

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

By JOHN MURRAY

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IT was the year 1531, less than forty years after Columbus made his historic voyage across the Atlantic, and only ten years and four months after Cortez and his Conquistadores had conquered Mexico and established Spanish rule in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. The Aztecs, although enjoying a highly-developed civilization, with a beautiful capital city and remarkable palaces and charming flower-gardens, were sunk in barbaric religious practices, offering human sacrifices to their god, Huitzipochtli, and their priests actually eating the flesh of the victims. The Franciscan friars, who accompanied the Conquistadores, found the hearts of these Indians a barren soil and few conversions were seen in that first decade of Spanish rule. Then, suddenly, all was changed by a miraculous event—the apparition of Our Lady to Juan Diego.

On a Saturday morning, on the 9th of December in 1531, this simple Indian convert was on his way to the church of Santiago el Mayor (St. James the Greater), the Patron of Spain, to attend Mass and to receive instructions from the Franciscan friars. At dawn he reached the little hill of Tepeyac, overlooking Mexico City. Suddenly he heard a sweet and melodious singing which, he said, resembled a choir of a multitude of birds, singing together in a soft harmony and answering each other in the form of a choir reciting office. Looking up he saw a white cloud, with a beautiful rainbow of various colours, formed from the rays of an exceeding bright light, within the cloud. The Indian was amazed and enraptured and thought he must be in heaven. Then he heard a sweet and delicate voice from the midst of the cloud, calling him by name and asking him to approach nearer. He did so and saw a vision of a most beautiful lady. Her robe glittered like precious stones and even the cactus at her feet appeared to be groups of fine emeralds. Speaking in an endearing manner, she addressed him in the Mexican (Indian) language, saying:—‘My son, Juan Diego, whom I love tenderly as a sweet child, where are thou going?’

The Indian replied: ‘I am going, my noble lady, to Mexico to hear Mass celebrated there by the ministers of God, who are his substitutes on earth.’

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Having listened to his reply, the Lady said:—

Thou knowest, my dear son, that I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, Author of Life, Creator of all, Father of Heaven and Earth, who is everywhere. . . . It is my will that a church be erected here in this place, where, as a merciful Mother of thine and of those who resemble thee, I shall demonstrate my mercy and sympathy to all the natives, to those who love and seek me, and to all those who solicit my help and call on me in their sorrows and afflictions; and where I shall give comfort and ease to those who would pray and turn their tearful eyes towards me. In order to carry out my wish it is necessary that you go to the city of Mexico and to the bishop's palace, and tell him that I send thee, that it is my wish that a church be erected for me in this place. Relate to him all that thou hast seen and heard, and be sure that I shall be grateful to thee for all that thou doest for me and as recompense I shall exalt thee. Hast thou heard my wish, my son? Go thou in peace and be sure that I shall repay thee for thy work and diligence; and do all that thou canst to accomplish this errand.

Prostrating himself on the earth, the Indian answered: ‘I am going, most noble lady, to obey that command, as a humble servant of thine. Remain in peace.’

Juan Diego proceeded immediately to the bishop's palace, asking to see the bishop, Monsignor Juan de Zummaraga, a Franciscan, and the first bishop of Mexico. He was kept waiting a long time by the servants but eventually was admitted. He fell on his knees before the bishop and delivered his message. The bishop listened with surprise, but was sceptical of the authenticity of the message. He dismissed the Indian, saying he would see him again, as he wished to enquire more deeply into the matter and as to the sincerity and integrity of the messenger. Crestfallen Juan Diego left, realizing that the bishop did not believe him.

On his way home, he again passed the hill of Tepeyac, and arriving at the summit of the hill, Our Lady was awaiting him. Prostrating himself before her, he said:—

My dear Queen and most holy Lady, I have done what thou hast commanded me. I was not admitted immediately to see the bishop but after waiting for a long time, I was admitted to his presence and immediately delivered to him the message in the way thou hast ordered me. He listened to me carefully and attentively. According to his questions, I inferred that he did not give credence to my story, as he told me to return again so as to question me further and investigate the matter thoroughly. He presumes that the erection of a church is a whim of my own and not thy will, and so I beg of thee that thou sendest on this errand some noble and important person, worthy of respect, to whom he will give credence; for thou seest, my Lady, that I am poor, wicked and humble and furthermore a peasant. Pardon me, my Queen, if my answer and behaviour are displeasing to thy greatness.

Our Lady listened with kindness to Juan's answer and said to him:—

My most beloved son, thou knowest that there are many servants I could send to carry out my orders if that were my desire, but thou art the most fitted for this undertaking, for I know that through thy instrumentality my wish shall be fulfilled; and thus I beg thee, my son, and I order thee, to return again to-morrow and see the bishop and tell him that he must erect a church for me and that I, the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, send thee.

Juan Diego replied :—

Do not be displeased, my Queen, and my Lady, with what I have said, I will go willingly and with all my heart. I will obey thy command and carry thy message for it is not hard at all for me to do it; but, perhaps, I shall not be heard or the bishop shall not believe me; but in spite of it all, I will do what thou orderest, and I shall wait for thee, Lady, to-morrow afternoon at sunset in this place, and shall bring thee the answer; and thus, thou remain in peace, my dear Lady, and God be with thee.

The next day, Sunday, Juan, after hearing Mass, went to see the bishop. As the bishop's servants took a long time to permit him to enter, Juan felt very miserable and humiliated. Amid tears and sobs he said to the bishop: 'For the second time I have seen the Mother of God in the same place. There she waited for the reply to the message she had sent to you, and again she sends me to let you know that you must erect the church for her in the place where I have seen and spoken with her; and that I should reiterate that she is the Mother of God and the ever Virgin Mary who commands it.'

After cross-examining him, the bishop told him that he should tell the Lady that sent him to give some real proof that he might know she was the Mother of God. Juan asked him what proof he would like and the bishop answered that he should bring whatever proof the Lady thought best. When Juan left, the bishop had two of his Spanish servants follow him to the place where he had said that he had spoken to the Blessed Virgin. However, on reaching a bridge near the foot of the hill, the Indian disappeared and the servants were very annoyed, regarding him as an imposter. As soon as Juan Diego reached the summit of the hill, he again found Our Lady awaiting him. The Indian humbly addressed her :—

So as to accomplish thy command, I returned to the bishop's palace and gave him thy message; and having cross-examined me he said that my simple story was not enough for such a serious undertaking, and he told me to ask of thee a sure sign or proof so that he might be convinced that thou sendest me and that it is thy will that a church be erected in this place.

Our Lady, with endearing words, thanked the Indian for his diligence in carrying out her orders and told him to return next day to the same place, and that she would then give him the sure proof that would convince the bishop and give credit to his account. The Indian bade farewell with great courtesy and promised to obey her orders.

The next day, Monday, December 11th, Juan Diego could not return to comply with Our Lady's orders, as his uncle was very seriously ill and he had to attend him all that day. Next morning, Tuesday, December 12th, fearing his uncle was dying, he set out for the Franciscan church to call one of the priests to administer the last sacraments to his uncle. Reaching the foot of Tepeyac hill, he remembered that he had disobeyed Our Lady's instructions and, instead of taking the direct route over the hill, he naively detoured along the slope of the hill, hoping he would not meet her, but

intending to return later for the proof for the bishop. As he was passing a fountain, Our Lady appeared to him; Juan saw her descend the hill to meet him, wrapped in the white cloud, and with the same brightness. She said to him: 'Where art thou going, my son, and what road hast thou followed?' The Indian remained puzzled, fearful and ashamed and replied with perturbation, prostrate on his knees :—

My beloved Lady, God be with thee. How hast thou spent the night? Art thou in good health? Do not be displeased with what I am going to tell thee. Thou knowest, my Lady, that a servant of thine, my uncle, is dangerously ill, as a result of a serious accident, and because he is dying I am hurrying to the Church at Tlalteolco to call a priest to give him the last sacraments, since we are all subject to death. When I have done this I shall come here and obey thy command; I beg thee, pardon me, my Lady, and be not displeased. It is not my will to disobey thee and I give thee my promise to be here to-morrow without fail.

Our Lady listened kindly to Juan's apology and replied :—

Hearken, my son, to what I have to tell thee. Do not be afflicted by anything; fear not sickness nor another painful accident nor suffering. Am I not here who is thy Mother? Art thou not under my protection? Am I not life and health? Art thou not in my lap and under my responsibility? Dost thou need anything else? Do not worry about your uncle's illness. He shall not die from this sickness. Be in peace. He is cured.

Juan felt comforted at Our Lady's words and immediately said :—
'Then send me, my Lady, to see the bishop and give me the proof for which he has asked.' Our Lady answered :—'Climb to the summit of the hill, my dear and tender son, and cut the roses that thou shalt find there and gather them in your tilma (cloak) and bring them to my presence, and I shall tell thee what to do and say.' Juan obeyed without answering, although he knew there were no flowers in that rocky place. He was surprised to find on the summit a beautiful garden, full of fresh, fragrant castilian roses, covered with dew. He gathered as many as he could in his tilma and took them to the presence of Our Lady. The Indian bowed humbly and showed her the roses he had gathered. She took them in her hands and he spread out his cloak to receive them. Our Lady, dropping them back again into the tilma, said :—

Here is the proof that thou must carry to the bishop. Tell him that these flowers are the proof that he needs and that he should do as I order. Be careful, my son, with this that I tell thee and consider the confidence that I have in thee. Do not show what thou carriest to anyone on the road, nor unfold thy cloak until in the bishop's presence, and have faith that he shall erect my church.

Our Lady then departed and Juan, very happy with his proof, set out for the bishop's palace. He was again kept waiting a long time and the servants were curious to know what he had hidden in his tilma. Despite his resistance, some of the servants saw the roses and tried to take some. However, when they put their hands in it, they seemed not to be real, but woven on the tilma. At length, introduced to the presence of Bishop Zummaraga, he gave his message and added that he had brought the proof which the bishop had

demanded. Then, unfolding his cloak, the roses fell to the floor, and the image of Our Lady was seen to be painted on the inside of the tilma. The bishop marvelled at these proofs of Our Lady's presence on the hill of Tepeyac, in particular the miraculous picture. He then took Juan's tilma and carried it to his oratory, giving thanks to God and His Holy Mother.

The bishop detained Juan at his palace that day and next morning he set out with him, to have him point out the site of the church which Our Lady wished to be erected. Having completed this mission, Juan asked permission to visit his uncle who had been ill. The bishop sent some attendants with him, ordering them that if the sick man was found restored to health to bring him back with them. Juan Bernardino, on seeing his nephew accompanied by the Spaniards, asked him the reason for it, and was told of the miraculous events. He enquired of his nephew the exact time that Our Lady had assured him that he (the uncle) would be restored to health. On being informed, Juan Bernardino said that in the same hour he had seen Our Lady, exactly as described by Juan Diego, and she had restored him to perfect health, telling him that it was her will that a church be erected in the place where his nephew had seen her and also that the miraculous image be named Holy Mary of Guadalupe. The two Indians were brought to the bishop who questioned them both, to get every detail of the amazing happenings.

The fame of the picture spread rapidly and great crowds gathered to venerate it. The bishop placed it in the cathedral, while a chapel was being erected on the site of the apparition. During the transfer of the miraculous picture to the new shrine, a miracle took place. In the excitement some Indians discharged arrows and one of them seriously wounded an Indian man in the crowd. While he lay on the ground dying, the miraculous picture was touched to him and he was immediately cured.

The Indians of Mexico wear, as an outer garment against the cold air of the mountains, a tilma or cloak woven of the thread from the cactus. It is a coarse cloth and resembles a blanket in appearance. It has a seam running down the centre, as has Juan Diego's tilma on which appears the miraculous image. To this day it is a living miracle to confound the sceptics. Great painters who were permitted to examine the cloth say it would be impossible for a human artist to use such a material for a painting and they have admired the beautiful colours, which are as fresh to-day, four hundred years later, as the day on which Juan received the roses from Our Lady. The cloth, according to human judgment, should have perished hundreds of years ago but it shows no sign of deterioration. In the picture one can still see clearly the seam running lengthwise, from top to bottom. The picture has been miraculously preserved not only against the ravages of time but also against the enemies of the Church and of Our Lady of Guadalupe. During the recent persecutions, in the year 1921, a man approached the high

altar on which the image is enshrined and placed a large bouquet of flowers at the foot of the altar. In a few moments there was a tremendous explosion, and a large piece of marble was dislodged from the altar and the brass crucifix on the altar was doubled up and twisted out of shape . . . but the miraculous picture was untouched, not even the glass in the frame being broken! To-day, the twisted crucifix lies in a glass case, with the story of the explosion recorded alongside it.

In considering the records of the apparitions, it is easy to discern that Our Lady's special care was for the souls of the native Indians. She appeared to Juan Diego as a dusky-skinned maiden and is affectionately called the *Virgen Morena*. In addressing Juan on the occasion of her first apparition, Our Lady said: 'It is my will that a church be erected here in this place, where as a merciful Mother of thine and of those who resemble thee I shall demonstrate my mercy and sympathy to all the natives. . . .' An immediate result of the apparition of the *Virgen Morena* on Mexican soil was the transformation of the country into a huge fertile harvest of souls, of fields ripe to the harvest. The Franciscan missionaries baptized the Indians by thousands and opened up new missions, sending urgent appeals to Spain for more priests to reap the harvest. It was realized that this great conversion of the pagan Indians was the direct result of Our Lady's intervention and the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe became a basic part of their instruction. To-day, throughout the country, each Catholic child learns by heart the 'Catechism of Our Lady of Guadalupe.' One of the first questions in this Catechism is:—'Who was the apostle to the Indian people of Mexico?' And the answer:—'Our Blessed Mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe, was the first apostle of the Mexican people.'

The people of Mexico come from all over the country a *pie* (on foot) to the Villa, as the shrine is called. While travelling in a bus recently to Queretaro, where the bishop has approved the Legion, I chatted with a student who was returning there. He gave me a little souvenir picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe, on the back of which was written (in Spanish): 'Memento of the 55th annual pilgrimage on foot of the Queretanos to the Shrine of Tepeyac.' My informant told me that it took them eight days to make the trip through the mountains! (I thought Lough Derg was the only 'Penitential Exercise' left in the Church to-day . . . but I'll take Lough Derg any day!!!)

Those who have devoted themselves specially to the shrine and to Our Lady of Guadalupe are known as 'Guadalupanos.' I am told that many men have sworn to defend with their lives the authenticity of the apparitions at Tepeyac! During the Calles persecution, the Government announced that it was about to take over the Basilica (the shrine) of Our Lady of Guadalupe and close it. The next morning, from all the hills and mountains, the Indians marched down—unarmed—and to the number of over a million

surrounded their beloved shrine, remaining there for ten days until convinced that all danger had passed. Surely a most impressive example of love for the *Virgen Morena*.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and remarkable miracles of grace was the conversion of an American newspaperman by the Virgin of Guadalupe, and it happened in our times. Heywood Broun was a very popular columnist and writer, with definite leanings to the left! He visited Mexico on one occasion as a tourist. Like most tourists, he wanted to see all the sights and in due course found himself inside the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He spent an hour there, watching mesmerized the simple and fervent faith of the Indian pilgrims that streamed through the doors and up the aisles on their knees. On his return to the U.S.A., Heywood Broun sought out Monsignor Fulton Sheen, the famous preacher, and in a short time he was received into the Church. His conversion caused a profound sensation throughout the United States where he was as well known as the President. He was but one of the many loving conquests of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

In 1895 the miraculous image was solemnly crowned with a silver crown, rich with precious stones, with all the dignity of the ceremonies of the Church. This year, being the fiftieth anniversary, it was decided to honour the occasion with fitting solemnity. The central ceremony was the solemn blessing and dedication of a new golden crown. The celebrations resembled the Eucharistic Congress which was held in Dublin in 1932! Cardinal Villeneuve of Quebec, Canada, was the Papal Legate and arrived in full pontificals, being received at the border by a delegation of the Mexican hierarchy. The Mexican government was tolerant and gracious, although not officially recognizing the great religious event. However, the Mexican people were thankful for this small favour, remembering other unhappy days! The Cardinal was expected at the Basilica that evening, but a huge crowd of people met him several miles outside the city of Mexico and he was unable to make his way in his automobile to the Basilica. The crowd just would not permit their Papal Legate, the first Prince of the Church to set foot in Mexico, to leave them. So his official appearance at the Villa was perforce postponed till the next day. During the week preceding the coronation ceremony, pilgrims flocked in from all over the New World—especially from Latin America. There were days set apart for the different Mexican ecclesiastical provinces, for Latin America, for the United States and for Canada. I myself attended the ceremonies twice—the first time with a Maryknoll Father, missioned in Yucatan, with the pilgrims from that part of Mexico. On the second occasion I had an official invitation (representing Ireland) and attended on the day for the United States pilgrims. There were over twenty bishops from the United States present and the Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Rummel of New Orleans, the Papal Legate presiding, with a sermon by Archbishop Lucey of San

Antonio, who is a great friend of Mexico and the Mexican people. In his sermon he recalled the great and historic events that had occurred on that holy ground, and quoting from a book by the Archbishop of Mexico referring to the devotion of the Mexican people to the *Virgen Morena*, he said: 'Juan Diego is not dead, he is still here, for we are all Juan Diegos!' That point is well illustrated by the great pilgrimages of Indian peoples filing through the centre aisle each day, holding lighted candles and singing their favourite hymns to their Virgin and Mother, who said to Juan:—'Am I not here, who am thy Mother?'

Seeing the humble Indians moving slowly up the aisles, on their knees, with their confident faces fixed on the miraculous image, one can realize fully that in all their sorrows and sufferings the people of Mexico have sought and found comfort and strength in the *Virgen Morena*. After all, is she not their Mother, in a very special way?

On Friday, 12th October, the solemn coronation ceremonies took place, with the Papal Legate, Cardinal Villeneuve, presiding and some sixty-nine bishops and one thousand, five hundred priests participating. The Diplomatic Corps of all the nations accredited to Mexico (except the U.S.S.R) were present. Although not officially represented, the government of Mexico participated at least unofficially by the presence among the distinguished gathering of the wife of the President, Senora Camacho. The ceremonies lasted for five hours and were high-lighted by a radio message from the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII.

In the course of his address lasting over eight minutes to the assembled prelates, priests and people, the Holy Father brought tears to the eyes of his listeners by using an endearing title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, usually known only to the Mexican people—*La Morenita del Tepeyac* . . . meaning, the Little Brown Lady of Tepeyac.

The following is a brief résumé of the Holy Father's address:—
Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, assembled together with our most worthy Cardinal Legate to commemorate the fiftieth year of the canonical coronation of the Virgin of Guadalupe. More than three centuries have now passed since the day in which the Sweet Mother began to receive the homage of the Catholics of Mexico, and of all America, at the throne which she herself erected. You have treasured it in the centre of your hearts and therefore you have repeatedly charmed her your Lady and Patroness; to her you have dedicated, first a small shrine, then a chapel, later a church and finally a magnificent Basilica. The voice of the Mexican people acclaims continually and never ceases with the cry:—'Noble Little Indian Mother of God and Our Mother.' But your piety was not yet satisfied. You sought to see her forehead crowned as befits a sovereign, as your Queen should be crowned. Finally, your destiny is realized. This day fifty years ago, the Basilica was restored. Tens of thousands of pilgrims entered its spacious naves and spread out before its altar. Some forty mitres inclined with reverence. The prayers, hymns and 'Vivas' went up to Heaven; and when the golden crown was glitteringly displayed, in every heart and on every tongue there arose a cry till now scarcely restrained:—'Viva the Virgin of Guadalupe; Empress of America and Queen of Mexico.' The spectacle was as beautiful as if seen in a sweet dream. The reality was simply a serene triumph of your love and of your faith. . . . We raise our eyes and give thanks to the Author of all good for in

this love and in this faith we find a guarantee for the conservation of your faith, Mexican Catholics, in the Virgin of Guadalupe. Your brothers and fathers were victims of the persecution and in defence of the faith they faced death without fear or flinching, exclaiming:—'Viva Christ the King and Viva the Queen of Guadalupe.' To-day, the conditions of the Church and of religion in your country have notably improved, showing that your prayers and your fervour were not in vain. You, Catholics of the Americas, should continue firm in your position, fully conscious of your rights. . . . We are sure that while the Virgin is recognized as Queen and Mother of the Americas, Mexico will continue to be secure. . . .

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the coronation of the miraculous image may well mark a turning point in the modern history of Mexico. After years of bloody persecution, the worst inflicted on any modern nation by a native government, Mexico appears now to be veering to the 'middle of the road.' Its politicians appear convinced that nothing can be gained—and everything lost—by a persecution of religion. Also Communism, which had made this city its headquarters for the American continent, appears to be on the wane. The sudden death of the Russian Ambassador, Constantine Oumansky, with all his diplomatic staff, in a plane accident, April (1945), appears to have permanently weakened the communistic cause. He, personally, was the dominant force behind communistic activities and was a man of great ability and a splendid linguist. He was one of the high officials of the Soviet, and the fact that he was accredited to Mexico signifies the importance attached to Mexico as a centre for future revolutionary activity.

The press of Mexico was unanimous in echoing the sentiments of the people and followed the ceremonies each day with pictures and detailed descriptions. At the ceremonies in the church, camera flash-bulbs were continually in action. Even the weekly and monthly periodicals appeared with pictures of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the covers. The Papal Legate left a very happy impression on the citizens of Mexico by his great sympathy and kindness, and his last act when leaving the capital was to bless the city and people.

As if to close for ever the sad epoch of the persecution, exactly one week after the coronation ceremonies at the Basilica, Plutarck Elias Calles, ex-President of Mexico and the 'strong man of Mexico' in the days of the persecution, passed away here in the English hospital from a heart ailment. It was rumoured in the press that, for several weeks before his death, a frequent visitor and friend of the late ex-President was a Jesuit Father. However, his death was quite sudden and there was no statement as to whether he died reconciled to the Church. At any rate, his death marked, we hope, the end of an epoch in Mexico.

To-day, the shrine has returned to its normal routine, with pilgrims daily entering its portals with their lighted candles and great bouquets of flowers, and approaching the image on their knees. And at night the letters formed with electric bulbs over the entrance shine out the joyful acclamation: *Non fecit taliter omni nationi.*

JOHN MURRAY.

OUR LADY'S MEDIEVAL PLAYS¹

BY REV. H. GAFFNEY, O.P., M.A., Ph.D.

MOST students of medieval drama are made familiar with the greater plays which concern the Passion of Our Blessed Lord and the mysteries of His life, and even with the plays of the Old Testament, but the plays which have Our Lady as their central figure are scantily written about, and consequently are less well known. This is a great pity; because, apart from their charm, they exercised no small influence on the development of the modern liturgy of Our Lady's feasts, and were a tremendous factor in fostering veneration and affection for her. Most of the minor plays are irretrievably lost, and all the others are still in manuscripts which for students in these islands are normally inaccessible.

In many of the New Testament plays Our Lady appears, but seldom does she dominate the scene or even speak. We know the silent part she takes in Bethlehem, for instance, at the Nativity and at the visit of the Magi, and afterwards in the Flight into Egypt. But, on some of her great feasts, she is made the centre of dramatic interest because those feasts were instituted in her honour.

There is one valuable record, which we owe to Philip of Mézières, regarding the origin and dramatic celebration of the feast of Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple. Philip lived from 1327 to 1405, and appears to have been an enthusiastic apostle of devotion to Our Lady. He was of noble birth, a member of the diplomatic corps of France, and a Crusader. While in the East he found the Oriental Church celebrating the festival of Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple. The celebration of such a beautiful and almost shy little episode in Our Lady's girlhood impressed him deeply. When he reached Europe he persuaded the Archbishop and the clergy of Venice to celebrate the feast. They yielded to the request of this lover of Our Lady; and we know that the illustrious City of the Sea celebrated the feast with great solemnity. The old manuscript adds the words: *cum representatione figurata et devotissima*. We shall see in a moment what this meant. Philip brought the whole matter before Pope Gregory XI.² The Pope approved of Philip's project, and the first official celebration in the West of the feast of the Presentation took place in the Franciscan church at Avignon in 1372.

¹ Synopsis of a lecture delivered at University College, Galway.

² Philip's reports are in the National Library in Paris. The official reference is 17330: Office de la Présentation.