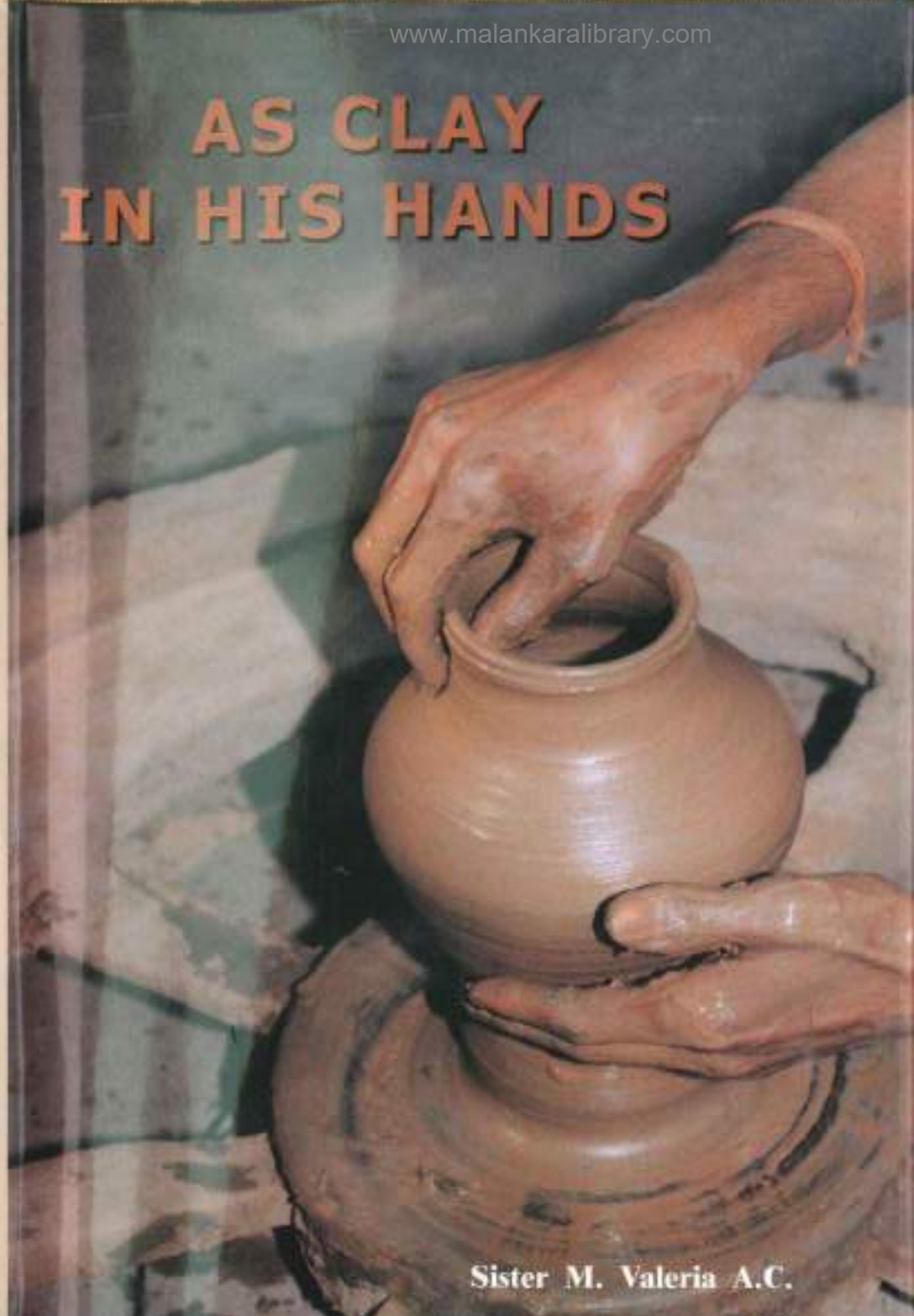




Sister M. Valeria A.C. has been actively involved in collecting and translating material on the life of Mother Veronica, foundress of the Apostolic Carmel, for several years. She has also served on the Historical Commission for the Introduction of the Cause of the Servant of God. Visiting Greece, Rome and France in 1987 and 1988 to obtain relevant information, she has drawn on both primary and secondary sources to write *As Clay in His Hands*.

Possessed of a doctorate in English Literature from the University of Delhi, she has served as college lecturer and Principal, Provincial Superior and General Councillor in the Apostolic Carmel. She has also been engaged in the ministry of the spoken and written word, giving courses in education and in spirituality, and retreats mainly to Sisters and lay groups, as well as contributing articles to Catholic publications.

# AS CLAY IN HIS HANDS



Sister M. Valeria A.C.

# *As Clay In His Hands*

\*Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand..."(Jer 18:6).

**Sister M. Valeria A.C.**

**The Apostolic Carmel Generalate**  
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**FOREWORD**

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Our beloved foundress Mother Veronica, the English woman who lived and died nearly a hundred years ago in far off Pau, France, has captured the minds and hearts of the old and young alike as she stands out as a woman with a passion for the impossible. Endowed as she was with a clear vision of her mission in life, she dared to risk everything in accomplishing it. Ever attentive and attuned to the will of God she fulfilled His designs with heroic faith, generosity and a spirit of joyful surrender. Though she did not live to gather the fruit of the vine she planted with tender love and watered with her tears, her innumerable children both religious and lay women, men and children are deeply fascinated and inspired by the beautiful facets of her valiant personality. Some have experienced her gracious presence and powerful intercession in their lives. Many have evinced a great desire and interest to know more about Veronica, the one they love and admire.

Sister Valeria has tried to respond to their need by sketching a brief but interesting profile of Mother Veronica, which, I am sure, will be appreciated by all who are looking



## INTRODUCTION

in order to make the story more readable. However, even these instances are infrequent, and most of the dialogue is taken verbatim from original accounts. The following records have been drawn upon as sources for all the events that are portrayed within these pages:

1. "In Memoriam": Memoirs of the Leeves Family, by A.M. Moon
2. The Autobiography of Mother Veronica as written for Father Lazare in 1889
3. A Short Biography of Mary Ann Leeves (Mother Ignace) by her sister Mother Veronica, written at the request of the Ursulines of Tinos
4. The Annals of Lutra, by Mary Ann Leeves, from the archives of the Ursuline Convent of Tinos
5. The Letters of Mother Veronica, from the archives of the Apostolic Carmel as well as from the archives of the Congregation of Carmelite Religious
6. "Carmel in India" by Mother Veronica (1895)
7. "Seed-time" by Sister M. Candida A.C.
8. "The First Forty Years", compiled by Sisters Carol and Noelle
9. Interviews with the Carmel of Pau recorded by Sisters Sophia, Doreen and Fidelia, as well as written accounts from the Carmel of Pau (archives of the Apostolic Carmel)
10. Note-books of Father Lazare O.C.D. as well as letters referring to Mother Veronica, from the archives of the Apostolic Carmel

## INTRODUCTION

11. Genealogical family tree obtained from living relations of the Leeves family in England (archives of the Apostolic Carmel)
12. The Encyclopaedia Britannica
13. The Catholic Encyclopaedia.

Mother Veronica is a woman whose life has had a special fascination for me from my earliest years in the Apostolic Carmel. It is my earnest hope that this modest effort, undertaken with love and prayerful reflection, will inspire many readers to answer the continual calls of God in their lives with the generous response:

"Here am I, Lord,  
that I should do your will" (Ps. 39:8).

Pune

2 February, 2002

Sister M. Valeria A.C.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Among the many persons who have contributed in one way or another to the creation of this book, there are some to whom I would like to express my special thanks in writing:

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May all of them be richly blest by the Lord.

**Sister M. Valeria A.C.**

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SOIL OF PROMISE

I.

Soil of Promise



All Saints' Church, Wrington

Sophie awoke with a feeling of excitement. She knew something special was going to happen that day. Yes, today was the day Papa and little Mary Ann would be arriving from Constantinople. She had missed them so much when Mamma, Henry, Emily and herself had returned to England almost a year ago.

At first, she had enjoyed the big ship and the deep blue sea all around. Henry, who was two years older than she, had also liked standing on the deck and watching the gulls skim over the waters of the Mediterranean. But later, they had soon tired of the endless expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, and Sophie had longed for the company of her playmate, Mary Ann, who was just two years younger than herself.

"Why didn't Papa and Mary Ann come with us, Mamma?" she had asked her mother.

"Papa is the Chaplain of the Embassy and has to remain with the Embassy Staff for some time", was the reply. "When the Ambassador and his wife return to England, Papa will come with them on a warship. He wanted Mary Ann to remain with him".

"Then why didn't all of us remain, too?" asked Sophie.

Mrs Leeves tried to explain the situation to the little child



so that she could understand. "Sophie, do you remember the day Papa told us that the Turkish soldiers belonging to the Sultan had been killed? You remember everyone talking about the massacre of the Janissaries, and how there was going to be trouble in Turkey?"

The little girl nodded her head solemnly. She recalled her father's worried expression and the special prayers the family had said that night.

"Well, Papa was worried about our safety. So he put us on a ship sailing for England. We will stay with your grandfather in Wrington until Papa joins us. It won't be long, I hope".

It had seemed ages before that voyage had come to an end. At last they had arrived in Wrington where Grandfather was the Rector. Grandmother was very ill. They had said she was dying. Sophie remembered how she and her brother and cousins had gathered round her bed and received her blessing. Uncle William, Uncle George and Aunt Bessy were also there, and Aunt Marianne came in, too, for she was married and lived some distance away with her family. Everyone said how much they missed Henry Daniel, Sophie's father, but they were happy that her mother at least was there when Grandmother died. Sophie remembered the funeral and the quiet sorrow in the house. She wished Mary Ann was there. They could have played together. Emily was just a baby and could not understand what was happening. And Henry was a six-year-old boy and had his own games.

Now, at last, Mary Ann was coming with Papa. Sophie was so excited that she could scarcely wait. When at length they heard the carriage wheels, she thought she would burst with joy. Everyone was talking and laughing, shaking hands

and kissing and asking questions. Grandfather's deep, rich voice boomed out a warm welcome to his long-absent son. Papa came forward to hold Mamma in a loving embrace, and then he turned to his children.

"How good to see all of you again!" he exclaimed. "How you have grown, Henry and Sophie!" he added, looking approvingly at his two eldest children and showering them with kisses. "And where's my little Emily?... Doesn't she walk as yet?" he asked as he gathered the baby into his arms. "She's nearly a year old now... Can she not talk either?" he asked anxiously.

"Some children take longer than others, dear," said Mamma. "She'll start soon enough!"

Meanwhile, Mary Ann was being passed from hand to hand and fondled by everybody. Sophie saw that she, too, had grown from a tiny toddler to a pretty golden-haired and blue-eyed cherub of three. A real angel, thought Sophie as she smiled lovingly at her little sister. The latter didn't know any English as she had been brought up by a Greek nurse, and spoke only Greek. Sophie, whose first language had also been Greek, was soon chatting happily with Mary Ann, and caressing the golden curls that fell to her shoulders in profusion.

All the grown-ups were busy exchanging news. The children, too, had an exciting day, and soon it was time for bed. Papa placed a chair at Mary Ann's bedside and told her to say her prayers. The little girl got down on her knees, and joining her tiny hands together, began to pray in Greek as she had been wont to do. The whole family stood around to hear her, and the sight of the little one praying so fervently touched the hearts of all the grown-ups who came to say good-night.

The days passed all too quickly now for the two little girls. But Papa was anxious about their education. One day, an English teacher arrived at Wrington to take charge of Sophie and Mary Ann. While they had lessons every day, they also had time to play together. A favourite haunt was the garden where a stream meandered from one end to the other. Miss Thornton, the governess, always remained close at hand, for she was careful about the children's safety. One day, however, while Mary Ann was playing by the stream which they had named "The Serpentine", she slipped and fell into the water. Happening to glance in her direction, Sophie was horrified to see Mary Ann's round hat floating on the water, and no Mary Ann in sight. In terror, Sophie cried out, "Miss Thornton! Miss Thornton! Mary Ann has fallen into the Serpentine!" The governess was only a few steps away, and, throwing down her muff, she came running in fear and plunged into the stream which was not very deep. Drawing out the little girl who was half drowned, Miss Thornton carried her tenderly in her arms and hurried into the house. Sophie followed her fearfully, carrying the muff in her hands.

Mary Ann was soon undressed, wrapped up in warm blankets and placed in front of the fire, none the worse for her frightening accident. Miss Thornton, however, was still shaken, and Sophie shocked and happy at the same time, aware that her sister could have lost her life, and relieved that she was still safe and sound.

On Sundays there were no lessons. Grandfather Leeves had brought up his family as good Protestants who observed the Sabbath strictly. There was the morning service in the church attended by the parishioners, at which the Rector preached. Everyone said that the Reverend William Leeves was a devoted minister and a holy man. But Sophie was tired

of listening to what she could not understand. She could make no sense of what was being said. Again, in the evenings, there was another service on Sundays. And then, no toys or story books were to be seen throughout the day. Not even a note of music which Sophie loved, except hymns which were dreary to the child in comparison with the songs she enjoyed. No, Sundays were not happy days for the children.

Sometimes Sophie and Mary Ann joined the hymn singing when the whole family gathered in the drawing room. Aunt Bessie sat at the piano. Grandfather took out his cello, and Uncle William and he sang together in rich tones, joined fervently by the rest of the family. Mary Ann would sidle up to Aunt Bessie and watch her fingers move with dexterity over the keyboard. "One day, I too shall play beautiful music and sing happy songs", she confided to Sophie.

"We will sing together", Sophie promised.

Soon after Papa returned to Wrington, Grandfather fell ill. Aunt Marianne Elsdale came to visit, bringing her son Henry and her other children to receive the old man's blessing. Grandfather placed his hands lovingly on Henry Elsdale as well as his cousin Henry Leeves. The former was moved to tears and went to another room where he wept his heart out for his dying grandfather. Papa was a real blessing to the old man. He prayed by his bedside, offered him words of comfort, and was present when the Reverend William Leeves breathed his last. He was buried with great solemnity in Wrington Church, where he had served as pastor for fifty years, being nearly ninety years old when he died. Papa preached the funeral oration and comforted all the family members who were present. Only Uncle George was away at sea.

After some time, Henry Daniel Leeves took his family



to London, where Mamma's relations were staying, for a new baby was expected soon. Little Catherine was born the year after Grandfather died. And still Emily could not walk or talk.

One Sunday, Sophie was watching Henry and another cousin occupy themselves with sliding down the banisters. They seemed to be having a good time, while Sophie had nothing to do. She asked herself why she, too, could not do what the boys were doing. It was dinnertime, and she climbed up to the top of the staircase in order to slide down in style as her brother had done. It started well, but the dizzy pace soon made her lose her balance, and she rocketed down to the landing thirteen steps below, losing consciousness with the impact of her fall. Her front teeth were knocked out and hung by a thread. There was a deep gash to the left of her mouth. A surgeon had to be called in and the gash stitched together. She recovered consciousness and was in great pain, not being able to eat properly for weeks after that. She had to be fed like a little baby.

Together with their other lessons, Sophie and Mary Ann were given religious instruction by their father. One day, he called them into his room and taught them the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not steal". After the explanation was over, he sent them out to play. Sophie went to the dining-room where she saw the tea things laid out. The jug of cream was looking so tempting that she could not resist helping herself to a teaspoon of its contents. Mary Ann caught her sister in this act.

"Wait, I'm going to tell Papa", she said, "Papa has just told us not to steal." And with that, she made off self-righteously to report the incident to her father. Strict Protestant that he was, the Reverend Leeves was intent upon

bringing up his children to be good Christians. "I have just told you that it is a sin to take what is not yours", he told Sophie. "Now I'm going to whip you so that you will always remember this lesson". And with that, he bore her off to administer the punishment, which filled her with shame rather than pain. Sophie resolved never to steal or lie again, and she kept this resolution all her life.

The two sisters had their little squabbles as happens ordinarily in most families. But as they grew, their sisterly bond became ever closer. They had no secrets from each other and even had the same tastes and occupations.

Soon after little Catherine's birth, the Reverend Leeves decided to return to Greece. Being fluent in Greek, and knowing Hebrew and Latin as well, he was asked by the British and Foreign Bible Society to translate the Bible into Greek. And for this, he decided to take his family to Corfu, an island of Greece which was then being administered by the British. Henry was placed in a public school in England for the sake of his education. So he remained behind when the rest of the family left for Corfu with Miss Thornton, who was to continue as governess to the girls.



## 2. *Moulded With Care*

Corfu, the most beautiful of the Greek islands, was a delightful place to live in. Covered with olive trees and other Mediterranean fruit, its fertility and scenic beauty as well as its old-world charm made it an ideal environment for the children to grow up in. The Reverend Leeves was appointed Chaplain to the troops stationed in Corfu, so that the family had some official standing there.

While Sophie, Mary Ann and Catherine were thriving in the salubrious climate, little Emily continued to be weak and sickly. One day, while Miss Thornton was showing the globe to the two older children, she placed Emily on her back on the table so as to be able to explain the lesson better to her pupils. Seeing the four cruets usually left on the dining-table, Emily reached out and picked up the vinegar bottle, trying to draw out the stopper. Though she could not succeed, a little of the vinegar rubbed off on her hands. She unthinkingly wiped her eyes with them, and the strong acid made them burn, causing her to cry out in pain. The others quickly came to her aid. Miss Thornton dashed water over her. But Emily's eyes were red and swollen, and she could not even open them, remaining quite blind for some time. It was then that Mrs Leeves discovered that the child could neither hear nor speak. She remained motionless, unaware



of what was going on around her and unable to respond to sight or sound. The whole family was plunged in grief at this discovery, and treated the little one with extra tenderness. But it was only after a fortnight that Emily could open her eyes again after the swelling subsided. Though she could now see, she remained a deaf-mute till the end of her life.

Meanwhile, the Leeves parents began to feel the absence of their son very keenly. So it was decided that Henry should also come to Corfu in the company of a tutor who should continue to teach him Latin as well as other subjects as in the public school. Since this young man could also teach Sophie and Mary Ann at the same time, Miss Thornton returned to England. Sophie was then between nine and ten years old, while Mary Ann was two years younger. They followed the same courses as Henry except for the Latin which he studied alone with his teacher. The two girls took music lessons instead.

However, the English tutor turned out to be a very rude-mannered young man. His experience as teacher in the public school had habituated him to strike his pupils who had been unruly boys. He began to use the same methods with his gently-brought-up girl students. One day, he struck Mary Ann's hand so hard that it was covered with blood. He then sent her to Mrs. Leeves to have it attended to. The mother, who very rarely corrected her well-brought-up girls, was indignant at the way they were being treated by their new teacher. They therefore sent him back to England.

"Perhaps we can get a good teacher in Switzerland", suggested Papa. "Anyway, I have to go to Athens, because there is now going to be a British Legation there. So all of you can go on a trip to Switzerland and have a holiday there".

"A Swiss teacher will be good to teach the children French", he added to Mamma. "I would like them to study German and Italian, too".

They found an excellent young man by the name of Mr. Wenger at Berne, who was ready to tutor the children. At Geneva, Mamma found a maid who was also ready to serve the family. They stayed a few months in Switzerland and then settled down in the Greek island of Syros, while the Reverend Leeves was seeing to the purchase of land in Athens and to the building of a house for his family.

Like all the other islands of the Cyclades, Syros is a brown and barren rock, very different from green and fertile Corfu. It is accessible by boat from Piraeus, the port of Athens, and its houses are clustered round its own small port. A huge conical rock behind the port leads to Old Syros, topped by St George's Cathedral, which one reaches by climbing a steep rocky staircase to obtain a fabulous view of the Mediterranean dotted with numerous islands. Old Syros is also populated mainly by Roman Catholics. The Leeves family, being Protestant, did not live in this area. Their tutor was also a fanatical Protestant, though not an Anglican.

The children continued their education in Syros, learning Old Greek with their teacher so as to be able to understand and translate the New Testament from the original. Every morning, the three older children had to read a part of the Greek New Testament with their father, who then explained it to them. The modern European languages as well as drawing, vocal and instrumental music also formed part of their education. In addition, they studied Mathematics, at which Mary Ann excelled. In fact, the little girl always stood first in their studies.



One fine afternoon in 1834, when Mary Ann was just nine years old, Mr. Wenger took the children up the steep steps leading to the Cathedral of St George. In spite of all their prejudices against the Papists as they termed those of the Roman Catholic Church, the group was rather curious about what went on there. Arriving somewhat breathless at the top of the rocky hill, they stopped to take in the beautiful view that stretched out before them. Just at that moment, a young Jesuit priest emerged from the confessional and stopped to say a word to the young teacher and to fondle the fair-haired children who were playing around him. Mary Ann was drawn, in spite of herself, to look at the smiling priest. Somehow she was magnetised by the compassionate and gentle tenderness with which he gazed at her until she went to hide her uneasiness behind her older brother. Little did she realise that she would meet this Jesuit priest again after thirty-eight years under far different circumstances in quite another place!

Life in Syros came to an end after three happy years. Though their house was ready in Athens, the English minister, Sir Edmund Lyons, took a fancy to it and begged the Reverend Leeves to rent it out to him for a few years. The Leeves family therefore took another house on rent until their own was vacated. Their education continued as usual in their new home. Music, above all, was a passion in the family. Good classical music, including that of Handel, Haydn and Beethoven. Whole mornings were spent in practising and the evenings in singing. Again it was Mary Ann who distinguished herself in music. Whenever she sat at the piano or organ, her characteristic touch could be recognised, and she poured out her beautiful soul into whatever she sang. While Sophie took the first soprano, Mary Ann provided a rich second soprano, Papa sang the bass and Henry tenor or alto.

Mary Ann also had a special aptitude for drawing and painting, as well as for composing poetry and writing interesting stories, for she was gifted with a fertile imagination. However, she was disorderly both in her person and her belongings.

"Mary Ann," Sophie would call out to her, "come here, let me arrange your dress properly. I'm so ashamed of you. Oh, why are you so untidy?"

"I don't know, Sophie," was the reply. "It just doesn't come naturally to me."

Sometimes Mamma came in to check on her daughters' desks and clothes-cupboard. Often she had to empty out Mary Ann's things on the floor to the great displeasure of the culprit. Naturally quick-tempered, she could not keep anger against anyone for long. Always lively and cheerful, she tried to give pleasure to others. Sophie was different in character. Neat and feminine in her person and belongings, she was proud in her bearing and rather self-willed, finding it difficult even to ask for forgiveness when she had committed a fault. Complementing each other, the sisters made a perfect pair together, having the same interests and aspirations in life, and being of "one heart and one soul", as Sophie used to say.

Every summer the family left Athens for their estate in the north of Euboea. The village belonging to them was called Castaniotissa and it offered a pleasant change from the excessive summer heat of Athens.

"I'm just waiting to go to Castaniotissa," Sophie used to say. "Why don't we go earlier? Athens is so hot!"

"Surely you know," explained Mamma, "that Papa has to carry out his duties as Chaplain to the Legation! Only after

Easter will he be free, for all the British families leave Athens for the summer only then. You surely want to wait for Papa, don't you?"

"Of course, Mamma! Only when he comes will our peasants come along with their donkeys and mules to welcome the Affendico. I love the donkey-rides!"

The family used to travel on horseback by land to get to Castaniotissa, or by sail-boat to the port of Oreos, from where the peasants conducted the "Affendico" and his family to the village. It took about an hour to reach the place from the port.

Sophie enjoyed this annual stay in the countryside. The scenery was magnificent with the blue waters of the Mediterranean stretching out from the Gulf of Volo and the mountains of Thessalonica outlined on the horizon with villages scattered in the distance. When the sun set in warm tints of rose, violet and orange, she felt transported to Paradise. Sometimes, too, she could see Mount Athos, that stronghold of Greek Orthodox monks, etched against the azure sky.

Mr. and Mrs. Leeves loved to play host to those in the neighbourhood. Visits were often exchanged and sometimes the young people just mounted their horses and rode into the woods that rose up behind their house, exploring the country around. As they grew, Sophie, Mary Ann and Catherine spent a good deal of their time at Castaniotissa in giving instruction to children of the village. The Reverend Leeves later bought the village of Galiades which adjoined Castaniotissa, and every morning, Mary Ann would go with Catherine on horseback to teach the children of Galiades, leaving Sophie to look after the school at Castaniotissa.

One of the brightest children in her class was the son of

the local priest named Pappa Stathi who had a large family. The boy was destined by his father to take his place later. He was intelligent and responded to Sophie's love and care by studying well and giving her every satisfaction.

"Both of us love teaching," remarked Mary Ann one day to her sister. "I wish I could be a teacher always!"

"Perhaps you will be one some day," said Sophie. "As for me, I enjoy both teaching and looking after the sick. And music, too! In fact, I like everything. Except writing out the Sunday sermons," she added wryly. "I really don't know why Papa insists on us doing so."

"To keep us attentive, I suppose," was the rejoinder.

"Well, Sundays are not my happy days. We are so strict about Sabbath observances."

"Never mind. Think of the happy times we have together on other days."

"Yes, that's true! Ours is truly a wonderful family!"

On their return to Athens, life resumed its usual pattern. The family had been brought up in sound religious traditions. The father himself was a model of Christian charity. When the children were small, they would often peep through the keyhole of his study to find him on his knees praying fervently. As a family, they had prayers morning and night. The children had also been taught to make little acts of self-denial in order to help the poor. For instance, they willingly gave up sugar in their tea, and were then given money to spend for the needs of the poor. They were united and happy, and the children grew up disciplined and well brought up.

Athens being a historic city full of reminiscences of



ancient Greece had its own educational value. Added to this personal experience was that of the numerous journeys the family made all over Europe. They visited churches and historic sites. In the Tyrol, they were impressed by the piety of the Catholic population praying their litanies or thronging the churches for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. "I have never seen such religious people anywhere else," remarked Papa. In Milan they even saw the incorrupt body of St Charles Borromeo in his episcopal regalia in a subterranean chapel. They looked at it with respect and curiosity. Yet they remained prejudiced against Roman Catholics as their upbringing had taught them to be.

When Henry turned sixteen in 1837, his father took him to England because he wanted him to enter the University of Oxford as he himself had done. So Mr. Wenger left Athens and Mrs. Leeves took her four daughters to Chimora for a time. There lived an American Presbyterian missionary at Chimora who was skilled in the education of deaf-mutes. While Emily learned to read and write from him, Sophie and her mother also studied sign language so as to be able to teach Emily and communicate better with her. In this way, the little girl could read the Bible and understand basic religious tenets. She was pretty like her sisters, but had an enlarged heart and was perpetually ill, so the whole family showered special love and attention on her. Special books and teaching aids were procured for her. Sophie usually took care of her and was a second mother to the child as well as her teacher. Emily was an intelligent girl and learned to practise virtue, controlling her fits of temper and her propensity to lie, so that she soon became gentle and patient, and would always tell the truth.

After Papa returned to Athens, having left Henry with an English minister to continue his studies, the Leeves family

went to live in their own house at Athens. The older girls were learning gradually how to take their place in society, becoming interested in their personal appearance and the parties that often took place. Both Sophie and Mary Ann were beautiful girls and had their share of vanity at their age. However, the parents were careful about the company they kept, their reading habits and their other occupations. Once a week, a group of ladies collected at the house to sew garments for the poor. Sophie and Mary Ann formed part of the group as a matter of course.

Towards the age of fourteen, Mary Ann fell dangerously ill of typhoid fever. For several days she remained between life and death, and was considered beyond recovery. But to the relief of all, she got through the illness. Her recovery was very slow. For a long time she could not study.

The following year, Mrs. Leeves decided to take the children to England. Papa could not leave Athens. He kept Catherine with him, and the others left together, visiting their relations in Somersetshire and London, and having new influences brought to bear on them which would change their lives.





The Anglican Church of St. Paul's, ATHENS

### 3.

## Seasoned In Love

Sophie was over sixteen years old and Mary Ann nearly fifteen when they arrived in England after a long absence from their country. The cold climate was an unwelcome change after the sunny warm weather of the Mediterranean countries. Sophie's health began to suffer.

However, it was time to think of other matters. For one thing, they were of an age to make their First Communion according to the Anglican Church. Mrs. Leeves therefore took them to the Cathedral of Exeter where the Bishop confirmed both the girls. The following Sunday, they made their First Communion after a devotional preparation. Imitating her mother's usual practice, Sophie withdrew on several evenings before the event, to read from a small book and make an examen of conscience. She confessed her sins to God, weeping and praying as best she could, and striving to make the occasion a special experience of piety.

At Exeter, there were cousins who introduced the two sisters to High Church practices. Both Sophie and Mary Ann were delighted with the services at the Cathedral which were so close to those of the Roman Catholics. They also began to hear rumours of the Oxford Movement which was growing among the Protestants.

The Church of England had been politically separated from Rome in the 16th century by King Henry VIII, and Protestants had justified the break by claiming the Bible as sole authority, and the right of every individual to interpret it. In the 1830's, however, with the separation of Church and State, serious thinkers at Oxford like John Henry Newman began to urge the priority of faith over reason, and to uphold the doctrinal authority of the Catholic Church. While Anglicans like Dr. Pusey supported the new thinking, they also upheld the Protestant position of separation from the Church of Rome. The High Church of the Anglicans began to adopt many of the customs, beliefs and worship of the Catholics. Several Anglicans like Newman, Faber and Manning entered the Catholic Church later. The new thinking among High Church Anglicans attracted both Sophie and Mary Ann. While Sophie was invariably ill during their stay in England, Mary Ann developed a special interest in the changes taking place, and shared her discoveries with her sister, who was equally interested.

Another matter which engaged Mrs. Leeves' interest was the "coming out" of her eldest daughter into society. Sophie was therefore taken by her mother to social gatherings in London. Both girls were sent to a dancing school and to a riding school which gave them much pleasure. They stayed a year and a half in England, and then it was time to return to Greece, taking Henry back with them.

In 1839, Aunt Bessie and Anna Maria (Aunt Marianne Elsdale's daughter) came out to Athens to stay with the Leeves family for a time. That year they went to Castaniotissa a little before Easter. Anna habitually composed verses to express her experiences in writing. As Mary Ann was also adept at poetic compositions, the two young cousins carried on a daily

correspondence in verse, a few pieces finding their way into the "Memoirs" of the Leeves family. One of Anna Maria's begins with these lines: -

*To Mary*

*Nightly now it welcomes me,  
That billet from afar;  
Gleaming in light upon my sight,  
Constant as evening star.*

*Retiring at the close of day,  
With strength and hope depressed,  
Its thoughts of peace refresh my soul  
Before I sink to rest*

Sophie did not enter into this daily exchange. However, she did give her cousin a Rose leaf on which were the words, "I am the Rose of Sharon", to which Anna Maria made a fitting reply ending with the lines:

*Oh! May thy gentle heart repose  
Upon thy Saviour's breast;  
Enfolded deep in Sharon's Rose,  
Find there an endless rest.*

*There may thy soul expand in love,  
There in His image glow;  
And in the Paradise above  
Thy joys eternal flow!*

The voyage to Castaniotissa was made in a Greek ship of war, a "condemned" craft which should not have been hired out to the family. One night a storm nearly destroyed the vessel and its passengers. They managed to reach Euboea, and as it was late, they had to spend the night in a rustic barn. The villagers warned them not to travel by night for



fear of wolves and bandits. So they gratefully got down to pray before settling down to rest. Next morning, the mules were saddled, and the peasants came out to meet them with flowers and welcome cries. Diamanti, the faithful Greek steward of the estate, arrayed in scarlet and gold, led them along, and a beautiful, dark-eyed Greek girl whose name was Paradeisos danced out to meet them. Soon, a huge black Newfoundland dog came bounding along to greet the children.

"See, Arab has arrived to guard us!" cried out Catherine, while she stroked the frisking dog lovingly. Anna Maria could not but put down her joyful thoughts on paper. The whole account of the journey found its way in verse into the Leeves "Memoirs".

Meanwhile, the Anglican Church at Athens was being completed. The Reverend Leeves had taken an active part in its planning and construction, and was to be its first Chaplain. Sophie and Mary Ann were imbued with all the Puseyite changes they had heard of and seen in England. They wanted to have crucifixes, church music and ceremonials in the new church at Athens, instead of the bare Protestant set-up. Together with some High Church friends who were visiting Athens at the time, the two girls began to persuade their father to have a crucifix above the altar. But Papa replied, "Some people have an objection to a cross." Near them stood an Anglican minister who quietly retorted: "Yes, Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics." Papa had an open mind, and these words settled his doubts. A gilt cross was put up and the church was fitted out in High Church style.

The group also began practising four-part hymns and motets for the approaching consecration of the new church. The music-master was a Catholic organist who often brought them sacred music, and the family delighted in the enchanting

harmony which flowed from the enthusiastic execution of the choral parts in a perfect blend of voices.

The Anglican Bishop Tomlinson of Malta arrived for the consecration of the church, and all went well. That Easter Tuesday, Sophie was awakened in the still hours of early dawn with a heavenly voice:

"Peace I leave unto you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The celestial timbre of this melodious voice resounded deep within her soul which was filled with unspeakable delight. She knew who had spoken to her, but could see no one. She treasured the experience as a precious secret within her heart for a long time, fearing that it would vanish if she spoke of it to anyone.

Meanwhile, Catherine had joined Sophie and Mary Ann in their High Church beliefs and practices. In fact, they now began to wear crosses in gold or precious stones as pendants. The family continued to lead a happy life together. The Leeves household was always open to the poor and needy. Having completed the translation of the Bible in Greek, the Reverend Leeves distributed thousands of copies to every district in Greece on behalf of the Bible Society. He befriended all those in trouble, even the notorious robber Bibisi who was wanted by the government for his part in several murders and other crimes.

Descending Mount Hymettus one day with a friend, the minister met three savage-looking men. Bibisi was one of them. "We are robbers," he called out after them, "but you need not fear. We shall not harm you. We only want bread to eat." Then he asked, "Do you think that I will be pardoned if I willingly give myself up?"

"Oh," said Reverend Leeves, "if that is what you are thinking of, let us sit down and talk about it."



Poor Bibisi told them how tired he was of his present life, hunted like a wild beast, without bread to eat, forced to rob in these circumstances. The clergyman promised to find out his prospects for pardon and to meet Bibisi the next day. This he did with his son Henry and his friend, but as the robber could not be assured of pardon he did not give himself up.

He was subsequently caught and imprisoned in the fort at Nauplia. The Reverend Leeves took his sister Bessy and his niece Anna to Argos and to Nauplia to visit Bibisi. He tried to comfort the prisoner and gave him a copy of the New Testament, while Elizabeth (Bessy) sketched him and gave him a copy of the Psalms.

Anna Maria returned to England in 1842, leaving her aunt Elizabeth Leeves to stay on at Athens. For Uncle William had died at Wrington in 1840, and Elizabeth would now be alone there if she returned. The church at Athens was flourishing to the satisfaction of its Rector, who wrote to his niece Anna that it was a bond of union and held promise of much spiritual good.

One day, Papa announced to the family that he wanted very much to visit the Holy Land. "I plan to go this year," he said early in 1845. "Perhaps Sophie and Mary Ann can come with me, while the rest of the family goes as usual to Castaniotissa. When we return, we shall join you there."

Both the girls were excited about the proposal. Subsequently, however, Papa decided that he could take only one of them with him. "Since Sophie is the eldest, she will be the one," he added. Sophie saw the disappointment on Mary Ann's face. She also knew that Mary Ann was Papa's favourite. So she quietly suggested, "Papa, perhaps it's better for Mary Ann to go with you. Mamma will need my help."

"Oh, Sophie," said Mary Ann, "it's you who should go. I'll stay back with Mamma."

But Sophie insisted on remaining with her mother.

"There's a little business for me to finish before we go," said Papa. "I want to make my will."

"Where's the hurry, dear?" asked Mamma. "Before you leave, I want your portrait painted.... We shall miss you at Castaniotissa."

It was Easter week when Mary Ann left with her father for Smyrna and Beirut. They were to go by land from there to Jerusalem. "Good-bye, Sophie," Papa said to her as he embraced her lovingly on the deck of the steamer at Piraeus. "I entrust your mother to you. Take care of her and be her consolation."

"I shall do my best, Papa," said Sophie at parting. "And Mary Ann shall take care of you."

Soon after, Mamma set off with her depleted family for Castaniotissa, where they would spend the summer. They missed the travellers, but looked forward to hearing from them. Some time later, a long letter from Mary Ann came in for Mrs. Leeves. It contained the heartrending news of Papa's untimely death at Beirut. The two pilgrims had had a happy journey until the heat came on as they took horse for Mount Carmel. Papa had fallen ill with fever and erysipelas and had been devotedly tended by the Carmelite monks. Mary Ann mentioned very specially the good Brother Angelo, a man of great charity and self-denial, who was the doctor of the community. However, the Protestant missionaries of Beirut, who came to know of the Reverend Leeves' condition, had carried him off by a small country boat to their mission to

care for him. There he had died in a beautiful spirit of surrender to God's will, leaving nineteen-year-old Mary Ann alone to cope with the situation.

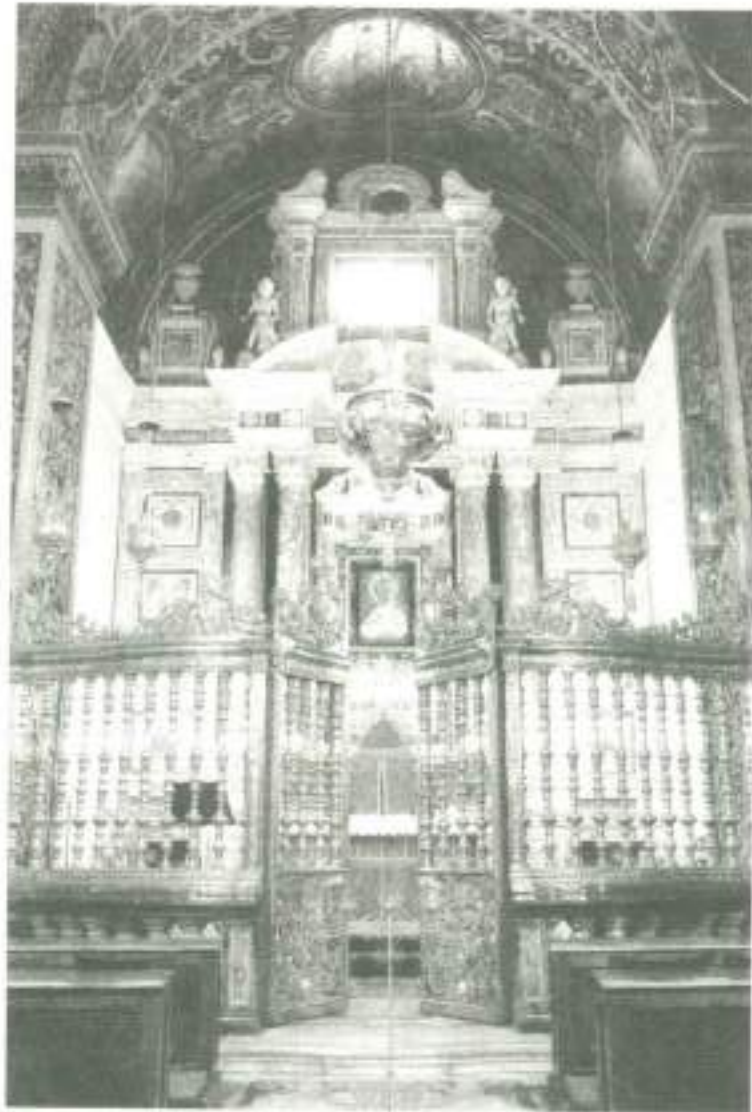
In her defenceless condition, an Anglican minister who was a widower and much older than Mary Ann, made her a proposal of marriage. Torn with grief and without the support of her family, the poor girl could only reply that she could not consent to anything without her mother's approval. Fortunately, at this juncture, a Mr. Lewis, who was a friend of the Reverend Leeves, came to Mary Ann's rescue and took her to stay with his family at Smyrna until someone should arrive from Greece to take her home.

This letter from Mary Ann brought great grief and shock to the group at Castanlotissa. Sorrow at the death of their loved father was mingled with anxiety for dear Mary Ann. Mamma left for Smyrna immediately with Sophie, and they brought back the hapless girl, refusing the untimely and unsuitable proposal of marriage that had been made to her.

The family was broken! Papa's chaplaincy at Athens had already been given to another. Mamma rented out the house and they left Athens, remaining, however, for a time in Greece.

## 4.

### *In The Potter's Hands*



The Altar of a side-chapel in St. John's Cathedral Valetta, MALTA

Henry was now a young man of twenty-four, of an age to manage the estates in Euboea. As for Sophie, she was nearly twenty-two and engaged to be married to a young naval officer who used to visit the family at Castaniotissa. Since most of Mamma's relations were also marine officers, she was in favour of the marriage which was to take place two years later, since the young man could not leave service before that.

As winter approached, Mamma suggested that they all go across to the beautiful Italian city of Naples, so that Henry could study the art of breeding silk worms. The Reverend Leeves had tried to develop the villages at Euboea during his lifetime, founding schools which he maintained at his own cost, and supplying them with books and stationery. Now it was Henry's turn to contribute to the development of Castaniotissa, and he decided to start sericulture there.

The Leeves family lived first in the neighbouring port of Portici close to Mount Vesuvius. This famous volcano was in the season of irruption, and the sight of the liquid lava with flames and smoke being belched out of the crater filled the beholders with awe. The rich colours of the Italian sky at sunset spread out over the bay of Naples, dotted with boats and other vessels were breath-taking. Sometimes the sound of subterranean thunder accompanied the ejection of fiery



masses from the heart of the mountain, followed by the crash of falling rocks and molten lava down the sides of Vesuvius. God's power and His majesty made themselves felt. His sacred Presence was almost tangible, too, in the Catholic churches which Sophie, her brother and sisters often visited, being drawn there by an irresistible attraction. She felt that there was something in the Catholic churches that was missing among the Protestants.

While at Naples, Sophie fell ill suddenly and was sent to England with Henry to recoup with her fiancé's relations, Mamma and Mary Ann going on to Rome with Emily and Catherine. The latter was most enthusiastic about Catholic practices and wanted by all means to make her confession to the English-speaking priest at St Peter's. Mary Ann had to pull her away to prevent this. However, they met some Puseyite friends in Rome, who told them that at Margaret Chapel in London, they could find an Anglican minister who would hear their confessions and satisfy their other aspirations towards Catholicism. In the spring of 1847, when Mrs Leeves and her three daughters returned to England, the family was once more reunited in London.

Meanwhile, a strange conflict was stirring within Sophie. She had once more met her fiancé on leave in his parents' home, and had fallen in love more deeply with him. At the same time, Jesus had somehow taken possession of her heart. She felt an inner void which could only be filled by God Himself. So, while she looked forward to marriage, she also felt drawn to give herself completely to God as a nun. In this turmoil, she needed to consult a spiritual guide.

Now, Mary Ann and Catherine began to attend the Puseyite services at Margaret Chapel, and Sophie joined them in their religious aspirations. Poor Mamma, who was anxious

to have her daughters take part in the social life of London, wanted to see them dressed well, attending soirées and accompanying her on her outings. The three girls, however, adopted a very simple style of dress. Both Mary Ann and Sophie wanted very much to become Puseyite Sisters, for the Oxford Movement had recently resurrected a form of religious life in the Anglican Church. As confession now became an accepted practice among them, they resorted to a Puseyite clergyman named Mr. Richards to hear their confessions and give them absolution.

It was to Mr. Richards that Sophie confided her inner conflict, telling him that she wanted to be freed from her betrothal. At first, the confessor advised her against this urge, but finally, allowed her to write to her fiancé, exposing to him her desire to be a Sister of Mercy. With great respect for the inner promptings of her soul, the naval officer freed her from her engagement, to the utter disappointment and anger of her mother. The three young ladies now began to adopt extreme devotional practices.

Dressing like maidservants with poke bonnets and long veils, they went about town visiting the sick and the needy. Mamma was disgusted with their prudery, and angry that they had given all their jewels to the Puseyite Chapel. She spoke strongly to them: "It is shameful for young ladies to tell their innermost secrets in confession to a man whom you don't even know! Such behaviour is only for ignorant Papists! I forbid you to give any more of your jewels to the church." However, obedience not being a Protestant virtue, Mary Ann and Sophie continued their Puseyite practices.

Winter was coming on, and Emily fell ill at the onset of the inclement weather. The doctor said she had to go to a

warmer climate. So Mamma decided to take her family to Malta. The girls were distraught at the thought of leaving their confessor and abandoning their new way of life. By dint of persuasion, Mary Ann succeeded in getting her mother's consent to remain as a teacher to Dr Pusey's little daughter.

"I shall be responsible for her welfare," Dr Pusey assured Mrs Leeves. "In fact, I shall treat her like my own daughter."

Finally, Mamma agreed, but she would not allow Sophie to accept a similar proposal. The Leeves family left for Malta shortly after.

Emily was visibly weakening before their eyes. Often gasping for breath, with fearful palpitation of the heart, the slight girl became more and more helpless. She could say a few words indistinctly and she loved to watch Sophie knit lace at her dictation. "Knit 3, purl 2, knit 4...." she would say, showing delight when the lace began to form. At the end she would make the sign of a kiss to thank anyone who served her. Her feet began to get swollen. Mamma and Sophie were in constant attendance on her together with their Maltese maid Teresa. The latter saw that Emily was slowly dying and wanted very much to baptise her as a Catholic. Towards this end, this Maltese maid managed to persuade Mrs. Leeves and Sophie to go down to tea one evening, while she herself remained with Emily. During the few minutes of their absence, Teresa and her sister, who was the cook, baptised the dying girl. She was comatose and breathing weakly. Early next morning Emily died peacefully without any agony. It was the 8th of December, 1847. She was buried in the English cemetery.

Not having any Puseyite chapel at hand, Sophie began to go alone to the beautiful Catholic Cathedral at Valetta. She

also tried to adopt corporal penances like some of the Catholics. Having fasted rigorously all through Lent in spite of Mama's remonstrances, she fell ill and was sent to a Dr Vialley who was a fanatical Presbyterian. It was Holy Saturday.

Dr Vialley began to discuss the translation of the Greek New Testament in relation to the Latin "Hic est Corpus meum." He insisted that the correct translation in English was "This represents My Body," while Sophie maintained from her knowledge of Greek that it was "This *is* My Body." She was so upset by the doctor's harangue on the subject, that, in her weakened state of health, she fainted and had to be laid on the sofa. Her sister Catherine was with her. Suddenly she came to herself as all the bells of the town began to peal the "Gloria in Excelsis" of Holy Saturday. With joy, Sophie cried out, "It is the Resurrection!" And with that, she got up to return home.

Those around her now began to ascribe her illness to her broken engagement and to accuse her of causing great unhappiness to her fiancé. She was torn apart within, and in the effort to end her torment, she knelt down in front of a small Crucifix one day and made a vow of virginity. Strangely, her health began to improve after that.

Catherine and Sophie had also made a small oratory in a recess under the staircase, where they placed a beautiful crucifix. One day, when both girls had gone for a walk, Mamma got hold of the key of this oratory and was upset at the discovery of the Crucifix. In her anger, she broke the image and left the place. Sophie returned and was told by the Catholic maid what had happened. In tears she ran to her mother crying out, "Mamma, how could you do this? Are you an iconoclast like the heretics of bygone days?"



"Sophie, let me tell you once and for all that I do not want idol worshippers in this house! I forbid you to have any crucifixes here."

In her grief, Sophie went more frequently to pray in the Cathedral of Valetta, spending hours on her knees, and weeping over her sins. She could not explain why she was drawn to this church, but an irresistible power seemed to urge her to the tabernacle, even though she had not yet learnt of the Real Presence of Jesus in Catholic churches.

Meanwhile Catherine was engaged to be married and left for England, while Mary Ann returned to her family in Malta at her mother's behest. Sophie was overjoyed to have her beloved sister back, and once more they could exchange confidences and let their affectionate companionship draw them together in the same direction.

Being very charitable herself, Mrs Leeves encouraged her daughters to join a local society of ladies who worked for the poor, giving clothes and other material necessities to the needy. The President of this society was a Spanish lady called Mrs Demech, and the meetings of the group took place at her house.

It was at this house that Sophie and Mary Ann met a Jesuit priest who was visiting the family prior to his departure for Rome. Father Giuliani began to speak of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Sophie's attention was immediately aroused, for this was a subject dear to her. Suddenly her heart was deeply moved. She put her head on her crossed arms on the table and burst into tears. Everyone was alarmed.

"What is the matter, Sophie?" asked Mary Ann with concern. "Are you ill?"

Sophie could not answer. She just continued to sob uncontrollably. With deep insight, Father Giuliani said gently: "Let the poor girl alone. Grace has touched her." Truly this was so. When Sophie recovered control of herself, she said painfully: "All this time, I felt I was in the true church. Now, I begin to doubt..."

Mary Ann quickly came to her rescue. "Well, Sophie," she said, "you and I are in the same state. I, too, have been in doubt for some time, but I didn't want to tell you for fear of upsetting you. Have you not noticed that I have been reading a book which I hid whenever you approached me? Well, this book is Milne's 'End of Controversy', and it has raised serious doubts in my mind.... Let us seek the truth together."

"It is God who has ignited this spark within you," said Father Giuliani. "Do not allow it to die out. If you require help, go to the Jesuit College. I shall speak to the Rector, Father Seagrave, and he will surely guide you."

"Thank you, Father," said Sophie. "And now, Mrs Demech, we had better go home. It is late and Mamma will be anxious".

A servant with a lantern was sent to accompany them. But they had scarcely set out on the return, when they met Mrs Leeves who had come to look for them. She scolded them angrily for their imprudence in staying out so late, and began to suspect that there had been a party at Mrs Demech's house.

This incident was only the beginning of a painful period of search for the two girls. They had no peace until they could satisfy their doubts with reading and instruction. So Father Seagrave, who was the brother-in-law of the governor's wife, came over to Valetta every week to the



house of one of the ladies where the instruction took place in secret. But Sophie and Mary Ann suffered great anguish in the process.

The fact that they had to conceal what was happening from their mother was itself a cause for anxiety and discomfort. Then there was the interior struggle involved in the search for truth. Over all hung the decisions they would have to make when the time came, and the consequent suffering that would befall the whole family. Meanwhile, the two girls thought it wise to consult an old friend of the family who loved them very much. Being a Protestant, Bishop Tomlinson of Malta would probably be in a position to enlighten them on the Anglican side.

However, they were in for a rude shock on discovering that their confidential consultation with the Bishop had been divulged to his wife. Mrs Tomlinson's remonstrances to Sophie and Mary Ann only served to strengthen their pro-Catholic leanings, for the flagrant failure to keep their secret only made them long for the seal of confession practised by the Catholic Church.

Intellectual conviction now brought them agony of heart. How were they going to take the step of turning to Catholicism without causing a painful division in their own family? A deep chasm of darkness yawned before them. And yet, their interior conviction could not be ignored. Their one comfort was that they had each other's support in the step they were planning to take. With all their anguish of heart, a deep peace possessed their souls. They had found the Truth. They must now follow it.

And so, the two girls decided to receive conditional baptism into the Catholic Church as well as their First

Communion on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1850, the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.

They managed to slip away from the house separately on the eve, and to go to the Church of the Gesù where Father Seagrave awaited them. With great courage and determination, they made their general confession and returned home separately so as to avoid suspicion. Sophie found Mamma seated near the fire in the drawing-room. She greeted her daughter very affectionately, Mary Ann having returned already. Visitors soon arrived in the house, and there was music and pleasant conversation. But within the hearts of the sisters there was a sense of foreboding.

It was difficult to tear themselves away from Mamma and Henry who remained in the drawing-room after their guests had departed. Finally the family broke up for the night but Sophie and Mary Ann could only weep together as they lay in bed. The prospect of the morrow was too threatening for slumber. They realised that the family would soon be broken up and they themselves isolated, as it were, on the edge of an unknown abyss.

Yet the morning held out a promise of special joy and the hope of long-awaited fulfilment. Sophie and Mary Ann set out from the house very early, dressed in their Sunday best, signalling to the Catholic maid to be silent about their departure. All was ready at the Church of the Gesù. In the side chapel, both girls received conditional baptism followed by the absolution which brought them great interior peace and joy. They were now Catholics and could set out with courage on this new phase of their lives.

It began fittingly with Holy Mass. Their First Communion was a deeply moving experience, overwhelming beyond

words. Sophie felt herself interiorly transformed in the consciousness that Jesus Himself was now one with her. The gift of an unshakeable Faith was implanted within her as a precious Treasure, and she held on to it with loving tenacity and profound hope.

However, what had taken place could no longer be kept secret from the family. The two girls set off with great trepidation to return home. Mamma was seated by the fire in the drawing-room, reading her large Bible. She looked up with pleasure, expecting them to have returned from a morning walk. Then, seeing they were in their Sunday best, she asked, "Where have you been, children?"

"Mamma," said Sophie kneeling beside her, "I am afraid we are going to cause you pain, but it is better that you know all."

"What have you been doing?" she asked in consternation.

"We have just been received into the Catholic Church," was the reply.

Mamma rose angrily from her seat. "So now you are Papists!" she cried out in anguish, pushing away Sophie who was trying to kiss her. She began to pace about the room, giving vent to her painful feeling in a tirade against the Catholic Church.

"So now you will pray to that wretched Virgin!" she exclaimed in disgust. Sophie's heart was pierced by the insult given to the Blessed Virgin as well as by her mother's strong reaction to her. Mary Ann was weeping uncontrollably, unable to bear the painful scene. Mamma left the room in anguish, crying and speaking aloud in her grief as she went into her

own adjoining boudoir, while Sophie wrapped her arms round Mary Ann, trying to comfort her.

"Jesus is with us, Mary Ann," she said, "He will give us the strength we need.... Courage! Let us face this together." The younger girl was inconsolable.

Just then, Henry came downstairs for breakfast. "When are we having breakfast?" he asked. "Sophie, where are you? Come and give us breakfast."

Sophie left Mary Ann and went into the dining-room where breakfast was laid. She poured out Henry's tea and he began to eat. Then he heard Mamma weeping aloud and he asked, "What is the matter with Mamma? What has upset her? Why don't the others come for breakfast?"

Sophie got up from her place, came round behind her brother and began to stroke his head affectionately. "Henry," she said gently, "Mamma is crying, because Mary Ann and I have just been received into the Catholic Church.

Henry stopped eating and turned round to see if Sophie was serious. "Yes, Henry," she said, "we are now Catholics."

"Well," he replied with a sneer, "at least we now know what you are. You were Catholics in secret all this time, and now you are Catholics openly!"

Sophie saw that he was not really angry, and she began to tell him what had happened. Soon, however, Mamma opened the door and called him to her. Sophie and Mary Ann went upstairs together, while Mamma in sorrow put on mourning dress and went to visit Bishop Tomlinson. Then in despair, the poor lady went to the cemetery to pray by Emily's grave. Little did she know that Emily, too, had died a Catholic! Mamma stayed in the cemetery for a good part of the day.



Widowed by the sudden death of her husband five years earlier, bereaved of her ailing daughter two years later, separated by traditional prejudice and the antagonism of centuries from her eldest girls, the suffering woman was immersed in grief, inconsolable and weighed down by her anguish of mind and heart. Her daughters suffered with her, knowing that they were the major cause of her pain. But they could do nothing about it except by showing their mother special love and understanding.

What added to the difficulty of the situation was the immediate ostracism to which Protestant society now subjected them. They could no longer lead their former social life, and Mamma, who had been so proud of her daughters and had found pleasure in taking them out into society, now experienced the isolation of being shut out from her former haunts. She decided to leave Malta with her family and return to Greece.

However, the change took time to be effected. And during that time, in spite of domestic storms, Sophie and Mary Ann were happy and at peace. They attended a retreat preached by Father Seagrave for the English, and Sophie was permitted to receive Communion everyday, which gave her much comfort. The two sisters also received Confirmation at the Bishop's house in a private chapel of the episcopal palace. Sophie felt drawn to the religious life, but thought she was unworthy of such a calling. However, having hesitantly broached the subject to Father Seagrave, she began to look for a Sisterhood which had both enclosure and exterior works of mercy.

Meanwhile, Mrs Leeves took a house at Piraeus, the port of Athens, very near the Catholic Church. Here, the young ladies were permitted to go to church accompanied by their

Maltese maid. However, at home Mrs Leeves subjected them to continued attacks on the Church of Rome and on their beliefs, while forcing them to listen to her explanation of the Bible, which exposed the so-called abuses in the Catholic Church. On the other hand, Henry had been struck by the conversion of his sisters. He wanted to meet Father Seagrave, to read Catholic books and receive instruction, but Mrs. Leeves turned him away and directed him to his property in Euboea.

Events now took an unexpected turn. Henry fell ill at Castaniotissa and needed his mother's care. Mary Ann took ill in Greece, and was advised change of air. Since it was impossible to move her to Castaniotissa, where medical help was not available, other arrangements for the two girls had to be made. Hearing that there was a convent of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition at Syros, which offered board and lodging to outsiders, Mrs Leeves asked Sophie to write to the superior in this connection. Both Sophie and Mary Ann were surprised to see their mother take such an initiative. In spite of herself, she seemed to be compelled to place them in a Catholic environment for a while. Arrangements were soon made, and the Anglican chaplain of Athens offered to accompany the young ladies to Syros.

Mamma went with her daughters to the steamer at Piraeus. As the boat left the shore, Sophie's heart was wrung to see her mother standing alone on the pier, a woman in grief who had lost nearly everything she held dear. There was now only her son, and she placed her hope in him, looking forward to his marriage and the promise it held for the family.



## 5. *Vessel Of Grace*



Syros

Sophie and Mary Ann were received with great affection and cordiality by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition at Syros. The two young converts could now practise their religion in peace. Sophie began to devote herself to prayer and meditation with great ardour.

One day, as she was praying in the Church of St Sebastian opposite the convent, she begged Our Lord to show her where He wanted her to be a Sister. She felt no attraction to the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition, for she wanted a cloistered life coupled with works of mercy. Suddenly she heard clearly in her heart the word "Tomorrow". She was frightened, not having heard of interior locutions. Resorting to the rosary, she asked the Blessed Virgin to tell her the meaning of that strange voice. Again she heard in her heart the words, "Tomorrow I will tell you what I wish."

Expectantly, she waited after Communion the next day, recollecting herself in the deepest silence of her heart. The voice came again: "I want you here." She understood that she was called to be a Sister of St Joseph of the Apparition in spite of her having no natural attraction for this congregation. Her confessor having confirmed this inspiration, Sophie now began to desire to put it into execution.

The priest also gave Sophie the works of St Teresa of Avila to read. She could now understand what interior locutions were as well as the deeper states of prayer into which God had led her. In fact, as sometimes happens to new converts, her soul was flooded with graces and favours. Prayer was her delight. On the feast of St Peter, her strong faith was deepened even more. She seemed to see and touch all that she believed in. She felt intoxicated with heavenly sweetness and was filled with joy. She also longed to do penance and to suffer as a response of love for Jesus.

Making known to her mother her desire to be a Sister, Sophie received from Athens a strong refusal from Mamma. "Even on my deathbed I shall never consent to see you in the religious habit!" wrote Mrs Leeves. Sophie, however, was now twenty-seven years old, and could take her own decisions in the matter. She and Mary Ann were accepted as postulants on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the 14th of September, 1851. The former was given the work of teaching Greek, French and music, and found her happiness specially in serving the poor Catholic children who were educated by the Sisters. Being greatly devoted to the Passion of Our Lord, she was given the name "Veronica of the Passion" after St Veronica Giuliani, the Capuchin stigmatist.

Meanwhile, Mary Ann wanted to return to her mother since she did not feel called to be a Sister of St Joseph of the Apparition. She was constantly ill with fever and needed her mother's care. Shortly after, Sophie too became very ill with inflammation of the lungs, and Mary Ann wrote to her mother about it. Mamma forgot her anger and sent Henry to fetch Sophie and Mary Ann to spend some time at Athens. Looking appraisingly at her older daughter in the religious garb, Mamma remarked, "I have never seen you look so pretty

as you do in this dress, Sophie! It is really becoming!" She received her very affectionately and treated her with motherly concern.

However, Sister Veronica was longing to return to the convent, and after three weeks, she went back with Mary Ann to Syros. Mary Ann entered the Ursulines de Casa, where she was happier than with the Sisters of St Joseph. In 1852, Sophie made her profession with great joy and a sense of fulfilment.

Soon after, Henry left for England with Mrs Leeves, and there he married Harriet Fletcher, a young English girl whom he brought back to Greece with his mother. On the way to Castaniotissa, the newly-married couple came to Syros to see their sisters, while Mamma remained in Athens. The following year, a little son was born to them, whom they named Henry Samuel. The boy was a charming child who brought much joy and new hope to his grandmother.

A few months later, tragedy struck a stunning blow to the family. One night, four peasants broke into the house at Castaniotissa, and, having wounded Henry and his wife, carried off their money and valuables. Unfortunately, however, Harriet recognised one of the robbers as the son of Pappa Stathi, and she said aloud in English, "Oh, Henry, it is the priest's son!" The young man, whom Sophie had taught with so much devotion years before, understood what Harriet said, and, finding that he was recognised, killed both Henry and his wife before leaving the house.

In the morning, the murder was discovered by the servants. The English Embassy was informed, and a warship was sent to Euboea to bring away the orphaned child and his nurse to Athens. The murderers were later caught and executed.



Mamma's grief and shock were overwhelming. She was now alone without anyone to support her in her inconsolable anguish. Near death herself, she was in despair with the last hope of her family gone. Only when her grandson was brought to her, did she revive painfully, assuaging her sorrow a little by caring tenderly for the child. She cried out for her daughters to come to her. Considering the tragic circumstances, Sister Veronica was allowed to go with Mary Ann to Athens, where their presence was a comfort to Mrs Leeves. But even this solace was short-lived, for little Henry died three months later, leaving Mamma utterly alone and without hope.

However, the next year, a new convent of the Sisters of St Joseph was founded in Athens, and Sister Veronica was sent there as a member of that community. She could visit her mother from time to time, and gradually Mrs Leeves took up the threads of her broken life and began to come to terms with her bereavement and loneliness.

It was at Athens that Sister Veronica's special aptitude for nursing was put to good use, especially among the members of the Diplomatic Corps. She found joy in administering spiritual solace also to her patients and was often the means of helping them receive the sacraments before death. The conversion of the French Minister, Viscount de Serre, on his deathbed, followed by that of his wife was a source of great consolation to Sister Veronica. He had led an impious life, mocking at all holy things, but the young Sister watched over him every night, and put round his neck a miraculous medal. Surprisingly, when she was making his bed, he said gently to her, "Sister, pray." He even made the responses to the Litany of Our Lady which she recited. Then he said, "Sister, I have not always been as impious as you

see me. Soon I am going to appear before God... I wish to confess myself." The chaplain was sent for immediately, heard his confession, and administered the sacraments before his exemplary death.

However, in her personal life, Sister Veronica now entered a period of dryness in prayer, and was burdened also with trying responsibilities.

In 1860 she was appointed superior of a new foundation at Piraeus. Mrs Leeves now consented to visit her occasionally. What a joy it was for Sister Veronica to receive a basket of flowers from her mother and to see her arrange them in vases for the May altar! Such a marvellous transformation in this anti-Papist woman could only be ascribed to the efficacy of her daughter's prayers to the Mother of God "through whom all graces flow". She was full of amazement and gratitude welled up in her heart for this grace. "Mamma, who never wished to go out in the street with me, thinking she would be disgraced if she were to walk with her daughter dressed as a religious," wrote Mother Veronica, "now came with me to one of the most frequented places to pay a visit to a lady we know!" With this consolation, there were trials enough to balance the scales. The convent was in dire straits for lack of material resources, and it was only the generosity of the French Admiral at Piraeus that kept the new foundation going and its orphans supplied with bread and other necessities.

A summons from Rome took Sister Veronica to the Eternal City in June, 1860. There, she had the happiness of assisting at the Holy Father's Mass, and of being introduced to His Holiness on two occasions by Monsignor Talbot. "Here is an English convert!" said the English Prelate, leading her forward in front of the Pope. The second time, the Holy Father looked at her, held out his hand and said, "Be good



and holy." She was filled with ecstatic delight and a deep sense of belonging to the Church.

After six months in Rome, Sister Veronica was sent as superior to Tremorel, a village in Brittany, where she took charge of the parish primary school as a government employee. She loved the children in her care as well as the people of the village who were simple and pious. Added to her teaching was the claim on her nursing skills. It cost her much in time and energy, and this together with the cold, wet climate, brought on spells of illness. Besides a crippling rheumatism, frequent spitting of blood and loss of voice together with fever made her weaker and weaker.

"I can't bend my fingers and all the fingertips hurt so much that I suffer awfully," she wrote to her superior general. "The Parish Priest has forbidden me to go to Mass in the morning and he comes at 7.30 or 8 a.m. to give me Holy Communion in our chapel, which is my only treasure and consolation." The doctor warned her of serious consequences if she did not give up teaching and move to a warmer climate. Finally, after a year of struggle at Tremorel she received an order to go to India to found a new house of the congregation at Calicut.

Before leaving France, she had the happiness of being present at Mary Ann's profession as a regular Ursuline at Montigny in 1861. Mary Ann had received the call to found an Ursuline convent in Greece, a congregation with a cloister and a regular way of life, different from that of the Ursulines de Casa, whose rule allowed them to live at home. Sister Mary of St Ignatius — as Mary Ann was now called — was to found this convent on the island of Tinos, a few hours by boat from Syros. The two sisters had a joyful reunion before they separated to go their different ways.

Scarcely had Sister Veronica arrived in Rome prior to her departure for India, when her Superior General, Mother Emilie Julien, fell on a staircase and broke her leg. Sister Veronica set about nursing her with devotion, but before she was fully cured, it was time to leave for her new assignment.



Calicut



## 6. On The Wheel

Sister Veronica had made obedience to the call of God the pivot of her life. When the inner search for Truth led her to the Catholic faith, she took the step of changing her religion in spite of the anguish it cost her and her family. Earlier, she had even broken her engagement in order to respond to the inner call to give herself to God in the consecrated life. Later, she had surrendered her personal preferences to answer the unmistakable voice of God directing her to the congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition. From Syros to Athens, from Athens to Piraeus, from Piraeus to Rome, from Rome to Tremorel, she had obeyed the summons of obedience without a murmur. And now, she was to go to a distant land with an alien culture, among people who were utter strangers, journeying in difficult circumstances to unknown horizons.

With characteristic faith and courage, Sister Veronica set out for India, ready to face all the hardships that lay ahead. One hope had been held out to her: that of having a reputedly good spiritual director in her new mission, namely, Father Marie Ephrem, a zealous Discalced Carmelite missionary, whose work among the people of the West Coast of India gave promise of establishing the Church there in strength and vitality.



The Suez Canal had not yet been built. Sister Veronica and her companion, a novice by the name of Sister Marie-Joseph, had to go first to Alexandria from Rome by boat, then cross by rail to Cairo and Suez. From there they travelled by a warship on a long enough voyage to Pointe de Galle in Ceylon. Another merchant vessel took them from there to a place midway between Calicut and Cannanore, from where a small Indian boat brought them to land. All these changes and the consequent inconveniences could not dampen Sister Veronica's spirits. She was full of zeal to begin work on her new mission. Nor did the half-naked crew who manned the boat deter her from stepping ashore with eagerness and kissing the earth "sanctified", she said, "by the great Apostle of the Indies".

Everything was strange. The stifling heat was overpowering. But the official who received the English woman put her at ease immediately with refreshments of water melon and coconut water, accompanying her himself to the shore to fetch her companions who had been reluctant to expose themselves to the danger of landing among "savages". His ability to speak English was a great help and he informed her that Father Marie Ephrem had already left Cannanore for Mangalore. She and Sister Marie-Joseph were to proceed there after a rest.

They left for Mangalore a few days later and were received by the Carmelite priest on the shore. He had brought a small bullock-cart to take the travellers to the Convent of the Sisters of St Joseph already established there. Sister Veronica and her companion were very affectionately received by the Sisters and were very happy to be among their own again. After a period of rest, they began to prepare themselves for their mission with a retreat directed by Father Marie Ephrem.

A special rapport sprang up immediately between these two great souls. "What a treasure you have sent us!" wrote the priest to the Superior General of the Sisters. While Father Marie Ephrem recognised the mystical graces that God had showered on Sister Veronica, enriching her natural gifts of mind and heart with spiritual vitality, the latter saw in the priest a zealous missionary after God's own heart, gifted with learning and eloquence among other attractive personal endowments. The retreat only served to deepen the mutual respect and affection that made their relationship a blessing to both in their apostolic work. He called her "God's favoured child," and she, in turn, referred to him as her guide and father.

Calicut, on the Malabar Coast, lay further south, but belonged to the same Vicariate of Mangalore headed by Monsignor Michael Anthony. This zealous Carmelite prelate wanted very much to start a Catholic school in Calicut for the children of the place. Mother Veronica was to be the superior as well as take charge of the school and the boarding-house. She accepted the challenge with great enthusiasm with three other Sisters.

Children flocked to the new school. In addition to the Catholics, several Protestants and Parsis also asked for admission, followed the catechism classes and attended chapel like the others. Together with the physical difficulties of poverty, the enervating warm and humid climate and the limited accommodation, Mother Veronica felt herself blessed with great consolations.

"I feel I have never been happier and more contented," she writes. And then she adds, "Ah, Mother, if you knew what the heat of India is like! We are obliged to bathe daily in cold



water. As for me, I do it out of obedience and necessity, else, I would succumb to the heat. We are drenched in incessant perspiration, the chemise practically soaked through and through, and the habit is not dry in the morning when we want to put it on again. There are terrible storms, and sometimes frightful thunder and lightning... But we also have blessings which we do not have in all our houses—Primarily the good God, and now, Benediction thrice a week....” The Christians, big and small, responded generously to the efforts of the Sisters. They prayed devoutly, were modest and well-behaved, and also studied diligently, to the great admiration of all who visited the establishment. Father Marie Ephrem, who was fluent in Malayalam, the local language, gave private lessons in the subject to Mother Veronica who found it difficult but very beautiful. She learned to read and write as well as to speak the language. She wrote “Hail Mary, Mother of God” in Malayalam for her Superior General, remarking: “If you knew how sweet that language is! I like it very much and experience extreme pleasure in studying it....”

In her personal life, too, she experienced a deepening closeness to the Lord. Together with the other Sisters, she was received into the Third Order of Carmel (Secular) which brought about a closer tie with the Carmelites who directed the mission. Her prayer life was intensified. She received special favours in prayer, and these helped her to face many painful challenges that came her way. For one thing, Sister Marie-Joseph began to show signs of instability, of mental aberration, of suicidal tendencies which demanded great prudence, discretion and understanding as well as firmness on the superior’s part. With guidance from Father Marie Ephrem, Mother Veronica carried on courageously until finally the Sister was removed.

A campaign of calumny was then raised against the convent by a person who tried to poison the mind of Bishop Michael Anthony against Mother Veronica. Writing to the Carmelite Superior of the Missions, Mother Veronica spoke of being overwhelmed with graces “in the form of persecutions and calumnies”. “It is now,” she added, “that I am sure that He is thinking of His poor servant with a love of predilection, since He wills only the adverse in almost everything that befalls me and I feel that I am worthless in the estimation of others. So much the better.... Our Lord has named me Veronica. He has begun to chisel the rough block, must I restrain His Hand? Pray rather that He deign to strengthen my weakness and renew my courage in order that I may become in truth, and not merely be in name *Veronica* of the Passion. This is my only desire, the goal of my life.” She also wrote to her Superior General that suffering of this kind was a gift to be welcomed from the Lord. However, it was a painful experience, and a long time passed before the Bishop discovered the mistake he had made in lending credence to a quite unreliable source.

What specially disturbed Mother Veronica was an inner voice frequently saying to her, “I want you in Carmel.” She had experienced personal fulfilment in her life and work as a Sister of St Joseph. She was loved in her congregation and she also loved her Sisters, especially her Superior General, Mother Emilie Julien, to whom she did not want to cause pain. She could not understand what this interior call meant, as she felt great repugnance at the thought of leaving her congregation and venturing into the unknown. Little by little, the light seemed to enter her heart. And once more, the obedient woman surrendered her will to that of God, without knowing how it was to be accomplished. “Obedience is my

only infallible guide", she wrote, and she waited therefore in peace.

Meanwhile, she sought the guidance of prudent directors. Monsignor Howard, who visited India as part of a Commission to settle the schism caused by the Padroado, met Mother Veronica and pronounced in favour of her vocation to Carmel. Father Marie Ephrem spoke to her of the felt need of the Carmelite mission for the establishment of a congregation of Carmelite Sisters who would devote themselves to the education of girls in the Vicariates of the West Coast of India. Though the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition were zealous missionaries they could not provide sufficient personnel for the needs of the Mission. Besides, communication with Europe caused so much delay that necessary permissions could not be obtained easily. A Carmelite group could, on the other hand, accept directives from Carmelite superiors. Mother Veronica waited on the Lord for His intervention in the matter.

The next event in the unfolding of His plan seemed to be in direct contradiction to her call. She received a transfer order to take charge of the convent at Rangoon. With great anguish of heart and mind, Mother Veronica bade farewell to her dear Christians of Malabar who could not be reconciled to losing their good mother. The monsoon had already begun. It looked as if nature was weeping in tune with her own heart, as she took the train for Madras, then another for Calcutta, and finally the boat for Rangoon in June, 1864.

If communication between Europe and India was slow, it seemed to be almost non-existent between Europe and Burma. The situation here was very different from Calicut. Provided with a large enough convent and a "splendid

orphanage", the Sisters were denied a proper chapel or even an oratory. The church was far from the convent, so that during the rainy season, even on Sundays, some of the Sisters missed Mass. On weekdays, Mass was offered on an open balcony in the convent, unprotected from the rain, and there was scarcely place for the Sisters. But the Bishop was adamant in not allowing an appropriate place to serve as chapel. Besides, he was rather tight-fisted, demanding that all the proceeds from the school should be handed over to him to be dispensed as he decided. To the Sisters he allotted a small allowance, from which they even had to maintain the orphanage. Rigid in his views, he made life very difficult for the Sisters.

Writing several times to the Superior General for guidance in this situation, Mother Veronica received no letter in reply. Left without instructions from higher superiors, she felt abandoned and obliged to rely on her own resources in the face of difficulties of various kinds. "The cross will always be my precious and glorious heritage," she wrote to Mother Emilie Julien in 1864.

However, there were occasional consolations to rejoice in. For instance, one evening, the boarders on their Sunday walk discovered a dying man in an abandoned shed of the local cremation grounds. Mother Veronica had him carried to the convent, where he was given food and medical attention. The doctor could do nothing more for him. So the Sisters asked him if he wanted to be a Christian and go to heaven. "I want to be like you", he answered, "you have been so good and kind to me when my people threw me to the jackals. I want to go where you are going after death." The poor man was wonderfully open to the simple religious truths of the Faith, and asked for baptism. When he had received



the sacrament, his face lit up with an ecstatic expression, and he exclaimed, "Oh, how beautiful!" He recovered a little, and being shown a picture of the Blessed Virgin, he kissed it, saying, "Oh, she is so beautiful! I have seen her." Later that night, he died without agony, happy and at peace. The Bishop himself officiated at the funeral, the Christians of the neighbourhood providing the poor man with a beautiful coffin and accompanying the body to the cemetery with the Sisters and girls.

After almost a year and a half at Rangoon, Mother Veronica had a very serious fall which injured her left foot very badly. She could scarcely put on her shoes, let alone walk. The doctors said an operation was necessary, but her health needed her return to Europe as she was too frail to undergo the surgery in Rangoon.

With motherly concern, Mrs Leeves asked that her daughter come to London to be treated by the best surgeon there. Mother Veronica accordingly returned to England for a time until her health was restored. The Superior General then asked her to return to Rome. Her mission in India seemed to be over, but her call to Carmel and to the task of founding a congregation of Carmelite Sisters for the education of girls in the Vicariates of Malabar remained in her heart. She awaited the unfolding of God's plan in whatever lay ahead.

## 7.

*The Master's Touch*



By a strange and divinely-ordained coincidence, Father Marie Ephrem happened to be in Paris when Mother Veronica was passing through en route to Rome. They began to discuss the project so close to their hearts.

"I have spoken to Father General in this matter," said Father Marie Ephrem, "and he entirely approves of the whole plan. But I am afraid neither of us wants to decide on the matter of your call. You had better get the guidance of someone not involved in the project. That would certainly be more prudent."

Mother Veronica then left for Rome, arriving there after Easter in 1866. She first visited Monsignor Howard and found Father Marie Ephrem there again. "Since Father de Villefort of the Society of Jesus is the confessor of your community here," he said to her, "it is better for you to place yourself under his direction. Until he decides in the matter, it is advisable not to have any contact with me." Mother Veronica agreed. She had always been very open with her superiors, and Mother Emilie Julien was now made aware of the situation which both accepted in spite of the pain it caused them. For both sought only God's will in the matter.

It was a more difficult task to approach Cardinal



Barnabo, the Prefect of the Propaganda and Protector of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph. His Eminence opposed the whole suggestion from the start. "God does not change", he said firmly. "You are a Sister of St Joseph. Stay there!"

The discernment process took time. After six months of prayer and reflection, Father de Villefort pronounced in favour of Mother Veronica's call to Carmel. A fortnight later, this holy son of St Ignatius, who had offered himself as a victim for the Church and the Holy Father, went to receive the reward of his sacrificial life from the hands of his Master. However, the decision had now been made. Much courage and prudence were required to put it into effect.

Father Marie Ephrem had arranged with the Prioress of the Carmel of Pau in France to receive Mother Veronica as a novice there, if she were called to Carmel. However, she could not leave her congregation without the approval of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars who were considering her cause. While Monsignor Howard and Monsignor Talbot, who was the Pope's Chamberlain, both spoke for her to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Cardinal Barnabo was not even ready to present her papers to them.

At this juncture, the Superior General of the Sisters of St Joseph decided to appoint Mother Veronica as Novice-mistress at the Motherhouse in Marseilles. So she took her with Mother Melanie, her second Assistant, to France in Holy Week, 1867. The Novice-mistress, Mother Honorine, had been ill for some time and could not exercise her office as she was often confined to bed. There was therefore need of a replacement.

The clerical superior of the house was a worthy priest

by the name of Father Olive. He told Mother Veronica in the presence of Mother Emilie Julien, "Sister, we want to entrust the care of the novitiate to you".

She replied, "Father, Mother knows there is a great obstacle to my being Mistress of Novices."

"Sister Veronica has her cause in Rome before the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in order to enter Carmel," said Mother Emilie.

"Well, that is no obstacle," was the rejoinder. "Rather, we would be happy if a little of the spirit of Carmel could be given to our novices, that is, the spirit of prayer and penance. Do you accept this charge in obedience, Sister?"

Mother Veronica bowed her head in submission. The will of God was always her unerring guide. He had His own ways of carrying out His designs and she did not question them.

There was among the novices an Arab girl whose life had been marked by extraordinary graces, one of which was the stigmata of the Passion, which appeared on her hands, feet and side every Thursday and continued until Friday evening. Almost illiterate, Mary the Arab spoke very bad French, and was treated harshly by some of Sisters who suspected that evil influences were causing extraordinary mystical phenomena in her life. The most menial work was given to her, the worst food and clothing as well as poor living conditions in a garret. Her acceptance of ill-treatment and insults in peace, together with her obedience and humility, convinced Mother Veronica of the authenticity of the graces she was receiving. Mary herself referred to the weekly stigmata as a recurrent malady that she had. "How filthy! Let me wash myself," she remarked whenever she came out of her ecstatic

re-living of the Passion and found blood stains on her face and hands.

Moreover, Mary was gifted with prophetic utterances, which were often verified by later events. One of these referred to Mother Veronica herself. Mary had spoken to Mother Honorine on the day of the arrival of the Superior General, about the Sister who accompanied her. "She will be the novice-mistress," she said.

"I do not think so," was the reply, for Mother Honorine knew of Mother Veronica's intention to leave for Carmel.

"You will see," said the novice. And events proved her right.

Later, she even told the new Novice-mistress: "Mother, I shall die in your arms." "That is not probable, my child," was the answer, as Mother Veronica was planning to leave the Sisters of St Joseph as soon as she was given permission.

However, one day after Communion, the Lord spoke to Mother Veronica these words: "I wish this child to go to Carmel with you."

"Then do everything yourself, Lord," was her reply, "for you know that I cannot act in this matter."

Strangely enough, when the time came for the novices to be elected for their Profession, the community Chapter did not vote in favour of Mary the Arab being admitted to vows. Mother Emilie was absent at the time. Mother Veronica therefore spoke to the rejected novice and suggested that she accompany her to the Carmel of Pau. The suggestion was received with joy. "Mother, where you go, I shall go," she said, "and where you are, I shall also be, and where you die, I shall die."

Mother Veronica then told the novice to ask Our Lord not to let the outer signs of the stigmata show, so that she would not need the attention of her mistress. The next morning, Mary came in with a radiant face to Mother Veronica.

"Mother," she said, "last night the Holy Virgin came to me and told me that I would not have this malady any more until next year during Lent."

"Very well, we shall see."

It was so.

Mother Veronica then wrote to the Prioress of the Carmel of Pau who consented to accept Mary as a postulant. And this is what occurred on the 14th of June, 1867, when Mother Veronica and Mary arrived together at the Carmel on the feast of the Most Holy Trinity.

Painful as it had been to leave the Sisters of St Joseph, the warmth of their welcome at Pau and the whole atmosphere of Carmel filled them with a heavenly joy. For Mother Veronica, it was a time of great graces. Prayer was her delight. She was blessed with the intellectual vision of the presence of Jesus and He directed her in everything. The liturgy was her happiness. Her attraction for penances grew stronger. She seemed to be in Paradise.

As for the Arab postulant, she was now given the name of "Mary of Jesus Crucified" and was accepted with love and respect by the community.

Meanwhile, the Father General of the Discalced Carmelites wrote to Mother Elias, the Prioress of the Carmel of Pau, that Mother Veronica was to make her Profession in the Third Order Regular which she was to found for India.



She must now set about preparing for the project without delay. So she made a retreat in September and then her Profession. At this ceremony, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified saw a great cross hover over the prostrate form of Mother Veronica in the choir of the cloister. The holy cross was henceforth to be her portion until death.

After her Profession, Mother Veronica set about drawing up the Constitutions for the new Third Order which would include the active life together with a modified version of the Carmelite Rule. As soon as the work was done, Mother Elias bade Mother Veronica begin the work of starting the new foundation. It was winter, and the latter wanted to spend Christmas in the Carmel of Pau. But Mother Elias feared that the delay would be a failure in obedience. And so, Mother Veronica set out alone, clad in a costume which made her look like some strange adventuress. A black skirt and a large mantle covered her Carmelite habit. This together with an old hat and a long black veil completed her outlandish garb, which was certainly not calculated to reassure those whom she approached for help in the project.

At the very outset, a misunderstanding blocked the smooth carrying out of the plan. Mother Veronica had understood, from previous discussions with the Bishop of Annecy, that the first foundation would be made there. Later correspondence with a priest related to the Bishop on whose help she had counted, confirmed the invitation. Before going to Annecy, Mother Veronica visited the Carmelites of Montpellier to seek their help and was assured by the Prior of his assistance. However, on reaching Annecy, she found that the Bishop had not been informed of her arrival, that he could not authorise the proposed

foundation there, for there were already enough convents in the place. He added that if she wished to try at La Roche, a small town six hours away, he would permit a foundation there.

Embarrassed in the situation, for Father General had given her authorisation to start the work in this place, Mother Veronica made her way with a heavy heart to a village near La Roche, where she spent Christmas. Praying in the deserted church at nightfall, she found herself, as it were, in a barren desert with a huge cross in front of her. She clung to the cross as to her only support. It was a sign of what lay ahead of her in the isolated region to which she had been directed.

Finding a small apartment which she rented, the Carmelite was provided with food through the charity of some ladies. She now wore her Carmelite habit openly, attended Mass at the Capuchin monastery, and wrote to the Father General to explain her situation. There was no reply. She could not know that he had not received her letters since he was held up by illness in Germany. Father Marie Ephrem, too, was silent. Only Mother Elias encouraged and sustained her by her affection and advice.

Meanwhile, Mrs Leves arrived with her maid to see what her daughter was doing. There being insufficient place in the tiny apartment, Mother Veronica begged one of the well-to-do ladies to be kind enough to give her mother hospitality for a few days. "What are you doing here in this utter destitution, Sophie!" Mamma exclaimed. "Why have you left the convent on this wild goose chase? Give it up and come and stay with me." She could not understand her daughter's words about religious obedience. In utter disappointment, the old lady left for Geneva after a short time.

Buried in the mountains of Savoy, La Roche was too isolated to draw possible candidates for the Sisterhood, and all Mother Veronica's attempts to make a foundation there met with no success. The situation seemed to be hopeless. At last, after five months of near despair, Father General's letter arrived, apologising for his silence, and instructing her to set out immediately for the Carmels of Lyons, Montpellier, Carcassonne, Agen and Bordeaux. He enclosed a signed letter to the Priors of these monasteries, asking them to help her start the Third Order Regular for the missions. The need, he said, was urgent.

Unfortunately, Father General had not affixed the seal of the Order to his letter. This gave rise to the suspicion that the letter was inauthentic and that Mother Veronica was an impostor. A rumour even went round that she had escaped from the Carmel of Pau. Though she met with kindness in some places, on the whole her reception was unfavourable. In Montpellier, however, the Prior did help her, and a few aspirants professed themselves ready to enter the Third Order as soon as a foundation was made. In Bordeaux, too, Father Athanasius promised to send her some candidates when she had a house for them. But no place seemed to be available for such a beginning anywhere.

In this situation, without hope of making a foundation in the places suggested by Father General, Mother Veronica returned to Pau, utterly tired and dejected, hoping to be received again into the community. But Mother Elias had other views on the subject. She directed Mother Veronica to go first to Bayonne, to talk over the matter with the Bishop, Monsignor La Croix. The Carmel there had a little house that was abandoned and that might be free for her purpose. Meanwhile, however, Mother Veronica could stay in the

apartments adjacent to the Tourriers for a period of rest, before starting again on her search. She wept in sorrow at being denied entrance into her beloved Carmel, and followed all the exercises of the community during her enforced stay outside the cloister.

In June, 1868, after a period of rest, she finally left Pau with a heavy heart, directing her way to Bayonne. As she approached the place, an inexplicable lightness of heart filled her with hope. She was received very affectionately by the Prioress, Mother Dosithea, and the community. She could certainly have the adjacent house at 500 francs a year as soon as the present tenants vacated it in a month's time. Mother Veronica went to see the place, and in spite of its poverty and state of disrepair, the inner conviction that God wanted her to start the work there took root in her heart. Joy and peace flooded her soul and a new courage to work for the establishment of a Third Order Carmel for the missions of India.

The Bishop, too, received her with paternal kindness, giving her all the necessary permissions and also allowing her to enter the Carmel of Pau while waiting for the house at Bayonne to be vacated.

Happy at last with the prospect of carrying out her mission, Mother Veronica returned to Pau. She was received with open arms by Mother Elias who did all she could to console her for all she had been through.

Meanwhile, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had once again received the stigmata in Lent and also the holy name of Jesus marked on her heart. Mother Veronica was happy to see her "little one" again, for their relationship remained that of a mother with her child, in spite of also being sisters together in the Carmel.



After about a month at Pau, Mother Veronica left her dear community to begin the foundation of the Little Carmel at Bayonne.

8.

## *Shaped In Beauty*



Parlour-door of the Little Carmel,  
Bayonne



Side-entrance of the Little Carmel,  
Bayonne

The Bishop walked up and down the small refectory where the community was having their poor dinner. He wanted to do something for this little group of Carmelites who were facing so many difficulties in starting their life together. He had given them one of his outstanding priests to be their superior and confessor. The Abbé Inchauspé was really devoted to them and not only ministered to their spiritual needs, but also shared part of his salary with them in the effort to alleviate their poverty and hard living conditions in their dilapidated house. The Bishop, however, had something more in mind.

"I've just visited your little chapel which is under repair," he said to Mother Veronica as she sat at table with her first two postulants. "As soon as it is finished, we shall place the Blessed Sacrament there."

"Oh, Monsignor, how I thank you!" she exclaimed. "I scarcely dared to hope for such a favour. We have been going for daily Mass to the chapel of the Carmel."

Monsignor La Croix smiled at her evident joy. Joy had been the hallmark of the little community since its inception on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Their poverty was shared in a peace and contentment that augured well for



the future. The Sisters of the Great Carmel sent them vegetable and fruit to add to the produce of their small garden. For the rest, their life was simple, their needs few, their zeal and devotion truly generous.

Would-be postulants kept coming in, from Montpellier, from Bordeaux, from Nîmes, and from neighbouring areas. Some were truly suitable for the life envisaged, others unacceptable. With true discernment, Mother Veronica had to send away the greater number, while some aspirants left on their own. One was even diabolically possessed, appearing to be gifted with extraordinary mystical states. Another, a butcher by profession, posited a veritable danger to the community. Still a third showed signs of mental disorder. But there were also promising aspirants. One from Bayonne was a young Irish girl who was educated and had the post of a teacher. Her name was Teresa Devine and Mother Veronica saw in her a Sister who would be very useful for the missions in India. She was given the name of "Elias of St Teresa". Another, sent by Father Athanasius of Bordeaux, hailed from Pointis-Inard. Of peasant origin, she was devout and seemed to have a genuine vocation for the new foundation. She was called "Marie des Anges". The first postulant from Nîmes was named "Agnes of Jesus" and gave promise of being a good religious.

By the time Father General paid them a visit in September, 1868, the first group numbered about five postulants in addition to Mother Veronica. He revised the Constitutions which she had drafted, and approved them. He also approved of the modified Carmelite habit the Sisters wore and said to Mother Veronica, "Now you have the episcopal enclosure; later on we shall see about giving you the canonical enclosure." Father General's visit was a source of joy and

encouragement to the little community. He gave them an inspiring talk before leaving Bayonne, and blessed them.

As soon as they had made a beginning, Mother Veronica once more established contact with Father Marie Ephrem in India. She received the good news that he had been consecrated Bishop and appointed Vicar Apostolic of Mangalore in place of Monsignor Michael Anthony who had now retired. Monsignor Marie Ephrem was overjoyed at the success of the new venture. He was to visit Europe for the first Vatican Council, and he wanted very much to take back with him to India a group of Carmelites from the Great Carmel as well as from the new Apostolic Carmel at Bayonne. In fact, he expressed the desire of receiving the vows of the first novice, Sister Agnes, who had now completed her novitiate.

He came after his Vicar General, Father Lazare, first arrived at the Little Carmel to announce Monsignor Marie Ephrem's visit to Bayonne. Mother Veronica was truly happy to see her old friend and director again, and to introduce him to the young Sisters who were to work in his mission. The convent was still in debt for the expenses of its repairs to the tune of 7000 francs. Monsignor Marie Ephrem paid this debt to the contractor who had patiently waited so long for his bill to be settled.

However, the prelate was not happy with some of the arrangements in the convent. He wanted the habit changed with the wimple outside the scapular. He wanted the enclosure removed, and Mother Veronica was not happy about it, especially as it had the sanction of both the Father General and the Bishop Monsignor La Croix. Moreover the changes Monsignor Marie Ephrem asked for in the food of the Sisters

were impracticable because of their limited financial resources. Without even meeting the superior, Monsignor Inchauspé, or even coming to an amicable agreement with the foundress on these and other matters, the Bishop left Bayonne suddenly the next day without informing her. To say that Mother Veronica was grieved by his abrupt departure would be putting it mildly. She wrote to him, pleading that he return and settle things, as the Little Carmel existed only for the missions in India. She had acted only under obedience. "Obedience is my life," she repeated. She begged him at least to give a hearing to Monsignor Inchauspé whose advice and understanding had been her support all along. Moreover, it was Monsignor Marie Ephrem who had directed her to obey Monsignor La Croix, the Father General of the Carmelites and their appointed superior. "If Your Excellency does not wish to have us in India, then of what purpose is this foundation?" she asked finally.

And now, Bishop Marie Ephrem began to reveal some characteristics in his new role which had not surfaced during his tenure as chaplain at Calicut. Knowing Mother Veronica's high regard for him, he wrote to her accusing her of disloyalty and insincerity and of making him pay for all the expenses of the foundation. Gone was the former affectionate respect in which he had held her. Now it was only his authority that he sought to uphold. After Monsignor Inchauspé spoke to him in Rome (where the priest had gone as Secretary to his Bishop at the Vatican Council), assuring him that the changes he wanted had been made at Bayonne, Bishop Marie Ephrem directed Mother Veronica through him to keep ready the first batch of three Sisters to accompany him on his return to India. There would also be a group of cloistered Carmelites from Pau going with them. Sister Elias, Sister Marie des Anges and Sister Mary Joseph — a lay Sister — were chosen from

Bayonne, while Mother Elias (Prioress), three choir Sisters and two lay Sisters including Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, were to go from the Great Carmel of Pau. At the last minute, Monsignor returned from Rome with the news that Bishop Marie Ephrem wanted a fourth Apostolic Carmelite, Sister Agnes, to go with the first batch. It was impossible to get her clothes ready for lack of time. So Mother Veronica set out for Pau with the other three, intending to send Sister Agnes later.

At Pau she met with the fiery indignation of the Bishop. He shouted at her in the parlour, his angry voice resounding through the whole Convent. He would not listen to her explanations. At length, at the Great Silence, Mother Elias opened the door and interrupted the frightful interview, drawing Mother Veronica inside and embracing her in silent sympathy. Her heart was in anguish. If the Bishop was so changed towards her who had been his "child of predilection", how would he treat her young, inexperienced and defenceless Sisters? She could not recognise her dear Father Marie Ephrem in this overbearing and high-handed prelate who was now in charge of the mission of Mangalore.

The next morning, she attempted to bring about a reconciliation with the Bishop by approaching him in the confessional. There, at last, he understood that she had not received any letter from him asking for Sister Agnes to be in the first batch. Matters were smoothed out for the time being. Letters of obedience were subsequently read out to all the Sisters who were leaving for the Missions. The whole party left for Marseilles with the Bishop, Fathers Lazare and Gratian, leaving Mother Veronica broken and humiliated and in a state of anxiety about her young Sisters. She could only entrust them to the Lord, and hope in His providential care for them.



The voyage was disastrous. Two of the Great Carmelites died on the way and were buried at Aden, while Mother Elias took ill as well and had to break journey at Aden. Father Gratian and the three other cloistered Carmelites remained with her, while the Apostolic Carmelites proceeded with Father Lazare to India. Later the other party took the next ship for the Missions. But Mother Elias succumbed to her illness at Calcut, and left her three bereaved Sisters to make their way to Mangalore for their first foundation there.

Meanwhile, circumstances in Mangalore had undergone a complete change after Mother Veronica had left India in 1864. The Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition had been obliged to close their school there when the roof of a classroom collapsed, for the building needed to be demolished. The Sisters were invited to Cannanore, where they opened a flourishing school, convent and orphanage. Fulfilling a long-cherished project, Bishop Michael Anthony selected the first novices for an active Order of Carmelites from among the Anglo-Indian boarders and orphans left behind by the Sisters of St Joseph. He did his best to form them in the spirit of Carmel and was rewarded by their fervent and generous response. Housed at first in a wing of the Bishop's residence at Jeppu, they were later established in the overhauled building formerly used by the Sisters of St Joseph at St Ann's. A group of them was even sent to make a new foundation at Tellicherry. Hearing of the approaching arrival of the Apostolic Carmelite Sisters from Bayonne, these Indian Sisters looked forward to joining them, and did all they could to prepare the place for both the Cloistered Sisters and the active Carmelites. They arrived together in November, 1870.

The former were given the two-storeyed block which

formed the main building, while the latter had to make do in the collection of huts around, which had become a refuge for cattle. Some dilapidated furniture was given to them, and in spite of very poor living conditions, the Sisters lived in great peace and contentment. Bayonne had prepared them for such a life.

Shortly after they had settled in, Sister Agnes accompanied by Sister Cecile arrived from Bayonne in March, 1871, and was appointed the first Prioress of the little community with Father Lazare as its superior. Mother Veronica was happy to hear from Bishop Marie Ephrem that he was pleased with the Sisters. She wrote to them often, encouraging and advising them for they were young and inexperienced. Sister Marie des Anges was appointed Mistress of Novices and Sister Elias was given charge of the school.

Mother Veronica's letters to her sisters in India are full of touches of motherly concern and homely pieces of advice. For example, she writes in September, 1871, " My very dear children... I was very happy to receive a little note from Monsignor,...in which His Excellency tells me that he is very satisfied with all of you. God be praised a thousand times!..." Then she asks, "How is my little Mother Agnes' hand and foot? Great precautions should be taken in tending wounds; always to wash them well, not to touch them except with forceps meant for the purpose of undoing dressings. As far as possible, one should not touch rags from foul wounds as you risk catching infection...How will you know all this? It is not surprising that you make some blunders. May Jesus bless you, my beloved children..."

Meanwhile, at Bayonne, the Little Carmel was thriving. A charitable lady by the name of Madame Pedro Gil Moreno

de Mora became interested in the convent and found pleasure in making numerous benefactions towards its welfare. She and Mother Veronica developed a lasting friendship, one that consoled the poor lady in her widowhood, and brought the Carmelite much-needed support in her difficulties. She was soon to need it in the painful events that followed.

In August, 1871, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition at Cannanore requested the Bishop to incorporate them into the new Apostolic Carmel, for, with the dearth of Sisters, the demands of the apostolate and the delayed communication from Europe, it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to carry on. Bishop Marie Ephrem was happy, for he would now have a group of Sisters with experience to strengthen the newly-formed Apostolic Carmel. But he made two serious mistakes in the transfer. The first was to allow the Sisters of St Joseph to become Carmelites without the prescribed novitiate to form them in the spirit of their new religious family. The second was to appoint Superiors from among the Sisters of St Joseph to have authority over the Apostolic Carmelites including Mother Agnes.

Father Lazare saw the danger to the new congregation in this move and represented matters to the Bishop. Mother Agnes, too, on Father Lazare's advice, wrote to His Excellency, objecting to the uncanonical procedure. She also spoke of infringements of the cloister freely permitted in St Ann's. Tendering her resignation as superior in these circumstances, she awaited the outcome hopefully. But she did not know the Bishop. He was not a man to brook any questioning of his authority. He was outraged at the plain speaking of this young Sister who had pleased him from the very start. Without any hesitation he accepted her resignation

and appointed Sister Marie des Anges as superior in her place. The change caused consternation and confusion among the Sisters, the greater number siding with Mother Agnes.

The confusion was compounded by an incident in the Great Carmel which also affected the community of the Apostolic Carmel. In November, 1871, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, having completed her novitiate in the Cloistered Carmel, made her Profession at St Ann's. Bishop Marie Ephrem gave an inspiring homily on the occasion, praising God for the graces poured out on this favoured child. The event was scarcely over, when a campaign of calumny was launched against the young sister, initiated by the Prioress and the Novice-Mistress who felt that the confidences exchanged between Sister Mary and Father Lazare, her confessor, were not made known to them. They accused her of being led by the devil. They even succeeded in poisoning the Bishop's mind against her. The ill-treatment that followed together with a situation compromising the sacredness of the canonical enclosure was too much for the poor Sister. In despair, she ran out through the open door to seek refuge with the Apostolic Carmel Sisters. Most of these had been deeply appreciative of the young mystic, and the situation surrounding the recent events in her life served only to aggravate their own.

"All authority is from God," thundered the Bishop. "Disorder and revolt never come from the Spirit of the Lord." He exacted obedience from the Sisters, and sent Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified back to France with Sister Cecile. Sister Agnes was to follow later. After transferring Father Lazare to Mahé, the Bishop sent him back, too, disgraced and dishonoured, to France.



Anxious for the future of her congregation, Mother Veronica wrote respectfully to His Excellency, objecting to the amalgamation with the Sisters of St Joseph without a proper novitiate for the latter. He disregarded her letter. He even forbade her own Apostolic Carmel Sisters to communicate with her. His disrespect for the foundress and his desire to have the Sisters entirely under his control to serve his purposes is painful to dwell on. Perhaps, the disorder in the community aggravated his own wounded feelings. Whatever may be said for each side, the consequences for the Apostolic Carmel were far-reaching.

Hearing of the events in India, Monsignor La Croix refused to permit any of the Sisters from Bayonne to leave for the mission of Mangalore. He, too, disregarded a letter from Monsignor Marie Ephrem about Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, whom he prized very much.

Before leaving Mangalore, the Sister had prophesied the death of Monsignor Marie Ephrem within six months. "Monsignor", she said to him, "you are planning to send back Father Lazare. Well, within six months you will die in anguish..." Events proved her right. During the Maundy Thursday mass of 1873, Monsignor Marie Ephrem breathed his last in a room of the presbytery adjacent to the Cathedral. It was a stunning blow for the infant congregation.

Mother Veronica's stand was also justified by subsequent developments. None of the Sisters of St Joseph persevered in the Apostolic Carmel except two who made their novitiate under Mother Marie des Anges, namely, Sisters Teresa and Philomena. Mother Mary Perillon of the Calicut community went later to Quilon. However, God did not abandon the work begun under obedience with so much self-sacrifice and

suffering. Though the group that originally came from Bayonne was reduced by Sister Mary Joseph's death in 1877 and Sister Elias' departure for Trivandrum, Mother Marie des Anges carried on courageously with the Indian Sisters. And soon, the Jesuit Fathers who took over the Mission, helped the congregation grow in stability and in a true religious spirit.

As for the house at Bayonne, the very reason for its existence vanished with Monsignor La Croix's decision not to allow the Sisters to go to India. Mother Veronica was shattered. Her health broke down. Her superiors and the Bishop urged her to close down the house and to return to the Carmel of Pau. There were about six novices and two Tourriers left in the community. In place of their former joy even in the face of difficulties, all of them were filled with grief and desolation at the prospect of closure. Mother Veronica felt that she herself lacked that sweetness of disposition that had characterised her dealings with them. She found herself inclined to harshness under the strain of the situation. Little by little, she tried to place some of the novices in convents where they could fulfil their vocation. Three of them returned to their families. One remained as a Tourrier at the Carmel of Bayonne. Another was to go to Pau, but did not persevere there.

The last days at Bayonne were a veritable agony for those who were yet to leave. For Mother Veronica herself, they sounded a death-knell to all her hopes, strivings, and courageous responses to God's repeated action in her life. She was now fifty years old. Her ageing mother was slowly dying in England. Her brother and his family were dead. Mary Ann was now established in Tinos, the foundress of an Ursuline convent quite near the Jesuit house on the island. She had met there again the Jesuit priest who had once

fondled her as a little child at Syros. But Mary Ann was too far to afford her any consolation now. Catherine remained in England, living her own life apart from that of her Catholic sisters. Emily was dead. Mother Veronica was alone. She felt herself abandoned and lost. In her own eyes and in the eyes of others, she was a failure. Broken-hearted and ill, she remained before the Blessed Sacrament in the now deserted chapel, reviewing her apparently useless life. It had been so full of promise. She had risked all and lost all.

"My heart suffered so much," she writes, "that it seemed to become insensate. One had to have a very special grace not to succumb under it, and God gave that grace to me."

Years before, she had realised that the cross was to be her portion in life. Now that she re-lived the suffering, the humiliation, the abandonment of Calvary, she was devoid of any glimmer of hope for the future. She would go to the Carmel of Pau, but as a broken woman with nothing to offer but the anguish of her painful experiences, not like the faith-filled, joyful novice who had been welcomed by Mother Elias six years before. Then she had been flooded with spiritual favours and consolations. Now, all was dark and desolate.

Madame Gil remained. When the last consecrated Host had been consumed in the almost empty chapel, and all the material possessions of the Little Carmel packed and sent to Pau, this dear lady took Mother Veronica to her home to spend the night before her departure for the Carmel next morning.

The Little Carmel at Bayonne was "swept away", as Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had prophesied earlier. An empty silence now reigned over the deserted house. A silence like that of the tomb. It was a silence full of memories. But

those memories now lay buried in the heart of a woman as painful reminders of the purposelessness of her own life. She had gladly given that life into God's keeping at His call for His work. It now looked as if he had discarded her as a useless instrument. She bowed her head in humble acceptance of His will.



## 9.

*In The Furnace*

The Carmel of Bethlehem

The Christian life is a paradox. Jesus Himself expressed it in the words, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake... will save it" (Mk: 8:35). Eternal life springs forth from a sealed tomb. There can be no Resurrection without a preceding Death.

Sometimes, the process of dying is a slow, long-drawn-out one. It gradually takes possession of every aspect of a person's life over an extended period of time, so that Christ's Risen Life may unfold in all its beauty and vitality within the person. This was what happened to Mother Veronica. She had surrendered to God's action in her on every level. Yet, the Divine Potter had still to effect His exquisite workmanship in His "work of art" to bring it to the perfection He desired.

The Carmel of Pau received the heartbroken woman with open arms. They showered affection and sympathy on her with great understanding. In her ruined state of health, she could not live the life of Carmel in all its rigour. Being afflicted with painful rheumatism, she could not even kneel and had to sit in chapel with her leg stretched out. Very feeble and unable to take proper nourishment, she was exempted from abstinence and told to take tea at the afternoon collation. This she enjoyed as an extension of her English habits, and it was a small comfort to her in her state of health. However,

she noticed that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified now avoided her. When asked why she was doing so, the Arab Sister replied, "Our Lord told me that you should not take tea any more. I have avoided you because I did not want to tell you."

"But why didn't you tell me, little one? I would have given my eyes if Jesus had asked for them."

"You are ill... I didn't want to deprive you of tea."

"Jesus will give me the grace to do without it," was the reply.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified also told Mother Veronica that Our Lord wanted her to be called "Marie Thérèse" from then onwards. These two names had always been part of her full name "Marie Thérèse Véronique", but she had been called "Veronica" by everyone. Now she reverted to "Marie Thérèse". Finally Sister Mary added, "Be always very little, for there is always place for the little ones."

This was easier said than done. Having occupied positions of responsibility both with the Sisters of St Joseph and in the Apostolic Carmel, possessed of gifts of mind and heart that outshone others even without being ostensibly displayed, blest with a close relationship with Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, and having that something in her bearing that set her apart as English in a community of docile French women, Mother Veronica stood out as a "special" person even while she lived her ordinary hidden life as a cloistered Carmelite. It was the Lord who took in hand her growth in littleness through a series of circumstances that now befell her.

She had been re-admitted into the Carmel only as a benefactress, since she could not live the rule in its entirety. Deprived of a voice in the Chapter, she could not use her

giftedness in any way save in humble service such as sacristan or wardrobe-keeper or infirmarian. After two years of novitiate, she made her solemn profession by omitting the words "which is without mitigation" in the formula of the vows. She had asked St Teresa for a sign of her acceptance, namely, to be able to kneel down when she made her Profession, and this was visibly granted to her. After the ceremony, she had one of her extraordinary experiences. It seemed to her as though the former Prioress, Mother Elias, of holy memory, appeared to her with three others. Mother Elias embraced her saying, "Happy suffering which produces so much joy." Her joy was, however, to be experienced only on the evening of that day. For she had had all kinds of interior sufferings during the preparatory retreat.

A few days later, Sister Veronica received a letter from Catherine to say that her mother was very ill. On the 12th of December, 1874, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified came to tell her, "Your mother is dead, but her faith has saved her." This interior light was confirmed by Catherine's letter which arrived two days later.

She was in great sorrow because her mother had died outside the Church. All her life as a Catholic, Mother Veronica had been praying fervently for the conversion of Mrs Leeves, and had obtained the prayers of many others, too, for the same purpose. Though she did not despair of her mother's salvation, the bereaved Sister was longing for some assurance of it from the Lord. One day, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, being in ecstasy, sent for her and told her that her mother was saved through the prayers of her children. She had asked that her religious daughter never do her own will, for it was her self-will that had nearly led to her damnation. In great joy, Mother Veronica asked the ecstatic whether Mary Ann



was where God wanted her to be. "Yes, both of you are where God wants you, but you are more favoured than your sister. Yet God is with her, too." Consoled at this assurance, Mother Veronica returned to her cell in peace.

The very next year, 1875, the foundation of a new Carmel at Bethlehem was undertaken by the Carmel of Pau. Among those chosen for the project were Mother Veronica and Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. The latter had predicted that she would die at Bethlehem. The benefactress of this new convent was a wealthy heiress, Mademoiselle Dartigaux, who was directed by a young priest of the Sacred Heart of Betharram by the name of Father Estrate. He was to accompany the pioneer group with the Abbé Bordachar, a Basque Canon of the Cathedral of Bayonne.

Setting out on the new venture in the month of August, the little band stopped at Lourdes for Mass and Communion. They reached Montpellier soon after, and were happy to meet Father Lazare again. This was the first time after the disastrous events in India, when the foundress, the Arab Sister and the priest had all shared in the ignominy and the anguish of what had transpired. All three of them were now peacefully embarked on a new stage in their lives, spiritually fortified by having passed through the crucible of suffering, and committed even more wholeheartedly to the Lord. But India had left a deeply-engraved mark on their souls.

From Montpellier, the group went on to Marseilles, where they met the Sisters of St Joseph once again. "Ah, my little Mary," cried out Mother Emilie, "you left while I was absent in Paris. If I had been here, I would not have let you go." It was a joyful meeting on both sides and re-established a kinship which could not be broken by physical separation.

The voyage to Jaffa brought them to the Holy Land. Deeply moved at being on the scene of the great events of Jesus' life on earth, the group made its pilgrim way to Jerusalem under the direction of the Franciscan Fathers. Every visit to the sacred places touched them profoundly. The experience was a fitting preparation for their life at Bethlehem. With full hearts, they resumed their journey, arriving at the hospice of the Franciscans, where they stayed until a makeshift convent could be set up for them. It was the 24th of September when the official opening of the convent took place. Starting from the Crib, a procession of prelates, religious (including the Carmelites) and the people led to the temporary house, where the Patriarch of Jerusalem celebrated Mass and reserved the Blessed Sacrament. After lunch, the canonical enclosure was inaugurated by the Patriarch, and the Sisters were left to begin their new life together. Shortly after, Father Bordachar, Father Estrate and Mademoiselle Dartigaux returned to France.

And now, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified began to take the initiative regarding the new plot and building to be erected. Though she was a Lay Sister and so not entitled to have a voice in such matters, the Carmelites had learned to depend a lot on the inner guidance she received when in ecstasy. In fact, the whole project of the foundation at Bethlehem had been undertaken as a result of her interior lights. It was in this way that a plot on the side of a hill was acquired and a plan for the building drawn up. There being no architectural blueprint for the latter, and no architect being willing to be guided by Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, everything was at a standstill. The Polish Franciscan priest who was in charge of the erection refused to do anything without a plan. The details of the future building were clearly shown to the Arab Sister

interiorly, but she was not in a position to draw up the necessary blueprints.

It was Mother Veronica's skill and resourcefulness that came to the rescue in this situation. Listening closely to the description given by Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, Mother Veronica at last succeeded in making a cardboard model of the building which satisfied the seer. However, no measurements had been given. The Franciscan priest could do nothing without these. Finally, the Prioress, Mother Anne, asked Mother Veronica to draw a proper plan.

"But I am not an architect," was her objection, "I do not know how to go about the work." Yet, in obedience, she begged the Lord for the gift of understanding, and being interiorly enlightened, she succeeded in drawing up a plan which the priest considered sufficient to undertake the building. The work was begun.

Meanwhile, the stigmata reappeared on Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified every week during the Lent of 1876. She was often in ecstasy, singing of love and giving utterance to heavenly things. When in her normal state, she went about her work with diligence. And since she knew the language, having been born in Bethlehem herself, the workmen listened to her and had special regard for her.

In May of that year, the community had an alarming warning. One day, the bell of the new tower began to ring furiously. People were fleeing towards the mountains or to the Franciscan monastery. Rumours were afloat that a massacre of all the Christians had been ordered. The Franciscan priest came to tell the Sisters to keep ready to flee to the comparative security of the Crib with all their sacred vessels. The sisters remained in prayer awaiting the summons.

Late in the night, they were told that the danger had been averted. For three days, a special guard was kept over the area. But the tension gradually gave way to normalcy. And life continued as before.

In November of that year, the solemn entry into the new monastery took place with the Patriarch as chief celebrant. Five new Sisters had arrived from Pau with Father Chirou who was to be their Chaplain.

At this time, Mother Veronica was interiorly urged to make a vow of humility in order to grow in this holy virtue. Her confessor gave her leave to make it for stipulated periods so as not to be too heavily burdened. But as she herself realised, humility grows best in the soil of humiliations. And in Bethlehem, the Lord sent them to her in abundance, so that she felt ground as "a grain of dust under the feet of all." This took place after the death of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified in 1878. Until this event, great charity reigned in the community.

One day, as Mother Veronica was picking flowers on the rocky terrain of the monastery grounds, she slipped and fell, dislocating her wrist. Attempts were made by a local priest to reset it. But it was realised that the hand had not been set properly, for she was in so much pain that she spent nights walking about the dormitory, being unable to rest. Next, an old Arab woman with a reputation for bone-setting was called in. But she succeeded only in inflicting more pain on the sufferer. Her left hand remained crippled and the fingers grew stiff. In this condition, she felt unable to assist at Matins for she could not hold the Breviary. She did not go to the refectory either, as she could not eat without help. However, one day when Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was in ecstasy,



she told Mother Veronica that Our Lord wished her to return to community life. This she did, being helped by a charitable Sister who cut her bread and assisted her in other ways.

In 1877, Catherine, who was now a widow, came on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She came to see her sister at Bethlehem. But Catherine had now become a bigoted Ritualist. Though Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified spoke to her at length, nothing could change her fanatical stance. Mother Veronica was pained to see her sister so entrenched in her narrowness. The Arab Sister said that only acts of humility on the part of the Religious could bring about a change of heart in her sister. This was an added incentive to Mother Veronica to make greater efforts to practise this holy virtue so foreign to her English temperament and to her upbringing.

Meanwhile, the Carmel in Mangalore had awoken to the great injustice that had been done to the Arab Sister by the calumnies that beset her after her Profession in 1871. Moved to sorrow, most of the Sisters wrote sincere letters of repentance to her, begging her to forgive them. She was now nearing the end of her short life.

One day, carrying a bucket of water to the workers along a steep rocky path, she fell and fractured her arm in several places. An Arab bone-setter was called, but the poor Sister suffered terribly, her arm turning black in a couple of days. By the time the surgeon arrived from Jerusalem, the gangrene had advanced too far. Sister Mary realised the end was near. She received Holy Viaticum and begged the Sisters to rest, asking for two of them to stay with her. Though she wanted Mother Veronica to remain, the Prioress intervened, knowing how exhausted the older Sister was. For she had been constantly in attendance on the sick Sister. Mother Veronica

approached her and softly whispered, "My dear child, you will not leave unless your old mother who brought you to Carmel is with you?" "No" she replied, "I promise. Go and rest. I will wait for you."

The next morning, Mother Veronica found the dying Sister in her agony. At the end, her eyes were fixed upwards in an expression of rapture and astonishment. Her last word was "Mercy!" as she fell back into Mother Veronica's arms. The prophecy she had made while still a novice with the Sisters of St Joseph was fulfilled.

Mother Veronica was crushed with grief, overwhelmed with fatigue, oppressed by the burning heat of the Palestinian summer. After the burial, she dragged herself to her cell and lay semi-conscious on the floor until evening, when she was found in a pitiable state and ministered to by the infirmarian.

Two months later, Father Estrate and Mademoiselle Dartigaux came to Bethlehem and returned to Europe, bearing the heart of the deceased Sister. It was placed in a niche in the wall of the chapel at Pau, where she had been received into the Carmel eleven years earlier.

And now there began for Mother Veronica a period of darkness, of suffering of every kind, of humiliation and misunderstanding. The greatest of these was perhaps the interior affliction that found her helpless, feeling the weight of her sins, and the sense of abandonment by God. True, she had been prepared for it by an interior voice that repeatedly told her, "Prepare yourself for suffering." True, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had once said to her, "Now people flatter you, later on it will be just the opposite. You will suffer both in soul and body, but in the midst of all your trials, Jesus will never abandon you.... The little birds will sing in the depths

of your heart as in a grove!" These prophecies, however, did nothing to allay her anguish.

She had suffered all her life. But her faith had been so vividly alive that God's Presence had supported her actively all through. Now, however, she felt His absence, and more, she felt that it was her sinfulness that had caused Him to abandon her to herself. She felt she was damned. She could neither sleep nor eat. Night and day, she kept on examining herself to find out where she had failed. She approached the Sisters to discover whether she had offended anyone. She accused herself in the confessional without being able to pinpoint any special sin. Aware of a sinfulness that enveloped her, she could not be comforted either by her confessor or by the truths of the faith. She saw herself reduced more and more to nothing, wasting away in her own estimation and that of others.

To add to these interior sufferings, exterior sources of pain were not wanting. She saw some of the Arab Sisters and others being ill-treated. Angered by representations she had made regarding certain irregularities including infringements of the cloister, antagonised by her plain speaking, the Superior, Father Estrate, and those in authority accused her of insubordination. They charged her with lying. She did not know how she had lied, but she believed them in her state of confusion. They kept away from her, and painful punishments were inflicted on her. Made to carry heavy baskets of mud and buckets of water in spite of her crippled hand and weakened physique, drenched with sweat in the heat of summer, fasting in isolation on bread and water for days together, not permitted to communicate with anyone in the community, barred from the usual offices in choir, insulted by the superior in unseemly invectives, the poor Sister could

meet with no understanding or kindness from anyone. The whole atmosphere of the convent was Jansenistic in the extreme. And all this for an extended period of time. Only Father Chirou, her confessor, tried to comfort her and to set her at rest by telling her not to repeat her unfounded self-accusations. Then, seeing how useless were his efforts, he finally asked her to bare her soul to the Patriarch who was soon to visit the monastery. To make it easier for her, he requested the Patriarch to take the initiative in asking for her.

His Excellency was well aware of several irregularities in the community, having received complaints from many sources. He could not, however, put a stop to everything, as he had to consider several other factors, including the position of Father Estrate, the Superior. However, he did reassure Mother Veronica regarding her inner state of soul, spoke to her of the value of suffering, and asked her to keep writing to him to give him an account of herself.

"What indeed is suffering, and in particular, false judgments!" he said to her. "They are the greatest graces that God can give to a soul. They make the soul resemble Jesus in His Passion where He deigns to endure all sorts of torments and calumnies... Accept everything with patience and in conformity with His holy will for it is with love that He does everything." He went on to speak of the work God was doing within her and the blessings that suffering would bring her. She was comforted. Peace came back to her troubled heart and mind. She was able to carry on courageously in spite of the continuing interior and exterior sufferings.

One of these was caused by innovations in dress and customs introduced by Father Estrate, supposedly dictated by supernatural revelations. With all her heart, she wanted only



the Carmelite Rule in all its pristine simplicity as she had embraced it on her entry into the Order. Finally, on an interior inspiration, with the Patriarch's permission, she asked to return to the Carmel of Pau. She was accepted, but before she left Bethlehem, she had to face a further storm in the community.

One day, the Sisters were assembled by their Superior in the parlour, where Mother Veronica and another Sister were placed in the middle. Then he accused both of them of ingratitude towards Mademoiselle Dartigaux who had died some time earlier. He called them monsters, saying that they had killed her, and her death should be avenged. Then he asked Mother Veronica what she had to say. She kissed the ground and replied that she had nothing to say. From all sides there were shouts of "Put her in prison!" and other cries of outrage. It seemed to her like the Jews crying out, "Take him away! Crucify him!" before Pilate. She felt as if she was in the midst of demons. Father called for order and then said that if both the Sisters did not have to leave soon, he would have sent them to prison. Instead, they were sent to their cells in disgrace.

Besides Mother Veronica, there were two other Sisters who had also asked to leave Bethlehem, and were accepted by the Carmel of Pau. There was no place for a fourth who had made the same request.

Until they left, they were confined in their cells and forbidden to communicate with anyone. Even the Sacraments were denied to them, so that they left the monastery early one morning without Mass or Confession or Communion. Father Chirou was to accompany them to Jaffa. Though the Patriarch had willingly given them permission to visit the Holy

Places at Jerusalem, they were denied even this legitimate comfort. They left Jaffa at the end of April, 1887, free at last from the constricting atmosphere of the convent at Bethlehem, an atmosphere, said Mother Veronica, which "had dried up her soul and let her die by inches."

Truly, the Holy Land had been for her a journey with her Lord from Bethlehem to Calvary. It had left her humiliated, rejected, calumniated, greatly weakened in health, and reduced to the minimum of her being. But she was given the grace to be able to thank God with all her soul for all that had taken place, recognising in it the "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly."



## 10. *His Work Of Art*

It seemed as if the Lord was now comforting the travellers with special graciousness to offset all they suffered in Bethlehem. "Everywhere we were welcomed and treated as if we were angels come down from heaven," writes Mother Veronica. A chance meeting with the ship's doctor also brought her news of her sisters with whom she had not been permitted to communicate for some time in Bethlehem. The doctor happened to have travelled with Catherine in Greece, while she was on a journey to visit her sick sister in Tinos. Both sisters had been upset over Mother Veronica's silence, and finally Catherine had written to the English Consul at Jerusalem to find out what had happened to her. She had just left Bethlehem when inquiries were made. It was a relief to her to have news of her sisters at last. She could now communicate with them.

If everyone was extremely kind and attentive to the Sisters during the voyage, they received even more kindness at Port Said from the Good Shepherd Sisters, where they assisted at Mass, received Communion and had a good breakfast. At Alexandria, it was the Sisters of Charity who surrounded them with warm hospitality. Again, at Marseilles, the Sisters of St Joseph received them once more with joy, and wanted to keep them longer. But they had now to



proceed to Montpellier, where good Father Lazare awaited them. To him Mother Veronica could open her heart without reserve. He was her spiritual guide and gave her direction for the life ahead in Pau, where he accompanied the travellers.

After an absence of twelve years in Bethlehem, Mother Veronica found only three or four Sisters whom she had known earlier. The others were all new. Yet she was received with great cordiality by the whole community.

Her struggles were not over, however. The first of these concerned the innovations of Bethlehem which had been adopted to some extent by the Carmel of Pau. Believing that God wanted her to live the Carmelite Rule "as lived by Mother Teresa and the Carmelite Saints" who had brought the Order to France, Mother Veronica wrote to Father Lazare as well as to the Bishop of Bayonne, asking for permission to go to a house where this Rule was kept in its original simplicity. She loved the Carmel of Pau as her home, but was ready to go elsewhere in response to the inner urge for authenticity. It took time for this question to be decided, for it was not only this convent that was involved, but others of the diocese.

Writing at this time to a Sister of her acquaintance, Mother Veronica says, "I await then quite at peace to know how the good God will dispose of my poor person. And while awaiting I do not waste time, for each day I console myself, reflecting that I am twenty-four hours nearer to my Fatherland." Speaking of the readings for the feast of St. Hermangild, she remarks, "Every time I read it I am ravished by it. It speaks of heaven and describes the ravishing beauty and the joy and the happiness that await those who get there." Finally, the Bishop of Bayonne made known his decision that all the three Carmels of his Diocese follow the usages

prescribed at the time of their foundation. Only Pau had to concur with this ordinance, as the other two had never changed. When the Carmel of Pau submitted to the Bishop's decision, and resisted all the attempts of the Carmel of Bethlehem to persuade them to change, Mother Veronica was at peace.

A second source of anxiety was the fulfilment of what she considered to be her mission regarding Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. She felt called to keep the memory of the saintly Sister alive in France. Almost all the Sisters who had known Sister Mary were now dead. Mother Veronica, therefore, began to collect material on her life. In 1887, Father Lazare asked Mother Veronica to write her own autobiography, being careful to give details about the little mystic also. Securing the interest of Lady Herbert, the sister of Father Kenelm Vaughan, who had been miraculously cured by a relic of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, Mother Veronica gave her relevant material for writing a life of the saintly Sister. She also had the joy of looking after the little niche where the heart of the mystic had been enclosed, decking it with flowers from time to time. However, there seems to have been some temporary opposition from the Bishop to the encouragement of this cause. In time, however, the "Life" was published by Lady Herbert, and later, Mother Veronica's own account of "The Marvellous Life of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified" in French was published in Montpellier. But this was only after a period of sixteen years. The cause of the holy Sister had now been taken up seriously by the Carmelites.

Meanwhile, other events, both joyful and sorrowful, came to leave their mark on Mother Veronica's life. A few months after her return to Pau, she received the news of Mary Ann's death at Tinos in 1887. More than sisters, their relationship

had been one of close companionship in their spiritual odyssey. "My heart is as though broken in two," she wrote on receiving this news, "for we were spiritual twins, born in the Church through baptism on the same day." They had been inseparable as children, and even as they grew in age and grace, they had undergone the same pains of conversion, and had faced the painful consequences together. Even though their religious vocations had drawn them to different congregations, they had been in contact from time to time. When Mother Veronica was at the Little Carmel of Bayonne, Mary Ann (as Mother Ignace of the Ursulines) had come to stay with her on one of her visits to France. She had now gone to her eternal reward, and her sister was plunged in grief. She felt drawn heavenwards, too,—a desire which often comes through in her letters—but had still to fulfil God's plan for her on earth. The Sisters of Tinos wrote to Mother Veronica, asking her for a biography of her sister. And this she willingly completed, her affection and understanding finding expression in a firsthand account of Mary Ann's beautiful life.

Mother Veronica's exile was brightened from time to time with joyful happenings. When in Bethlehem, she had learnt that the little Apostolic Carmel, whose beginnings had been so painful, was still surviving. The Jesuits had taken over the Mission from the Carmelites, but they had done all they could to stabilise the infant congregation. For the Apostolic Carmel was still suffering the consequences of the early divisions, and some of the Sisters could not accept the authority over all the convents which had been vested in Mother Marie des Anges by the Carmelite Administrator, Father Victor of St Anthony, in 1878. Bishop Pagani S.J. confirmed the appointment of Mother Marie des Anges as Superior General of the Apostolic Carmel. It was a time of internal turbulence

and Mother Marie des Anges fell ill. Then it was that Mother Veronica wrote anew to India in 1879 after a silence of over seven years. Her letter was full of tenderness, humble and inspiring.

"I feel the need of writing to you," were her words to Mother Marie des Anges, "for I came to know that you were ill and in pain. Nothing can break the tie between your dear soul and mine, for Jesus has led you to me and I have given you to Jesus to be His Spouse and you know that the heart of a mother always draws nearer a child that suffers and that is in pain, and still more than when she is in prosperity."

However, only after her return to Pau, could Mother Veronica resume communication with the Apostolic Carmel in India. Her letters show the interest she had in each Sister, though most of them were new to her. One to Sister Aloysia, dated New Year's Day, 1892, speaks of her anxiety for the health of Mother Marie des Anges. She refers also to the rosaries she made both for Sister Aloysia and for her Superior General, and rejoices at the affiliation of the Apostolic Carmel to the Discalced Order. She had been disturbed at the thought that her little family would lose its Carmelite character under the Jesuits. But Father Athanasius of Bordeaux told her that "a vine branch transplanted and separated from its mother trunk does not... cease to be a vine." The letter of affiliation confirmed the Carmelite character of her little congregation.

Meanwhile, Sister Elias had founded another branch of the congregation at Trivandrum, and from there she and her Sisters kept up a regular correspondence with Mother Veronica. But it was a visit from Bishop Pagani to the Carmel of Pau in 1890 that brought her the joy of knowing that the Apostolic Carmel was now flourishing in Mangalore. His



Excellency spoke appreciatively of the Sisters and of Mother Marie des Anges as their Superior. "She has a particular tact for exercising her office," he said, "and her numerous daughters hold her in love and veneration." Mother Veronica's painful labour to bring the Apostolic Carmel to birth had not been lost. The Lord, who had acted through her to start the work, had now given it new life without her active participation. She rejoiced at its growth and vitality. Perhaps neither she nor her daughters realised what an immense contribution she had made to its progress through her life of hidden prayer and self-abnegation. Like the apparent failure of Calvary which gave life to a sinful world, her seemingly fruitless sowing had borne an abundant harvest. She had accepted her own abjection and uselessness in peace, and this made her empty enough to let the grace of God flow richly through her to others.

In 1892, there was also the joy of a visit from Mother Marie des Anges herself, who returned to France for a short respite because of ill-health. Moreover, the Apostolic Carmel had in this year received new letters of affiliation and aggregation to the parent Order of Discalced Carmelites. This was a special source of comfort to Mother Veronica. From now on, the correspondence between the foundress and her congregation would be more personal, more affectionate, more reciprocal. For at last, the Sisters were learning to recognise the essential role that the foundress had played in the birth and growth of their congregation. For years, her very name had been suppressed among them as a hangover of the painful events of 1871 and 1872. At last, the recognition that had been denied her was beginning to grow. Not that she now sought it, for she had embraced with joy the obscurity in which her life in Carmel immersed her. But certainly it

brought her consolation in her closing years. The visit of Mother Elias to Pau was another source of joy, and Mother Veronica did whatever she could through letters to help the convent at Trivandrum which was struggling with financial problems and other difficulties.

Occasional visitors from England also brought her comfort. But it was Carmel that was truly her "element" as she had stated on her entry into Pau. "My tears flow with thankfulness and consolation," she wrote to Mother Elias in 1902. "Our Reverend Mother says I look happy, and this is true. I feel it. Our dear Lord has permitted such a grain of dust to do and suffer something for Him.... Is this not something to rejoice at and to render Him thanks?" In a letter to Father Lazare in 1894, she writes joyfully, "Oh, how I render thanks to God for all the days of my life for having brought me back to my dear Carmel of Pau!"

Her evident peace and prayerful union with God could not but overflow into her relations with her community. They regarded her as "a select soul, endowed with moral and intellectual qualities of the highest order, profound piety, rare delicacy of heart." They spoke of her ascetism and that mutual charity, "that family spirit made up of simplicity and humility, which constitutes the happiness of religious life," which she inculcated in her daughters. Gifted in many ways, "she was of great help to the convent of Pau, particularly in the sacristy." The younger Sisters, especially, were struck by her "benevolent disposition, which made her religious life so sweet." The painful chiseling that the Master Sculptor had wrought in his precious material had perfected his work of art over the years. The humility she had striven for and suffered for now seemed to settle on her soul as a mantle of peace in a life of self-effacement and joy.

What vibrated most strongly in her life was Mother Veronica's ardent Faith which flowed out in her constant obedience to God's will. "I cannot say that I have faith," she used to say, "for, in order to have faith, one must believe without seeing, and in my life I have come in such contact with things supernatural, that for me it is *seeing* rather than *believing*." This vibrant faith of one "who constantly pulsated with thanksgiving" led her into that prayer-filled union with God that seemed a foretaste of heaven.

Heaven was very close. Her longing for this goal of her earthly existence grew more intense as time went on. Physical infirmities were on the increase crowned with an extreme feebleness. In the autumn of 1906, she received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction with great joy, looking forward to the event it foreshadowed. On the 16th of November of that year, while the community was at Matins, Mother Veronica went to her Eternal Home. They were singing the "Te Deum" in chapel, and she, who had been such an accomplished musician herself, now went to join the heavenly chorus of praise that rose to the throne of God.

Some distance away, a young woman, the sister of a Carmelite nun, was getting ready to retire for the night. As she delayed, her mother called out, "It's time to go to bed." "I'll come in a few minutes," was the reply. The young woman took her candle and left the room. Returning, she said very calmly, "I have just seen a Carmelite. Something seems to have happened at Pau. Above the candle flame, a halo of light was formed around the face of a Carmelite who looked at me smiling."

She had known nothing of the illness of Mother Veronica, but her description of the face she had seen

coincided perfectly with the appearance of the Sister who had just died. Whether an illusion or not, this beautiful experience surely serves to confirm our faith in Life beyond death, a Life which crowns a life lived totally for God.

Of Mother Veronica it may truly be said, "She sowed in tears, she reaps in joy", as she now sees the abundant and rich harvest her labours continue to yield.

The Potter had completed His work of art, in joy and pain, in fulfilment and in apparent failure, and, responding in beauty to His Divine touch, she had indeed become His instrument of grace for thousands of those whom she and her little congregation of the Apostolic Carmel were called to serve.

*"Her children rise up and call her blessed" (Prov. 31:24)*