especially do young couples come to Montserrat, for the

blessing of La Moreneta is said to insure a happy union.

The dinginess of the interior of the basilica serves only to accentuate the brilliance of the altar, with its jewels, silver plate and bright vestments. It was on this altar in the Sixteenth century that Loyola laid his sword when he abandoned his military life to devote himself to the service of Christ. Above the high altar, surrounded by lighted candles, is a small stage concealed by two velvet curtains. You keep your eye on those curtains for you know the image must be back of them. Presently the chanting of the priests increases in volume, and the curtains are drawn slowly aside.

You gasp! Even though you have been told that the image is blackened from age, you had not expected anything like this. White vestments and a light background make the face and the hands gleam like jet! For a silent moment everyone gazes, and then the curtains drop together. Only so long is the sacred image exposed to view.

Quietly you make your way to a door leading upon a paved terrace. "El Cami dels Dehotalls" (The Road of the Drops), a sign reads. The "drops" do not refer, as they well might, to the breath-taking abysses along the side of the path, but to a kind of grotto, moistened by trickling water, which is reached after a few minutes' walk.

Here is one of the finest panoramas in Montserrat. Almost half of Catalonia is spread below. Surprisingly near is the sparkling blue water of the Mediterranean, while the white peaks of the Pyrenees seem but a good stone's throw away. The river, which was a silver ribbon from the cog railway, is only a thread from this dizzy height. It is a view to stir the imagination and to make the head swim.

Bedtime Story

By Thornton W. Burgess

NANNY MEADOW MOUSE IS WORRIED

NANNY MEADOW MOUSE was worried. Yes, sir. Nanny Meadow Mouse was worried. Nanny is a home body. In the first place, most of the time she has a family to think about and care for. There are babies in Nanny's snug little home most of the time. What with helpless babies and headstrong, half-grown children eager to get out in the Great World and show how smart they are, and fully grown children already setting up homes



Sometimes Danny Meadow Mouse Laughs at Her and Tells Her That the Older She Grows the More Timid She Becomes.

of their own, Nanny has real cause for worry. You see, no one knows better than she what a lot of dangers surround a Meadow Mouse and how necessary it is that a young Meadow Mouse who would live to a good old age be carefully trained.

One of the first things to be learned is the foolishness of taking unnecessary risks. The most pre-

cious thing anybody possesses is life. To risk this for something which at best is nothing more than pleasure is the most foolish thing in the world. Nanny will risk her own life for her babies any time, but she is far too wise to risk it for any other reason.

"If you lose your life you've lost everything," is a favorite saying of Nanny's, and when you come to think of it, it is exactly so. Sometimes Danny Meadow Mouse laughs at her and tells her that the older she grows the more timid she becomes. That doesn't trouble Nanny at all. She simply smiles and says nothing. She knows it is true, but she also knows that this added timidity is because of increased knowledge of the dangers of the Great World, and that the more timid she is the less likely is she to feel careless. "A Meadow Mouse cannot be too timid," says Nanny, and in that she is more than half right.

Danny Meadow Mouse is different. He doesn't have the care of those babies all the time on his mind as does Nanny. So he has more time to think about himself and the things he wants to do. Then, too, the sharp little wits in that funny little head of his have brought him through so many tight places that he has come to think himself quite as smart as anybody else and quite able to take care of himself no matter what happens, which shows that he isn't as wise as Nanny, though it wouldn't do to tell him so.

The day that Danny took it into his head to visit the Smiling Pool had been a very trying one for Nanny. Danny hadn't told her where

he was going or that he expected to be gone long. The half-grown children had been very trying that day, for they had persisted in taking foolish risks whenever Nanny's back was turned. They kept her so worried that she didn't have time to think of Danny. But when the Black Shadows began to creep out over the Green Meadows and Danny had not returned, it popped into her head that something dreadful must have happened to him. She began to worry. The later it grew the more she worried.

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So Are You

Next time you meet some one who tells you he is descended from William the Conqueror you will be quite justified in telling him that you are, too. If each generation was distinct, you had four great-grandfathers, 16 great-great-grandfathers, and by the time you have gone back to the thirtieth generation—that is, the time of William the Conqueror, you would have piled up over 500,000,000 ancestors.—Pearson's Weekly.

BY THE YARDSTICK



"How is your garden coming along?"

"Very poorly. The directions on the package say to measure the seeds carefully, and it has taken me since yesterday to get the dimensions of seven of them, they're so darn small."