

## OUR LADY OF CHARITY

NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA CARIDAD DE COBRE (SANTIAGO DE CUBA)  
NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA CARIDAD DE ILLESCAS  
(CASTILLA, SPAIN)

At Cobre, a mining village near Santiago de Cuba, there is revered an image of Our Lady of Charity, which, according to accepted tradition, appeared in 1627 or 1628, to three men, on Nipe Bay. They had gone there for salt and the image came to them floating upright and not wet, upon the waves of that great expanse of water. They took the image home with them to the copper mines at Cobre, where, by subsequent miraculous manifestations, according to report, Our Lady indicated her determination to remain. A chapel was built upon a hill, and there through three centuries and more the Mother of God has been ardently revered, especially by the negroes of Cuba. She is credited with very many miracles and her shrine is the objective of an annual pilgrimage, although vicissitudes have harassed her and untoward circumstances have much reduced the splendor of her cult.<sup>1</sup>

Some students (the writer among them) have supposed that this image is the one which Alonso de Hojeda left among the Indians of the south coast of Cuba in 1511. Perusal of Las Casas' History of the Indies seems to suggest this possibility, and the writer in the course of investigation of Cuban documents at Seville has seen nothing to render the idea untenable.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nothing, however, has diminished the ardor of her devotees. In her honor they wear coral and yellow ribbons and especially checked gingham dresses. To her they erect altars in the meetings places of the *cabildos*—social-religious associations of blacks and mulattoes.

<sup>2</sup> The main facts of this article (and the documents thereto appended) were presented, in Spanish, in a paper similarly entitled, before the Spanish Association for the Progress of Sciences, in its congress at Oporto, on June 30, 1921, and published by the society in its proceedings. On reconsidering that article the writer believes that the data in hand do not prove that Sanchez de Moya conveyed

The purpose of this paper is to prove that, as a matter of historical fact, Our Lady of Charity of Cobre, in Cuba, is Our Lady of Charity of Illescas, in Castile, and that at least twenty years prior to the accepted date of her miraculous appearance on Nipe Bay, she was revered in her own hermitage, attended by her particular hermit, at the Cobre mines, then called *las minas del Prado*, near Santiago de Cuba.

To provide himself with artillery with which to fight the English, by 1597, the king of Spain had been compelled to undertake the development, under administration, of the copper deposits which had long been known to exist in Cuba, near Havana, and especially near Santiago de Cuba. To have charge of their exploitation, and other related work, he sent to the island Captain Francisco Sanchez de Moya (army inspector from Perpiñan, experienced in the Lisbon foundries), with the title of captain of artillery for Cuba.<sup>3</sup> Captain Francisco Sanchez de Moya was a native of the province of Toledo.

Among numerous obligations laid upon Sanchez de Moya by his instructions<sup>4</sup> was that of providing a modest church, if the seat of his activities was outside Havana. It was not at first decided which deposits should be worked—those near Havana, or those at Santiago. Eventually experience proved the deposits in the east to be far the better, and it was at Cobre that Sanchez de Moya established himself, his staff, and his laborers. Here,

this image from Spain; although he might well have done so. On the other hand, in view of the fact that the great cardinal who gave Hojeda his image was a patron of the charity hospital at Illescas, it may be argued that he was likely to give an image of Our Lady of Illescas to Hojeda, since she must have been much in his mind precisely at the time he made that present to his protegee. One can imagine the amazement of the devout Sanchez de Moya if, on arriving in the wilderness of eastern Cuba, he found the famous virgin of his native province, worshipped by the aborigines there!

<sup>3</sup> Documents concerning Captain Francisco Sanchez de Moya and his creditable activities through more than twenty years in Cuba are numerous in the Archivo de Indias. He opened and maintained the mines. He was at one time acting governor of eastern Cuba, chosen by the people in an emergency (I. A. Wright, *Santiago de Cuba and its District*, Madrid, 1918, p. 31). He assisted in establishing the sugar industry in Oriente and was himself one of the first mill-owners.

<sup>4</sup> See Appended Document No. 1.

prior to 1600, he built his church. The presbyter, Miguel Geronimo, was its first chaplain.<sup>5</sup>

Upon this church the captain lavished devout attention. In his day the religious festivals of Holy Week and Corpus Christi were celebrated at the Cobre mines with a pomp not equalled elsewhere in Cuba outside the far-distant capital city of Havana itself.

In the late summer of 1604 Bishop Fray Don Juan de las Cabezas y Altamirano visited Cobre, and blessed its bells and the altars of its church.<sup>6</sup> Now, in addition to this church there was also a hermitage at Cobre, erected to the virgin and in charge of a hermit who, prior to 1608, had Bishop Cabezas' sanction.<sup>7</sup> In 1620, this hermitage, built on a hill, sheltered "a small image of Our Lady . . . . *Nuestra Señora de Guia*, mother of God, of Illescas".<sup>8</sup>

Illescas! On the highway between Madrid and Toledo—Toledo, the region whence Captain Sanchez de Moya came!

Without any knowledge whatsoever concerning Illescas—celebrated in fact and fiction of the 16th century—without any previous acquaintance with its famous charity hospital, built under exalted patronage<sup>9</sup>—the writer journeyed down to Illescas<sup>10</sup> entered the largest church in sight, and asked to see *Nuestra Señora de Guia*, mother of God, of Illescas.

The kindly sacristan informed us that the image upon the altar we approached was not that of *Nuestra Señora de Guia*, but

<sup>5</sup> See Appended Document No. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *A. de I.*, 54-1-9, Bishop Cabezas to his majesty, from Santiago de Cuba. See also appended Documents Nos. 3 and 4. There seem to have been three of these altars: one to Mary, one to Saint Barbara, and the main altar, to Saint James the Greater, under whose advocacy Sanchez de Moya had placed the church. He had brought an image of this tutelar saint with him from Spain (see appended Document No. 4, for description).

<sup>7</sup> See Appended Document No. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Appended Document No. 4.

<sup>9</sup> See ante, note 2.

<sup>10</sup> Among the members of the party on this expedition was Sr. D. Joaquin Ciria, born in Santiago de Cuba. Mr. Ciria's present address is Plaza del Cordon No. 2, Madrid.

of *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad*<sup>11</sup> de Illescas—a very ancient and “miraculous” virgin, widely known and deeply revered through all Spain in the sixteenth century.<sup>12</sup> He exhibited strange old paintings of her, hanging upon the walls of the rooms and narrow corridors through which he conducted us toward the small chamber, high at the rear of the altar, where he promised to afford us a close view of the image. He called attention to the attitude of the mother in these paintings—she holds the child squarely before her in the pose usual in ancient images; later, it was altered so that now she carries the babe upon her arm. He remarked also that the face of the image had until quite recently been almost black; and warned us that it had been repainted lately.

By winding stairs we had now entered the small, decorated chamber directly behind the image, which the sacristan swung on a pivot, and we found ourselves face to face with—Our Lady of Charity of Cobre. *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad* of Illescas in Castile and *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad* of Cobre in Cuba are one and the same. There can be no question of that fact. The sacristan had never heard of the image at Santiago.

They are the same. The documents appended prove, therefore, that prior to 1608, Our Lady of Charity was revered in a hermitage on a hill at Cobre: surely in the shape of the same image<sup>13</sup> which is revered there to this day. Whether she came

<sup>11</sup> None of the party had known that Our Lady of Charity of Illescas existed. Our astonishment was extreme; nor did our amazement decrease on learning that the virgin had been too dark, for Our Lady of Charity at Cobre is *muy morena*, and not less popular because of that detail. When, in finding Our Lady of Charity at Illescas we found that we had discovered her identity with Our Lady of Charity at Cobre, we did not go further, for we had not the time, to see *Nuestra Señora de Guía*, who is worshiped in another church. Nor can the writer explain why the image at Cobre is so called in appended Document No. 4, unless some clerk in writing confused the two famous virgins of the one never large city of Illescas.

<sup>12</sup> In the sixteenth century *seises* danced before this virgin, as now they dance before the high altar of Seville Cathedral (*A. de I.*, 145-150).

<sup>13</sup> Hojeda's image was small—he carried it in his knapsack. The image at Illescas is small. So is that at Cobre—smaller, still, than the one at Illescas. The image at Illescas is a head upon a tripod. The image at Cobre is undoubtedly the same. The writer, visiting Cobre, asked if there was a body and what it was like. The president of the ladies' society which dresses the image was astounded

to Cuba with Hojeda, was by him left among the aborigines in gratitude for his escape from the south coast swamp (as Las Casas relates), whether the image still honored at Cobre is the one the good *clerigo* saw in the neat chapel the Indians maintained for her at the time of the Spanish conquest of Cuba; or whether Captain Sanchez de Moya brought her with him when he came to the island in 1597, the fact remains that Our Lady of Cobre is Our Lady of Illescas, and that she was in her place in her hermitage upon a hill, at the mines, prior to 1608.

Concerning the tradition of her miraculous appearance, twenty years later, on Nipe Bay, the writer has nothing to say; excepting that close examination of documents at Seville, appertaining to the history of Cuba, up to the year 1660, has not yet furnished any reference whatsoever to this event, which, surely, could not have been ignored by the bishop, the chapter at Santiago, by the governor at Havana, and by all the lesser officials, civil and ecclesiastic, and minor individuals who wrote tirelessly to his majesty in his council for the Indies upon every conceivable topic.

Therefore, rather than attribute the presence of Our Lady at Cobre to a miracle, the writer would prefer to see in it evidence of the immortality of those human qualities which make for good: perhaps of the gratitude of that picturesque, courageous adventurer, Hojeda, who swore mightily by the mother of God; and certainly of the deep devotion, and the sincerity, of Captain Francisco Sanchez de Moya, for whom, despite thorough scrutiny of documentary sources for the history of which he was a part, the writer has been able to maintain profound respect and high regard. Of Hojeda, here survives one admirable trait; and of Sanchez de Moya—a good, an active, an honest man—here lives

at this question, and replied that when she dressed the virgin ecstasy overcame her, so that she did not know what the body was like. When the shrine of Cobre was robbed, during the American Occupation (about 1899) the head was found where the thieves had thrown it away. Persons who then had forced upon them the opportunity to examine it assert that it is entirely modern—"a French doll", was the description. It does not look like a French doll to worshipers, who are permitted to come very close indeed, thanks to the arrangement of the altar at Cobre.

his influence, century after century, unvanquished, immortal!  
Behold in this the miracle!

I. A. WRIGHT.

---

The four following documents are all from the Archivo de Indias: the first two being from Est. 53, caj. 2, leg. 9, the third from Est. 55, caj. 5, leg. 23, and the fourth from Est. 54, caj. 1, leg. 16.

I

+

El Rey

Lo que Vos fran<sup>co</sup>. Sanchez de Moya Mi Veedor de la gente de guerra de Perpiñan haueis de hazer en la labor de las minas de cobre que se an de beneficiar en la ysla de Cuba y fabrica del Artilleria es lo siguiente. . . .

CAPITULO

Si esta fundacion huuiere de estar de asiento en alguna Parte que esto auéis Vos de procurar encaminar hareis levantar Vna Iglesia y edefiçio Vmilde el que bastare Para la gente y a vn Religioso. que se dara Orden Asista alli hareis dar Razion y lo neçessario de mi hazienda y este administrara los sacramentos a toda la dha gente y terna Cuidado de la correction y buenas costumbres de todos y de que oyan misa los dias de fiesta Principalmente los negros como gente de menos Razon Procurando que no Hagan falta en esto ni ofensa a n̄ro Señor y hauiendose de mudar las Rancherias se hara de tablas y como mejor y a menos costa se pudiere. de manera que este el santissimo sacramento con deçencia y seguridad. . . .

fecha en madrid a Veynte y tres de março mill y quis<sup>o</sup> y nobenta y siete años yo el Rey Refrendada de Juan de ybarra y senalada de los del conss<sup>o</sup>. . . .

Concuerta. . . .<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The *cedula* entire is to be found in A. de I., 79-4-2, Y 7, pp. 1 *et seq.* The certified extract found in 53-2-9, among papers of the presbyter Miguel Geronimo was preferred for copying. Here, too, are to be found certified copies of those provisions according to which this first chaplain at Cobre was paid according to Sanchez de Moya's appointment of him.

## II

. . . . fran<sup>co</sup>. Sanchez de Moya cap<sup>an</sup>. de la arti<sup>a</sup>. en esta ysla de cuba Por su Mag<sup>d</sup>.

Por quanto Aviendome mandado El Rey Nrõ Sr. que Viniese A esta ysla de cuba a formar dos fundiciones Una de Sacar Cobre Y otra de Arti<sup>a</sup>. fue su Voluntad que en la parte que hiziese mi asiento se fundase Vna yglesia donde se administrasen los santos sacramentos a la Gente de mi Cargo Para cuyo efecto manda que aya Vn capellan y Vicario que Acuda a la dha administracion Como Consta Por los despachos. y cedula Reales Suyas que para el exercicio de mi offi<sup>o</sup>. me dio, y por la Satisfacion que tengo de con quanta Virtud suficiencia. y cuydado El P<sup>e</sup>. Miguel Ger<sup>mo</sup>. ha exercido el offi<sup>o</sup>. de cura y Vicario en algunos lugares desta ysla estandolo continuando Con mucha Satisfacion de todos en la Vi<sup>a</sup>. Del Bayamo Sirui<sup>do</sup>. el curado della le escriui que Viniese. si era Su Voluntad a encargarse desta Capellania. y Vicariato el qual lo hizo con mucho Amor Por acudir al Serui<sup>o</sup>. de su mag<sup>d</sup>. Por tanto en Virtud. de las dhas Cedula Reales le Nombro Por Capellan y Vicario de la Yglecia Parrochial del bien aVenturado Santiago el mayor desta Vi<sup>a</sup>. de las minas del prado que yo he fundado Para que todo el tpo que fuere la Voluntad del Rey Nrõ sr. sirua el dho benefi<sup>o</sup>. y la capellania se le Pague el stipendio que Por su serui<sup>o</sup>. hubiere de hauer en conformidad del asiento que oy dia de la fecha se ha despachado Para Poner en los libros de la contaduria. Para la q<sup>ta</sup>. que con el se ha de tener que son doze escudos de a diez Reales cada mes y Racion y m<sup>a</sup>. Para su sustento demas del dhõ Sueldo todo el tpo que siruiere. y desde luego le pongo en la posesion de la dha yglesia eomo a cura Capellan y Vicario della Porque assi conViene al Serui<sup>o</sup>. de dios y de su mag<sup>d</sup>. y para que se cumpla assi Tomara la Razon deste nombram<sup>o</sup>. el Sargento Bernardo fernandez yzquiero que haze offi<sup>o</sup>. de Cont<sup>or</sup>. y tesor<sup>o</sup>. desta fabrica Por ausencia y con poder de P<sup>o</sup>. de Redondo Villegas y Marcos de Valera Arceo, que lo son de la arti<sup>a</sup>. desta ysla de cuba. Por su mag<sup>d</sup>. Y le boluera este original Para su Resguardo. fecho en las minas de la Vi<sup>a</sup>. del prado. A onze de Septiembre de mill y seis cientos años.

FRAN<sup>co</sup>. SANCHEZ DE MOYA (rubric).

Tome la Razon.

BER<sup>do</sup>. FRNZ. YZQUIERDO (rubric).

## III

. . . Reconocimi.<sup>to</sup> del assiento de estas minas y lauores que se bee que estan hechas en ellas

Primeram.<sup>te</sup> ay Una yglesia fundada sobre pilares de madera Cercada de Tablas y cubierta de teja con tres altares que cada uno Tiene su lampara (que estas son de limosna Que se a rrecojido entre la Gente de estas minas) Y sus hornamentos ordinarios. biejos con dos buenas Campanas. . . .

. . . en el cerro de la mina. ay Vna ermita de nra S.<sup>ra</sup> en que reside Un hermitaño q esta en ella Con liçençia del obispo de esta ysla

Fho el dho Reconoçimiento en estas minas del Prado A beinte y nueue de Nouiembre de mil seis<sup>os</sup> y ocho años

P<sup>o</sup> VARONA BARAHONA (Rubric).

IV<sup>15</sup>

. . . en las minas del Prado en treynta dias del mes de Entrega henero de mill y seis.<sup>os</sup> y veinte años su merzed del dho señor g.<sup>or</sup> en cumpli.<sup>to</sup> y ex.<sup>on</sup> de la dha zedula rreal. . . estando pres.<sup>te</sup> el señor cap.<sup>an</sup> fran.<sup>co</sup> ss.<sup>a</sup> de Moya y el señor alcalde mayor Juan de eguiluz y el contador ambrosio de Seuilla guerrero con ynterbencion de su merzed del dho capitán fran.<sup>co</sup> ss.<sup>a</sup> de Moya empezaron a hazer entrega al dho señor alcalde mayor Juan de eguiluz de la santa yglesia de estas dhas minas de Prado y hornamentos y de mas cosas del seruicio de ella por ante mi Juan de fromesta s.<sup>o</sup> publico la qual se hizo en la forma sig.<sup>te</sup> |

Primeramente se le entrego la santa yglesia destas minas armada sobre diez pilares de cal y canto y sobre pilares de madera que tiene tres naues y con una dibision de una rreja que haze capilla m.<sup>or</sup> y otra del coro para que detras della oygan misa los negros separados de los blancos con su sacristia zercada de tablas de madera y en el altar mayor con sus gradas de madera y un sagrario donde esta el santisimo sacramento en una custodia pequeña de plata encima de un arca con las gradas aforrado el dho sagrario de tafetan y en el dho altar una y magen de bulto de santiago el mayor adbocacion desta santa yglesia

<sup>15</sup> The document from which these extracts are taken is an enclosure of about 150 pages sent to his majesty by the governor of eastern Cuba, Rodrigo de Belasco, with his letter of February 18, 1620, reporting the delivery of the copper mines to Juan de Eguiluz who was succeeding Francisco Sanchez de Moya in their management.



que dice traxo de españa con yntento de colocarla en la santa yglesia que hiziese con su capa de terziopelo azul listada y un sombrero de plata con el articulo de fee que compuso en el ala del y la dha custodia tiene su cubierta de tafetan.

Yten un cripsto de bulto con un belo de tela de plata delante.

Una custodia chica de plata con unos beriles en que se saca el santisimo sacram.<sup>to</sup> el dia del corpus en procesion y corporales. |

Mas un frontal de terziopelo berde labrado y morado ya usado.<sup>16</sup> . . .

| . . . Una lampara de plata con que se alumbra el santisimo sacramento con su baso de plata | que la mayor parte della se hizo de limosna que lo que a su mag.<sup>d</sup> costo se echara de ver por las cuentas viejas.

Otras dos lamparas de plata con sus basos de lo mesmo que alumbra los dos altares de la madre de dios y santa barbara las quales el señor capitán fran.<sup>co</sup> ss.<sup>2</sup> de moya declaro que la del altar de santa barbara se hizo de limosna de la cofradia della y ansi mesmo uno de los calizes de plata que estan ymbentariados y que ansi mesmo la lampara del altar de nra señora se hizo de limosna de la dha cofradia de nra señora... |

Un pendon de rraso blanco que es de la cofradia de nra señora del rosario.

Una ymagen de santa barbara de bulto que esta en su altar dorada... |

...Todas las quales dhas cosas y hornamentos contenidos y declarados en este ymbentario lo rrezibio el dho señor Juan de eguiluz... |

en las minas de Santiago del Prado en treynta dias del mes de henero de mill y seis.<sup>o</sup> y v.<sup>to</sup> años el dho señor g.<sup>or</sup> rrodrigo de velasco en cumplimi.<sup>to</sup> de la dha zedula rreal estando presente el señor cap.<sup>an</sup> fran.<sup>co</sup> ss.<sup>2</sup> de moya y el señor alcalde m.<sup>or</sup> Juan de Eguiluz y el contador ambrosio de seúilla guerrero fue prosiguiendo en la entrega de las cosas tocantes y pertenecientes a las dhas minas y fabrica de cobre della y el dho señor alcalde m.<sup>or</sup> se fue entregando dellas y las rrezibio en la forma y manera sig.<sup>ta</sup>... |

Una hermita que esta en zerro de la mina de la adbocacion de nra señora. de guia madre de dios de yllescas cubierta de texa y sobre pilares de madera con un altar y ymagen de nra señora de bulto pequeña y otras ymagenes en estampas y una casa en que biue un hermitaño...

<sup>16</sup> Omitted portions recited the delivery of "frontales, casullas, etc., campanas, mangas de cruz, palios, lamparas, ynzensario, pila de bautismo, etc., etc.,"—all the utensils and ornaments of a church of considerable importance.