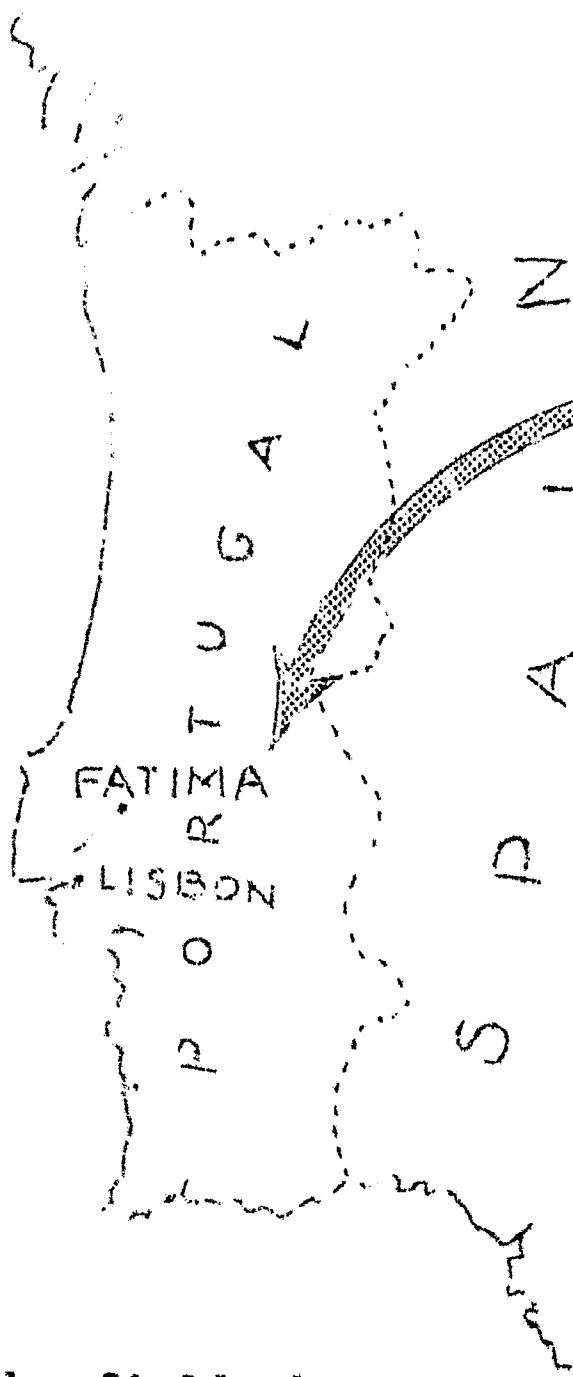


the THREE CHILDREN OF FATIMA



In 1917 Our Blessed Mother appeared to three small children, Lucy Santos, Francis and Jacinta Marto. At the time of the apparitions, Lucy was scarcely ten, Francis was nine, and Jacinta was just seven.

An angel first appeared to these three little shepherds some months before they saw the Blessed Virgin. Apparently the purpose of these angelic visits was to prepare the minds and hearts of the children for their special mission. There were many visits made by the angel. Three, however, are worth knowing.

On a very rainy spring afternoon in 1916, the children took shelter in a cave. They remained there until about noon, when they ate their lunch, said their Rosary and played jacks. Suddenly a gust of wind startled them. They looked out toward the fields below the cave. There they saw a dazzling light, and in the midst of it, coming toward them, a human form. It was whiter than snow. As it drew nearer, the children saw that it was a handsome youth of fourteen or fifteen. The youth spoke to the three children, "Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me."

Then the Angel went down on his knees, and bowing to the ground, he repeated three times, "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love Thee! I beg pardon for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope, nor love Thee."

The Children made the same profound bows as the Angel and likewise repeated the prayer. The Angel arose and said, "Pray like that. The most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary will be touched by your prayers." Then the figure disappeared. The exhortation of the Angel did not go unheeded. Thereafter, when left unnoticed, Lucy, Francis and Jacinta would prostrate themselves on the ground and pray like the Angel did, until they could no longer pronounce the words or keep the painful position.

The Second Apparition.

Two months after the visit of the Angel of Peace, the three children were playing in Lucy's garden. Without any previous warning, the Angel appeared and said, "What are you doing here? Pray, pray much! The Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary have plans of mercy in regard to you. Continually offer up prayers and sacrifices to the Lord."

Lucy became anxious about the sacrifices they were to make, so she asked for an explanation.

"You can make sacrifices of all things," came the reply. "Offer them in reparation for all the sins that offend God, and beg of Him the conversion of sinners. In this way, try to draw down peace upon your country. I am its Guardian Angel, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear humbly the sufferings the Lord will wish to send you."

From that moment the three children began in earnest to offer to Our Lord all they could suffer for His sake. Their favorite penance was to remain, for hours at a time, prostrate upon the ground, repeated the prayer the Angel had taught them.