

THE DEVIL'S CROSS

It does not matter if you believe me or not. This is something my grandfather told my father, that my father told me, and I am about to tell you as a way to pass the time.

I

Dusk was beginning to spread its wings over the picturesque banks of the Segre river when, after a tiring journey, we finally arrived at Bellver which was our destination.

Bellver is a small town that is situated on the side of a hill behind which, rising up like the stone steps of a colossal amphitheater, the cloud-covered peaks of the Pyrenees can be seen in the distance.

The white farmhouses, scattered here and there over the rolling expanse of green that surrounds it, look from afar like a flock of doves who have ceased their flight and have come to satisfy their thirst on the banks of the river.

A bare rock next to a bend in the river, on which there are the remains of an abandoned building, marks the boundary between the land of the Count of Urgel and that of his most powerful vassal.

Standing by the side of the torturous path which follows the twisting banks of the river until it reaches this point, there is a cross.

The trunk and the arms are made of iron, the rounded base is marble, and the stairs that lead up to it are blackened and poorly connected fragments of masonry.

The corrosive effect of the passage of time has caused the iron to be covered with rust, and the stones of the pedestal have broken, allowing several vines to take root and climb until they almost cover it, while a large live-oak tree serves as a canopy.

I had gotten a few moments ahead of the rest of my travelling companions and, reining in the tired horse I was riding, I stopped for a moment to contemplate the cross, thinking that it was a silent and simple example of the pious beliefs of centuries gone by.

A world of ideas began to stream through my mind: indistinct thoughts, connected by an invisible thread of light with the profound solitude of the place, the deep silence of the night, and the vague feeling of melancholy that filled my spirit.

Driven by an indescribable, spontaneous religious impulse, I dismounted and removed my hat; I began to search my memory for some of the prayers they taught us to say as a child, for one of those prayers that, when we say it, relieves our worries and soothes our cares which then seem to disappear.

I had begun to recite it softly when, suddenly, I felt someone shake me violently by the shoulders. I turned my head and saw a man standing next to me.

It was one of our guides, a native of that country who, with an indescribable expression of disapproval painted on his face, was struggling to drag me away and cover my head with the hat which I still held in my hands.

My first response, part astonishment and part anger, was to ask him heatedly what in God's name he thought he was doing.

Without ceasing his efforts to drag me away from the cross, the poor fellow began to explain, telling me of things which at first I could not understand, but speaking with such vehemence that it startled me:

“For the love of your mother, for all that you consider sacred, young man, cover your head and get away from that cross as quickly as you can! Are you so desperate that the help of God is not enough, that you must also resort to that of the devil?”

I looked at him in astonished silence for a moment. I frankly thought he must be mad; but he continued to speak with the same vehement tone:

“You are heading for the border. Well, if you were to ask for help from heaven in the presence of that cross, in just one night the peaks of the nearby mountains would rise up toward the stars in the sky, so that we would never be able to find the frontier for as long as we lived.”

I could not help but smile.

“You think this is a joke?... Is it that you think this is a holy cross, like the one in the entrance to our church?...”

“Of course... What else could it be?”

“Well you could not be more mistaken, because in spite of its sacred appearance, that cross is cursed... that cross belongs to a malignant spirit, and that is the reason it is called *The Devil’s Cross*.”

“The Devil’s Cross,” I repeated, as I gave in to his insistence and, in spite of myself, began to feel an involuntary sense of fear, a feeling that some unknown force was driving me away from that place. “The Devil’s Cross! It is difficult for me to imagine a more absurd combination of ideas that are so completely opposite!... A cross... and the Devil? What nonsense! You will have to explain to me how anyone could have ever conceived of something like this monstrous absurdity.”

During this short conversation, those who were traveling with me had picked up their pace and had finally arrived at the foot of the cross. I explained to them briefly what had just happened. Then I got back on my horse and, as church bells were calling the faithful to prayers, we arrived at one of the isolated and dismal inns of the town of Bellver.

II

Bright red and blue flames were circling around the large oak log burning in the wide hearth, and the trembling shadows which the fire cast on the darkened wall became larger or smaller, as the flickering flames shone with a light that was more and then less bright. The glass, sometimes empty sometimes full, and not with water, was passed around the circle of those who were gathered before the fire and were impatiently waiting to hear the history of *The Devil’s Cross* to serve as dessert after the frugal meal they had just eaten, when our guide coughed, and after downing the last few drops of his wine and wiping his mouth with his hand, he began to speak:

“What I am going to talk about took place long ago... I am not sure how long it was, but it was when the Moors still occupied a large part of Spain, when our counts were kings and the villages and towns belonged to a group of lords who owed homage to other more powerful lords.” After this short introduction our story teller stopped for a moment while he gathered his thoughts, and then he continued as follows:

“As it happened, long ago this town and several others were part of the patrimony of a feudal baron who erected a castle that for many centuries was perched on the crest of a rocky cliff whose foot was bathed by the Segre river, for which it was named.

As a testament to truth of this account, there are still a few moss-covered ruins on its summit that can be seen from the road which leads to this town.

I do not know if it was for good or ill fortune, but the Lord of this castle who was hated by his vassals for his cruelty and who, because of his bad qualities, was neither welcomed to the court by the King nor to their hearths by his neighbors, became bored living with nothing more than his ill humor and his archers there on the top of the cliff where his forefathers built their nest of stone.

He racked his brain night and day, trying to think of some new distraction that would interest him, which was not easy since he had already become tired of such pastimes as making war on his neighbors, beating his servants, and hanging his subjects.

The chronicles tell us that on this occasion, although it was unprecedented, he decided on an worthy idea.

Knowing that Christians from other countries were preparing to set out in a formidable armada to a strange country where they would attempt to recover the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was then held by the Moors, he decided to join them.

His reason for doing this was to purge his faults, which were many, by offering to risk his life for a worthy cause or, at any rate, to travel to a place where they were not known, or were ignored. So the result was that, to the great joy of his vassals and the other nobles, he gathered his followers and for a large sum of money he granted independence to his towns. Then, keeping for himself only the Rock of the Segre and the castle with its four towers, the inheritance of his family disappeared overnight.

The entire region was now able to enjoy this newfound freedom, as though it had just awakened from a nightmare.

Now, hanging from the branches there was only fruit, rather than the bodies of men; the women of the town were no longer afraid to venture out with their jugs to get water from the roadside fountain, and shepherds did not have to lead their herds to pasture following difficult and dangerous paths, afraid that at any bend in the road they might be met by the archers of their beloved lord.

This continued for a period of three years; the story of *The evil Nobleman*, because that was the name they gave him, was mentioned only in tales that old women told with an ominous voice around the fire at night to frightened children; and mothers would threaten their naughty or weeping children, by telling them: "The Lord of the Segre is coming." When lo and behold, one night, or perhaps one day, either falling out of the sky or rising out of the depths, the feared and hated Lord did in fact reappear, much to the dismay of his former subjects.

I will not try to describe the effect of this unwelcome surprise. You can imagine it yourselves better than I could explain it, if I tell you that he now wanted to reclaim all the privileges he had renounced. If he was bad when he left, he was worse when he returned, and if he had no love or support before he went off to war, when he came back he had no resources other than his arrogance, his lance, and a few mercenaries who were as cruel and heartless as their chief.

As you might expect, the towns objected to paying tribute again after all they had done to escape it, so the Lord set fire to his former properties, farmsteads and cornfields.

A few villagers appealed to the King's justice, but the Lord mocked the written decrees of the royal ministers by nailing them to the doors of his towers, and then he hung the troublemakers from an oak tree.

Frustrated, and with no other means of achieving deliverance, the villagers came to an agreement and, commending themselves to Divine Providence, they took up arms. But the Lord summoned his own followers, asked for help from the Devil, and marched up to his castle to prepare for battle.

When it began, it was bloody and terrible. They fought with all their armaments, in every place and at all times, with swords and with fire, on the mountain and in the plains, during the day and the night. It was not just a battle to stay alive: it was living to battle.

In the end, justice triumphed. So listen, and I will tell you how it happened:

One very dark night, when no earthly sound could be heard and there were no stars in the sky, the men of the castle, elated after a recent victory, were dividing up their booty; while they were drunken with liquor in the midst of a mad and raucous orgy, they sang sacrilegious songs in praise of their diabolical patron.

As I said, all was silent around the castle, except for the sound of these blasphemies, which echoed in the bosom of the night like the cries of condemned souls that are filled with pain in the fires of hell.

After seeing that the village below them was silent and calm, the sentries had gone to sleep without fearing that there would be an attack; however, later that night a group of villagers, protected by darkness, began to scale the steep side of the Rock of the Segre until they reached the top when it was close to midnight.

Once there, their work was quickly accomplished: it took only a moment to transfer the sentries from the land of their dreams to the world of the dead. Then, using torches filled with resin, they set fire to the bridge and the portcullis, and the flames quickly spread to the walls of the castle. Aided by the confusion, the attackers surged through the flames and, in a blink of an eye, were able to put an end to all those who were inside the fortress, where everyone perished.

By the time day had dawned, smoke arose from the remains of the collapsed towers, and through gaps in the walls, one could see the sunlight reflected from the armor of the Lord which was hanging from a stone pillar, and underneath it his body was lying in a pool of blood that was surrounded by fallen tapestries and ashes, as well as the bodies of his followers.

Time passed, and eventually briars and brambles began to spread through the deserted patios, vines began to climb up the darkened buttresses, and the bluebells growing out of the battlements rocked back and forth. The sound of the wind, the cries of nocturnal birds, and the quiet swish of snakes slithering through the tall weeds was all that disturbed the deathly silence of that accursed place. The unburied bones of its former inhabitants were whitened by the light of the moon, and the armor of the Lord could be seen, still hanging from the stone pillar of the central hall.

Nobody dared to touch it, but there were numerous different stories about the armor that became the source of frightening rumors, rumors that were spread by those who saw it glowing in the sunlight during the day, or those who swore they heard its metal pieces clashing against each other, when they were rocked by the wind during the night.

In spite of all these stories about the suit of armor which spread from mouth to mouth, they were still only stories, and the only damage that occurred was an unhealthy dose of fear, which everyone tried to hide as best they could.

If nothing more had happened, little harm would have been done. But it seems that the Devil was not satisfied with his work and wanting, undoubtedly with God's permission, to make people atone for their guilt, he decided to continue his efforts.

After this the stories, which had been nothing more than vague rumors without any corroboration, became more consistent and more plausible. In fact, there were nights when everyone began to notice some very strange phenomena.

Through the darkness in the distance, people saw mysterious lights traveling up the twisted paths to the Rock of the Segre and, once they were there, they spread through the ruins of the castle, traveling back and forth, disappearing and then reappearing, in a strange way that no one could explain.

This happened on several nights for almost a month, and the puzzled villagers were waiting anxiously to learn the cause of these strange occurrences. But they did not have long to wait before some farm-houses were burned, a number of cattle disappeared, and the bodies of several travelers fell from the cliffs, all of which caused great alarm in the region, and for more than ten leagues around.

There was no longer any doubt. A band of evildoers had taken up residence in the ruins of the abandoned castle.

At first they were only seen from time to time in certain parts of the forest, which in those days still spread along the banks of the river; but later they occupied the mountain passes, they lay in wait along the roads, and they sacked the villages, descending like an avalanche over the entire region until the destruction was widespread.

More and more people were killed, women disappeared, children were torn from their cradles to the dismay of their mothers and were forced to serve during diabolical feasts in which, according to popular belief, sacred vessels stolen from churches served as cups.

People became so frightened that, once it became dark, hardly anyone dared to venture outside their homes, and even there they did not feel completely safe from the bandits of the castle.

But who were these people? Where were did they come from, and what was the name of their mysterious leader? This was the enigma that everyone tried to explain and no one could solve. However, it was noticed that the armor of the dead Lord had disappeared from the place where it was hanging, and several farmers also reported that the Captain leading the cruel group of bandits was wearing something that looked very similar to the missing armor.

All of this, if you take away those things that were products of imagination prompted by fear, contained nothing which was supernatural or unusual.

It was to be expected that a group of criminals like these would commit evil deeds, and it was only logical that their leader would take possession of the armor that had once belonged to the Lord of the Segre.

Nevertheless, some revelations that were made before he died by one of the members of this group who was captured and then executed, explained things that made those who were worried even more preoccupied. And this is most of what he had to say:

'I belong to the aristocracy; I am a member of a noble family,' he said. 'The excesses of my youth, my wild extravagance, as well as my crimes, eventually brought down on me the anger of my relatives and the condemnation of my father, who disinherited me before he died. Alone and abandoned by my family, without any means of support, it must have been the Devil who led me to a group of young men who found themselves in

a situation similar to mine and who, seduced by the promise of a life of dissipation, freedom, and abundance, did not hesitate for a moment to subscribe to my plan. Which was, to bring together a group of like-minded young men who were carefree and fearless, who did not worry about danger, and who would be content to live by the force of their courage, and at the expense of the country, until such time as God might decide to call each one of them to account, as is now the case with me. So with this plan in mind, we decided on this region as the location for our future activities, and the abandoned castle by the Segre was chosen as the most appropriate spot to serve as our meeting place: because of its safe location, and because it was an area that was avoided by the general populace out of fear and superstition. One night when we were gathered under its crumbling arches around a fire that cast its reddish glow into the abandoned galleries around us, a heated dispute broke out with regard to the choice of who was going to be the leader of our group. Each one described his own merits, and I insisted on my right, since it was my plan in the beginning. Some were muttering among themselves casting threatening looks; others, whose rough voices showed signs of drunkenness, placed their hand on the hilt of their swords, ready to resolve the issue violently, when we began to hear the rattling of armor accompanied by the sound of footsteps that were rapidly approaching. We all looked around nervously to see where the sound was coming from; we stood up and drew our swords, ready to defend ourselves to the last breath, but we could then only stare in awe as we saw a man of elevated stature purposefully advancing toward us covered with armor from head to foot and with the visor of his helmet hiding his face. Unsheathing his broadsword, which two men could barely manage to lift, and placing it on the crumbled remains of one of the fallen arches, he exclaimed in a loud voice: "If one of you thinks he can be the leader while I am here in the Castle of the Segre, let him pick up this sword as a sign of his power." At first we were silent; then, recovering from our stupor, we all proclaimed with loud voices that he was our Captain, offering him a glass of wine, which he refused, perhaps because he did not want to uncover his face, which we tried in vain to distinguish through the metal bars of the visor which hid it from our eyes. Nevertheless, that night we gave him our solemn vows of support, and the next night we began our nocturnal forays. In them our mysterious leader always travels in the lead. He never says a word, but when buildings burn with crackling flames, when women flee through them and children cry out in pain, when others perish under our blows, he responds to the moans and laments with a gleeful burst of fierce laughter. After the battle he never removes his armor or lowers his visor; neither does he participate in our celebrations or take time to sleep. The blades that wound him when they sink through the cracks in his armor do not kill him, nor are they covered with blood when they are withdrawn. Fire reddens his shield and his armor, but he travels harmlessly through the flames and continues searching for new victims; he scorns gold, he abhors beauty and does not crave honor. Some of us consider him merely eccentric, others see him as a ruined noble who covers his face out of shame, and still others are convinced that he is the Devil himself in person."

The author of this account died with an ironic smile on his face, without any sign of repentance. Several of his fellows met a similar fate, but their fearful commander, who always continued gathering more followers, never stopped carrying out his terrible crimes.

The ill-fated inhabitants of this region became increasingly frustrated and desperate, without being able to come up with a successful means of putting an end to the terrible situation which, day by day, was growing more unbearable and more disheartening.

Not far from the village, in a hermitage devoted to Saint Bartholomew that was located in a secluded part of the forest, was a holy man of great piety who, because of his helpful advice and his accurate predictions, was considered a saint by those of the region.

It was to the great wisdom and good judgment of this venerable hermit that the citizens of Bellver entrusted the solution to their difficult problem. After he asked for guidance through his patron saint who, as you know, is well acquainted with the Devil and on more than one occasion has been able to thwart his efforts, he gave them the following advice: they should take cover during the night at the foot of the twisted path which leads up to the wall of rock where the castle is located and, while there, they are not to use any weapon other than the prayer, which he made them learn from memory, and which according to the chronicles of Saint Bartholomew, has often been used with success to imprison the Devil.

This plan was put into effect, and its results surpassed even their greatest expectations. So when the sun had hardly begun to shine on the tower of Bellver, the townspeople had gathered in the Plaza Mayor and were talking with each other in amazement about how, that night, tied hand and foot and on the back of a strong mule, the Captain of the bandits of the Segre was carried into their town.

Nobody was able to understand or explain exactly how or why this occurred, but the fact was that, thanks to the prayer of the saint, or the sincere faith of his devotees, it all happened in the way that has just been described.

The news had hardly begun to spread from mouth to mouth, and from house to house, when a large crowd of people stormed into the streets, and making a noisy uproar they hastened to gather in front of the door to the jail. The bell of the parish church rang to announce a meeting of the most respected residents of the village who were to decide what should be done, and everyone waited anxiously until the time when the criminal would appear before his impromptu judges.

The latter had been authorized by the Count of Urgel to administer a rapid and severe judgment on all the criminals; they deliberated only a short time and, when they were finished, they ordered the leader to come forth to hear his sentence.

As I have said, in the Plaza as well as in the streets through which the prisoner would travel to the place where the judges were meeting, the impatient crowd of villagers was gathered like an excited swarm of bees. It was in front of the door to the jail where the raucous throng assumed its largest and its noisiest proportions. The heated dialogues, the insistent comments, and the threatening shouts all increased in intensity until, fortunately, the order came for the guards to bring out the prisoner.

When he appeared in the doorway of the prison, he was dressed in armor with his face covered by the visor, and a prolonged murmur of surprise and amazement arose from the crowd of people, who were forced to step aside to make way for him.

Everyone recognized at once that this was the armor of the Lord of the Segre, the same armor they had seen hanging inside the ruined walls of the accursed castle, and which had been the subject of so many frightening stories.

There was no doubt; it was the same armor. Everyone had seen the black plume of its crest floating in the battles that were waged against the feared Lord; everyone had seen it

swaying in the evening breeze when it was hanging from the charred pillar after the death of the Lord. But who could be the person who was wearing it now? That would soon be known; at least, that is what they all expected. However, the events will show how this hope was frustrated and why, once the truth was finally revealed, many other things that happened during this solemn quest for justice turned out to be even more inexplicable and more confusing.

As the mysterious bandit Captain entered the room where the Council was meeting, the nervous silence of those present was filled by the metallic sound of the golden spurs that rattled under the arches of the high ceiling. With a hesitant voice, one of the members of the tribunal asked him to give them his name, and everyone listened intently, trying not to miss a single word of what was said. But the Captain just shrugged his shoulders with an air of scorn and insult that could not help but irritate his judges, who looked at each other with surprise.

“Make him raise the visor! Make him raise it! Make him lift it up!” repeated the villagers who were shouting with anger. “Make him raise the visor! Then let us see if he dares to insult us like he does now while he is protected by his lack of identity!”

“Uncover your face,” repeated the same judge who had spoken before.

The warrior continued to stand there, silent and impassive.

“I order you in the name the authority that has been granted us.”

There was still no response.

“In the name of the Count of Urgel.”

Still nothing.

The indignation of those present was rising to a fever pitch when one of the guards moved to the bandit leader, whose stubbornness was enough to try the patience of a saint, and violently tore open the visor. A cry of alarm filled the auditorium, and for a moment everyone was seized by an incredible stupor.

And with good reason. The helmet, whose broken visor had fallen down over the steel breastplate, was empty... completely empty.

When the first moment of shock had passed and the guard tried to touch it, the strange suit of armor shook for a moment, and then it broke into pieces which fell to the ground with a strange, hollow metallic sound.

After the sight of this unnerving spectacle, most of those present were so terrified that they immediately left the room and streamed into the Plaza.

The news spread rapidly through the crowd of those who were impatiently waiting for the results of the Council meeting, and once they heard what had happened, there was no one who doubted what everyone was saying; that is, that after the death of the Lord of the Segre, it was the Devil who inherited the town of Bellver.

When the agitation finally subsided, it was decided to return the frightening suit of armor to its cell in the jail.

Once it was there, four emissaries were chosen who, on behalf of the afflicted village, would present the strange case before the Count of Urgel and the Archbishop; the latter waited only a short time before they made a decision which pleased everyone, a decision that was both simple and direct.

“Let the armor be hung,” they said; “let be hung in the Plaza Mayor, so if the Devil is inside it, he will either have to abandon it, or be hung up in it.”

The inhabitants of Bellver were delighted with this ingenious decision, and right away another meeting was held. While the streets were still full of people, the members of the Council ordered that a gallows be built in the Plaza, and then they headed to the jail with the solemnity that this important situation deserved.

As the honorable retinue arrived at the massive archway leading to the entrance of the building, they were met by a pale and agitated man who threw himself to the ground before the bewildered Council members and exclaimed with tears in his eyes:

“Pardon, Lords, pardon!”

“Pardon! For whom?” someone asked. “For the accursed Devil who inhabits the armor of the Lord of the Segre?”

“No, for me,” said the unhappy man, whom they now recognized as the governor of the prison; “for me... Because the armor... has disappeared.”

On hearing this news, the faces of those waiting in the entrance were filled with amazement, and it appeared that they would remain there indefinitely, until the unhappy jailor continued speaking and they gathered around him and listened avidly.

“Forgive me, Lords,” the poor governor said; “I will hide nothing, even if it makes me appear incompetent.”

They were all silent, so he continued speaking:

“I will never be able to understand it; but the fact is that it always seemed to me that the story about the armor was a fabrication, that it was invented to protect a nobleman whom, perhaps for reasons of public convenience, they did not want either to identify or to punish. That is what I assumed, and it was confirmed when the empty suit of armor was sent to the jail for the second time by the Council. Hoping to find what was behind the mystery, which I was going to reveal if, in fact there was an explanation, I tried in vain for several nights to listen through the cracks in the door of the cell where the armor was located, but I never heard a sound. I also tried in vain to observe it through a small hole in the wall. Lying on a bit a straw in one of the darkest corners of the cell, after several days, the pieces of armor were still disconnected and immobile. Finally one night, spurred by curiosity and, wanting to confirm once and for all that there was nothing unusual behind that armor, I lit a lamp and descended to the place where the cells are located. I lifted the cross-bars without bothering to close the door behind me, such was my confidence that it was nothing more than a story, and I entered the cell. I never should have done it. I had scarcely taken a step, when the light in my lantern went out. My teeth began to chatter, and my hair stood on end. Through the deep silence around me I heard the sound of pieces of metal that were moving about in the darkness. My first thought was to jump back and close the door, but just as I reached it and was about to pull it shut, I felt a hand enclosed in an iron gauntlet that grabbed me and knocked me to the ground inside the cell. I remained there until the following morning when the servants found me unconscious, remembering only that, as I fell, I seemed to hear the noise of heavy footsteps and the rattle of spurs moving further and further away in the distance.”

When the governor had finished speaking there was a profound silence, followed by an outburst of protests, shouts, and threats.

When the tumult finally quieted down, the members of the council began to discuss a new plan. It was one which would have a satisfactory result.

After a few days the armor was once again in the possession of its pursuers. Using the method they had employed before to find the armor with the help of Saint Bartholomew, it was not difficult to locate.

But that was not the end of their troubles. Because even though they hung the pieces of armor from a gallows to restrain it, and even though they attempted to keep an eye on it so it would not be able to escape again, one night, not long after it began to get dark, the pieces of armor reconnected themselves and then, without making a sound, it quietly slipped away in the darkness, and it began to travel around, just as free as could be. It seemed like this was going to be a never-ending tale.

They were able to find the armor again, but after it continued escaping for perhaps the hundredth time, they decided to divide up the pieces among themselves and then to ask the hermit, who had helped them once before, to advise them what they should do.

The holy man told the town to commit itself to an act of penance and closed himself off for several days in the cave where he had taken refuge. After some time had passed, he reappeared and told them they should melt down the pieces of armor and, together with some stones from the castle of Segre, use them to construct a cross.

This was done eventually, but not without some hair-raising experiences that filled the anxious inhabitants of Bellver with fear once again.

When the pieces of armor were placed in the forge and began to turn red, deep moans seemed to escape from the flames, which jumped and moved about as though they were alive and were feeling the heat of the fire. A cluster of red, blue, and green sparks danced and twisted over the tongues of flame as though a legion of devils was riding on them, while trying to free their Lord from his torment.

When the melting armor began to change its form and take the shape of a cross, the transformation was unnerving and terrible. Hammers struck the anvil with a harsh sound, as the workers labored to transform the molten bars of metal that shook and moaned as they felt the blows.

The arms of the cross were extended as a sign of redemption and were beginning to form the upright mast, when the entire diabolical shape began to twist in a frightening convulsion and, wrapping around the bodies of the unfortunate workers who fought to free themselves from its arms of death, it coiled around them like the rings of a snake, or sometimes it contracted into a zigzag like a bolt of lightning.

Thanks to the persistent efforts of the workers, the faith and prayers of the villagers, as well as frequent baths of holy water, they were finally able to conquer the infernal spirit and convert the armor into a cross.

This is the cross you saw today, a cross in which a devil is imprisoned and from which it takes its name. Before this cross you will never see children leave bouquets of flowers during the month of May, you will not see shepherds remove their hat, nor an old woman kneel down before it. The severe warnings of the clergy are all that keep the local boys from throwing stones at it.

God has closed his ears to all the prayers that are offered in its presence. In winter, wolves gather in the juniper that grows around it and from there they attack the herds of cattle; bandits wait in its shadow for the travelers who pass by whom they bury at its foot, after killing them; and when a tempest flares, bolts of lightning change their course to wrap around the spine of the cross and then strike the stones of its pedestal.”