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A Strange Destiny



Sister M. Carol, A.C.

A STRANGE DESTINY

The Life of Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion,
Foundress of the Apostolic Carmel.

Sister M. Carol, A.C.



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FOREWORD

It was really a decision worthy of praise to prepare the Biography of Mother Mary Veronica, a woman who came out in an Ecclesial and human context in which she had to live with much mental strength. This is seen in her human and spiritual personality; in her decisive will to follow the ways of the Lord, sometimes mysterious and unknown; in her generous service to the Church in her missionary activities, at first as a Religious of the Sisters of St. Joseph and then as a Carmelite; in her enlightened and sure affinity to the life of a Carmelite Nun, Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified; and especially in the fact that she was chosen by the Lord as an instrument to give rise to a Religious Congregation in the Church with the Charism of serving the Missions by means of the Apostolate of Education.

I think that it is very important to point out that the vocation and mission of Mother M. Veronica chronologically belong to a time in which the Lord was giving rise to other Religious Families in the Church, which were inspired by the Teresian Carmelite Charism with the same apostolic and missionary spirit. It is enough to remember the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate of Bl. Chavara Kurtakose, the two Branches of the Carmelite Sisters, i.e., the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (C.M.C.) and the Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites (C.T.C.) in India, the Carmelite Missionary Sisters of Bl. Palau in Spain and the Carmelite Sisters of Florence and Turin in Italy... Under this aspect the Biography of Mother M. Veronica has great significance and makes a contribution to a complete and rich vision of the Teresian Carmelites in the last century.

As the Superior General of the Teresian Carmelite Order, I am very happy to draw the attention of the readers to

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a special characteristic of the spiritual personality of Mother M. Veronica. With the help and discernment of her Superiors from the moment she clearly came to know of her vocation in the Church, she lived with great fidelity the Carmelite Charism in its dimensions of interior life and missionary zeal. It was really very providential and exemplary that she had personal contact and relations with the Missionaries and Religious of the Carmelite Provinces of Aquitania and Avignon. At that time these Provinces were going through a period of dynamism and missionary thrust. It was also very providential that she had a very personal contact with Very Rev. Fr. Dominic of St. Joseph, Superior General of the Carmelite Order, who restored the Order in France and Spain. The visit of Fr. Dominic to the Mother House known as the "Little Carmel" on 1st September, 1868, that is, a month and a half after its inauguration by Mother M. Veronica on 16th July, 1868, was a cause of great joy and expectation to him. It was because he himself had opened, on 14th August of the same year, a College at Marquina (Vizcaya - Spain), known as the "College for Overseas Missionaries". This College became the cradle of the Restoration of the Teresian Carmel in Spain.

I am still happy to remember that this project from its very start was a wonderful work of Mother M. Veronica and the whole Teresian Carmel, namely, Fr. General, the Fathers of the Provinces of Aquitania and Avignon and the Carmelite Nuns of Pau and Bayonne had very closely cooperated with her. Fr. Gracian and Fr. Lazare accompanied the first three Missionary Sisters on their voyage to India. The Carmel of Pau received the Religious Profession of Mother M. Veronica. The Carmel of Bayonne offered one of their houses to start the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel... In short it can be said that the Carmelite Fathers and Nuns had very clearly understood that the work of Mother M. Veronica was a call by the Lord to render a great service to the Church and to the Carmelite Order, which is enriched by the Charism of Mother M. Veronica.

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On this occasion, I very sincerely congratulate Rev. Sr. Carol for her enthusiasm and hard work, as is seen in bringing out this Biography of Mother M. Veronica. Certainly it was not an easy task to prepare such a work, especially because of the special characteristic of Mother M. Veronica's life, which was so busy and lively. Sr. Carol has succeeded in presenting in this Biography the inspirational grace of Mother M. Veronica with such liveliness. I hope and wish that this Biography will promote new studies and researches on the Personality and Mission of Mother M. Veronica.

Rome,
October 15, 1988
Feast of St. Teresa of Jesus.

Fr. Philip Sainz de Baranda
of the Mother of God,
Superior General O.C.D.

PREFACE

"Good deeds can never die." And when these deeds are the deeds of a foundress, the words just quoted are even more true. To keep alive the memory of a loved one is the main object of a biography. And so, what follows is the well-written life-story of a well-lived life, that of our saintly foundress – Mother Veronica of the Passion. She founded the Apostolic Carmel in answer to a call – a call that was shrouded in pain, rejection and uncertainty.

"A STRANGE DESTINY" can trace its beginnings to the meeting of the General Chapter of the Congregation in May, 1984, when the delegates voiced the need to have a biography of the Foundress written. To quote the exact words:

"Grateful for the Founding Gift we have received through Mother Veronica, we shall prepare a revised biography based on her own writings that it may be a constant source of inspiration to us."

This has been made possible for us through the researching ability of Sister M. Carol, A.C., who took up this work in a spirit of devotion and loyalty to the foundress.

We pray that all those who read this life may be inspired to trust in the Lord who holds our "destinies", however "strange," in His hands.

SISTER MARIELLA, A.C.
Superior General
Apostolic Carmel Generalate,
Bangalore.

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I have profited much in every way from working on the Life of my Foundress, Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion. I have also enjoyed it. I am, therefore, grateful to God and to my Superior General, Sister Mariella, A.C., for giving me this privilege, and to Sister Mirabelle, A.C., my Provincial Superior, for her encouragement, interest and support in my work.

My appreciation is due also to Sister M. Noelle, A.C., archivist and general councillor in charge of seeing to the production of this biography, for her never-failing availability and approachability. She has been ready to fulfil not only every requirement of mine, but even my smallest desire. I had only to say the word.

I am grateful in a special way to Father Philip Sainz de Baranda, Superior General, O.C.D., who so kindly consented to write the Foreword, and to Father Richard Lambert, S.J., Father Carl Dincher, S.J., Father Simeon of the Holy Family, O.C.D., Sister M. Carmelita, A.C., former Superior General, and Sister M. Lucile, A.C., Assistant General, for taking the trouble to go through the typescript critically from various points of view, and giving me encouragement as well as valuable suggestions. My thanks go also to Father Gerald Drinane, S.J., for designing the cover.

The sisters of my community of Avila Convent, Patna, have been an unfailing support to me in my work, gladly allowing me time to write, listening and reacting when I needed to objectify my views by talking, and tactfully shielding me from dispensable visitors and phone calls. To them I owe a big debt of gratitude, especially to Sister M. Bernard, A.C., who so generously undertook the difficult task of doing the first typescript, and to Sister M. Violita, A.C., who painstakingly revised it and helped in other ways.

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I thank also Sister Maria Gemma, A.C., for her secretarial assistance at the stage of collecting material, and Sister M. Vinutha, A.C., for the long hours of intensive work spent in preparing the final typescript, hours lightened for us both by her cheerful dedication and thoroughness.

Nor can I forget the community of Lourdes Convent, Bangalore, where I spent long periods of time, collecting material, writing and revising my work. I wish to express here my appreciation to the sisters for their warm hospitality, their concern and their lively company, which provided me with very welcome relaxation.

For the use of library facilities, so generously put at my disposal, I am indebted to the Apostolic Carmel Generalate (Bangalore), Avila Convent (Patna), Patna Women's College (Patna), St. Xavier's (Patna). For access to unpublished material, my thanks are due to the Archives of the Apostolic Carmel, and for translation, photography and other services to Sisters M. Amabel, A.C., M. Valeria, A.C., M. Gertrude, A.C., M. Paula, A.C., and M. Fidelia, A.C. The photocopy of the manuscript music of "Auld Robin Gray" has been graciously contributed by The British Library, London.

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The Archives of the All Saints Parish Church, Wrington, England,

The Archives of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers, Rome,

The Archives of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Betharram, Rome.

INTRODUCTION

It may seem strange that over eighty years should have elapsed since the death of Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion, Foundress of the Apostolic Carmel, before a full-length biography of this great woman could be presented to the world. There are several reasons for such a circumstance. Barring the five years, during which she was training the first sisters at the novitiate of Bayonne, France, she never lived in her congregation, and only very briefly in India. Her life was spent for the most part in Europe and, even then, in many different places. As such, it was difficult for an Indian congregation to have easy access to the various persons and archives that possessed material for the *Life*.

Despite these obstacles, however, and notwithstanding that much of the material is in French or Italian, the Apostolic Carmel has persevered doggedly over the years in the ongoing quest of collecting whatever could be found, and thus, thanks to the generous cooperation of various bishops, congregations and other persons involved, has succeeded in amassing a wealth of relevant material – Mother Veronica's *Autobiography*, letters and books; memoirs by members of her family; articles from contemporary periodicals; letters to or about Mother Veronica written by various persons; letters, histories, documents connected with the two branches of her congregation at Mangalore and Trivandrum.

However, all the material could not do away with the third and most important reason why the biography could not have been written earlier, and that is what we call God's good time – which, in this case, has a special connotation. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was very closely associated with Mother Veronica and, as such, the strange phenomena which were the former's daily companions, posed an insolu-

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ble problem of interpretation, thus closing the doors to Mother Veronica's would-be biographer. The Open Sesame was uttered only on 13th November, 1983 – the day the Church acknowledged and pronounced upon the genuineness of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified by beatifying her and, in so doing, took the task of interpreting the strange phenomena out of the hands of a biographer.

The Life of Mother Veronica presented here is based mainly on her *Autobiography* and her Letters, including the letters about her early life written in sequel form. The other material has been used to explain, to fill in the gaps and to interpret.

As much of the primary source material is unpublished, the information given in the footnotes is meant to be supplemented by that found in the bibliography (classification according to the archives of the Apostolic Carmel).

A problem which faced me in writing this biography was that of presenting the facts in chronological sequence. There are, it is true, several instances where I have chosen to use flashback narration for special effects. Apart from these, I would have wished to keep to a strictly chronological sequence. But I was baulked again and again by the very flow of Mother Veronica's life. She had lived in many different places, but without cutting off important threads with people and places figuring earlier. In fact, while she was living in one country, France, for instance, things were happening in India that were crucial to her life. The events in the two places were, moreover, important enough to require following one set of circumstances to the end, before taking up the other. This might, quite naturally, tend to confuse the reader. Foreseeing such a difficulty, I have made free use of dates as well as of words and phrases, like 'meanwhile', 'to go back to', 'simultaneously', in the hope that the reader will be helped to keep the right focus.

Trust, as the most indispensable element of biography, has been reiterated over and over again down the ages. "The

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value of every story," observes Dr. Samuel Johnson, that authority, *par excellence*, on the art of biography, "depends on its being true. A story is a picture either of an individual or of human nature in general. If it is false, it is a picture of nothing."* For Dr. Johnson, the whole interest of biography lay in telling "the truth completely and courageously." Convinced of the wisdom of these ancients, I have in this study endeavoured to adhere to fidelity to historical fact and to honesty in interpretation – even at the risk of presenting results which may, in parts, be unpalatable to some readers. It has been a severe discipline, at times, but it has brought its own reward – the satisfaction of having presented a faithful picture of the great woman that was Mother Veronica, a woman whose greatness lay, not only in a deep spirituality, but also in a disarming humanness, not only in admirable strength and courage, but also in a comforting vulnerability.

* Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Everyman edition, Vol. 1), p. 609.



Chapter I

HORIZONS

A tall English nun stepped precariously out of the tiny rough country-made canoe on to the sand and, falling on her knees, kissed the shore of the country hallowed by the life and labours of Francis Xavier. "I was not afraid of anything," she writes. "I was ardent and full of zeal to begin my work among these peoples whom St. Francis Xavier had evangelised".* For the moment, "these people" were represented by about fifty dark-skinned men who had been awaiting her with curiosity on the shore. They had hardly any clothes on, besides a loin cloth, and resembled the man who rowed the boat.

Sister Veronica was clad in the habit of her Order - a black flowing full-sleeved robe and a white fluted tight-fitting cap surmounted by a white fluted bonnet forming a halo round her oval face. Over this head-dress was thrown a black veil that descended to her elbows. A large cross was suspended from a ribbon

* Mother Veronica, *Autobiography*, Part II, p. 26.

round her neck. Her long aquiline English nose rose prominently from her face and, combined with her thin lips, might have given her an appearance of severity, were it not for the clear soft gaze of her large eyes, which reflected the benevolence that was basic to her nature.

Sister Verónica looked about her. The sand stretched away as far as eye could reach on both sides parallel to the sea and about a hundred yards inland, beyond which was a grove of casuarina trees, with coconut palms in the distance, swaying in the breeze. Meanwhile, the natives were eyeing this tall stately woman, wondering, no doubt, what she was doing here all alone on this shore, deserted except for them.

Mindful of the sister and priest she had left behind in the *patimar*, who would worry if she delayed, she tried communicating with these men to get the information she wanted. The efforts on both sides proving futile, "The one who knew a few words of English," she relates, "told me that there was, a short distance away, an individual who spoke English, and they took me to his house. He was the chief, I think. He gave me a chair to sit down under the coconut trees and they offered me water melons and coconut milk, which refreshed me a little, for it was suffocatingly hot."* He informed her that she was in Calicut and would find Father Marie Ephrem at Cannanore, some way north along the coast. Then a boat was made ready and he himself escorted her back to the *patimar* anchored a short distance from the shore.

* *Ibid.*, p.39.

At last, she had reached India. The voyage had been long and tedious, but it had been worth it. Some years ago, she could not have dreamt that this privilege of working for the Indians would be hers. But could she, that February day in 1862, have looked down the vista of the years and seen all that would be accomplished through her on this vast subcontinent, her joy and thanksgiving would have been multiplied a hundredfold. Her daughters, inspired by her charism, would bring the light of the Gospel and the benefits of education and culture to millions of girls and young women of the soil and, through them, to entire Indian families. But that future was hidden from her now and there was much to live and die through before that future would come to pass.

Sister Veronica had set sail for India in December, 1861, with her companion, Sister Mary Joseph. Her assignment, "to go and found a new house of the Congregation (of St. Joseph of the Apparition) at Calicut on the coast of Malabar, India,"* had actually come to her at Tremorel, France, six months earlier, but, for one reason or another, she had been delayed. As she planned, she had realised that, before going, she would have to stop at Marseilles, the mother-house of the Sisters of St. Joseph, to take a companion from there, and then go to Rome to get instructions from Mother Emilie Julien, the Superior General.

Before leaving France, she had gone to Montigny to spend a few days with her sister, Mary Ann, and be present at her profession as an Ursuline on 6 August,

* *Ibid.*, p. 36.

1861. Mary Ann had taken the name Sister Marie of St. Ignatius. In talking of Mary Ann, Sister Veronica gives us a clue to one of the traits of her own character. "This well-loved sister, who was my spiritual twin," she says, "was also marked with the sign of the cross, for all her life was a succession of sufferings of all kinds. She was an enthusiastic legitimist (perfectionist), as I myself am, but more peaceably."* Sister Veronica too would have much to suffer till the end, some of the suffering being caused, no doubt, by her being "a legitimist" and not such a peaceable one either. Many of our crosses, as we all experience, are due to our weaknesses, and the suffering that results is, if anything, the greater for being caused by ourselves.

Staying with the Ursuline contemplatives had stirred Sister Veronica's own contemplative leanings. A few days later she had written very enthusiastically about all she had discovered in that convent of "good and holy daughters of God." She felt deep joy there. The "strict and regular" observance, the talks she had with the superior were "doing (her) good."**

It was September before Sister Veronica reached Rome, after picking up her companion from the mother-house. Hardly had she arrived, when Mother Emilie Julien fell and broke her leg. So, pending her departure, Sister Veronica had the opportunity of looking after her Superior General, whom she loved dearly. In December, she and Sister Mary Joseph set sail for India.

As the Suez Canal had not yet been built, Sister Veronica and her companion, like Bishop Hartmann

* Ibid., p. 36.

** Letters, To Mother Emilie Julien, 11 Aug., 1861.

seventeen years earlier, had to alight at Alexandria, where they enjoyed the hospitality of the Sisters of Charity of Mercy. They then went by land to Cairo and across the desert to Suez. Some progress had, however, been made during the last few years, for, where Hartmann's group went down the Nile by boat to Cairo and across the desert in big baskets placed astride camels,* Sister Veronica and her companions made the journey from Alexandria along the same route by railroad.** By the time Father Constant Lievens, S.J. came to India nineteen years later, the Suez Canal had been built.***

Two Carmelite Fathers, who were to accompany the sisters to India, were awaiting them at Alexandria. The travel arrangements of the Fathers not having been properly made, they were refused permission to embark. But Sister Veronica, by means of running from one consul to another, by begging and beseeching, managed to get one of them, Father Clement, a passage on board the "Rhone", which was waiting at Suez. Arrived at Suez, they had to go in a tug-boat to the "Rhone" anchored off the shore. Father Clement, who had no experience of travelling, left all their luggage on the mainland and the "Rhone" could not wait for it to be brought.

It was a French troop ship and the General, his staff and all the troops, nine hundred soldiers, had already embarked, bound for the war that was going on in Cochin-China.**** The two sisters and the wives of

* Vide Fr. Fulgentius, OFM Cap, Bishop Hartman, p.26.

** Vide Autobiography, Part II, p. 37.

*** L. Clarysse, S.J., Father Constant Lievens, S.J., p. 57.

**** What is now the southern part of Vietnam.

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two troopers were the only women on board. The ship's chaplain, Father Surieux, completed the number of passengers.

The two priests celebrated Mass every morning in Father Surieux's cabin and on Sunday on deck, so that the crew could attend. The sisters were touched by the kindness they experienced from everyone. One of the officers even offered them new shirts, to make use of till their luggage arrived. But they did not need to avail themselves of the offer, as their luggage reached them at Aden, brought by an English ship.

Arrived at Point de Galles in Ceylon, the sisters and Father Clement left the "Rhone" for a French merchant vessel going to Bombay. On the way, it would drop them at Cannanore, where they were to meet Father Marie Ephrem, OCD, to whom they had been referred. The missions on the coast of Malabar belonged to the Discalced Carmelites and would continue so for nearly twenty years longer.

Opposite Mont Dilly, which was a port half way between Calicut and Cannanore,* the captain of the merchant ship carrying Sister Veronica and her companions, stopped a *patimar* and made arrangements for the group to be taken with their baggage to the shore. A *patimar* is an ill-smelling, roughly-built craft, with an awning made of coconut palm leaf and no separation between hold and cabin, or between live and dead stock. The vessel moves only by its sails and, hence, one can never tell when it will reach its destination, de-

* Today, Mount Dilly, where the Naval Base Academy is coming up, can boast a beach and a lighthouse. Ruins of an old port can still be seen.



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pendent as it is entirely on the wind and the waves. Other modes of travel in the India of the nineteenth century were equally primitive - tiny rough canoes, bullock carts, sedan chairs. The railway, which had been opened just seven years earlier, would take many years to reach this part of India.

The travellers had to spend the night in the *patimar* (their first taste of missionary life !) for it would probably reach the shore only in the morning. Their only companions were "people who had no clothes on but the usual loin cloth around the waist."* Entering the port of Mont Dilly, they were still not at the shore. It was necessary to get into yet another vessel, a very small boat, which would carry one passenger at a time, and even then at some risk. Sister Veronica describes the contraption:

Attached to the *patimar* was a very small boat about one metre long and proportionately wide, big enough to hold one of these savages who pushed it by means of an instrument which appeared to be like a big spatula, for it was certainly not an oar, with which he struck the water to right and left and made the skiff move forward. If absolutely necessary, another person could enter it by lying upon a wooden lath three fingers wide that was placed on the two sides of the skiff and it would have been necessary to watch one's equilibrium so as not to capsize.**

Since the others did not know a word of English, one of the few non-Indian languages used in that part of India at the time, it was decided that Sister Veronica

* Autobiography, Part II, p. 39.

** Ibid.

should go ashore alone. But she adds another reason also : "I think the boat hardly pleased them!"*

When Sister Veronica returned to the *patimar*, escorted by the man who knew English and had treated her so graciously, she found Sister Mary Joseph and Father Clement awaiting her anxiously, fearing that the fierce-looking men had devoured her. She assured them of their good dispositions, and the *patimar* continued on its way to Cannanore, where she had been told that Father Marie Ephrem was to be found. Unfortunately, their boat crossed the one which was taking him to Mangalore and, when they got to Cannanore, they were disappointed. But, a few days later, they also proceeded to Mangalore, where Father Marie Ephrem was awaiting them on the shore with a small bullock cart to take them to the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition (what is now St. Ann's Convent, motherhouse of the Apostolic Carmel). Here, they were welcomed with joy and warm affection. Sister Veronica was glad to be among her sisters again after three months. It was 7 March, 1862.

Used, as we are, to give the laurels for women's liberation to the twentieth century, we tend to forget that brave women, who dared to assert themselves, existed even before our times. The Suffragette Movement was not the starting point of women's awakening to their rights, their human equality with men and their innate capability. It was only the formal expression of that awakening. Nor was Sister Veronica, destined though she was to play a decisive role in the uplift and libera-

* *Ibid*

tion of women, the only woman in the nineteenth century to be so favoured. Already, from the early years of the century, there were women in the forefront of life in many spheres in various countries. The American-born Elizabeth Seton, with whom Sister Veronica would come to have many affinities, had, as early as 1808, at the peak of her career, laid the foundation of the American parochial school system by opening a school for girls at Baltimore and, by 1810, had founded the religious order of the Daughters of Charity. In 1809, Cornelia Connolly, another foundress, was born of an English father and an American mother. Like Sister Veronica and Elizabeth Seton, she was a convert to Catholicism and, where the two former worked for the education of girls in India and America respectively, the latter did a similar service to England. In England, Florence Nightingale, her life almost exactly colateral with that of Sister Veronica, was, like her, unusually well-educated for a woman of her time. Dissatisfied with the only life open to Victorian young ladies and believing that she had a mission, she had withstood raised eyebrows and many another obstacle to become an expert on hospitals and public health. Another English woman, Elizabeth Fry, helped to improve the lot of the women prisoners, while Dorothea Dix, an American, made a name for herself by her work for the mentally ill. In India, Annie Besant's reputation grew in socio-religious circles as she continued to influence the great men who worked side by side with her in the Theosophical Society, first at Madras and later on in other parts of the country. In the past, women had never set foot as personnel in schools, hospitals, prisons, but now their presence brought peace and comfort in addition to efficiency and humanitarian benefits.

Although women all over the world were, for the most part, considered "not worth educating", there were some who were more fortunate, and turned their education to good use. Thus, we hear of Marie Curie in the field of science and of Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot (who felt it necessary to take a masculine pen-name!), Toru Dutt, Emily Dickinson in the sphere of literature.

Indeed, God himself seemed to be cheering the gentle sex, for he raised up women who would be shining lights even in the strictly spiritual sphere. It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that many women lived such saintly lives in the cloister that they became known to the world for their spiritual prowess and, in some cases, their doctrine became an inspiration and pattern of life for all Christians. Such were Thérèse of the Child Jesus (the Little Flower), Bernadette Soubirous, Mary of Jesus Crucified, Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Sister Veronica, then, was one of a galaxy of outstanding women more or less known to the world, women who, believing in God and themselves and undeterred by the cult of "the weaker sex," which sought to keep women in the background, had taken bold steps in the face of much opposition. In this group of intrepid women, Sister Veronica would play her special role, which God would make known to her in the very near future at the place where Obedience was leading her.

Meanwhile, on meeting Father Marie Ephrem, she immediately recognised in him a kindred spirit and, a few days later, in a letter to her Superior General, she wrote:



Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion
Foundress of the Apostolic Carmel



Bishop Marie Ephrem of the Sacred Heart of
Jesus O.C.D. Co-founder of the Apostolic Carmel.

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...the first person I saw on landing was my dear and good Father Marie Ephrem. You know how much I loved this holy man even before knowing him. Well, Mother, he is all, and more than all, I could desire. I feel that God arranged that I meet this man of God on my arrival here, for he immediately adopted me as his daughter, as if he knew me all my life. I do not know what charm reigns on his person. One feels, one sees, that he is a man inflamed with the love of God and his neighbour. You would say, dearest Mother, looking at his limpid tearful eyes that they had "seen the divine." I had no difficulty in opening my heart to him, as you recommended, for he has a key which one cannot resist, he would make you love God as it were by force, if one did not love Him. He leads you by the most perfect way – total obedience and renunciation. One sees that he loves your soul as God loves it. One can see that one can count on him and leave the direction of one's soul to him.

And then, with a hint of prophecy, Sister Veronica adds, "What a bishop that man would be!"*

Indeed, Sister Veronica (née Sophie Leeves) had met in Father Marie Ephrem, not only a bishop-to-be, but her co-worker – though she did not know it yet – in the life's work that was in God's special plan for her.

* Letters, To Mother Emilie Julien, 10 March, 1862.

Chapter 2

ROOTS

"Sophie, Sophie, where are you? Are we not going to have breakfast?" Sophie Leeves hastened to go and meet her brother, Henry, and to enter with him into the dining-room, where the table was laid. She poured out his tea. They could both hear their mother weeping very loudly in the side-room, and Henry asked: "What is the matter with Mama this morning?" Not daring to look him in the face, Sophie answered, "She has some sorrow." Then, getting up and placing herself behind his chair, and passing her hand caressingly over his hair, she continued, "Do you know why Mama is lamenting? It is because we have just told her that we have been received into the Catholic Church this morning."

Henry stopped eating and turned round to look Sophie in the face to make sure she was speaking seriously. Then, with a sneer, half of astonishment, half of displeasure, he said, resuming his breakfast, "Well at least one knows now what you are. Before, you were papists at heart, and now you will be so openly."

And Sophie concludes the narration of one of the

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most painful moments of her life by telling us that her mother, "putting on, as a sign of mourning, her old hat with a long black veil, went to spend the day in the cemetery," at the grave of her daughter, Emily. She did not know that this beloved child of hers, a deaf-mute, had also received Catholic baptism from their Maltese maid before departing for her heavenly home.*

Protestants and Catholics have come such a long way towards friendliness and unity in recent years that it is difficult for young people of today to imagine that, for centuries, a most disedifying narrowness of outlook and rigidity of attitude characterised the relations between these Christian Churches. The Leeves family belonged to the earlier period and, as such, their reactions are to be understood in that context. It is in point here to observe also that a convert to Catholicism tends, particularly in the early years, to be rather judgmental towards the religion she has relinquished. Hopefully, as time passes, she acquires a more balanced viewpoint. It will be found that, in this, Sophie is no exception.

Hailing from a family of Anglican pastors, Sophie and her sister, Mary Ann, spiritual twins, as it were, had at last come to the end of their long search and had, that morning, received Catholic Baptism from Father Seagrave S.J.** at the Church of the Gesù, Malta. At the Holy Mass that followed, they had received their First Communion, about which Sophie writes:

"It is impossible to describe this Jesus. He whom

* Autobiography, Part I, pp. 24-25.

** Spelt this way in the Autobiography, 'Segrave' in the Jesuit records.

*we had desired and sought so long, came to take possession of the hearts of His two poor lambs. The Good Shepherd had brought us on His shoulders into his fold and now he put the seal on our happiness by coming himself to dwell in us! Oh, my God! I had so many things to say to Him that I think I said nothing. I remained engulfed in silence, but I felt that I possessed my God. I had everything. The whole world was nothing to me any more."**

"I remained engulfed in silence." This attraction for contemplative prayer had manifested itself before and would continue to remain with Sophie and grow stronger as the years passed.

"But now," she continues, "it was necessary to return home and encounter the indignation of my mother and my brother, for we could no longer hide what we had done."**

Earlier, they had thought it advisable, after much deliberation, to keep the matter secret from the family, till they had been baptised. Otherwise, Mrs Leeves would have raised "terrible obstacles." Sophie records how much suffering this concealment caused them. The day before the Baptism, they had made their confession and, when Sophie returned home (Mary Ann had returned earlier), their mother, not knowing where she had been, showed so much affectionate concern for her that her heart smote her. Then, too, that evening there were visitors and the sisters had to put on a forced gaiety, "to talk and be pleasant and have music," and

* *Autobiography, Part I, p. 23.*

** *Ibid., p. 22.*

when, at last, the visitors had gone and prayers were over, they had to tear themselves away from the drawing-room, where their mother and brother remained, for "we thought," says Sophie, "of the desolation that was going to come on them the next day. The family was going to be broken up and we would be separated as by an abyss from all those we loved most in the world."*

Sophie Leeves was born on 1 October, 1823, at Constantinople, the second child of Henry Daniel and Marina Leeves. Sophie's parents were English. Her mother, Marina Haultain, was the daughter of a colonel in the English army and many of her relatives had been officers in the army or royal navy. No doubt, some of the courage and stamina that ran in the family on her mother's side rubbed off on to Sophie. From her father's side, she inherited toughness of another type. Her father, Henry Daniel Leeves, a minister of the Anglican Church, had studied at Oxford. He came from a family which numbered many Protestant ministers. His father was the well-known William Leeves, Rector for half a century (1779-1828) of the Anglican church at Wrington near Bristol in Somersetshire.

William Leeves, Sophie's grandfather, strikes the reader as one of those people who combined light-hearted cheerfulness with sanctity, a blend that G.K. Chesterton might term essential sanity. One sees him as a loving husband and father and, in later years, his affectionate concern for his extended family, including sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren, his

* *Ibid.*

longing for their presence and his joy at their visits from near and far, makes one wish that, in family relationships, at least, the world had remained unchanged. With such a patriarch, it is not surprising that the family, however extended in number and distance, remained close-knit. For Henry Daniel and Marina, in faraway Turkey and Greece, the Wrington rectory spelt home, to which they returned periodically and especially in any need or crisis. The same was true of other Leeves sons and daughters. The diary of family events,* kept by a granddaughter, Anna Maria Elsdale (Mrs Moon), has captured the warmth and closeness of the family atmosphere of which William Leeves was the inspiration.

It was also a cultured household, filled with literature, music and numerous friends. Wrington was the home of writers like Locke and Hannah More. The latter was a neighbour and close friend of the Leeves family. William Leeves played the violoncello, and married Anne Wathen, who was "celebrated for her skilful violin playing." About 1770, when William was twenty-two and an ensign in the King's 1st Footguards, he had composed the tune of the ballad, "Auld Robin Gray," written by Lady Anne Lindsay. The original manuscript of the song in Leeves's handwriting is preserved in the British Museum.** All his life he sang in a beautiful voice and composed both music and poetry.

His love for artistic things, as well as his concern for his family, found expression in the little thatched cottage on the sea-front in Weston-super-Mare, intended and used as a summer holiday house. Built in 1774,

* A.M. Moon, *In Memoriam*.

** R.B.H. "Romance of the Countryside", *The Somerset Herald*, Sat, May 25, 1935.

a part of the cottage may still be seen. It is now a café. Though not architecturally outstanding, it is, of course, of immense historical interest, being "about the only piece of old Weston left."* Its beauty lies in its picturesque appearance. Little wonder, for "Leeves certainly knew how to make the cottage look attractive." As built by him, this summer residence of his was "quite a commodious and snug place." Only the eastern portion with the high thatched roof remains today. It must have been a charming place over a century ago, "with its jasmine-draped windows, its outer wall covered with ivy and creepers, figs and grapes, its lawns dotted with flower-beds, and a rockery smothered in bloom. One would like to be able to say that the air of 'Auld Robin Gray'... was composed at Weston or Wrington.**

As Rector of Wrington, William Leeves is said to have edified his congregation, being "a religious man, a pastor devoted to his flock, happy in ministering to his people." But there was no *display* of religion. He followed and inculcated the faith "in the true spirit of meekness and humility." He lived cheerfully from day to day, concerned about bringing joy into the lives of others, least concerned about himself. It was characteristic of his self-forgetfulness that, according to his son, Henry Daniel, the music of 'Auld Robin Gray' got into print, not only without the composer's consent, but even without it being known who the composer was. So that, when it became popular, as it soon did, it was taken to be an old Scottish melody. Nor was William Leeves anxious to correct the error. But a close friend of his urged him strongly to re-publish the music in his

* *Seven-Bristol Evening Post*, April 15, 1953.

** R.H.B., *op. cit.*

own name – which he finally did, over forty years after its composition and, even then, only with a *Collection of Sacred Airs*, which he had also composed.

To sum up,

*It is necessary if the reader wishes to get a true picture of the musical parson and his family, to place them against the background to which they belonged; a period when powdered wigs, three-cornered hats, knee breeches and buckled shoes were fashionable for men; when ladies' heads were crowned with most elaborate coiffures and their flounced skirts rustled and their fans fluttered in the candle-lit ballrooms; when mad King George shuffled in and out of sanity; when the French Revolution raged and the wooden ships of England were challenging the French, the Dutch and anybody who crossed their path; when coaches were the only means of conveyance from one town to another; and when highway robbery, public executions, duelling, gaming, heavy drinking and loose morals were commonplace. It was in such a world that the Rev. William Leeves had perforce to live and rear his children, and he seems to have found the rectory at Wrington and the (Little) Cottage at Weston a complete escape from the coarseness and excesses of his age. The picture which has been handed down to us of the Leeves family has all the beauty, grace and charm of an old painting with something of the atmosphere of 'The Vicar of Wakefield'!**

The Rev. Bernard Leigh, Rector of Wrington as recently as 1966, describes in a letter, the subsequent

* R.H.B., op. cit.

fate of the rectory that William Leeves had lived in. It had been sold about twenty years before the time of Leigh's writing, "being overlarge for the priest in these days", and the new owners had remodelled it till "it looks very different from the early 19th century house young Sophie Leeves knew." The church she worshipped in had also undergone much alteration in its furnishings. Reverend Leigh is quite certain that the changes which took place about 1860 and since would please her very much. He is probably referring to the changes introduced into the Church of England by Dr. Pusey. It is a most beautiful church, Leigh continues. The 14th – 15th century building is as Sophie knew it and the little Sanctus bell of the 15th century, inscribed Sancta Maria above the chancel, is the same one that she heard. The big bells, however, have been improved and their number raised to ten.*

Shortly after their marriage, Henry Daniel Leeves and his wife set out for Constantinople, where Leeves was chaplain to the English Embassy. Henry Daniel and Marina had five children. The eldest, Henry, was born at Odessa on 16 October, 1821. The next three children – Sophie on 1 October, 1823; Mary Ann on 24 June, 1825; and Emily on 19 January, 1827 – were born at Constantinople. Catharine, the youngest, was born on 1 January, 1829, in London. Emily was born deaf and dumb, and also had a defective heart. She died at Malta at the age of twenty.

In 1822, George Canning had become foreign secretary of England and leader of the House of Commons.

* Rev. Bernard Leigh to Sister Rose Marie A.C., Wrington, 30 Dec., 1966.

The emperors of Austria and Russia with the King of Prussia formed the "Holy Alliance", seeking to control the whole of Europe, a policy which was very unpopular. Rebellion broke out in Spain, Portugal and Naples, within the countries themselves and from their colonies. In Eastern Europe, the Greeks raised an insurrection against the hateful tyranny of the Turks. It is with this latter situation that we are concerned in this story.

Canning warmly shared in the widespread sympathy for the Greeks, waging, as they were, a heroic struggle for freedom against Turkey. The Russians were also strongly in favour of the Greeks, probably intending to extend their power on the ruins of the Turkish Empire. On March 26, 1826, Russia sent out an ultimatum to Turkey, presenting certain demands. Threatened, Mahmud of Turkey carried out certain army reforms in June, 1826. The body of Turkish infantry, known as Janissaries, formed the Sultan's guards and the main fighting force of the Turkish army. Disapproving of the reforms, they revolted against Mahmud, but many of them were massacred. Although Mahmud managed to arrive at an agreement with Russia, this did not put an end to the Turco-Greek hostility. Mahmud entered into alliance with Ibrahim of Egypt and the latter's war of ruthless extermination and depopulation of Morea (southern Greece) angered the civilised world. The Greeks, in despair, appealed to England for help, and England, Russia and France decided on joint intervention. The allied admirals, having tried and failed to persuade the Turkish commander to accept a truce, entered Navarino Bay (where the Turkish fleet lay anchored), in order to enforce the truce. But a chance shot by the Turks on the allied fleet caused a naval battle, 20 Oct., 1827, and the Turco - Egyptian fleet was destroyed.

It will be remembered that these politically troubled years were also those in which Henry Daniel Leeves and Marina were bringing up their young family in Turkey. During the Greek Insurrection, Henry Daniel Leeves, compassionate pastor as he was, assisted the Greeks, hiding them in his house and saving them from the Turks. Sophie was three years old when the massacre of the Janissaries took place, and all the English had to leave Constantinople, which was Mohammedan territory. There being no steamers in those days, Henry Daniel put his wife and three children (Henry, Sophie and Emily) on board a merchant ship bound for London, himself remaining behind with little Mary Ann, to follow later, when England declared war on Turkey, in the English warship which would carry the English ambassador and his retinue. "This", Sophie tells us, "was the first of 25 voyages on the Mediterranean that I made during my life."*

Arrived in England after a long voyage, Mrs. Leeves went with her children to the house of her father-in-law to await the arrival of her husband and Mary Ann. It took about a year before Henry Daniel Leeves and Mary Ann, now three years old, were able to come to England. The house was naturally filled with joy. Everyone wanted to hear little Mary Ann say her prayers in Greek, which was the only language she knew. In fact, the first, or one of the first, languages Sophie herself spoke was Greek.

The family stayed on in England for some time. One day, seeing her brother and cousins sliding down the

* *Autobiography, Part I, p. 1.*

balustrade of the staircase, four-year-old Sophie thought she could do the same. The little boys might have told her she could not, she was a girl. Her little feminine heart might have felt outraged. She could do it and she would. That she was smaller than the boys and had not yet learned the art could not have entered into her calculations. The result was that she fell over the handrail and was picked up unconscious. "Two of my front teeth remained on the landing," she narrates, "and another clung only by a thread. My mouth was horribly cut, it was stitched and for a long time I could not eat anything solid."^{*}

She learnt a lesson from this incident, no doubt, and from others too. But her father also disciplined her. Henry Daniel had just explained to his two older daughters that theft was against God's commandments and, as such, should never be committed. A short while later, the little girls entered the dining-room, where the table was laid for tea. Sophie felt a great desire to help herself to a spoonful of milk. No sooner did she do so, than Mary Ann went and reported the deed to her father. "I have told you," said Rev. Leeves to Sophie, "that theft is a sin and should not be committed, and here I find you stealing. Now, I am going to whip you," which, Sophie attests, he did. "I have never forgotten it," she adds, "although I was more ashamed than hurt. But, as I was very proud, it was enough, so that I have never stolen anything again in my life." It was the same with falsehood, she confides. "I was too proud to lie, but I was disobedient and proud to the point of not being able or willing to ask pardon of my

* Ibid., p. 2.

mother, even when I had done something foolish."^{*} Such self-knowledge was probably a much later development, but it certainly contributed to what Sophie became in the years ahead. In training her charges, she would repeatedly take advantage of opportune moments to stress the importance of striving after humility, while, at the same time, recognising the difficulty of practising this virtue. On the other hand, her strength of character, coupled with an innate streak of wholesome pride, would lead her to stand up against great odds in the work she was destined to do.

While Henry Daniel Leeves and his family were still at Wrington, they were privileged to witness the last days and holy death, in 1828, of the venerable Patriarch of the family, the Rev. William Leeves. His son, Henry Daniel, in the opening lines of a sermon preached at Wrington church after his father's death, gives an account of the event:

Very soon after his last appearance in this pulpit, to which exertion he was evidently unequal, another attack of his complaint seized him, from which it was apparent, both to those around him and to himself, that in this weakened state he could not recover. He then desired that his absent children might be sent for, whom he expressed an anxiety to see once more... It pleased God to hear and fulfil his wish, I think in its fullest extent, and to grant at the same time to his Family the consolation of seeing their Father pass out of this world without pain of body and in tranquillity of mind, through the ex-

* Ibid.,

*ercise of a truly Christian faith, and hope, and resignation to the will of God."**

The very last moments of William Leeves are thus recorded by his daughter, Marianne (Elsdale): "We echoed our prayers, and our dear father's eyes were lifted up to heaven in supplication. A melting scene! He now ceased to speak or to notice us... He continued thus near a quarter before three in the morning of Whitsunday, when he breathed his last, surrounded only by five of his children (William, Henry Daniel, Marianne, Elizabeth), Sophia Leeves being included. Dear George was absent in America."^{***} The Sophia mentioned here is not little Sophie, but her mother, who is mentioned by this name several times in the annals of the family.

If it is true, as the saying goes, that as you live so shall you die, the death of William Leeves was an index to his life of faith in the Saviour, of hope in his merits and of charity to all, his family, the household servants and his parishioners, rich and poor alike. Anna Maria Moon testifies that the Leeves family were always "energetic in works of charity... 'feeding the hungry' and 'binding up the broken-hearted'." So that it might be said that, to them, the promise was fulfilled, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor and the needy." The Lord was with them and, when the end came, "with smiles of peace and joy, they passed to the mansions prepared for them in their 'Father's house' above."^{****}

William Leeves was buried at Wrington and a tablet to his memory may be found in the south porch of the

* A.M. Moon, op. cit.
 ** Ibid.
 *** Ibid.

church. Other monuments to his memory are the ballad, "Auld Robin Gray", his compositions of sacred music, and his poems, among which two may be mentioned, "To a Lady Playing the Violin", celebrating his early love for Anne Wathen, who later became his wife, and "The True Christian's Death", commemorating her departure from this world.

Writes Rev. Bernard Leigh, "I was so interested and delighted to hear the story of the beginnings of your Institute by this Foundress who came from Wrington Rectory," and our hearts echo his sentiments when he concludes, "I like to think that the Rector of those days did something to inspire a love and devotion to our Lord which was the seed from which your community has now blossomed."^{**}

* Rev. Bernard Leigh, op. cit.

Chapter 3

GREECE

Soon after the birth, in June, 1829, of the youngest child, Catharine, Rev. Henry Daniel Leeves, singularly gifted with the knowledge of languages, was commissioned to undertake the translation of the Bible into Greek (He knew nine languages, including Latin, Greek and Hebrew). For this purpose, the family set sail for Corfu, an island off the West coast of Greece, a place readers may remember having encountered in Gerald Durrell's books on animals. Corfu belonged, at the time, to England. Henry was left behind in school. A teacher, Miss Thornton, who had been given charge of Sophie and Mary Ann, went along with the family.

Two or three years later, Miss Thornton returned to England and Henry came out to Greece with a tutor, under whom all three children were placed. This man wielded the stick on the girls as he would on boys and, consequently, Sophie and Mary Ann were removed from his charge and placed under other teachers to learn French and music. Emily and Catharine were still very small. It was only at this time that the parents discovered that Emily was deaf and, therefore, dumb.

She was four. Naturally, Henry Daniel and Marina were grief-stricken.

The children never went to a boarding-school or even to a day-school. Their mother was too possessive of them and would never hear of being separated from them. She would spare herself no pains, however, to give her children a good education. And so, when Henry profited no more from the tutor than the girls had, she took advantage of the time when her husband had to go to Greece, to take the rest of the family on a trip to Switzerland to bring a teacher and a nurse, and also to accustom the children to speak French. They found a tutor named Mr. Wenger at Berne and a nurse at Geneva. These two persons remained in the family for many years. Mrs. Leeves had seen to it that both were Protestants.

Henry Daniel Leeves was very keen that his children should learn old Greek, so as to be able to read the New Testament in the original language, and he personally checked the work of the tutor by asking Sophie and Mary Ann to read to him each morning from the Greek New Testament and translate it into English. This ability, Sophie states, "was one of the greatest helps to my conversion later."* And this is how they learnt also French, German, Italian. In addition, they were taught instrumental and vocal music, drawing and other accomplishments.

Thus, the Leeves family in Greece carried on the cultural traditions inherited from the family in England.

* Autobiography, Part 1, p.4.

"Music above all was a passion in our family," Sophie records; "my father, my mother, my brother, my sisters, we were all passionately fond of music. Whole mornings were spent in practising and the evenings in singing ... We would do without eating to enjoy music, and not the music of the theatre, which my father did not want, but good, solid music, in the best taste, religious music of Handel, Haydn, Beethoven etc."** They used to practise church music also with their friends and, "as in our own family" she adds, "we had all the four parts necessary for a choir, I must say the singing was very nice."*** Henry Daniel Leèves had a beautiful voice and sang the bass, Henry sang tenor, Mary Ann second soprano and Sophie first soprano. Their music teacher was a Catholic and the organist of the chapel of the King of Peace. He used to bring Catholic music for them to sing outside church, such as Bossini's *Stabat Mater*. "I remember even now," says Sophie years later, "the enthusiastic delight we used to take in executing the splendid quartets with the four voices all in the family, which blended together perfectly, and Mama used to sit by and listen enchanted, whilst our music master accompanied on the piano." Her father, she continues, did not quite like all the verses of the *Stabat Mater* and she remembers him changing the words, "Per te Virgo semi defensus" for "Per te Christo semi defensus," but it was done "without irreverence and in good faith because he believed that Our Lady ought not to be prayed to."****

Travelling was considered a very important element in the education of the children, and the whole family –

* *Ibid.*

** *Epistolary Autobiography*, 11 Dec., 1892.

*** *Ibid.*

"father and mother, servants and all" – made numerous journeys through the years." During my life," says Sophie, "I have made twenty-five voyages to and fro in the Mediterranean only, besides twice by the Straits of Gibraltar round to England and my voyage to India and back. I have crossed the Alps six or seven times at least and have been in nearly all the countries of Europe. I have lived at London, Paris, Rome, Athens, Bethlehem, Geneva, Naples, Malta."**

About 1833, when Sophie was ten years old, they travelled in Italy and Switzerland. Passing through Tyrol, they were impressed by the piety of the people and in the Cathedral at Milan by the body of St. Charles Borromeo. "My father", Sophie remembers, "looked at it with great respect and we children with much curiosity."*** Then she continues: "We used to travel in what we called in Italian a *vetturino* for there were no railways at that time, and stage travelling was too fatiguing for such young children." A *vetturino* is a large coach with two compartments and a seat behind for a footman, besides the coachman's boy, and drawn by four horses. The luggage was piled up on top. "Into this, the whole family – Papa, Mama, five children, our tutor, my mother's maid, a man servant – used to pack and travel for weeks, at a short day's journey, stopping, of course, every night and sometimes for two or three days when we arrived at some town where anything interesting was to be seen, such as museums, painting, fine churches etc."**** They never travelled on Sundays.

Travelling in this unhurried way is one of the most

* *Ibid.*, 20 Nov., 1982.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*

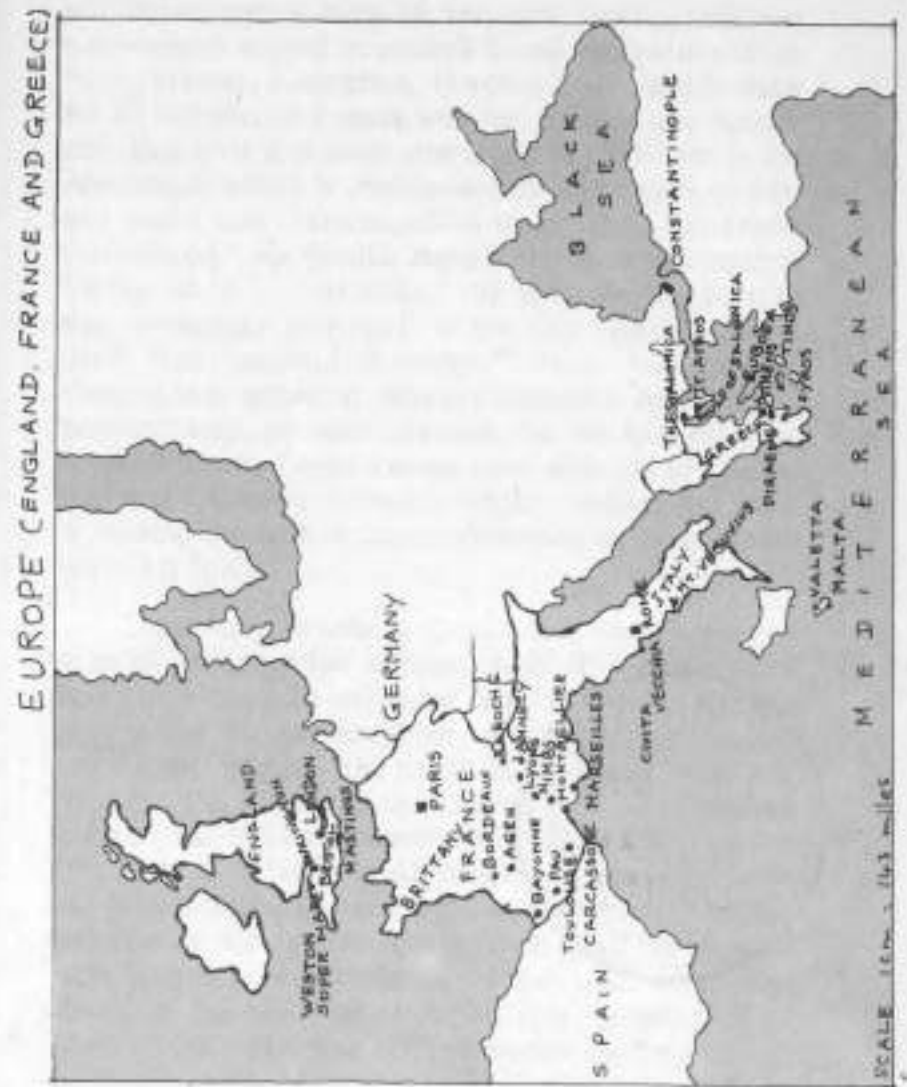
GREECE

Edward Schuchert

effective ways of becoming educated in the true sense and Sophie's account of these family excursions, as well as other opportunities the children were given, indicates that Henry Daniel and Marina Leeves attached importance to what, in their days, was called a liberal education, and included art, culture and breadth of outlook. This is all the more admirable when we recall that these were Victorian days, an age not favouring women's education overmuch. Nor did the parents neglect the education of Emily, their little deaf and dumb child. "During our journey in Switzerland and Italy," Sophie recalls, "we visited several celebrated asylums for the deaf and dumb."* Mrs. Leeves got acquainted with the system for instructing them and with picture books and other material which were used to educate them, and when the family settled down in Greece, they set to work to teach little Emily to read and write and count.

On their return from Switzerland, the family had settled down on the island of Syros, south-east of Greece. Although Mr. Leeves was very much engrossed in intellectual and religious pursuits, he did not neglect the material well-being of his family. He bought land, first at Athens and later at a village, Castanietisa,** north of Euboea, opposite the Gulf of Salonika. At Athens, he built a large house with a pretty garden adjoining, and "it was in this house," Sophie reminisces, "that I have spent the happiest years of my girlish days."*** Sophie was twelve at this time. "Athens," she says, "is a beautiful place full of reminiscences of ancient Greece and ruins of magnificent heathen

* Ibid., 24 Nov., 1892.
 ** Castanietisa is no longer known in Greece.
 *** Epistolary Autobiography, 24 Nov., 1882.



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temples of olden times, built all of white marble with sculptures and statues of exquisite beauty, and we were taught to read in ancient Greek the grand old authors, Homer, Xenophon, Herodotus etc. which were full of histories of heroes who had lived in this famous city. But what was most interesting to Christians is the Areopagus, where St. Paul preached to the men of Athens about the Unknown God which they ignorantly worshipped." As Sophie writes, she feels a nostalgia for the place "... how often," she sighs, "have I been in that Areopagus and read, in the very Greek St. Paul used, that beautiful discourse."* Thus, the classical element was added to Sophie's education in the most practical way, by circumstances, by the fact that the family of Henry Daniel Leeves were with him in Greece and that he, being himself a scholar, realised the value of making the best of the opportunities so easily available to his family.

Their summer villa at Castanletisa was an experience of an altogether different type. The family went there to escape the excessive heat of Athens, and Sophie would always remember with nostalgia the vacations at this village - the travel on horseback or by sailboat and the last lap of the journey by mule or donkey caravan led by the peasants. The house was built on "the knee of a hill" and surrounded by peasants' houses. Sophie loved the scenery, the view from the front balcony of the house, "the verdant plain surrounded with ravines and undulations of the land, which ran down to the sea that stretched blue to the Gulf of Volo,"** the mountains of Thessalonica on the horizon,

* Ibid.
 ** Autobiography, part 1, p.5.



with villages outlined in the distance. The sunsets, with their "warm tints of rose, violet and orange to light up this picturesque landscape," turned this place into an earthly Paradise.

They spent their time in the village teaching the children to read, write and sew. Each one had her own little group and Sophie remembers especially a boy of eight or nine, the son of the village priest, who was being prepared to succeed his father in the priestly function. He was very intelligent and Sophie taught him the old Greek grammar, which he could read and write almost as well as she herself. Unfortunately, he was to play a tragic role in the life of the Leeves family some years later.

When they were not with the children, Sophie and her sisters would go riding in the woods and oak forests with their father or brother. They would "scamper all over the country, visiting their neighbours in the villages or climbing up the hills behind." "Don't fancy," Sophie cautions, "that there were fine roads - oh, no! There were goat paths and steep ruts and ravines to scramble through."* But they did not mind, and seldom or never had a fall. Nearer home, behind the house, there rose a mountain covered with a beautiful forest of oak trees where they could ride and walk to their heart's content. "I never saw a more beautiful place," says Sophie, "and I used to delight in our country life there during the summer."**

Describing her father, Sophie says, "He had perfect

* Epistolary Autobiography, 24, Nov., 1982.
** Ibid.

command over himself and, therefore, exercised over those around him a wonderful influence for good." They always had family prayers, morning and evening, and sometimes the children used to peep through the keyhole of their father's study to see him kneeling and praying. "My father," writes Sophie, "although a Protestant, was a man of great virtue; if he had received the grace of being a Catholic, he would have been a saint (by which she means, presumably, a canonized saint). I was twenty-one years old when he died and I always saw him a good father, a good husband, good to his servants, excessively charitable to the poor...practising conscientiously his religion... he had a depth of humility which astonished me."* Many people, she adds, repaid his kindness with ingratitude, but he would not harbour resentment against them, nor would he permit his family to talk against these people.

Comparing both her parents, Sophie describes her mother "as a very different character" from her father. "She was very pretty and fair with blue eyes and long golden hair which she used, as a girl, to wear in ringlets down to her waist, but in religious matters she was a deeply bigoted Protestant and not, like my father, open to conviction. She was altogether devoted to her husband and children and really sacrificed herself to take care of us, watch over us and have us brought up in the best way possible." The children used to say, "One word from Papa makes more impression than a whole long lecture from Mama."** Indeed, Mrs. Leeves loved her children with such an ardent love that she forgot, says Sophie, that they belonged

* Autobiography, Part I, p.7.
** Epistolary Autobiography, 12 Nov., 1982.

to God more than to herself. She never resigned herself to the conversion to Catholicism and call to religious life of her two daughters, Sophie and Mary Ann. On this account, she was unhappy and wretched to the end of her life.

When Henry was sixteen, his father took him to England to prepare to enter the University of Oxford, and the rest of the family went to spend the summer at Chimora, ancient Sparta, with an American Presbyterian missionary who was skilled in the education of deaf-mutes. Under his instruction, little Emily learnt to read the Bible, and to distinguish between right and wrong, reward and punishment. Sophie, who carried on teaching her, tells how Emily underwent a transformation as she grew older. From being irritable and ready to lie, she became gentle and patient in her sufferings and would not tell a lie for anything. Thus, when she died at twenty, she was "innocent, like a child in the cradle." When she was about to die, the Catholic maid, Teresa, taking advantage of a moment when no one else was in the room, baptised her. This she revealed to Sophie and Mary Ann many years later, when they had become Catholics.

In 1840, Elizabeth, Henry Daniel's sister, came to stay with the family at Athens and wrote the following poem for her niece, Emily:

The Deaf and Dumb Child's Hymn

*Jesus, Thou lovest me!
I smile, and think of Thee;
I smile, and think of Thee;
For Thou hast died for me.*

*Jesus to Thee I come,
For I am deaf and dumb;
O speak unto my heart,
And silently impart,*

*The way to go to heaven,
The way to be forgiven,
The way from sin to cease,
The way to die in peace.*

*Then, then my longing ear
Thy trumpet's voice shall hear,
And then my silent tongue
Shall burst into a song. **

It was only on the father's return from England, that the family went to live in their own home at Athens as, earlier, Rev. Leeves had been under a constraint to allow the ambassador to live there. In Athens, there was a great deal of social life. Mrs. Leeves kept open house, only there was never any dancing, for Rev. Leeves used to say that it did not befit the wife and family of a clergyman. Sophie was growing up and the gaiety suited her very well. She tells how, one evening, when they were having a fairly big party, she was dressed in white muslin and, passing in front of her mirror, she looked into it. "I am not as ugly as I thought I was," she mused, "it seems to me even that I am pretty:"** She accuses herself, as she writes years later, of the "venom" of vanity. Much depends, as we see, on the period one is living in. Today we would have called it acknowledging the truth as one sees it. But Sophie agrees that there was no real evil in her, for both her parents took the greatest care to see that

* A.M. Moon, op. cit.

** Autobiography, Part I, p.7.

nothing entered the lives of their children that could tarnish their purity of heart: dangerous novels, indecent fashions or unwholesome talk. Perhaps there was a bit of prudery in this – "we were never permitted to talk to the servants nor to see anyone, except in the presence of my mother herself or of someone trustworthy,"* says Sophie.

On the other hand, here in town, as at Castanietisa, they were encouraged by their parents' example to think of the poor and to serve them. One evening every week, Mrs. Leeves would have all the ladies of her acquaintance meet at her house to sew garments for the poor. "Each one of us," writes Sophie, "had adopted a small girl for whom we made clothes, and in order to procure for ourselves a little money we had thought of depriving ourselves of sugar in our tea. Then my father gave us each week a small white coin that we set aside and, when there was a sufficient sum, we bought some cloth to clothe our protégées. Never was it permitted to us to spend our small savings on dainty titbits or on similar things."** Love and concern for the poor was certainly a family heritage of the Leeves clan, for we have already seen that it was an important ingredient of the way of life at Wrington Rectory.

In religious matters, the parents were very strict. On Sundays, the family went to church twice a day, and Rev. Leeves always wanted the children to write in a notebook what each could remember of the sermon preached either by himself or by some other clergyman. "This used to be a dreadful penance for me," Sophie

* Ibid.

** Ibid.

confesses, "for I never could remember anything." No playthings or story-books or even music, except hymns, were permitted on Sundays, "so that," she complains, "we were somewhat puritanical, and Sundays were anything but happy days in my childhood. Later on," she continues on a more joyful note, "when ... we had got imbued with the new High Church Puseyitical views, we became more catholic."*

But she also sees a value in the upbringing her parents gave her: "I have only to bless God for having preserved me from much evil which I have seen elsewhere and for having given me such parents, who watched so carefully that no evil communications would come to our young minds either through books or from light companions."** As these lines are addressed years later to those who are in charge of training children, she adds, "I write all this ... that you may see what care must be used in bringing up children, where young minds are easily influenced for good and bad, and how strictly parents and teachers ought to watch over them. Of course," she goes on, "Catholic parents and children have infinitely more help than Protestants. They have the Holy Sacraments, and children are instructed for confessions which hinders innumerable sins."

When Sophie was seventeen, her mother took her to England, along with Mary Ann and Emily. Only Catherine was left behind with her father in Athens. It was time for Sophie and Mary Ann to receive their First Communion and Confirmation in the Anglican Church. The Bishop of Exeter confirmed them and, on the fol-

* Epistolary Autobiography, 12 Nov., 1892.

** Ibid.

lowing Sunday, they received their First Communion. Coming as she did from a very pious family, Sophie had seen her mother prepare carefully for the sacrament, book in hand. So, although Sophie's health was bad, she took great pains to prepare seriously "to receive this morsel of bread and drink this wine."^{*} And she recalls that since then she became more pious. It was 1839, the year, significantly, when the Oxford Movement in England was at its height.

Meanwhile, Sophie being at an age when young girls go out, her mother took her into London society, but, as she was often ill, she did not enjoy herself much. She longed to return to the beautiful climate of Athens and be near her father. But, before setting off again, Mrs. Leeves, ever eager to have her daughters add to their accomplishments, made them attend a dancing school and also take riding lessons.

When they finally set sail, Henry returned with them. Sophie tells how she became so ill *en route* that they were forced to break journey at Florence and she missed the sights of that city. In fact, even when she was permitted to travel again, Henry had to carry her into hotels, so weak was she. At last, they reached Athens, where Henry Daniel and Catherine were awaiting them at Piraeus, the port of Athens. It was indeed a happy family reunion.

In their absence, Rev. Leeves had been busy building an Anglican church at Athens. So far, he had, as Embassy Chaplain, conducted the Sunday services for

* Autobiography, Part I, p.8.

the English residents in the dining-room of the English minister. As the church building was reaching completion, he began preparations for its consecration, which would be performed by the Anglican Bishop of Gibraltar. One day, Sophie and other members of the family, together with some friends, were assembled in the church and were making suggestions regarding the fitting up of objects in the church and on the altar. Sophie makes it a point to tell us that the friends were "High Church" and also reminds us that, while Mrs. Leeves and her daughters had been in England, "we young people had got imbued with the new Puseyite doctrines then getting into vogue at Oxford and, therefore, were full of devotion for crosses, church music, altars and other ceremonials."^{**} Now, in Protestant churches, she explains, "there are no crosses or pictures."^{***} So, on this day, in the unfinished church, the young people suggested to Rev. Leeves that a pretty cross be made and put over the altar. "Some people," said Rev. Leeves, "have an objection to a cross." Standing close beside him was a young Anglican minister, a Mr. Anderson, nephew to Cardinal Manning, who later became a Catholic and a Jesuit. "Yes," he said quietly, responding to Rev. Leeves, "Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics." "My father," explains Sophie, "had a large mind, open to conviction, and these words removed all former objections. We had the joy of seeing a gilt cross put up."^{****}

The church would be consecrated during the pastoral visit of the Anglican Bishop of Gibraltar. Naturally, many people would have to be received at the

* Epistolary Autobiography, 11 Dec., 1982.

** *ibid.*

*** *ibid.*

Leeves house. In fact, they never lacked visitors. Sophie was now nineteen and Mary Ann seventeen. Their mother saw to it that they were dressed well and in good taste. Since their childhood, as was the custom in England, they dressed for dinner at six o'clock in dresses that were "low-necked but modest." From such details, it is evident that Sophie and her family kept to the typically English customs and culture, even here in far-away Greece.

All that has been said of the Leeves family, gives us the impression that they were upper middle class, affluent enough to be able to afford the time and the kind of luxuries not easily available to all - travelling or music, for instance - but which turned them into well-informed people. This acquisition of culture and taste was one of the merits of the slow and stately Victorian age which we, in this rat-race of the twentieth century, are the poorer without, propelling ourselves forward (or is it backward!), as we are, with lust for money and with little else.

Five years longer they lived together as a happy family, the father the centre around which they were "all united with one heart and with one mind." Each one loved and obeyed him without reserve, he was undoubtedly their master. And then the blow struck. God took him from them and the family was shattered. Rev. Leeves had long desired to go on a trip to the Holy Land, taking with him his two older daughters. For some reason, only one could go, and Sophie, whose prerogative it was to choose, decided to stay with her mother, and passed the opportunity over in favour of Mary Ann. In Easter week, 1845, Rev. Leeves and Mary Ann set out by boat for Smyrna and Beyrouth, planning

to go from there to Jerusalem by land. Before leaving, both Henry Daniel and his wife seemed to have a presentiment that he would not return. He made his will and Mrs. Leeves had his portrait made. Also, while embracing Sophie for the last time on the deck of the steamer, he said to her: "Sophie, I entrust your mother to you, take care of her and be her consolation."*

Sophie comes across to us as someone whom people could depend on and turn to in a time of necessity. She naturally stepped into her mother's shoes with the younger children. Her father could depend on her to be a support to her mother. And so it would continue to be all through her life. She would be, not the proverbial timid woman of her times, always in need of protection, but a pillar of strength to others. Having taken up a project, she would not spare herself any pains to see it through.

No sooner had the pilgrims departed, than the rest of the family set off for their summer home at Castanietisa. They had hardly arrived, when they received the shocking news that Rev. Leeves had died at Beyrouth. Arriving at Mount Carmel, he had fallen ill with fever and erysipelas. The Carmelite brothers there took care of him, especially Brother Angelo, who was a doctor. But, when the Protestant missionaries in Beyrouth heard of his illness, they came and took him and Mary Ann to Beyrouth, where he died a few days later, calm and perfectly resigned. When he heard from the minister that there was no hope for his life, he replied calmly: "I would have desired to live some more years for my

* Autobiography, Part 1, p. 12.

wife and my children, but God's will be done."* He received communion according to the rites of his Church, after which he fell into a sort of insensibility to all things around him. But he seemed to Mary Ann to behold invisible objects and from time to time with an air of calm dignity to wave off something on one side, saying, "Devil, fire," and then, looking towards the opposite side of the bed, with a look of astonishment, "I thought it was so!"** Who knows, Sophie wonders, "what God in his mercy revealed in his last moments to this dear soul?" He had always served God faithfully. "I have firm hope," she adds, "that God had mercy on his soul."***

Poor Mary Ann, just nineteen, was left alone and did not know how to get back to Greece. Meanwhile, when the news reached Castanietisa, the family was plunged into unfathomable grief, especially Mrs. Leeves. But they could not afford to indulge it. They had to make arrangements to fetch Mary Ann. Mrs. Leeves and Sophie left immediately for Smyrna. A friend of Rev. Leeves went to Beyrouth and brought Mary Ann to Smyrna, where she met her mother and sister and returned with them to Castanietisa. But the family would never be the same and they never again returned to live in the house at Athens as a family.

After his death, *The Times* carried an obituary of Rev. Henry Daniel Leeves, an extract of which reads thus:

We are much grieved to record the decease, at Bey-

* *Ibid.*

** *Ibid.*

*** *Epistolary Autobiography*, 11 Dec., 1982.

*routh, on the 8th ult. of the Rev. Henry D. Leeves, Chaplain of the British Embassy and minister of the English Episcopal Church at Athens, and for upwards of twenty-five years the zealous and valuable agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, first at Constantinople, and afterwards at Athens, previously to which he was for three years chaplain to the Factory at Madeira. He may in truth be said to have exiled himself from his native land for the Gospel's sake. The translation of the New Testament into the modern Greek language, and now in use throughout the Greek territory was accomplished under his immediate superintendence. He was the means of circulating 1,50,000 copies and mainly through his instrumentality and exertions the requisite funds were used for the completion of the new church at Athens. Mr. H. D. Leeves was a man of most unaffected and exemplary piety, and in all the relations of life combined in a remarkable degree the meekness and gentleness of the true Christian with great fervency of spirit. His firmness and decision of character, in implicit reliance on his Saviour's purchased gifts, sustained him through many arduous and trying scenes in the difficult position he filled, from which men, equally well-intentioned and of greater physical strength, might almost excusably have shrunk.**

The death of Rev. Leeves was the first crisis in the family, but it was only the forerunner of many others. Indeed, it was, says Sophie, the first sign of "the cross which began to settle down on the family."***

* Quoted, A.M. Moon, *op. cit.*

** *Autobiography*, Part I, p.13.

Chapter 4

PUSEYISM

It will be recalled that Mrs. Leves had taken Sophie and Mary Ann to England in 1839 to be confirmed and to receive First Communion. It was the year when the Oxford Movement in England was at its height. In 1841, Newman published the famous *Tract 90*, which brought the Movement to its crisis. Sophie tells us that, although, so far, she had been taught to follow the sentiments and doctrines of the Low Church, she now made the acquaintance of some relatives who followed the High Church, "which was nearly like what, later, was Puseyism and we were impassioned for the services mostly as they were sung in the Anglican Cathedrals."* By "we", Sophie is referring to herself and Mary Ann, for in religious matters, they shared much in common.

The Church of England, or Anglicanism, had

* *Autobiography, Part 1, p.8.*

emerged from the Reformation as an amalgam of Catholicism and Protestantism. In the early seventeenth century, the Catholic tradition, under the influence of famous Anglo-Catholic divines, like Lancelot Andrewes and William Laud, had triumphed over the Protestant element. But the revolution of 1688 had changed this state of things. Parliamentary influence had gained ascendancy, minimizing doctrine and fostering internal divisions, worldliness and a lukewarm attitude in the clergy. By 1800, the Anglican Church was badly in need of reform.

Newman, Keble, Froude, Pusey and others, mostly Church of England priests, started what came to be called the Oxford Movement. They aimed at purifying, renewing and vivifying the Anglican Church by freeing it from the secular influence of Parliament and reviving Catholic doctrine and practice. They believed that the only true remedy for the evil condition of the Church lay in the theological and spiritual renewal. The Catholic heritage of the Book of Common Prayer and the seventeenth century divines had to be recovered, the English Church had to "re-affirm her commitment to the almost forgotten Catholic truths" – authority in God's visible kingdom, the sacramental system, and apostolic succession (the bishops direct successors of the Apostles). These doctrines were to be elaborated and substantiated in a series of tracts.

Pusey's joining the movement was a great asset to the cause, for he had a reputation for both learning and holiness. Newman, Vicar of St. Mary's, Oxford, and a sincere and conscientious Anglican, with his acute, sensitive mind, his insight into the minds of others, his great capacity for friendship, became the natu-

ral leader of the movement. He exercised this leadership in many ways – through his sermons, his writings (including letters), his personal conversations. His aim was to prove his belief that the Church of England was an ideal, a *Via Media* between the extremes of Roman infallibility and Protestant private judgement. Characteristic of his thoroughness, he sought to give this thesis a sure theoretical basis and, to this end, he burnt the midnight oil to make a "theological investigation," studying the history of Christ's Church, the writings of the Fathers, the various heresies down the centuries. The result was that, in spite of himself, it began to grow on him that the Anglican Church was not what he had believed it to be, that there was no such thing as a *Via Media*. "The history of St. Leo showed me," he says, ".... The *Via Media* was an impossible idea."* Before he was fully conscious of where he was heading, his new convictions began to get into his writings and his sermons. The suspicions of his audiences were finally confirmed when he published *Tract 90*, a commentary on the Thirty-Nine Articles, interpreting them in as Catholic a sense as possible, torn as he was between the new insights he was unwilling to face and his love for the Anglican Church. A furore ensued. Newman, rather than retract what he had written, withdrew from the movement. Further reading and deep study convinced him that the Roman Catholic Church was the only true Church of Christ.

Meanwhile, Pusey was forbidden to preach for two years after a sermon he had given on the Holy Eucharist. Newman despaired of the Anglican Church and

* J.H. Newman, *Apologia*, p. 149.

withdrew into lay communion. For two years he struggled over the Catholic doctrines of Transubstantiation and devotion to the Blessed Mother and the saints. Finally, he saw his way and, on Oct. 9., 1845, made his profession of the Catholic faith.

After Newman's withdrawal, that is, in the eighteen-fifties, a long struggle was waged within the Church of England by Pusey, Keble and others to revive the Catholic Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Penance. Puseyites were condemned and even brought to court, but patience and perseverance gradually won partial acceptance of these sacraments in the Church of England. As a result of the efforts of Pusey and his friends, there was also a revival of Catholic ceremonial, the use of altar lights, Eucharistic vestments – not however, without opposition and even hostility at "the popish innovations." Another outcome of the Oxford Movement was the revival, in the Anglican Church, of religious orders. Pusey's foundation of a sisterhood in 1845 led to the foundation of other communities of men or women.

One wonders whether Henry Daniel Leeves or, for that matter, William Leeves, would have taken to the Puseyite reforms, if they had lived. Certain it is that the reforms came very soon to Wrington, about 1860, according to Rev. Bernard Leigh. Henry Daniel Leeves must have followed the progress of the Oxford Movement, for he died only in 1845, the year of Newman's submission to the Roman Catholic Church. Sophie tells us, besides, of the gilt cross placed over the altar in the Anglican Church that her father built, which would not have been done before the Puseyite reforms had begun.

It is a common experience that people usually make a personal religious choice or affirmation in their early teens. That seems to be the age when a person reaches the maturity required for such a decision – an observation which was borne out with the two Leeves girls. Sophie was seventeen and Mary Ann fifteen when they visited London and it turned out to be a crucial visit for them, from a spiritual point of view. England was humming with the Oxford tracts, and we know that Sophie and Mary Ann had been impressed by what was going on. Possibly, it was at this time that the seed was sown, the nurturing of which, as in the case of Newman, though less spectacularly, led them further than they foresaw. It was a case of responding in God's way to each circumstance as it turned up over the years ahead.

When they returned to Athens, there was talk of Sophie's marriage. At first, Sophie would not hear of it and wept, pleading that she was too young. But later, she and Mary Ann read books which initiated them into the doctrines and practices of the Puseyites and they sought God with all their hearts, although they had no one to guide them. Sophie's ambition was to become the wife of a minister and sing the offices of the church, teach poor children and look after the sick. It was Catharine who had exalted ideas about religious life, virginity, penance, fasting. She even disciplined herself, walked barefoot on gravel and tried to fast. But it was Mary Ann who was always closest to Sophie. Mary Ann wanted to be like St. Ethelreda, virgin wife of St. Edward, King of England. She was very intelligent, wrote well, "understood algebra like a man" and was a good musician. She was amiable, playful, very lively and indefatigable. "We were always united," says Sophie,

"in the sweetest and tenderest sisterly affection and had nothing to hide from each other, and in our religious quest to find the truth we were perfectly in agreement. **

On Easter Tuesday, 1840, Sophie had an experience which made a deep impression on her, though she did not know how to interpret it. She did not speak of it to anyone till long after, for she thought that by doing so she might lose a precious treasure. "It was early in the morning," she relates;

*no one in the house had yet risen and I was still in bed in my single room. Suddenly I was awakened by a sweet and clear voice that I heard with the ears of the mind as well as those of the body. It said in English: 'Peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I to you. I opened my eyes and remained motionless to listen to the celestial harmony of this voice which seemed to die away in the distance. I cannot express the effect that it had on my mind. I never knew what it was. Everything was silent in the house, but it seemed to me like a voice that came from heaven; I knew who it was that had uttered these words and I kept them to myself like a treasure that I never wished to communicate except after long years when I had entered the Church.***

That God may have communicated with Sophie in this way is possible, for we know that he does speak words to people which are audible, at least to their in-

* Autobiography, Part 1, p.11.

** Ibid.

terior senses. The authenticity of such locutions lies in the fruits produced. In Sophie's life there would be several occasions when God would thus manifest himself in a palpable way.

Soon after her father's death, a young English navy officer asked for Sophie in marriage and, Mrs. Leeves having given her consent, they were engaged. The marriage would take place only after two years, as the young man could not leave his service before then. Now, Henry wished to learn the art of rearing silk-worms at Naples in order to introduce it into his estate. So, it was decided that all should go along and spend the winter there. They stayed with a family of their acquaintance at Portici near the foot of Mount Vesuvius. The volcano was just in the season of eruption and the view of it was splendid, as it interruptedly threw up liquid lava with flames and smoke. At night, Sophie tells us, the sight was "awfully beautiful." There is an expression, "See Naples and die," and Sophie understood its meaning when they all set out one evening to ascend the mountain in order to view the sunset as they went up. "In truth it was beautiful," Sophie exclaims,

fairy-like to contemplate midway up Vesuvius that sunset over the bay of Naples all studded with vessels and boats, those splendid rich colours in the warm Italian sky, the fine city of Naples with the palaces and churches lying all round the calm bay and the picturesque villas spreading far and wide. Then, just above, the crater of Vesuvius vomiting up torrents of molten lava which rolled slowly and majestically down the mountain; at intervals a sound like subterranean thunder was heard and with a roar a

shower of fiery matter, stones, lava etc. was thrown high into the air and then fell with a fearful crash all around the crater. At times, as we went up the side of the mountain, immense stones came rolling down and we had to be on the look-out to keep out of their way as they bounded past!

"Of course," she says, allaying our fears for her and her companions, "we cannot go near the crater, but we sat down by the side of the fiery molten river in part covered with the lava cooling or cooled, and I just got upon it, but soon jumped off, for my boots would have been burnt." They had brought their supper with them and, after the hard climb, ate with a good appetite." But the sight was wonderful," and Sophie remembers thinking that the feeling of God and His almighty power was the only one to fill one's mind and one's whole being there on the top of that volcano in eruption at night and lighted by the flames sprung from its crater. It was very cold up there, but they warmed themselves at the river of lava before retracing their steps homeward. Sophie, being not quite well and very weak, had been carried up in a chair by two men, but coming down she walked, supported on either side by Henry and an old friend." It was like sliding and slipping down the almost perpendicular descent with one's clothes following, and rolling the stones and ashes on one's heels!!" What an expedition it had been! Laughing all the way down, they reached home at midnight, each having worn out a pair of shoes.

In Sophie's description of Vesuvius, as in those of

* Epistolary Autobiography, 17 December, 1892.
** Ibid.

Castanietisa and Athens, we discern a writer with a rare gift of observation and a singular power in the use of descriptive words and phrases.

It was here, at Portici, that Sophie began to feel that there was something in Catholic churches which was absent from the Protestant churches, and she would kneel and pray whenever she visited Catholic churches with her brother and sisters." My heart seemed empty and languishing after I know not what,"* she ruminates.

While here, she was again taken ill. One day, in the public gardens of Chiaga, she was suddenly seized with severe convulsions, which naturally alarmed her sisters, who were with her, and her mother, in obedience to the doctor's orders, packed her off to England with her brother, to spend some time with the parents of her fiancé. Sophie says she was also disturbed in her mind because of the attraction she felt to enter into a Catholic church to pray. Something seemed to be drawing her there. Mrs. Leeves, with her three other daughters, went to Berne and from there in the spring came to London. *En route*, they had gone to Rome, where Mary Ann and Catharine heard from Puseyite friends that there were Anglican ministers in London who heard confessions. The Leeves girls resolved that, as soon as they reached England, they would confess their sins. In fact, so impatient was Catharine to do so, that, when, in St. Peter's, Rome, they passed before a confessional, with an English priest waiting inside, Mary Ann had all she could do to prevent Catherine from entering.

* *Autobiography, Part 1, p.13.*

So, in spring, they were all re-united in England. The journey had done Sophie good and she had recovered completely. She had met her fiancé in his home and grown to love him, but, "I felt nonetheless in the depths of my heart," she says, "that something was lacking to me. I searched for God, and it seemed to me that I had a weight, which I wished to be rid of."** Like her sisters, she had heard of confession in the Anglican Church and was delighted that Mary Ann and Catharine had introductions to the Puseyite minister of Margaret Chapel, the place where this movement began in the Anglican Church. So they went, one after another, to make their confessions to Mr. Richards, clergyman of Margaret Chapel. Catharine, who was the most impatient to confess, got an appointment and went in first. Then Mary Ann, and finally Sophie. The Puseyites had no confessionals at the time, nor did the clergymen hear confessions in their churches, perhaps due to the hostility the Puseyite innovations evoked, but great mystery regarding it was observed. A few years later, they were doing almost everything the way the Catholics did, for general acceptance had made them bolder.

Sophie's exclamatory remark in parenthesis regarding Mr. Richards, to the effect that "he was married and had children,"** seems strange to us at first. Whether in 1887, the time when Sophie was writing, or in 1848, when the encounter with Mr. Richards actually took place, no Catholic would have thought of connecting celibacy in any special way with the hearing of confessions, even though Vatican II was still almost a century in the future. So we find it strange to hear it

* *Ibid.*
** *Ibid, p.14.*

from a Protestant. It probably occurred to her only at the time of writing, when she was already a Catholic and, more important, in the light of an experience she had shortly after this confession. But, let us listen as she recounts this present experience:

*When he made me enter that small room, and sat down on a chair near what seemed to be an altar with a crucifix above, I think, and I fell on my knees a short distance away before another chair, for there was no confessional, I did not know how to set about it and I think that he was hardly more knowledgeable than I in the art of confessing, for he did not help me at all. However, I had the good will to confess myself and to tell all my sins, so that in spite of the shame that I felt in seeing myself opposite this stranger, I gave him the story of my whole life and of all that my conscience reproached me with. That was done in two meetings and when I had finished, he got up and gave me absolution according to the formula that the Anglican Church uses for those who are in danger of death, which is almost like that of the Catholic Church.**

She notes here that "he had no more right to give (the absolution) than you or I have. Yet," she says, "I felt so happy and light that I thought God had forgiven me and felt entirely changed."**

Those of us who are Catholics know how difficult it is to confess our sins to a man, even though we have been trained to it from childhood and taught to believe

* Ibid.

** Epistolary Autobiography, 26 Dec., 1892.

that the priest is the representative of God. Sophie had no such training, nor probably had she, at the time, the true faith that the Catholics have. We are, therefore, filled with admiration for her courage in shrinking from no pain whatever in taking the means, as she saw it, that would draw her closer to God. It was, no doubt, the work of grace.

After this, she felt at ease. Probably, she says, God considered her good faith and the humiliation she had submitted to. She and her sisters put themselves under the direction of Mr. Richards, whom they called "Father," wishing to lead "a wholly pious and devout life." Sophie gave up all her beautiful dresses and jewels and the three sisters began to wear the dress of the "devotees" of an Anglican congregation, which was so simple that Mrs. Leeves was annoyed, but they did not mind, as "obedience," Sophie explains "is not a Protestant virtue." They would go twice a day to Margaret Chapel, which was quite far from their house, and then visit the poor and sick of the parish allotted to them by their "Father."

Even her love for the young officer, Sophie tells us, was changed. It seemed to her that God had removed that affection, that he was calling her to be a religious. "I felt," she says, "as if Jesus had taken possession of my heart and that he had turned out all other affection and all other desire except to become a nun somehow or other."** She had heard that there were Anglican religious who were Sisters of Mercy and she wished to join them. At first, Mr. Richards did not approve of her

* Ibid.

breaking off her betrothal, but when he saw that the idea of the religious life persisted, he advised her to write to her fiancé and ask to be released of her engagement to him, that she "might be free to belong only to God." His reply was that "although distressed he did not wish to force her to be unhappy with him." So she was free now to join the Puseyite sisters. Mr. Richards told her that it must indeed be the will of God, for rarely did a man yield so easily as her fiancé had done.

It was not to be, however. Through circumstances, God led Sophie elsewhere. She had tried to say something to her mother, but she had got vexed and would not hear of it. Emily fell very ill and Mrs. Leeves decided to leave England to spend the winter in Malta. This plan came as a great disappointment to Sophie and Mary Ann, for they had been happy with their confessor and with their life as "devotees". In Malta, there were no Puseyites at all. Mary Ann got permission to stay on in England in the house of Dr. Pusey to take care of his daughter, and Sophie, with the rest of the family, embarked for Malta. As usual, Sophie was the support of her mother. Mrs. Leeves depended on her. Soon after their arrival in Malta, Emily died.

Penance
Now Sophie was inspired to practise penance – fasting, staying away from the fire for warmth, wearing a cross with a sharp point on her chest, tying a string tightly round her waist so that it entered her flesh – and this in order to be like the Catholics, whom she did not yet know. Her Anglican confessor in England

* Autobiography, Part 1, p. 15.

had forbidden her to enter a Catholic church, so she was deprived of the fulfillment of that desire. I had advanced much towards Catholicism, she says,

*without however having a doubt that I was outside the Catholic Church. I used to do all kinds of Catholic practices and devotions, such as fasting and penance – of course, out of my own head – for I had no confessor at Malta, but I used to go alone into the beautiful Cathedral at Valetta and, without knowing that Jesus was there in the Blessed Sacrament, I always went and knelt before the side altar where he resided to cry and weep over my sins all by myself. In time, the Good Shepherd drew His poor lamb to Himself even without my knowing He was there.**

Jesus was indeed drawing Sophie to Himself. Having tested the sincerity of her sorrow for sin through confession and penance, He attracted her by the power of His Real Presence, in spite of her ignorance and consequent lack of faith in that sacred mystery. About this time, Sophie fell ill with cholera, which was raging in Malta, and very nearly died. She was disappointed, and remembers "crying very much because He had not taken (her) for (she) wished very much to die."**

Penance
The whole of Lent, despite her mother's remonstrances, she kept an extremely rigorous fast – tea, macaroni, bread and potatoes. On Holy Saturday, Mrs. Leeves, defeated, sent her with Catharine to their doctor, a friend of the family and a staunch Protestant. He knew that Sophie had broken off her engagement to become a nun, and had tried his best earlier to frighten

* Epistolary Autobiography, 2 Jan., 1893.

** Ibid.

her into taking it up again, on the score of her responsibility for the young man's happiness. All this, when she was just recovering from cholera, had made her unhappy and very weak. At last, one day, she made a vow of perpetual virginity before the little crucifix she kept hidingly with her for fear of her mother. God seemed to be pleased with this gesture of trust in Him, for she soon got well.

On this Holy Saturday, on their way to the cemetery to put flowers on Emily's grave, the two sisters had called at the Doctor's. As usual, he had begun talking on religious subjects and running down Catholic doctrine and practice. Today, the topic under discussion was the Real Presence, Sophie, proving the doctrine from the Greek Testament, which she had with her, and the doctor arguing that the relevant Greek verb was to be translated as "represents", not "is". So Jesus' statement, according to Dr. Vialley, became "This represents my body." Sophie knew Greek well enough to hold to her point, but the doctor would not have it. This showed her how Holy Scripture could be falsified by private interpretation. She felt disgusted with the discussion and, luckily for her, at this moment, "it seemed that Our Lord himself interrupted the discussion,"* for she fell down in a swoon and, in the process of resuscitating her, the matter was left at that. As she came to, the *Gloria in Excelsis* bells of Holy Saturday were pealing out from the Cathedral of St. John. Sophie, filled with great joy, explained, "Ah! it is the first Resurrection." The fainting fit was, of course, attributed to the fasting and, in fact, Sophie fell ill in Easter week.

* Autobiography, Part 1, p. 16.

Here, in Malta, there seemed no way for Sophie to fulfil her desire of becoming a religious. Forbidden to visit a Catholic church, Catharine and Sophie decided to make a small oratory in a recess under a staircase. There, unknown to their mother, they erected an altar, surmounted by a beautiful crucifix. Mrs. Leeves suspected something and, one day, unlocking the recess while the girls were out, found the crucifix. Breaking it, she went and threw it into the sea. When the girls returned, they were informed by the maid, who was a Catholic, that their mother had been to the oratory. Sophie went immediately to inspect, and found the crucifix gone. Filled with grief, she accosted her mother, calling her an iconoclast and a heretic. Mrs. Leeves countered by saying that she wanted no idolators in her house and she forbade her to have a crucifix. Sophie and her mother were representative of the two categories of Anglicans of the years immediately following the Oxford Movement – the Puseyites, who were all for a more orthodox (Catholic) liturgy and ritual, and others who were militantly hostile to it.

Soon after this incident, Catharine, nineteen, was engaged to be married and went to England to consult an Anglican confessor about a vow she had made when quite a child. She stayed with her uncle, General Haultain, Governor of the Citadel at Portsmouth, and from his house was married to Mr. Lauphier, nineteen years older than herself, who had been an officer in the army in India. All her ideas of becoming a nun vanished, but she persuaded her husband, who was always very good to her, to take orders in the English Church. He became like her, High Church, and adopted all the Puseyitical doctrine and practice.

Chapter 5

THE ROCK OF PETER

When Catharine left Malta for England, Mrs. Leeves wanted Mary Ann to return home, and the sisters crossed each other on the way. Mary Ann arrived while the family was spending the summer at Athens. Sophie was delighted, for she and Mary Ann had always been very close and Sophie had missed her younger sister very much. She found that Mary Ann was more than ever taken up with the new Oxford (Puseyite) doctrine.

They all went to their beautiful village of Castanietisa, where the girls taught the village children and nursed the peasants, many of whom suffered in the fever epidemic that had broken out. Henry too caught it and became so ill that he nearly died.

Meanwhile, Sophie and Mary Ann were always on the look-out for someone who would hear their confessions and give them communion, but here in the village there was no English church or clergyman. One day, a young Greek monk from the large Greek Cenobium on

Mount Athos called at the Leeves house. He had come from a neighbouring town where he lived with his mother, and Mrs. Leeves asked him to stay with them for a few days. Sophie and Mary Ann thought that this was their opportunity, so they asked the monk if he would hear their confessions, say Mass for them and give them communion. He agreed to do so, but not in the village church, as the village priest would not allow him to say Mass, but if they would go with him to a little chapel in the forest behind their house, he would do all they wished. The girls, however, could not agree to this, for it did not seem either proper or prudent for two young girls to go so far into the forest in secret accompanied only by a handsome young priest. And just as well they decided against it, for later they discovered that this monk had been excommunicated by the bishop for immoral conduct and sent away from the monastery.

Mary Ann had received permission in England to go into Catholic churches and so, when they were all back in Malta, Sophie would often go to pray there and make the Stations of the Cross, being drawn, as before, by an irresistible power, to the Blessed Sacrament, though she did not recognise it for what it was. The sisters began as usual, to look around also for a minister who had Puseyite leanings and would hear their confession. Finally, they met someone they felt might serve their purpose, though they did not know him and they wrote to ask him to hear their confession in the drawing-room of a Catholic lady friend. He had probably never heard a confession before. They had met him at the house of the English bishop, Dr. Tomlinson, and had "supposed", says Sophie, "from his white collar and buttoned waistcoat, as well as his conversation, (that he) would answer (their) pur-

pose".* So, having ascertained where he was staying, Mary Ann and Sophie had written, asking him to hear their confessions. He had agreed and very early one morning the two of them went to this lady's house, and their confessor arrived also, as he had promised. "I shall never forget," states Sophie, "this my last confession to a Protestant clergyman."** He was probably, according to her, more embarrassed and ashamed than she herself, and when she got on her knees, he did the same and remained kneeling all through her confession. The impression Sophie got was that he did not possess the authority to administer the Sacrament of Penance. But the sisters had at last succeeded in their quest, which was, in fact, a double achievement, as it was necessary to keep their movements secret from their mother and brother.

Again, we cannot help marvelling at the workings of grace in these young girls, ready as they were, to go to so much trouble to respond to the promptings within.

An added consolation at this time was that the warship of the young man, whom Sophie had been engaged to, touched at Malta and she was able to meet him personally and explain to him once more "that (her) happiness now depended on nothing and no one in this world - that (her) heart was given to God and not to any other person alive."*** Then, she had wished him a last farewell and felt inwardly free and happy. Nor did her mother or brother interfere, for, "in England", Sophie reminds us, "one is free in such matters"****

* *Epistolary Autobiography*, 8 January, 1893.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*

**** *Autobiography*, Part I, p. 18.

Ever and always, the code of this very English family was the English code.

Sophie could see God's hand in all that was happening. He was clearing away one obstacle after another, opening one door after another, leading her to the place where he wanted her. The sisters again began working for the poor and, innately charitable as Mrs. Leeves was, she heartily approved, and even allowed them to join a society of ladies in Valetta which was devoted to helping the poor. The society was composed of both Catholic and Protestant ladies and they had their meetings at the house of a Spanish Catholic lady, Mrs. Demech. Sophie and Mary Ann were given some poor families to take care of. The parish priest recommended them and supplied their addresses. A man-servant used to go with the two girls, to talk Maltese and to find out the garrets and cellars indicated in the addresses.

One Sunday in Christmas week, 1849, Henry, wishing to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Demech, accompanied Sophie and Mary Ann to her house. They sat there chatting away until Henry, saying he would leave them with Mrs. Demech, as he had another appointment, went away. His sisters asked him to tell their mother where they were, so that she would not be anxious. When Henry was gone, Mrs. Demech announced, "Do you know, young ladies, that I expect a Jesuit this evening who is coming to say goodbye before setting out for Rome. His name is Padre Giuliani,* and he has been my sons' professor in the college they attend.

* The spelling as used in Mother Veronica's writings. In the Jesuit records of Malta it is 'Zuliani'

Have you any curiosity to see a Jesuit?"* she asked, and they both replied that they would love to see a Jesuit. And they could stay a little longer, as their mother would be going to the evening service and would not miss them. When Padre Giuliani arrived, it was already rather late, but they all sat round a large table in the drawing-room. The Jesuit Father took the seat on Sophie's left and began to talk on religious matters. Mrs. Demech was on Sophie's right with Mary Ann next to her. The talk turned on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the words of the priest, who really loved and firmly believed in it, went to Sophie's heart. "Suddenly", she says, "I felt a sort of confusion in my whole being – it seemed to me that my heart had melted, liquefied, and, leaning my head on my crossed arms on the table, I began to sob irresistibly."** Naturally, all were alarmed and wanted to know what had happened. Mrs. Demech sent her children out of the room and drew the window curtains, while Mary Ann came round behind Sophie's chair asking what the matter was. Sophie could say nothing. Finally, Father Giuliani said, "Leave the poor child alone; it is the grace of God which has touched her heart."*** Sophie felt that he alone understood and was thankful for it.

We may be tempted, in this day and age, to judge Sophie and dismiss as hysteria her frequent bouts of illness, her attacks of sobbing. But before doing so, let us put ourselves in her place – a very sincere and extremely affectionate person in the process of conversion from one religion to another. What, in such circumstances, must be the struggles, exterior and interior, the

* Epistolary Autobiography, 8 Jan., 1893.

** Autobiography, Part I, p. 18.

*** Ibid.

pangs that are to be faced, alone, and often even against one's dear ones – as was the case with Sophie in withstanding her mother. In a more modern age, one might hesitate to let these struggles be seen. But in the Victorian period a woman felt free to show her feelings.

When Sophie was herself again, she explained that, until now, she had believed that she was in the true Church, but after this she doubted it. And it came out that Mary Ann had already, some time earlier, had the same doubt, which she had been trying to hide from her sister for fear of troubling her. It had started with her reading of Milner's *End of Controversy*. "Look", Mary Ann concluded, "how God himself gave you the same thoughts, and we shall seek the truth together."** Fr. Giuliani, who was himself leaving Malta, promised to speak about them to his superior, Father Seagrave, Rector of the Jesuit College. He earnestly begged them not to allow the spark which God had kindled in their hearts to be extinguished.

It was already late. Their mother would be returning home and might even come to fetch them. "If Mama comes in search of us and finds us with a priest, what will happen?"*** they wondered anxiously. So Mrs. Demech sent her servant with a lantern and her son to accompany them – not a moment too soon, for they had hardly taken a few steps when they met their mother. She was angry, for she thought there had been a party and that they had met some priests at Mrs. Demech's. However much the girls might have tried to conceal what was happening to them, their mother, with a

* Ibid., p. 19.

** Ibid.

woman's intuition, and that woman their mother, had begun to suspect something.

From this day, when God had touched the girls so tangibly, they had no peace till they had imbibed the full truth. But they would have much to suffer in the process. Besides reading books, they begged Father Seagrave to instruct them personally in the Catholic doctrines – which he did. He lived at the Jesuit College at Civita Vecchia, a good distance away, but he came every week to Valetta for the lessons, which were given at the house of a lady (probably Mrs. Demech). Secrecy was necessary and the girls had also to seek refuge behind dissimulation. They would go out to visit the homes of the poor, run to the lady's house, and then visit one more family before returning home, so that they could truthfully say they were coming from visiting the poor. They were always afraid that Henry might be walking behind them to spy on them. Father Seagrave, not only instructed them, he also consoled them and gave them courage in their trials. "When I thought," says Sophie, "of the terrible step that I was going to take into the unknown, it seemed to me like being in the agony of death. Chaos was going to begin between me and all that I held dear in this world... My mind was convinced, but my heart was sore all over. My God, what anguish!" she exclaims – and adds, "It is necessary to have passed through it to understand it."^{*}

We are grateful to Sophie for the intimate conversational style of her *Autobiography*, for sharing with us so deeply her feelings in the various experiences she

describes, the joy and ecstasy of peak moments as well as the heart-rending anguish of the times of insecurity, doubt and pain. We are fortunate that this work was written for her confessor, which doubtless explains the complete baring of her soul. That Mary Ann made the journey of the soul with her must have been a source of support and strength to her, on the one hand, while, on the other, it must have greatly increased the anguish for both sisters at the thought of the double loss Mrs. Leeves would have to face.

At this juncture, Sophie told Mary Ann that she thought they should consult some clergyman on their side regarding their intentions, to see if they could get some enlightenment. So, they decided to explain everything, with the utmost secrecy, of course, to the English bishop, Dr. Tomlinson, who was a great friend of the family, and knew them well. So, one day, Mary Ann and Sophie went to the bishop's palace and asked to speak to Dr. Tomlinson. They were immediately ushered into his study, where they told him that they had come to him with the utmost secrecy, that Mrs. Leeves and Henry knew nothing about the matter. Then they explained that they wished to enter the Catholic Church because they did not find the truth in the Anglican Church. What ensued is best told in Sophie's own words:

He tried to turn us away from our project, but his reasons were hardly convincing and we left him as we had come. But what was my surprise and indignation to receive the next morning a long letter from Mrs. Tomlinson, in which she lectured me and rebuked me vigorously on the perversion that I had the intention of committing, on the dishonour that I

* *Ibid.*, p.20.

was doing to my parents... I was utterly indignant to think that I had entrusted my secret to a bishop, who was reprimanding me through his wife! and I took the letter to Father Seagrave, exclaiming against this flagrant failure to keep the secret. The good Father laughed heartily (over the result of their consultation), above all when he heard my invectives against married bishops !!!

And Sophie adds by way of comment, "This adventure only increased our ardour to enter the Catholic Church, where one does not have to be afraid that the secret of the confessional may be revealed to wives!"*

In order the better to keep their secret, Sophie and Mary Ann continued to follow the services of the Anglican Church, but it was extremely painful, especially the last communion they were obliged to receive. For some time, Sophie had been convinced, according to the belief of the Puseyites, that they were receiving the body of Christ, but now she realised that she was receiving nothing but a morsel of bread. Their only consolation was, "It is for the last time."

Now they could not keep secret much longer their intention to leave Protestantism. Their mother and Henry would have to know. But first, it would have to be an accomplished fact, so that, whatever the consequences, no one could take their treasure from them. When they told this to Father Seagrave, he immediately fixed the day for their reception into the Church – the 2nd of February, the Feast of the Purification of our Blessed Lady. As their Baptism would be only condi-

* Ibid., pp. 20-21.

tional, they would have to make a general confession before and receive absolution after Baptism. Then they would receive their First Communion during Mass.

On the evening previous to their Baptism, Father Seagrave heard their confessions in the church of the Gésu. The confessional was placed at the foot of a tall crucifix with a Madonna of Dolours suspended below. They could not both together remain too long away from home. Hence, they had to leave home at different times, so as not to attract attention. Sophie asked leave of her mother that morning to go and spend the day with a friend who lived outside the town and whom she could trust even though she was a Protestant, and Mary Ann went to pay a visit to the wife of their family doctor. They arranged that Mary Ann would go first to the Gésu, where Father Seagrave would be waiting, and Sophie would follow at about four o'clock. She told her friend her intentions and with her help managed to reach Valetta in time for her confession. When she arrived, she found Mary Ann still occupied with Father Seagrave, not in the church but in a chapel (of the Confraternity of a Good Death) adjoining, for Mary Ann would not go to a confessional. She said she would be all the time afraid that Henry would enter the church and recognise her, and besides, she added, "It seems to me that the absolution cannot reach me through the grating!"* Naturally, Father Seagrave was amused, but he obtained permission to hear their confessions in the private chapel, where they were to receive Baptism the next day.

* Epistolary Autobiography, 8 Jan., 1893.

Sophie sat down on a low footstool in the church to wait for Mary Ann to finish. Full of sorrow and apprehension, she began preparing for confession. Looking up towards the altar, she noticed an officer in a red coat, with his back to the altar, watching her. Taken up, as she was, with her own thoughts, she did not pay much attention to him, but just at that moment Mary Ann came out of the sacristy door and, passing before the officer, told Sophie to go to Father Seagrave, which she did immediately. Now, Father Seagrave was brother-in-law to the Governor of Malta, and Mr. and Mrs. O'Farrell had come to the church to go to confession to him. This officer was one of the aides-de-camps, who was a Protestant and knew Sophie and Mary Ann. Of course, he guessed immediately that they were doing something mysterious and, had they not been received the next morning, their secret would have been published abroad, for they heard later that he had talked about it.

Father Seagrave was waiting for Sophie. She knelt down at a prie-dieu placed at the large life-size crucifix with the lovely picture of the Sorrowful Mother below it, and Father Seagrave sat beside the prie-dieu. Sophie had written out her whole confession, "but", she relates, "in spite of my good intention to make a full confession, a moment came when I no longer felt the strength to continue. I sank down on the prie-dieu and could not say a word more."* She put her hands on Father Seagrave's knees and told him that she could not continue. She felt faint. Then, "this good father who was a mother also" joined his hands on hers and

* *Autobiography, Part. 1, pp. 21-22*

prayed to Our Lady of Dolours, begging her "to have pity on this poor child, who desired to enter the fold and become her child."* He asked her to give Sophie the strength she needed, to show herself a mother to her. As he prayed, Sophie felt her strength return. Father Seagrave left her for a moment to bring her a glass of wine and water which he made her drink and then, telling her to rest awhile, he said he would hear the confessions of Mr. and Mrs. O'Farrell and would be back immediately. When he returned, Sophie was able to finish her confession. But, by this time, it had become quite dark and the street lamps were already lighted. Mary Ann had gone home so as not to arouse suspicion. So, Sophie had to go home alone in the night, and in a state of mind that might be called a stupor. Father Seagrave conducted her to the door of the church and, commending her to her guardian angel, sent her gently on her way. "It was a good bit of distance to our house," she explains, "up and down two or three streets, and I went out alone hardly knowing what I was doing, and to this moment I have not the least idea how I got home. I only remember the dark night, the street lighted with lamps, and then I found myself at the door of our house where I began knocking."** The servant opened the door and when Sophie went upstairs, she found her mother alone in the drawing-room. Mrs. Leeves remarked that she was late coming home. At this moment, Sophie's wits returned and she replied, "Yes, Mama, but Louisa's brothers and cousin came over with me." This was true, though not the whole truth. But Mrs. Leeves was satisfied.

* *Ibid.*

** *Epistolary Autobiography, 8 Jan., 1893.*

Sophie ran upstairs to her room, where she found Mary Ann awaiting her anxiously. That evening some gentleman came to visit them and the two girls had to sing and play and make themselves agreeable. They sang several duets and Sophie even remembers which ones: Mrs. Heman's 'Ave Sanctissima', and Mendelssohn's 'If with all your hearts you truly seek me, you shall surely find me'. But they were glad when the company was gone and prayers were over and they could go up to bed, but not to sleep, for their hearts were very heavy at the thought of the pain the morrow would bring to their mother and brother: "it seemed," Sophie sadly reminisces,

*as if we could not get away (from those in the drawing room). We each lingered and the terrible thought that this was the last evening we should pass as a peaceful, united family, and that on the morrow there would be a gulf between us and those we loved best in the world was heartbreaking!**

That night, Mary Ann came to Sophie's bed and they "cried together half the night."**

They had to be at the Gésu at 7 o'clock the next morning. So they got up very early, dressed simply in Sunday clothes and set off. The maid, who was sweeping downstairs, and the manservant, who opened the door, were both Catholics. They would understand the sign they made of a finger on the lips and would say nothing. Arrived at the Gésu, they found Father Sea-

* *Ibid.*** *Ibid.*, 23 Jan., 1893.

grave awaiting them, as also Mrs. Bowden, an English convert, whom he had asked to be their godmother. This lady was the widow of an Anglican clergyman. She had two daughters and two sons, all converts. Later, the two boys became Oratorian priests and one daughter became a nun.

Throughout her *Autobiography*, Sophie mentions again and again the names of various English Protestant converts whom she came across. It may seem strange to us that so many converts should enter one person's life – unless we remember that they were all part of a phenomenon that has come to be called the Catholic Renaissance. Starting with the famous converts of the Oxford Movement – Newman, William Ward, Oakeley and others – there has been a steady stream of conversions to the Catholic faith among English Protestants, all through the second half of the nineteenth and the whole of the twentieth centuries down to our day. It numbers persons from all walks of life, among them, many artists in words, who have described the pathos, travail and splendour of their spiritual odysseys with unusual clarity – Father Faber, G.K. Chesterton, Arnold Lunn, Evelyn Waugh, Douglas Hyde, Clare Booth Luce, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and others. Sophie and Mary Ann had, like these compatriots of theirs, journeyed on the road to Damascus and met their Lord. In the early years of the Catholic Renaissance, there would periodically be a whole spurt of converts. One such spurt took place in 1851, the year following the conversion of Sophie and Mary Ann, and among the converts of this group was Cardinal Manning.

They all went into the chapel, where, the previous evening, Sophie and Mary Ann had made their confess-

ion. The ceremony began with their conditional baptism, first Sophie and then Mary Ann, Father Seagrave pouring water on their head and forehead and saying in Latin: "If thou art not baptised, I baptise thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Then, each in turn, went with Father Seagrave into a small sacristy on one side of the altar to receive absolution and have the excommunication resting on heretics removed, and also to sign an act of faith which was the Creed of Pope Pius IV. Says Sophie: "When the Father said the words: 'I absolve thee from the excommunication incurred by...'; I felt as if a weight was taken off my soul..."** "I was no longer a heretic but a child of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church."*** Unfortunately, it is not possible to see the church of the Gesù in Malta today (or to obtain the records of the Baptisms of the Leeves sisters), as it was burnt down during the Second World War****

Mass followed, at which Sophie and Mary Ann were to receive their First Communion. The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition were present with their pupils. They had been invited to the ceremony by their chaplain, Father Marchetti, who was godfather to Sophie and Mary Ann. At Communion, Sophie and Mary Ann knelt side by side with their godmother and received Jesus first, and then all the others received him. "A whole eternity will not suffice", says Sophie,

to render Him thanks for that Inestimable, unspeakable gift He bestowed on me on that blessed day, second February, 1850. It was indeed the Gift of

* Ibid.

** Autobiography, Part I, p. 23.

*** Letters, 2 Mar., 1986 (Michael Galea).

Faith - and what faith ! - and I trust to carry it intact before the throne of God for all eternity ! After wavering and fluctuating and doubting and trembling, now I was firmly anchored on the rock of Peter.

"What a marvellous change came over me!" she exclaims. "Even my sister and those who knew me best were astonished, and myself more than they."*

Indeed, throughout her life Sophie would never fail to render thanks for the gift of conversion which had been hers. Before her death in the Cloistered Carmel at Pau, she asked that there be no obituary circulated for her, according to the Carmelite custom, but that, instead, a request be sent for prayers of thanksgiving for God's gift to her of conversion to Catholicism.**

In such cases, where God's grace is powerfully evident, we are inclined to attribute everything to God (as indeed, in a way, is right), and to forget that there is such a thing as correspondence with grace. Only in heaven, where everything will stand revealed, shall we know how many there were, who, like the rich young man in the Gospel, were offered the grace of God, but went away sad, unwilling to relinquish all. Correspondence with God's grace in bigger things is usually preceded and accompanied by courage and perseverance in the things God asks from moment to moment. This courage and perseverance are noticeable in Sophie all through the long years since she had first begun to feel a void in her soul and been drawn to fill it. These virtues would be remarkable in her and form a pattern in her life to the very end.

* Epistolary Autobiography, 23 Jan., 1893.

** Carmel of Pau, Souvenirs and Recollections.

After the Mass, Sophie and Mary Ann went to the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, where they had been invited for breakfast, but, as we may imagine, they could hardly eat. They were filled with apprehension at the thought of returning home. It was nine o'clock when they got there and found Mrs. Leeves awaiting them for breakfast, being under the impression that they had gone, as usual, for their morning walk. Looking up and seeing them in their Sunday clothes, she asked in surprise where they had been. Sophie fell on her knees beside her, saying, "I am afraid we shall grieve you, dear Mama, but it is better you should know all." "What have you been doing?" she asked. "We are just come from the Catholic Church where we have been received." "And so now you are Papists!" she exclaimed, pushing Sophie from her and beginning to pace up and down the room.* Then, after a pause, she sneered, "Ah, henceforward, you will pray to that wretched virgin!" Mary Ann burst out crying and Sophie prayed,

*Pardon, my sweet and tender mother, Immaculate Virgin, such an epithet coupled with your blessed Name! My poor mother does not know what she is saying in the frenzy of her grief, and so she is attacking and insulting you... But I am confident that as Mother of God and of poor sinners you will obtain salvation for my poor mother... You know that I cannot go to Heaven, if my mother goes to hell.**

How Mrs. Leeves then proceeded to go in mourning to weep on Emily's grave has already been narrated.

* Epistolary Autobiography, 23 Jan., 1893.
** Autobiography, Part I, p. 34.

From the time it became known in Malta that Sophie and Mary Ann had left the Anglican Church to become Catholics, people began to cast stones at the family. Mrs. Leeves, once proud of her daughters, had gladly taken them into society, but now society was shut against the girls, and their mother, not wishing to go out alone, wanted to leave Malta. Besides, Mrs. Leeves thought that, if she got her daughters away to Greece, they might revert again to Protestantism. Henry, too, wanted to go to the village at Castanietisa to look after the peasants.

But Sophie's mind and heart were at peace. She felt firmly anchored. She still cherished the desire of becoming a religious, though now she felt unworthy of it. When, after much hesitation, she broached the subject to Father Seagrave, he not only set her fears at rest, but strongly encouraged her to think of the religious life.

Mrs. Leeves had forbidden her daughters to go to any convent, but they sometimes went to the door of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition to speak to the novice mistress, who was English. Sophie had no attraction for these sisters. She preferred an enclosed congregation like the Sisters of Mercy, for instance, but there were none in Malta. Her heart was drawn to contemplation, though she could not then have expressed it, as she did, writing many years later.

Four or five months had passed before the family was ready to move. Sophie and Mary Ann were confirmed in private by the Bishop of Malta in June, 1850, and then Mrs. Leeves with Henry, Sophie and Mary Ann left Malta for Greece.

They took a house in Piraeus, the port of Athens and five miles away from it. Fortunately, it was near the Catholic church and Mrs. Leeves permitted her daughters to go there with their Catholic Maltese maid. But there was a continual domestic war on account of their religion. They had to be present at the family Protestant prayers and reading of the Bible, when Mrs. Leeves would choose readings where "the abuses" of the Catholic Church and the Popes were expatiated upon. This used to horrify Sophie. Mrs. Leeves made it a habit to have an informative book on history read aloud to the family in the evening. At times, when the mother was doing the reading, the girls would hear the bell on the street announcing that Jesus in Viaticum was being taken to the sick. Then, Sophie describes how one of them would drop scissors or thread and both would fall on their knees pretending to look for it and remain so till Jesus had passed. At Malta, Henry, struck by the conversion of his sisters, had wished to see Father Seagrave and hear some sermons, but his mother had turned him away and, says Sophie, "It was like seed that fell on the highway."

The Syrotic priest at the Catholic Church, Don Marino, had known Sophie and Mary Ann earlier as the daughters of the chaplain of the English Embassy. He now blessed God for the immense grace they had received and helped them "to bear the oppositions and the continual war that (their) mother made (them) undergo on account of their religion."** While Mrs. Leeves was reading the Protestant family prayers, Sophie used to say the rosary or, in other ways, she and Mary Ann

* *Autobiography, Part II, p. 27.*
 ** *Ibid.*

made their mother realise that they were joining her prayers against their will. One day, she told them that, as they no longer liked to pray with her, she would not insist that they came. "Of course", comments Sophie, "we were delighted to be exempted from this presence at the heretical prayers and so we got rid of them."*

When God desires something, man cannot thwart his plans. In fact, as events here will show, man is at times even forced to advance those plans, unknowingly. Mrs. Leeves wished to get Henry married and, presumably in preparation for this event, he left Piraeus for his property in Euboea. There he fell ill. At the same time, Mary Ann caught a fever which would not leave her and the doctor ordered her a change of air. Mrs. Leeves was in a dilemma. Mary Ann could not be taken to Castanietisa, where Henry was, and Mrs. Leeves herself would have to go. Sophie would have to remain with Mary Ann, but two young ladies could not live by themselves in the house. And thus it happened that Mrs. Leeves herself precipitated the next important step in the Catholic life of her daughters. In her predicament, she got Sophie to write to the superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition at Syros, asking if she would allow the two girls to stay with them for a few months as boarders or paying guests. Don Marino, on his part, wrote to the bishop of Syros explaining the situation. "My sister and I," Sophie remarks, "were utterly astonished at seeing my mother herself take all the initiative in this business."** Thus did God himself force Mrs. Leeves to take Sophie and Mary Ann, much to their relief and joy, out of the

* *Epistolary Autobiography, 23 Jan., 1893.*
 ** *Autobiography, Part II, p. 28.*

"atmosphere of Protestantism", which had become a continual torture, and place them in a religious house. Had the Leeves family been living today, the atmosphere in the home would probably have been very different, on account of the new Post-Vatican openness that has come to exist among the various Christian Churches.

The Anglican minister offered to accompany the girls to Syros and Mrs. Leeves saw them off at the waterside at Piraeus, where they embarked. "Poor mother", exclaims Sophie, "my heart was wrung at thus leaving her all alone on the shore."* Sophie did not see her again till she was a religious. The sisters of St. Joseph received the girls with warm affection and, when the minister who had accompanied them left, they could breathe freely. They felt grateful that they were in a religious house, where they could practise their religion in freedom and in peace. It was November 13, 1850, the feast of St. Stanislaus.

* *Ibid.*

Chapter 6

A SISTER OF ST. JOSEPH

From the time the two sisters had come as boarders to the convent at Syros, dates Sophie's embarkation on the voyage of prayer. Before this, she had wished and tried to pray and meditate, but there had been no one to guide her. Her happiness had been daily Communion, but she had not known anything about the interior life of prayer. One day, the feast of the Holy Innocents, 1850, during a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in St. Sebastian's Church, opposite the convent, she was begging Jesus to show her where he wanted her to be a religious, when suddenly she heard pronounced clearly in her heart, "Tomorrow." I had no knowledge," she adds, "of interior speech and I was frightened, so clear and sudden it was."*

As it was raining, she could not go to her Jesuit confessor for help, so she tried again to pray, asking the Blessed Virgin in the rosary to help her understand

* *Ibid.*

where that voice came from and what it meant, and then again she heard the same voice, "Tomorrow I shall tell you what you wish". Consoled and reassured, she waited for the next day and," in fact", she says,

*after having received Communion it seemed to me that there was deep silence within me, all my senses were awakened and the voice said to me, 'I want you here'. I understood that the Lord wanted me to be a religious of St. Joseph, but, as I was not attracted by this, I answered with some astonishment, 'Lord, do you wish that I remain here always?' I did not receive any direct answer to this question but it seemed to me as if our Lord reproached me very gently for my curiosity and that I had only to trust myself to him.**

When she related this experience to her confessor, he gave her the *Autobiography* of St. Teresa and other books to read. This was to her a new world and she learnt that God could speak to the heart and work other wonders when he wished. "...during these first months of my life in the convent (as a boarder), it seemed," she remarks, "as if our Lord was pleased to teach me by experience what I read about the prayer of St. Teresa, making me pass through several of those states that I certainly could not obtain by myself." **

The fruit of her prayer was the insatiable desire to do penance, to suffer for Jesus, even to die with ardour to see God. However, she did nothing without the permission of her confessor, who moderated the

* *Ibid.*, p. 29.

** *Ibid.*

penances she ingeniously invented and forbade her to think of death.

The Catholic Church, while acknowledging that God can work in the soul through rare supernatural phenomena, such as locutions, intellectual visions, indescribable consolations, is very wary in her judgment in individual cases. Anyone may be vouchsafed these graces at any moment, but there is always the possibility of delusion. They are not in themselves necessary for sanctity. What is necessary is to live the Christian life through the Gospel virtues of obedience, humility and love. That supernatural favours may be bestowed by God on a person, for a specific purpose, as in her case, Sister Veronica illustrates, quoting Faber's book, *Growth in Holiness*, where he divides the spiritual life into three parts (chiefly, Sophie supposes, that of a convert). In the first part, which lasts only a short time,

*the soul is overwhelmed with graces and favours like those of which one reads in the lives of the saints..... this period is very short..... it passes and never returns - but... it is very real, for then one needs all these delicious dishes in order to entice the soul from the world, to launch it on the service of God and to fortify it for the second period of sufferings, aridity, dangers and sorrows. This period is much longer and constitutes the life of man in general, for the majority of souls devoted to piety die during this stage before having reached the third, which is, I suppose, the seventh mansion of the soul of St. Teresa, where the soul enjoys perfect peace and continual union with God..**

* *Ibid.*, p. 30.

After this, Sophie's desire for a cloistered life changed. She was strongly attracted to the Sisters of St. Joseph and asked to be admitted. That the sisters at Syros were in no hurry, understandably, to receive two new converts, though everyone else concerned was on their side, may be gathered from the following extract from a letter written by Abbé Privilegio, parish priest of St. Sebastian's, Syros, to Mother Emilie Vialar, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph:

*Two months ago there arrived in this Institution two young English girls converted some time ago in Malta. They are daughters of a Protestant parson who is dead. The two young girls are very pious, they receive Holy Communion every day, they speak several languages, especially Greek. The elder of the two, Sophie, has asked to be received into the Congregation and the other also; I spoke of it to the Superior. She has some objection. I am of the opinion that if it is God's will both should be received... these two subjects are very capable. They know the language well and the Greek customs. I would request you to give an order to the Superior to admit them for they are capable persons ... Monsignor has just spoken to me about these young girls and he tells me to accept them. Father Louis Joseph is of the same opinion. Therefore, please be kind enough to advise the Superior on this matter.**

Mother Emilie Vialar must have intervened, for, on 19 March, 1851, both girls were admitted as postulants.

When Sophie wrote to her mother of her intention

* Letters, 15 Jan., 1851.

to join the convent, Mrs. Leeves replied that "even on her death-bed she would not wish to see (Sophie) in that costume and spoke, moreover, of maledictions."* Mrs. Leeves was a totally committed Anglican. She was, besides, an Englishwoman with the frankness and forthrightness characteristic of that race, traits to be found not a whit less pronounced in her daughter than in herself. No one could understand her mother's reactions better than Sophie, so, although she was pained, she was not resentful. In addition, she knew the gross misconceptions with regard to the Catholic Church on which English Protestants were bred. Although in her cultured home these were not fed to the children, they were there to be used on occasion, as had happened after Sophie and Mary Ann had become Catholics.

Sophie did not feel obliged to put off her entrance into religious life, so she replied to her mother in just as forthright a manner that she could not prevent her from following her vocation as she was 27 years old, that her vocation being from God she had to obey him rather than her, and that she was leaving the whole matter to him to dispose in his own way. So, on 14 September, 1851, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, with deep joy and consolation, she took the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the name, Sister Mary Veronica. Her special devotion was to the Passion of our Lord, on which she continually nourished her spiritual life. St. Veronica Giuliani, the Capuchin stigmatist, was the inspiration behind her new name, at the prompting of her confessor, who had given her this saint's life to read, in order to kindle further her devotion to the Passion of Jesus.

* Autobiography, Part II, p. 29.

For some months after receiving the habit, she tells us, she was "as if intoxicated with favours and celestial delights. I heard the music of the angels, I saw things that I would not know how to describe; prayer was my delight – when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed I could not take myself away from the church."* On the feast of St. Peter, she received "an astonishing increase of faith. I seemed," she says, "to see and touch all that the Church teaches and not only to believe. This happened to me for several consecutive years after my conversion. I was as if drunk with faith on that day."**

From the first day of her entrance into the convent, she was assigned to teaching (French, Greek, music). Later, she was made headmistress of a large school, where there were Catholics and poor children. She loved these two categories of children and found great pleasure in teaching them. Her work too was greatly appreciated. Abbé Privilegio writes: "It seems to me that Sister Veronica is a well-formed person, full of charity and ready to sacrifice all for the glory of the Lord and the good of her neighbour... Monsignor loves this religious very much for her good qualities and would to God that she remain so always."***

Shortly after receiving the habit, however, while helping to wash clothes, she caught a cold and inflammation of the lungs, and became very ill. Mary Ann wrote to their mother, and it is touching to see how the furious woman of a few months before was ruled now only by her motherly heart, and this behaviour will

* *Ibid.*, p. 30.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Letters*, 8 March, 1852, To Mother Emille Vialer.

be noted of her in her relations with her daughter until her death many years later – always straightforward, even harsh at times, but with a true mother's heart, which melted and suffered when her daughter was in trouble, and went out to her in every possible way. When Sophie was a little better, she sent Henry to fetch her to spend a few days with her at Athens for a change of air. Being a novice, her congregation permitted her to go with Mary Ann and Henry. Mary Ann had not received the habit. "Poor mother!" Sophie exclaims, in deep appreciation. "She had forgotten her anger and received me with great affection and then, looking at me in my religious dress, she exclaimed that she had never seen me so lovely!"* Sophie and Mary Ann stayed three weeks, but all the while Sophie longed to return to the convent.

On their return to Syros, Mary Ann, who was not called to be a sister of St. Joseph, joined the Ursulines in the same town. The Ursulines in Syros did not live in community at that time, but each one in her own house. Hence, Mary Ann made her profession only in 1861, many years later, in the Convent of the Ursulines of Montigny in France, as we have seen. She then returned to Greece with a small band of sisters to found the Ursuline Convent of the Sacred Heart at Tinos (Lutra).

Sophie made her profession on the second Sunday of October, 1852, feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin. After her profession, since there was question of beginning a new foundation in England, her superi-

* *Autobiography*, Part II, p. 31.

ors thought of sending Sister Veronica there. One gets the impression from the letters written at this time, that the Superior General, Mother Emilie Vialar, finds it difficult to carry the matter through, because Syros too seems to need a capable person like Sister Veronica. Mother Vialar writes to Syros on 21 March, 1853: "...a house in England is necessary for our missions in India and Malta. I cannot do without Sister Veronica for a year or 18 months: after that she will return to Syros. I shall send her with a Sister Superior who would suit England" — and adds in a postscript: "I repeat I cannot do without Sister Veronica."

Again, towards the end of the year, she refers to Sister Veronica in connection with England: "...Father Patterson, with whom I was corresponding for some time and who had promised Sister Emilie (Emilie Julien) to establish us in England ... spoke to me of Sister Veronica with great esteem, which she deserves for her knowledge and good education. It seems he knows her family well."** However, finally, Sister Veronica was not sent to England.

Meanwhile, Henry had gone to England, married Harriet Katchen and, on his return to Greece, had taken his young wife to see his two religious sisters at Syros before leaving for his estate at Castanietisa. Sometime later, a child was born to them, Mrs. Leeves was with them at the time, but when the child was a few months old she returned to Athens. A few days later, five peasants, among whom was the son of the Greek priest whom Sophie had taught as a child, and who

* Letters, 21 March, 1853 - either to the Superior at Syros or to Abbé Privilegio.

** Ibid., 1 Dec., 1853.

had been her favourite pupil, came to rob Henry's house. They wounded Henry in the knees, dragged him all over the house to give them silver and money and then, before escaping, shot both him and his wife, because Harriet had shown recognition of the priest's son. The child was left alive in the cradle. Henry had not died immediately, for he was found dead with a protecting arm on the cradle of his child. He was thirty-three. The child was taken to Mrs. Leeves at Athens, where he was baptised and died some months later. Mrs. Leeves was obliged after a few weeks to give evidence in a court of law. "When my poor mother heard the dreadful news," says Sophie, "she was alone at Athens and her grief was so great that they thought she would have died; but when her little grandchild was brought to her, she seemed to recover to take care of him."

One marvels at the stamina of Mrs. Leeves. Starting with the shock of her husband's tragic death, one blow after another had hit her — the death of her deaf-and-dumb daughter Emily, the conversion of Sophie and Mary Ann, their entry into the religious life, the brutal murder of her son and daughter-in-law, the extinguishing of a last flickering hope in the death of the infant. And now she was left, not only alone, but lonely and desolate. Naturally, she staggered, but she rallied and then stood erect again, a woman of faith, a valiant woman indeed! One is reminded of a tall palm tree, withstanding one storm after another, bending but not breaking under them. This stamina, Sister Veronica inherited, as events will show.

Mrs. Leeves asked to see Mary Ann and Sophie,

* Epistolary Autobiography, 23 Jan., 1893.

who were both at Syros, and they were allowed to go to her. There was no one now for Mrs. Leeves to expect at her home in Athens, she was so completely alone. But soon a new foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph was made at Athens, and Sister Veronica was sent there. She could now visit her mother, but Mrs. Leeves never came to see her, until a new foundation was opened to run an orphanage, this time in Piraeus, where Sister Veronica was superior. Then she would come – because her daughter was the mistress of the house. Mrs. Leeves's visits must have been a great joy to Sister Veronica, "for beginnings," she owns, "are very painful."

At Athens, Sister Veronica was, as usual, assigned to teaching. However, an incident occurred which helped her to recognise another and special vocation. One day, the king's chief doctor asked that a sister be sent to nurse him (the doctor) in a very serious illness – pneumonia. Sister Veronica was appointed to this task. "...from that time," she recalls,

*dates my special vocation with the sick, to whom I devoted myself day and night with an affection that God gave me and that he sustained in me by giving me the strength and the health to bear extreme fatigue in spite of my health remaining weak. On several occasions, the good God gave me the grace to be able to make some sick people receive the sacraments who would have died deprived of the help of religion... Suffice it to say that it was my happiness to look after the sick, poor and rich, and God blesses those who do so with love. **

* Autobiography, Part II, p. 32.

Sister Veronica seems to have hit it off badly with the superior at Athens, Sister Jeanne Blancal, who writes as follows to Mother Emilie Julien, the then Superior General,* regarding Sister Veronica and her family affairs:

The sister of Sister Veronica, whom you thought was in London arrived here 15 days ago; the mother... wished to settle her family affairs in such a way as to allow Sister Veronica to take what belongs to her and give it to the Mother House. But not at all. She did not wish it. She wants to make a will not fully in favour of the community, for there is some sort of intrigue which one cannot understand at all; it seems her brother-in-law is her confidant. He is quite interested in the affair; I tell you all this so that you may be guided by it and take measures accordingly. This gentleman and Sister Veronica do not have the interests of our Congregation at heart, as you can guess. She prefers the interests of the Parish Priest to ours. If I had let her have her way our house would be empty long ago... All that I am aware of, is that she places her money in England although I tried my best to dissuade her.

*PS. "...detachment neither from her goods nor from her self-will is in her. She will do the will of her confessor rather than of her superiors. That is enough."***

Lacking other information regarding the matter in question here, one is at a loss to interpret this letter. However, considering the tone of the letter and reading between the lines, one is inclined to suspect that Sister

* Mother Emilie Vieler had died in 1856.

** Letters, 13 November, 1857 (to Mother Emilie Julien).

Jeanne Blancal had some axe of her own to grind, albeit on behalf of the congregation, which was not in line with the freedom Sister Veronica would want as an Englishwoman and would have as a right, even as a religious, in the matter of a will disposing of her inheritance.

In another instance, however, we have reason to believe, with Sister Jeanne Blancal, that Sister Veronica's independent spirit, combined with her inexperience of the religious life, caused embarrassment to others concerned. Sister Jeanne writes again to the Superior General:

The permission (to open a class at Piraeus) had been granted on the eve but I had not received it in writing from the Greek Government. I had warned Sister Veronica not to open the class until I had brought her the permission myself, for she had told me she wished to tell the Parish Priest of Piraeus to publish it in the church. I repeated to her not to do it until the permission was given in our hands. It was useless. Without a word, she informed the priest and made him publish it. She began the class on Monday without any authorisation... The Roman Consul as well as our French Charge d'Affaires were very sorry that Sister Veronica acted in this way.

And Sister Jeanne goes on to comment: "She is an excellent sister, dear Mother, as I have told you several times, but she has a misplaced zeal which can cause us great harm." An example follows of how Sister Veronica copied out a false document for the Spanish Consul on behalf of an ill-intentioned man, and could have caused the Greek Government to send away the sisters. The Parish Priest, Sister Jeanne adds, "has

asked me to tell you to oblige her not to do anything without permission. **

Sister Veronica knows her weakness and acknowledges it in a letter to her Superior General: "The English character submits with great difficulty and my own in particular."*** Notwithstanding such failures, however, her superiors could still discern the sterling worth that underlay the faulty exterior. In the course of a short summary of Sister Veronica's life with the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Sister Genevieve Tardy writes: "We can say that Sister Veronica, drawn to the contemplative life 'following the impulse of grace' of which her conversion to Catholicism had given her 'the experience', had always been the object of the greatest esteem on the part of her superiors."****

The short period of "consolation and celestial sweetness" had long passed. However, now and then, Sister Veronica tasted a little of it. But, as 1860 approached, she saw a cross falling on her, the meaning of which was withheld from her for a time. It was shortly after this that she was sent to found the house at Piraeus.

Soon, however, in June, 1860, her Superior General, Mother Emilie Julien, summoned her to Rome. Sister Veronica responded promptly. Here, she had the great joy, which she describes with deep devotion, of seeing Pope Pius IX on several occasions, of receiving his blessing, of attending a Mass on the anniversary of his coronation at which he was present, of being introduced to him as "an English convert", by no less a per-

* *Ibid.*, 19 Jan., 1860.

** *Ibid.*, 27 Nov., 1861.

*** Sister Genevieve Tardy, "Digging in the Archives."

son than Monsignor Talbot, himself a convert, and of hearing the Holy Father sigh with satisfaction and give her his hand to kiss with the words, "Siate buona e santa" (Be good and holy). "Oh," she exclaims, "if I had carried out this command, this injunction, which the Vicar of Christ gave me, I would have been a saint... but alas!"*

"Never will I forget," she murmurs fervently, "the emotion, the intense joy, the immense gratitude which penetrated my soul at the sight of the well-loved Pontiff-Ruler. My God, I wept with joy and could not stop. I reflected that for so many years I had been outside the fold, but now I had the unutterable joy of being... his child, a daughter of the holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman Church."** She had the same moving experience on seeing the Pope again a few days later, 29 June, when she was present at the Solemn Mass which he sang. Her heart thrilled to the sight of him in the *Sedia Gestatoria*, to his rich, deep-toned, melodious voice singing the Mass, to his lifting of the Host at the Consecration.

As one reads, one can sense Sister Veronica trembling with excitement at the mere remembrance of the experience. Even a born Catholic feels deeply thrilled at just seeing Christ's representative on earth. We are told that St. Philip Neri went into an ecstasy in the Pope's presence. Sister Veronica's elation was different in kind and perhaps, for that reason, deeper. It was that of one who had, as it were, long been wandering in the dark and had but recently "come home". Considering the

* *Autobiography*, Part II, p. 35.

** *Ibid.*, p. 34.

widely accepted belief that English people are reserved, and even without feelings, we are, no doubt, surprised to find Sister Veronica so emotional. This is an indication, perhaps, not that the English are lacking in sensitivity, but that the general estimate of them is incorrect. Reserved they may be, but reserve cannot be equated with insensitivity. That they can, on occasion, give spontaneous and adequate expression to a gamut of deep emotions is borne out by the greatness of their literature. Sister Veronica, then, was typically English in her excitement over her encounters with the Pope.

After six months in Rome, she was sent as Superior to Tremorel, a little village in Brittany, France, where there was a mixed school of 60 boys and 60 girls. Sister Veronica tells how hard the work was, as they were only three or four sisters and, besides being in charge of the school, she was doctor and apothecary to the whole village and the neighbourhood. She had a little pharmacy and, there being no doctor within a radius of several miles, the people used to come and fetch her when anyone was very ill. When the patient was too far away for her to walk to the house, they would bring a horse for her to ride. Nor were there saddles to make riding more comfortable. Only a truss of straw was fastened over the back of the animal and she had to perch herself on top of it as best she could. Her skill in treating the sick inspired so much faith that, as she admits, "sometimes the good God rewarded their faith and their trust by the cure of their ills."*

This sort of work at Tremorel could have been, in the plan of God, a preparation for her future experien-

* *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 36.

ces in the mission land of India, as well as an example and model to those of her daughters who would, over a century later, be toiling in the villages of South Canara, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Sri Lanka.

"Although the work in the school was taxing," I loved my 'enfants Bretons'," says Sister Veronica. "There was such an innocence and purity of morals – such respect and veneration for the nuns." Typical children, as they were, she was obliged to use a long rod, three or four yards in length, with which to tap the boys on the head when they were too uproarious. The girls were most docile and obedient. "The schoolroom had its amusing side too. Sometimes it happened that one of the girls would be naughty and begin to cry and "then in a trice all the boys were up and mounted on the benches to see over (the wooden partition) into the girls' part of the room, what the matter was. "You may fancy," Sister Veronica comments, "what an uproar they made. Then I called out, 'Boys! down in your places! who has made you inspectors of the girls'. The greater number would sit down, but some of the more insubordinate would still remain perched on the benches. Then with the long rod I had to give a good tap on each disobedient head and then down they went at last."*

Sister Veronica's attraction for the contemplative life kept surfacing whatever the work she was doing. Tremorel (1860) "was the occasion for her to write frequently

* *Epistolary Autobiography*, 23 Jan., 1893.

to Mother Emilie Julien and to tell her that the life she led did not correspond to the ideal she had of the religious life. **

Sister Veronica remained at Tremorel only a year, for her own health suffered from the cold, wet climate and from overwork. Her new assignment was to go to India and take charge of the house the Sisters of St. Joseph were planning to open at Calicut on the coast of Malabar.

* *Sister Genevieve Tardy, op. cit.*

Chapter 7

INDIA

When Sister Veronica arrived in India, the Church there was in the throes of the Padroado scandal and the "Goan Schism," and almost immediately she found herself involved with it. The Padroado or Patronage was a form of Church-State relationship, begun as early as the fifth century, in which the State played an active role in the administration and support of the Church. Rich laymen, mostly kings and nobles, were called on to build churches and other foundations and, in return, these patrons, as they were called, were given certain privileges. Such a system of patronage was common throughout Europe. In the fifteenth century, Portuguese patronage (padroado) was extended overseas by the Popes and not only to churches, but also to aid for the missionaries. Whole territories thus came under Padroado jurisdiction. From this time, although patronage declined in Europe, it flourished in Africa, India, Brazil, China and Japan.

In 1622, the Congregation for the Propagation of

the Faith (Propaganda Fide) was established and immediately took command of missionary work. This led, a few years later, especially in India and the Far East, to clashes between the missionaries of the Padroado and those of Propaganda, rendering the appointment of bishops extremely difficult. The Holy See appointed the first two Vicars Apostolic in 1658. They were to exercise their jurisdiction regardless of whether or not their territories came under the Padroado. Thus originated the famous *double jurisdiction*. Whenever clashes arose, automatically the Church (Propaganda Fide) took over the Padroado dioceses.

In India, however, the most deplorable misunderstanding took place between the Padroado and the Propaganda missionaries. The Padroado dioceses were Goa, Cochin, Mylapore and Cranganore.* Bombay had been given to England by the Portuguese, in 1661, as the dowry of Princess Catharine, when she married Charles II. The Bombay Catholics, mostly Goan, were sympathetic to the Padroado clergy appointed by the Archbishop of Goa. The British (through the East India Company) with the consent of the Holy See, sent away the Goan priests (Padroado) and replaced them with priests appointed by the Vicar Apostolic of the Great Moghul (Propaganda). A few years later, the situation was rectified, it is true, and the Goan priests returned, but the harm had already been done. The loyalties of the Bombay Catholics were radically split. The result: Bombay churches were divided between the two groups – two for the Padroado and two for the Propaganda missionaries.

* Located south of Cochin.

In 1838, Pope Gregory XVI published the brief *Multa Praeclare* solemnly stating that the Padroado was to be exercised only in the diocese of Goa. All the other territories would belong to Propaganda. It was overlooked that Bombay belonged to the Archdiocese of Goa, while geographically it was British territory. It was this geographical error that gave rise to all future clashes. The Goan missionaries rejected the brief as spurious and surreptitious, and held that even the Holy See could not legislate thus without the consent of the King of Portugal, as was stated in the original bulls. This resistance in Bombay and elsewhere in India came to be called the "Goan Schism." Incidentally, this is a misnomer. Papal pronouncements, except for four priests in Bombay, call the Goans, not schismatic, but only "openly disobedient." The Goans held that they were only defending their canonical and natural rights.

The ten years, 1840 - 1850, have been called the Dark Ages of the Bombay Vicariate. E.R.Hull, S.J., describes it thus :

*The tension grew as the years went on till it reached a climax in 1848, when for two years, Bombay was a veritable hell - a microscopic miniature of the French Revolution, one might almost call it, with the guillotine left out; and this was the state of disorder inherited by Bishop Hartmann of Patna in 1850, **

when he was sent by the Holy See to put things right.

But the situation did not improve after his arrival. In February, 1853, there was a fresh outburst of the storm

* Quoted, Fulgentius, OFM Cap., *Bishop Hartmann*, p. 85.

over Bombay. A terrible struggle ensued, police, judiciary and the British Government becoming involved. The bishop and a few faithful were even locked up in a church with no food and water.

On Pentecost Sunday, the 15th of May, 1853, Dr.Hartmann was to consecrate Father Michael Antony of St. Aloysius Gonzaga as Vicar Apostolic of Mangalore. He went to the city to perform the ceremony and returned at once to his place of confinement, which lasted from 13 March to 4 July, 1853.

On 22 May, 1853, Dr.Hartmann collected the views of the Vicars Apostolic of India, in the form of a letter of protest and petition to Plus IX, against the increasing interference of the Padroadists and, in order to hasten the decision, sent it to Rome through three ecclesiastics who had stood by the bishop, one of them being Bishop Michael Antony of Mangalore. The Pope acted promptly, first warning and then, in September, 1853, excommunicating the four Goan priests who were particularly responsible for the latest happenings. All four priests ignored the papal excommunication and carried on with their ecclesiastical functions as usual. Only nine years later, in December 1862, would they be brought to submission by the new Archbishop of Goa, John Chrysostom d'Amorim Pessoa, who landed in Bombay, accompanied by the commissaries of both Portugal and the Holy See, to effect the execution of the Concordat which had been signed in 1857.

Ten months earlier, in February, 1862, Sister Veronica had landed in India. While resting at Mangalore from the fatigue of her travels, she had decided to make a retreat in preparation for the work God would entrust

to her at Calicut. During her retreat, which she made under Father Marie Ephrem, he asked her to pray for the cessation of a schism "which was causing much sorrow to the missionaries and a great scandal to the Christians."^{*} It was the Goan Schism, which had begun in Bombay and spread to other places. In 1858, some discussions had arisen in Calicut between the parishioners and the bishop, which became so serious, that some people formally renounced their adherence to the Vicar Apostolic and put themselves under Goa.

It seemed to Sister Veronica in prayer that, in order to obtain the grace of conversion for these people, God wished her during three nights to suffer the obsessions of the devil. She spoke about it to Father Marie Ephrem and was exhorted to offer herself to the Lord for whatever he might wish or permit. "That same evening as night was falling," she recounts,

*I began to see and hear what I had never seen or heard before, above all when I was in bed. I was surrounded as it were with demons who had power to do what they wanted with my body. Only my will was free to resist and to detest all they said and did. I spent these three nights in striving, in praying, in suffering what I could not describe. ***

Each morning, when she gave her director an account of what had taken place, he strengthened and encouraged her and gave her absolution. Weak and crushed as she was, absolution gave her the strength to resume the struggle.

^{*} Autobiography, Part II, p. 40.
^{**} Ibid.

There were, no doubt, others besides Sister Veronica praying and doing penance that this schism might cease. Before the end of the year, 1862, not only had Father Marie Ephrem succeeded in bringing the Mangalorean "schismatics" * back to their lawful pastor, but even the four excommunicated priests of Bombay had submitted to the Holy See, as we have seen, and the long-drawn-out Padroado hostilities had ended. On March 5th, 1863, a Commission arrived in Mangalore to deal with the provisions of the 1857 Concordat in Canara. Among the Papal Commissioners was Mgr. Henry Edward Howard, an Englishman who later became a Cardinal, and was to play an appreciable part in Sister Veronica's life.

What follows in Sister Veronica's memoirs is meant, she says, only for Father Lazare, "who ordered (her) to write these notes." "Perhaps it comes only from my imagination," she admits, and adds, "I affirm nothing." With this introduction, she goes on to relate:

Shortly after these struggles, (with the devil, described above), I was alone one day working and praying, for at that time I was very close to God, when suddenly I fell into contemplation and saw the most holy Virgin holding in her hand a ring which she offered to me on behalf of her divine Son. I answered that I could not receive it without permission, as I had made a vow of poverty. This reply did not appear to offend her. On the contrary, she told me to ask permission and on the following

* A very small pocket of Christians, however, in the area of Kallyanpur and Brahmavar never became reconciled to the Catholic Church. To this day, they are under the Jacobite Metropolitan of Malabar. This is known as the Brahmavar Schism.

*Friday, the Feast of the Seven Dolours, Jesus would come and give me this ring himself and make his espousal with my heart. Then everything disappeared.**

She gave an account of what had taken place to Father Marie Ephrem, who granted her the required permission and told her to prepare to receive this grace. On the Feast of the Seven Dolours of Our Lady – a special devotion of Sister Veronica – Father Marie Ephrem, as usual, celebrated Mass, at which Sister Veronica received Communion. "I cannot relate," she says,

*what I saw and felt during Mass. I seemed to see Our Lord with his blessed Mother, Saint Teresa and Saint Veronica. Our Lord held the ring in his hand and told me several things. Then, everything disappeared and I found the ring on the ring finger of the left hand. There was a white stone and a red stone and on one of them was marked a cross. They were set in a circle of gold.***

After this experience, she was "quite beside herself," understandably, and hid her hand, fearing that the ring might be seen, but Father Marie Ephrem, to whom she related everything and "who had been warned of what was to take place,"*** reassured her.

Almost the first impression Sister Veronica formed of India was a typical one. "In these idolatrous regions," she remarks,

the devil has much more power than among us. At

* Autobiography, Part II, p. 41.

** Ibid.

*** Ibid.

*least, one often sees things which can be attributed only to a satanic power. In a ravine near the convent there was a pagoda, where during the night Satan and his worshippers held their orgies. I heard the tom-tom and their wild howlings and I was told that the devil appeared in visible form.**

"I was told," she says – which is significant. Catholics used to feel outraged at the gross misconceptions the Protestants laboured under with regard to the Catholic Church some years ago. But the Christians in India laboured under (and a few still continue to do so, perhaps) just as gross misconceptions with regard to the religions of their countrymen. Even just before Vatican II, the sound of the *tabla* to Christian ears signified the presence of the devil. Fortunately, things have changed and the move towards ecumenism and inculturation in the wake of Vatican II has opened many eyes to the regrettable errors of the past. It is not surprising, then, that Sister Veronica should have formed the picture that she did on her arrival in India.

Although she had come from Europe expressly to start the new foundation at Calicut, it appeared, at one point, as if she would not be sent there, after all – nor did she know in what capacity she would remain in Mangalore. "I was a little bit embarrassed interiorly," she acknowledges, but with Father Marie Ephrem's help, her dispositions changed. "I asked Sister Thérèse," she says, "to dispose of me as if I had come to live under obedience in this house, that it suited me better than to have to command and that I was ready to be useful in any way that I was able.**"

* Ibid., p. 40.

** Letters, 10 Mar., 1862.

A few weeks later, however, Mgr. Michael Antony sent for Sister Veronica to establish the house at Calicut, where, with Sister Paula and postulant Ann Mary Texeira,* he was awaiting her and Sister Mary Joseph. Henceforth, as superior, she would be known as Mother Veronica. St. Joseph's Convent, Calicut, was established on 27 April, 1862. In the school, there were little boys in addition to the girls - Catholics, Protestants and Parsis.

While she was waiting to go to Calicut, Father Marie Ephrem, who was an expert in Malayalam, had given Mother Veronica lessons in that language, as she was eager to fit herself to spread the message of Christ more effectively in her new mission field, where Malayalam was the chief language.

Calicut was to play a very important role in the special work God had in store for Mother Veronica - the founding of the Apostolic Carmel. "Calicut" is the Anglicized form of the Malayalam name, "Kollikotu", "Kotu" meaning stronghold or fortress. Calicut was the fortified abode of the Zamorin or ruler and not the capital of his kingdom of Malabar. The city was considered a haven to traders on account of the hospitality of the Zamorins, as well as for other reasons. A port commanding the waterway, the capital of a growing kingdom, it gave easy access to the pepper country and, as such, Mohammedans, Moors, Chinese and Arabs preferred this port to any others on the West Coast. The Catholic Church in Calicut dates back to 1513 A.D. when, as a result of a treaty between the Portuguese

* Later, Sister Teresa of Jesus, A. C.,

and the Zamorin, a factory with a chapel attached was erected in Calicut. Later, the Zamorin undertook to erect a church in stone and mortar, complete with parochial house, porch, vestry and belfry. The bell weighed 150 lbs.

Bishop Michael Antony stayed on at Calicut for some months to help the community settle down and when he was obliged to return to Mangalore in October, Father Marie Ephrem was transferred to Calicut as parish priest and chaplain of the convent. This priest evidently had deep spiritual insight and a gift for attracting souls to the Lord. Mother Veronica was very happy to be once again under his direction, the more so as, before she had left for Calicut, he had received her into the Third Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and she now belonged to the Carmelite Order.

Father Marie Ephrem of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Lucien Garrilon)* born on 29 November, 1827, at Castel-Jaloux in the diocese of Agen, France, was an only child, the other children having died in infancy. His pious parents had early instilled into him a lively faith, a practical humility and a tender Christian charity, virtues which remained the hallmarks of his personality all his life. Having completed his studies, he joined the priesthood and was ordained in 1850. Distinguished by his brilliance and his gift of oratory, he was marked out for great works. But he felt called to the contemplative life and, glad to flee the forthcoming honours, he joined the novitiate of the Discalced Carmelites at Broussey, where he took his vows on 15 May, 1855.

* *Chronicles of the Cloistered Sisters of Mangalore* (IV A, Ep/5).

His intelligence, humility and apostolic zeal brought him several important appointments in his new vocation, among them the founding of a house of the Restored Carmel at Rennes.

Just before coming to India, Father Marie Ephrem, had been prior of the Carmel of Bordeaux, but, wishing to devote himself to the foreign missions, had obtained permission to come to the Malabar coast, arriving at Mahé early in 1860.

*He was a scholar and possessed the gift of eloquence in an eminent degree, as also a most attractive personality and an indefatigable zeal for the salvation of souls. He was a very perfect religious, a distinguished preacher, a missionary after the heart of Jesus Christ.**

He had a way with all categories of persons – religious, schoolchildren, poor people. Sometimes, while hearing the schoolchildren's confessions, he would see coolies looking in at the door, whereupon he would leave the confessional, go to them, speak to them in Malayalam and, bringing them into the sanctuary, would sit down and hear the confessions of these poor men, his arm passed around the black body,...with no other clothes on than their loin-cloths...No one, "says Mother Veronica," "could resist the charm of the attraction which this man of God possessed"***

Mother Veronica was very happy with her assignment in Calicut. "Our new Convent is progressing marvellously," she writes six months after her arrival. "We

* *Autobiography, Part II, p. 38.*
 ** *Ibid., p. 42.*

already have 24 members, 8 of whom are orphans.** She goes on to give details of baptisms, victories over Satan, her "thirst for souls," her study of Malayalam. A year later, she states that the work continues to prosper, the orphans are increasing. True, there was insufficient accommodation and they were "so very poor and abject" that they could not think of building.** But she was undaunted. She felt abundantly fulfilled as regards her missionary vocation. God seemed to be blessing her efforts with the Christians, both adults and children. People came to her for advice, a few members of the Third Order of Carmel came to share convent life periodically, and the young girls of St. Joseph's were so much appreciated that they were sought after as wives for worthy young men.***

Some perplexity, however, characterized Mother Veronica's personal life. "For some time," she relates, "I had begun to suffer many things from the demons who, I suppose, saw that many souls were snatched from hell. At the same time, I often heard an interior voice which said to me: 'I want you in Carmel.'**** At first, she did not understand the significance of all this and felt reluctant to take the words at their face value, for this would mean that she would have to leave the congregation which she loved and where she was loved and highly esteemed. Besides, she was doing good work here in Calicut. But, as with all God's doings, slowly, imperceptibly, a change began to take place in

* *Letters, 1 Oct., 1862.*
 ** *Ibid., 22 Dec., 1863.*
 *** It was from this Catholic community, Goans who had settled in Calicut, that many Apostolic Carmel vocations would flower in years to come - Sisters Isabel, Elsie, Alberta and others.
 **** *Autobiography, p. 42.*

her dispositions and she began to feel convinced that this was the will of God "...little by little," she explains, "the light seemed to enter into my heart and, without in the least knowing how that could be accomplished, I attached myself to this thought as being the will of God."* In a letter, probably to Father Joseph Louis C.D. of the Carmelite Missions, Rome, she describes in greater detail the stages through which she had passed: "this subject which by degrees is taking hold and growing in the core of my being... I cannot account for it in any manner. The first time that this desire was sown in me was not at all a time of tribulation or desolation. It was a time when I was overwhelmed with heavenly graces and blessings." She acknowledges that "violent attacks" were never wanting, but she was always guided by obedience to her spiritual guide, who interpreted the will of God for her. She did nothing without consulting him and so she was not afraid. "Obedience," she asserts,

*is the only infallible guide. When the idea of entering Carmel first presented itself to me, I rejected it as impossible and ridiculous, finally I rejected it as a temptation, even a very dangerous one, for it did not cause any anxiety of spirit. But the thought of Carmel was always there in spite of all my objections and all my reasoning... Little by little, my distaste for it, my reasons and objections seemed to disappear and the way smoothed. Finally, I was, as I have always been, beset with discontent and distaste for my present state and my heart was in Carmel.***

* Ibid.
** Letters, 21 August, 1863.

Towards the end of her stay at Calicut, besides the agony of the prospect of leaving her congregation and giving her superiors and sisters pain, Mother Veronica seems to have undergone bitter trials and sufferings of a different sort as well, for she writes:

*I do not desire nor ask for a change from this mission precisely because I fear that our Lord may chastise me for my failure in not making use of the graces He is overwhelming me with in the form of persecutions and calumnies. It is now that I can have the assurance that he thinks of his poor servant with a love of predilection.**

She is totally committed to obedience and to the cross. "I am and shall always be, by the grace of God," she professes, "perfectly content and satisfied with all that superiors judge as prudent and proper in their decisions...the good God directs their counsels and in perfect calm we wait for the result as long as it pleases His Divine Majesty."*** Shunning the cross or yielding to anxiety and impatience in time of trial she attributes to a lack of faith, "We do not reflect," she reminds us, "that this is the opportune time to gather an immense and precious treasure that will last and bring us to an eternity of happiness...if our Lord even for once had made the soul understand the greatness and value of the cross and of suffering, it would never let go the least chance for anything in this world."****

From another letter written about this time, the reader senses that her heart is wrung with pain and

* Ibid., 22 Dec., 1863.
** Ibid.
*** Ibid.

desolation: "I find myself in a strange world without any support and without any human consolation. Sometimes, nature begins to weary and lassitude seems to set in, for one does not know which side to turn for spiritual or temporal support." But the thought of the Passion of our Lord comes to her help – that

He suffered so much dereliction, much more than we can imagine, gives me the courage to rise again and recommence the fight. This reflection alone suffices me: my Lord and Spouse has chosen spouses for Himself and for all his chosen spouses without exception this way of humiliations: of persecution and crosses. How, then, can I dream of anything else, I, who am a soul specially privileged, having been chosen from the midst of darkness to be his very own?

"... Only pray for me, my Father," she pleads, "that my courage may not fail me and that having undertaken the road of Calvary with my Lord, I might follow Him to the summit and die there, crucified with Him and like Him...how far I am still from this!"* she sighs.

Father Marie Ephrem had told Mother Veronica that Monsignor Howard would be the one to smooth the way for her with superiors in order to leave the Sisters of St. Joseph and enter Carmel. Now, Monsignor had come to India as a member of the Commission sent from Rome to settle the matter of the Goan Schism. As Father Marie Ephrem was his friend, he made his way to Calicut to see him. Father Marie Ephrem advised Mother Veronica to speak to him openly about her

* *Ibid.*, 21 August, 1863.

problem in the confessional – which strengthened by obedience, she did and, from then on, he took great interest in her and helped her in whatever way he could.

Monsignor Howard was a cousin of the young Duke of Norfolk, who had married a Miss Lyons, daughter of the English minister at Athens (a connection which naturally inclined Mother Veronica to Monsignor). Monsignor's mother was a Protestant and his two sisters were brought up in their mother's religion, while he had followed the religion of his father, the older Duke of Norfolk's nephew. Monsignor Howard had been in the Queen's royal guard when he heard the call to the priesthood, and his mother, whom Mother Veronica met later in England, never ceased to lament that he had given up such fine prospects. Just before her death, however, she went one morning to Father Faber's church at Brompton Oratory and returned to tell her son, much to his surprise, that she had embraced Catholicism.

As superior of St. Joseph's Convent, Mother Veronica repeatedly complains in her letters of a dearth of hands, lack of money and consequent lack of accommodation, all of which hamper the good work that is being done and prevent a great deal more which is possible. While she acknowledges "that the work is prospering," she qualifies it by adding, "as much as is possible without the support and favourable assistance of superiors which are so very necessary to run an establishment."* And again she writes, "Mgr. the Archbishop is very anxious to know why the sisters have

* *Ibid.*, 22 Dec., 1863.

not yet arrived... The house is quite ready and he is waiting for us impatiently at Cochin."* The Sisters of St. Joseph in India had heroically withstood the trials and difficulties of pioneering days and were now looking forward to reinforcements from among the younger generation – which, unfortunately, were not forthcoming. In ten years' time by 1872, the situation would so deteriorate that the the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition would have to pull out of India.

Father Marie Ephrem, with keen foresight, could gauge what was bound to come, and cast about for a solution to the problem. After prayer and reflection, he came to the conclusion that, in the Carmelite diocese of the West Coast of India, Sisters of the Third Order Regular, having the Carmelite spirit, would best answer the existing educational needs, which involved not only the intellectual but also the spiritual formation of the young, particularly girls, strengthening them in the knowledge and practice of their faith. To secure the permanence of the Order, its members should be recruited from the people of the soil. Two other coincidences seemed to put the seal of God's approval on Father Marie Ephrem's reflections. The other Carmelite Vicars Apostolic wished to have their youth also educated by religious and approved of the founding of a Third Order Regular of sisters. At the same time, Mother Veronica's declaration of her Carmelite vocation offered them a foundress for this Order. Father Marie Ephrem spoke to her of the desirability of founding a Third Order Regular for the Missions and told her that the Vicars Apostolic of Verapoly and Quilon would

* *Ibid.*, 21 Aug., 1863.

also be happy to have Carmelite sisters for the education of the girls in their vicariates. But, for the moment, the idea had to be shelved in face of the difficulty of being released from the Congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition.

At this juncture, Mother Veronica, instead of being sent to Cochin, as she had expected, was transferred to Rangoon – an insuperable obstacle, as it seemed, in the way of the project of a new Third Order Regular. But God had his own way of working it out.

Mother Veronica was to replace the superior of Rangoon, who had just left. With great anguish of heart she tore herself away from her dear Christians and, alone in the beginning of the monsoons, she began her journey – to Madras by railway, embarking there for Calcutta and Rangoon. Here, at Rangoon, too, there were a boarding school and an orphanage. Things were evidently in bad shape when Mother Veronica arrived. "I see," she writes to her Superior General, "that you always send me to places where our sisters have had trouble and where things have to be put in order before anything else."** That here too she experienced a lack of support from higher superiors is evident, when she complains:

*It is very painful, far as we are from our superiors, to be left without any instruction as to how we should act when we are in difficulty...it is very painful not to receive a single word from our Superiors for such a long time. It is six months since I left Calicut.***

* *Ibid.*, 15 Nov., 1864.

** *Ibid.*

In describing her stay at Rangoon, Mother Veronica has an interesting story to relate about a man "or rather a skeleton, for he had absolutely nothing but skin on his bones,"* whom some children of the school, while out on a walk with the sisters, found moaning beside a "pagan cemetery." One of the sisters asked him in Burmese why he was lying there on that dirty mat, to which he replied that the "peonghies" (the priests of the idols) had left him there to die. He willingly allowed himself to be carried to the convent and everything was done to revive him. But to no avail. As the man was dying, the sisters asked him if he wished to be a Christian and go to heaven. He had never seen Christians before, but he answered: "I wish to be like you, you have been good and charitable to me when my priests threw me to the jackals, I want to go where you are going after death". Mother Veronica and the other sisters having taught him as best they could the mysteries of the Catholic faith, he asked for Baptism. As Mother Veronica poured the water of Baptism over his forehead, an ecstatic look came into his face and he uttered the words, "Oh how beautiful!" On further enquiry, it came out that he had seen the angels and their Queen. He wanted to kiss the crucifix Mother Veronica was wearing and wanted her near him, saying: "It is you who poured the water on my head. I like to see you." Soon after, without any agony, he died - and was given a grand funeral.

Meanwhile, Mother Veronica thought incessantly of her Carmelite vocation. In a letter to Mother Emilie Julien, she refers to the matter in passing. Speaking of a sister who has Carmelite leanings, she concludes,

* Autobiography, Part II, pp. 45-46.



All Saints' Church, Wrington.



Rev. William Leeves

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The Last Supper
(a stained glass window, All Saints' Church Wrington)



Leeves Cottage,
Weston-super-Mare, England.



Anglican Church, Athens,
(built by H.D. Leeves).



The Chapel of a Good Death,
St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valetta, Malta



St. Sebastian's Church,
Syros, Greece.

GREECE

and

MALTA



Memorial Plaque of Rev. H.D. Leeves, his son,
daughter-in-law and grandson,
Anglican Church, Athens.



Mother Ignacie Leeves
(Mary Ann)



Mont Dilly, India
where Mother Veronica landed, 1862



St. Joseph's Convent chapel, Calicut, today,
(The portico is the same as when Mother
Veronica founded the convent, 1862)

MOTHER



Bishop Michael Antony, O.C.D.,

VERONICA

IN
INDIA



St. Joseph's Convent today,
Community Quarters



The Well used in Mother Veronica's time,
St. Joseph's Convent, Calicut.

A STRANGE DESTINY

*If, one fine day, Mother, you hear that I have left Rangoon, do not be too surprised, for it is not at all impossible. Only, it will not be to escape the miseries that await us everywhere. The Cross is and always will be my precious and glorious lot.**

Little by little, God prepared the way. Mother Veronica remained in Rangoon only a year and a half, for she had a serious fall and injured her left foot so badly that an operation was needed, which, in her weak state of health and in a tropical country, she would not be able to sustain. So, at the end of 1865, she returned to England. Her mother wanted her to be looked after by the best surgeon in London. The surgeon who examined her foot found no fracture nor any bone out of place, but he ordered a treatment which very slowly, but surely restored to her the use of her foot. The cool climate and the tonics helped her, very weak as she had become, to regain her strength.** Her shattered health completely restored, she longed to return to her convent life. Her Carmelite vocation too was becoming stronger every day and she wished to see Father Marie Ephrem, who had returned to Europe and was at Rome. Her mother had, by now, become tired of having a Catholic daughter staying with her and had sent her to the Convent of Marie Reparatrice in London. But she was soon recalled to Rome by her Superior General.

* Letters, 15 Nov., 1865.
** Autobiography, Part II, pp. 45 - 46.

Chapter 8

CARMEL AT LAST

" 'Mother, let me go,' Mary said to me, 'for I feel that, if I wait for the return of our mother, I cannot do it. She will not allow me to go.' "

Mary was one of the postulants in the Generalate house at Marseilles and was, therefore, in the care of Mother Veronica, who, on her return from London, had been entrusted with the novitiate and appointed Mistress of Novices. Naturally, she had been taken aback by being entrusted with such an assignment at a time when her whole desire was to be a novice herself rather than Mistress of Novices.

Two days after her arrival at the motherhouse in Marseilles, the Superior General had sent for her to the parlour, where she was awaiting her with Father Olive, the superior. By way of preparation for what he had to ask of her, Father Olive appealed to her desire as a

* *Autobiography, Part II, p. 59.*

A STRANGE DESTINY

good religious to obey. Then he said, "Well, Sister, we wish to confide to you the care of the novitiate; in a word, to make you Mistress of Novices." In view of the step she was about to take, Mother Veronica turned to Mother Emilie Julien and reminded her of the obstacle that prevented her from accepting the office. But neither the Superior General nor Canon Olive would consider her objections. Indeed, the latter considered it rather an asset. "... this would be no obstacle," he said. "On the contrary, we would be very happy if a little of the spirit of Carmel were inculcated in our novices, that is to say, the spirit of prayer and mortification." And so, there was nothing Mother Veronica could do but bow her head and accept the charge.

Having introduced Mother Veronica to the postulants and novices as their new mistress, the Superior General left for Paris, and Mother Veronica began her work. A day or two later, a small Arab postulant stopped her on her way to the chapel. She was dressed very shabbily, as if the worst in the house were good enough for her. "Mother," she said, "I must do the washing today. Will you give me some of the novices to help me, because, I am often ill on Thursdays and I would like to finish today." She just managed to make herself understood, for she spoke very bad French. Mother Veronica looked at her for a moment and, instantly, "an interior light," she says, "made me perceive that this young girl participated in the Passion of Our Lord." She gave the permission requested and promised her the necessary help. Then, she went up to see Mother Honorine, whom she had replaced in the novitiate.

There were many Arabs in the novitiate on account of the large number of houses the Sisters of St. Joseph

had in the Holy Land. Candidates were sent to the motherhouse for the novitiate and, on their return to the East after profession, were assigned to one of these houses.

Mother Veronica found the ex-Novice Mistress in bed. The latter began the conversation by asking Mother Veronica if she had seen Mary the Arab. "Who is Mary the Arab?" Mother Veronica enquired. As it turned out, the postulant she had just met was the one. In the course of the conversation, Mother Honorine related that, on the day Mother Veronica had arrived from Rome, Mary had said to her: "Mother, a sister has arrived with our Mother General. I like her very much and thou wilt see that she will be the novice mistress." (She addressed people as "thee" and "thou" according to the Arab custom). Mother Honorine had challenged her, knowing that Mother Veronica was preparing to leave for Carmel. Mary had only replied, "Thou wilt see." *

Mother Honorine related other things about Mary, among them that every Friday for the last three or four weeks she had received the grace of the stigmata in her hands, feet and side, and around her head the crown of thorns, from all of which blood had flowed. Mother Honorine herself loved and venerated this child as a gift to the congregation, but, being ill herself, she could not shield her from the scorn and cruelty meted out to her by several of the sisters, especially some of the old ones, who, seeing the extraordinary things that happened to her, said they came from the devil. Some went

* *Ibid.*, pp. 50 - 51.

so far as to strike her, deprive her of food, give her the ugliest and worst clothes, and deprive her of rest and even of water when her mouth was dry with fever. Mother General, who was in Rome, had been informed about the unusual phenomenon and had forbidden it to be talked about. Mother Honorine compared her to Bernadette who, thirteen years earlier, had seen Our Lady at Lourdes and was kept by the sisters of Nevers at their motherhouse as their greatest treasure.

The two nuns decided that, on the days when Mary had what Mother Honorine called "her malady," she would sleep in Mother Honorine's room, as Mother Veronica had no room of her own at the time. Thus it was that Mother Veronica was able to examine at close quarters what happened to Mary on these occasions. She describes it in some detail:

I saw that the skin of her hands, in the middle, was raised like a sort of blister and not only the epidermis as in a burn... In the palm of the hand corresponding to the blister, a red and painful point had formed and slowly when the blood had flowed one could see the light through the hand. I examined also her left side and I saw that it was red and at that time showed three well-impressed points... I think the redness was in the form of a cross. She was also suffering in the head, but nothing could be seen there...

... She had a burning thirst, and I gave her some water which she found bitter like gall. I spent the night beside her on a chair... She said to me: 'Mother, go and lie down, I pray you. Do not stay so close to me, you will catch my malady.' She be-

lieved that it was a malady which could be communicated, so simple and entirely ignorant was she of this sort of thing. I smiled within me.... Towards five o'clock, I returned (after a short rest) and found her hands all stained with blood, the wounds had opened and the blood was flowing... Shortly afterwards, her feet also began to bleed, the blister disappeared and a hole was formed that pierced to the other side.

The moment when the blood flowed was so sudden that few persons or almost no one had been able to see it. However, God gave me this grace in order that I should bear witness to what he deigned to be effected in this child....

That same evening, towards 9 o'clock, I was in the room where she had slept in an ecstatic state... Suddenly Mary lifted both hands quickly and covered her face and forehead uttering small moans. She had suffered much from her head and did not know what to do to lay it on the pillow. I made haste to go to her and bent over her. I saw that her whole face was covered with blood which spurted across her fingers. She withdrew her blood-stained hands and I examined carefully to see from where it came, but there was no trace of wounds or scratches. I began to wash her forehead and face and I said within myself: 'Lord, I pray you, make me see from where this blood comes so that I may give witness to this child,' and at that moment was formed under my hand, a little above the right eye-brow, a hole which seemed to be made by a big thorn, more wide and irregular along the edges and diminishing towards the back. From this hole spurted waves of blood.

I continued to soak up the blood with the pad which I held in my hand, but I noticed that the edges of this hole did not yield like those of an ordinary wound, and then suddenly, it closed or rather disappeared, leaving the skin perfectly smooth, without the least appearance of a lesion! Only the blood which had flowed remained on her face and her forehead. Never in my life shall I forget what I felt at that moment. I touched with my hands, I saw with my eyes so astonishing a marvel. Only the omnipotence of God could, in a few moments, cure a wound without leaving the least trace... all that I have just related lasted only a few seconds, and already Mary had come out of her ecstasy and was seated on her bed looking at her hands in a distasteful way: 'Oh, how filthy! Let me wash myself,' and she took a towel and with both hands she began to scrub her face and head as if it was nothing; while complaining of being dirty', as she said.

After midday, the stigmata began to dry up and towards four o'clock Mary got up and was able to walk and even to take supper with the community. She ate nothing these two days, the whole of Thursday and till evening on Friday. *

It is not ours to interpret these unusual phenomena or those to be recounted later on in this narrative regarding Mary. The Church has already done so and, as Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, OCD, she was beatified on 13 November, 1983.

Mary worked harder than any of the others on the

* Ibid., pp. 53 - 55.

days when she was well. She did not know to read and till the end of her life no one succeeded in teaching her. One day, shortly after Mother Veronica had taken charge of the novitiate, Mary said to her: "Mother, I shall die in your arms," to which Mother Veronica replied, "That is not probable, my child," recalling that she would soon be leaving for Carmel and Mary would shortly take the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph – and yet, eleven years later, her prediction was fulfilled. In recounting to Mother Veronica the tale of wonders that was her early life, Mary mentioned that the "Religious" had predicted that she would die in the arms of a novice mistress to whom she recommended humility. On being questioned as to whether this mistress was Mother Honorine or herself, she said she did not know. Some years later, she again spoke to Mother Veronica of this novice mistress and this time said it would have to be the one who performed that office at her profession : Mary made her profession at Mangalore and her novice-mistress at the time was Mother of the Infant Jesus. "However", she added, "this grace is not entirely lost, it will come back to another. You will see that at my death." *

In mentioning the "Religious" above, Mary is referring to the story of her martyrdom at the age of twelve. Mother Veronica relates it very briefly. Here it is narrated as in the story of Mary's life by Amédée Brunot, S.C.J. A Moslem family, to whom she had gone for help in a great difficulty, suggested that she give up Christianity and embrace Islam. Mariam, as she was known, rejected the proposal so vehemently that the man unsheathed his scimitar and slashed her throat.

* *Ibid.*, p. 55 - 56.

Years later, when obliged by obedience to relate the story of her martyrdom, Mariam affirmed that she was really dead. To her mistress of novices at Marseilles, who asked if she had undergone the particular judgment, she replied, "Oh no, but I found myself in heaven." Then she described a vision she had had of heaven, and someone said to her, "You are a virgin, but your book is not finished." Here, the author draws our attention to the similarity of the narrative with the Apocalypse of St. John. "Mariam," he goes on,

*found herself in a grotto; near her was a religious in azure clothing. The latter told her she had picked her up on the street, brought her to this shelter, and stitched up her slashed neck. This mysterious sister of charity in the blue habit... spoke very little, she moistened the child's lips with a cotton sponge, she induced her to sleep. She had no resemblance to any other religious.**

All this happened at Alexandria in 1846. Mary showed Mother Veronica the scar on her throat, "which was much more visible and in relief at that time (when she was younger and thinner) than subsequently."**

Meanwhile, Mother Veronica was languishing with the ardent desire of leaving for Carmel. She had consulted expert directors and all had indicated their belief in the genuineness of her Carmelite vocation. Before she had come to Marseilles, much had taken place. On her way from London, she had met Father Marie Ephrem at Paris, who had also returned to Europe for a

* Amédée Brunot, S.C.J., *Mariam, "The Little Arab"*, pp. 8 - 9.

** *Autobiography*, Part, II, p. 55.

short while. He still believed that God was calling her to Carmel, and spoke again about the necessity of a Third Order Regular for the Carmelite Missions in India. The Superior General of the Discalced Carmel was apprised of the project and approved of it, but, led by prudence, neither priest would decide definitely on her vocation.

In Rome, before going to the Sisters of St. Joseph, Mother Veronica had gone to see Monsignor Howard. There, she had met Father Marie Ephrem again, who told her this time to lay her heart bare before Father de Villefort S.J., the regular confessor of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Rome, and to abide by his decision. In the light of future events, it is significant that, at critical moments of her life – conversion, vocation to the Sisters of St. Joseph, vocation to Carmel – Mother Veronica was directed by Jesuits, for whom she always bore great esteem. She gave a detailed account to Father de Villefort, who, for six months, examined her vocation before finally pronouncing definitely in favour of Carmel. A fortnight later he died. The death of Father de Villefort, soon after pronouncing definitely on her vocation, following a long period of testing, must have been for herself at least, a strong confirmation that her vocation to Carmel was the work of God, particularly as she had put herself under obedience to the lawfully appointed confessor of the community. However, she was left at a loose end, considering the hope she had cherished of his continuing support. "In him," she says, "I lost a friend, a father, the support of my vocation," for her superiors, as well as Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Propagation and Protector of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, were opposed to her entry into Carmel. Fortunately, Father Marie Ephrem had prepared her for such opposition.

On his part, he had spoken to the prioress of the Carmel of Pau about Mother Veronica's vocation and of his own desire to have sisters of the Second Order (cloistered) as well as Tertiaries Regular for the Carmelite missions in India. Quite enthusiastic, Mother Elias told him that his plan would be welcomed by the community, and expressed her readiness to receive Mother Veronica, to study her vocation and to form her in the Carmelite life.

Now, her cause had to pass before the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and the papers had to be presented by none other than Cardinal Barnabo. Whenever Mother Veronica went to him to request him to speak for her, his answer always was, "God does not change. You are a sister of St. Joseph. Stay there."* Many years later, Mother Veronica learnt that he and her superiors were planning to make her the Superior General of the Congregation, such was their esteem for her. Fortunately for her, she could turn for advice and help to Monsignor Howard and Monsignor Talbot, Chamberlain to the Pope. Monsignor Howard spoke on her behalf to Monsignor Svegliati, Secretary to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

It was at this juncture that Mother Emilie Julien, the Superior General, had to leave Rome for the mother-house at Marseilles and asked Mother Veronica to accompany her. Monsignor Howard advised her to go, as it would be easier to proceed to Pau from Marseilles than from Rome. He also gave her the breviaries of the Carmelite order, together with five hundred francs for

* *Ibid.*, p. 48.

the expenses of her journey to Pau, and accompanied the nuns to the station. Mother Veronica could not thank him enough for his kindness. On account of his position in the Church, his noble family, his knowledge and piety, her superiors could not prevent her from seeing him. He later became a Cardinal.

On their arrival at the motherhouse, Mother Veronica found, to her delight, that the local superior was Mother Battistine, who had been present at her baptism. The novice mistress, Mother Honorine, was ill and had been in bed for a long time, so that the novices, about twenty in number, were left to their own devices. She had to be replaced as soon as possible and, as we have already seen, the mantle fell on Mother Veronica.

Hardly a month had passed since Mother Veronica had taken up the assignment, before it was time to prepare for the grand ceremony of professions and receiving of the habit. Mary was among those who were to receive the habit and her dress was ready. The ceremony would take place as soon as the Superior General returned from Paris. But, before that, the Chapter had to be held to vote for the novices and postulants who would be accepted by the Congregation. Only the five council members of the community (including Mother Honorine), Father Olive, Mother Melanie (second Assistant General) and Mother Veronica, as novice mistress, would be present.

Before leaving for Paris, Mother Emilie Julien had said to Mother Veronica, "We have put you to the proof in order to know the will of God, but now that it is manifested, we have no more to do than to help you". Father Olive too expressed his approval "at least

in theory." As for Mother Veronica herself, she continued to hear the same voice deep in her heart, "I want you in Carmel," and prayed that God would manifest his will. She realised too the responsibility of guiding the postulant whom God was showering with his graces, and prayed for light. One day, after Communion, Our Lord said to her, "It is my will that that child should go to Carmel with you". "Lord," Mother Veronica replied, "if you wish it, make it possible; for it is not for me to take the initiative in the matter." In May, 1867, Mother Veronica was given the necessary permission, by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to join Carmel.

At the Chapter, Mother Melanie and Mother Veronica both refused to vote because they did not know the postulants and novices well enough. Mary's name came up first and the votes showed that she was rejected. Mother Honorine tried to remonstrate, but Father Olive imposed silence, saying that everything had been done legitimately. Mother Veronica's reaction was: "The finger of God is here. Lord, what you do is well done." *

It was Friday, and Mary was in bed with her mysterious malady. Mother Veronica went to her to break the news of her rejection, which she received with striking calm. Then, Mother Veronica added, "Since it is so, I am free to propose to you something I could not tell you before." She told her that she would be leaving shortly to enter Carmel and asked if Mary would like to go with her. At this, Mary became quite animated and answered in the words which reminded Mother Veroni-

* *Ibid.*, pp. 56 - 57.

CARMEL AT LAST

ca of Naomi's words to her mother-in-law: "Mother, where you go, I shall go, and where you are, I shall also be and where you die, I shall die."

It now remained to write to the prioress of Pau, asking if she would accept Mary as a lay sister. But, before doing so, Mother Veronica imposed on Mary (or was it on God ?) a severe test. "Now, my dear little one," she said,

I wish to see if you are very obedient.. every week I cannot leave all the novices in order to be near you and look after you. I am quite willing that you should suffer all that our Lord wishes, but you will ask him out of obedience to be able to get up and do like the others.

"Mother, I promise it to you," she answered. And Mother Veronica continued, "... now you are going to get up at once and go down for supper with the community" – which she did, instantly.

The next morning before prayers (it was still the Great Silence), Mary entered Mother Veronica's room, radiant. On being granted permission to speak, she burst out, "Mother, this night the holy Virgin came and told me that I would not have this illness any more until next year during Lent for five weeks." "Alright," replied Mother Veronica, "we shall see." From that time, though Mary still suffered on Friday, nothing appeared outwardly and she could lead the ordinary community life.

Before finally writing to the prioress of Pau regarding Mary, Mother Veronica had to speak to Mother Melanie and Father Olive who, naturally, put no obsta-

A STRANGE DESTINY

cles, since Mary had been rejected. Mother Veronica also took Mary to pay a visit to Father Phillipe Abdou, curate of the Greek Uniate Church, who had befriended her since she had come to France and knew about her past. When Mother Veronica explained all that had taken place, he was not surprised. In fact, he was of the opinion that Carmel would suit her much better. "She needs to be in a cloister," he said, "and I thank God that she has found someone to protect her,"*

In her letter to the prioress of Pau, Mother Veronica mentioned that Mary was very virtuous and that her obedience bordered on the miraculous. Mother Elias wrote welcoming both Mother Veronica and Mary and urging that they come as soon as possible. Mary was impatient to leave before Mother General returned. "Mother," she said, "let me go, for I feel that if I wait for the return of our mother, I cannot do it. She will not allow me to go." So it was arranged that Mary should leave the motherhouse first, and await Mother Veronica at the house of Father Abdou and his mother. Mother Veronica supplied her with a new black dress, tidied her up and put her on the bus to Marseilles. It was the 30th of May, 1867.

The next day, after Communion, our Lord said to Mother Veronica, "Now, my daughter, go, you have accomplished what you had to do here." Immediately after Mass, she went to take leave of her confessor, whom she had kept informed of everything regarding herself and Mary. As she knelt before the holy old man, begging his blessing before departing, he placed both his hands on her head and said with emotion, "Go, my

* *Ibid.*, pp. 57 - 59.

child, with God's blessing and mine. May he accompany you." When she went to wish Mother Melanie, she begged her to wait till Mother General returned. But nothing could stop her. She was convinced that God's time was now. Mother Melanie "knew all the opposition I had had to endure," says Mother Veronica,

and all the difficulties I had surmounted and, not wishing to make me suffer any more, she sent a sister to the door to fetch a carriage. I had all my luggage taken to the entrance door which was at the end of a long avenue of trees; and without a word to my dear novices, and without taking leave of anyone, while the community were at dinner, I went to the door with Mother Melanie to await the carriage. The sister who had been sent for it returned without it.

Instead, she brought a note from Father Olive, urging Mother Veronica not to go in such a hurry. "It was too late. Nothing could keep me back now," recalls Mother Veronica.

*The carriage had not been brought, but at that moment our good God sent an omnibus on its way to Marseilles. I stopped it and having found room for my luggage and a seat for myself, I was carried away, no more to see a sister of St. Joseph till eight years later, when Mary the Arab, now Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, and I, both professed Carmelites, visited our former Convent, as we passed Marseilles on our way for a foundation at Bethlehem in the Holy Land."**

Mother Veronica went straight to the house of Fa-

* Ibid. pp. 59 - 60.

ther Abdou, where Mary was overjoyed to see her. They could not, however, immediately leave for Pau. Mother Veronica needed a few days to go to Annecy to discuss with Monsignor Howard and Monsignor Magnin, the Bishop of Annecy, the business regarding the foundation of the Carmelite Third Order Regular. Leaving Mary with Father Abdou's mother, she went to Annecy, where it was agreed that she should make her novitiate at Pau and then return to Savoy for the foundation.

Mother Veronica returned to Marseilles after ten days. That night, she and Mary stayed with some ladies, friends of Mother Veronica, and the next day, 14 June, 1867, they left Marseilles.

It was Friday and Mary was suffering, but nothing was visible. They broke journey for the night at Toulouse, proceeding the next morning by coach to Pau. One wonders what was in each one's mind and heart as the coach wound its way up the beautiful Pyrenees.

For each, a long-awaited goal was all but reached. God had led them by diverse, yet equally marvellous, ways to this point of meeting and, henceforth, till Mary's death, their destinies would be inextricably intertwined. For all its joys and consolations, Mother Veronica's life till now had been a slow crescendo of suffering which had not yet, by far, reached its climax. She would have a long way to go on "the royal road of the cross" ere she could say, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." But God would find her ready, as He ever had. She would say later, "As for me He keeps me on the cross, always. That is my place up till the end of my poor life. May His Holy name be blessed."*

* Letters, 18 January, 1871.

Every moment was bringing them closer to Carmel, the spiritual garden, as, no doubt, Mother Veronica reflected with deep joy, where they would be planted, take root and bloom for the rest of their lives. On either side, they could see lush verdant expanses falling away from the coach, as it wound its way upwards in the summer morning sunshine. Mary, whose attraction for Carmel had been instinctive, probably knew nothing of its spiritual symbolism. But she had grown up on the wooded slopes, as it were, of the Palestinian mountain. Today, her mind must have flown to her homeland and her childhood, her lyrical heart exulting in song, that, put into words, might have echoed the lines :

*O Carmel fair, whose peaks arise
O'er Esdraelon's thrice-fruited tree,
Bath'd in the blue light of the sky
And laved forever by the sea!
I love the greenness of thy woods,
The fragrance of thy spiced air,
Thy vine-empurpled solitudes,
O Carmel dear, O Carmel fair!*

They arrived at the outer yard of Carmel at 3 p.m., as the nuns were singing the First Vespers on the eve of Trinity Sunday. It was 15 June, 1867. Mother Elias and two other sisters came to open to them the great gate of the cloister. Mother Veronica fell on her knees, but Mother Elias raised her and, embracing her and Mary profusely, welcomed them warmly.

Chapter 9

SAVOY

Mother Veronica left the portals of the Carmel of Pau, alone, wearing over her habit a black skirt and mantle, her disguise completed by an old hat with a long black veil. It was the 15th of December, 1867, the depth of winter. She was on her way to Annecy in Savoy to begin the foundation of the Carmelite Third Order Regular for the Missions, enjoined on her by the Father General of the Carmelite Order. "But this project (of a Third Order),... as yet only a seed sown in the earth,... needed to die first, and then revive slowly and give forth its little sprouts."* Indeed, the next six months would witness the first of the several deaths in store for this seed and its sprouts.

"It is urgent you should carry out our plan of the foundation in Savoy," Father Dominic of St. Joseph, Carmelite Superior General, had written.

* *Carmel in India*, p.3.

*As soon as you have obtained the Bishop's permission, send me the Christian and surnames through Abbé Dubouloz and I will send him papers of authority to admit members of the Third Order. As soon as a certain number of you are gathered together in some house or establishment, draw up your special Constitutions, which must be first approved by Father M. Ephrem and then you will submit them to the local Bishop and thus establish your community in due order. **

Incidentally, Father General envisaged, besides, a foundation for men tertiaries. Mother Veronica writes to Father Marie Ephrem: "... he (Father General) wishes... that, with Abbé Dubouloz, I should undertake a foundation for men as well."***

Father Dominic of St. Joseph, (Stanislas Arvizu -y - Munarriz) was Spanish. In 1818 at the age of 19, he took his Solemn Vows as a Discalced Carmelite.*** Already the winds of a pernicious liberalism in religion and politics were blowing over Spain. As a priest, he was asked, on the death of Ferdinand VII, to give the funeral oration. He preached a fiery sermon against the growing menace of anti-Christian liberalism, which set in motion for him a chain of events that forced him to flee to France, the country where God in His providence had a special work marked out for him to do.****

He arrived in Bordeaux empty-handed. But he lost no time in acquiring a Carmelite habit and the little he

* Letters, 8 Nov., 1867.

** Ibid.

*** Liber Professionum Provinciae Aquitaniae. (Ms. Archives Provinciales, La Broussey - Serie C (Province No. 12).

**** ALEXIS - Louis of St. Joseph O.C.D., "Éloge Funèbre Historique de T.R.P. Dominique de St. Joseph," Carcassonne, 1870.

needed to begin to live the religious life in all its austerity. At Bordeaux, he met Mother Bathilde of the Infant Jesus, who gave him the idea of re-establishing the Discalced Carmelite friars in France, suppressed during the French Revolution. A house was acquired and Father Dominic set about looking for companions. A friend of his youth and fellow Carmelite, Father Louis of the Blessed Sacrament, had also fled from Spain and, along with his two companions, was staying at Bayonne. On hearing from Father Dominic, the group was only too happy to join him and thus was founded on 14 October, 1839, at Rue Permentade, Bordeaux, the first community of the Restored Carmelite Friars in France.

Two years later, in 1841, the property of Broussey was donated to Father Dominic and became the novitiate of the Restored Carmel. Vocations presented themselves and foundations followed rapidly on one another. By 1858, they numbered Agen, Carcassonne, Montpellier, Bagnières, Bordeaux, Montigny, Pamiers, Rennes, Lyons. About this time too, an off-shoot of the French Carmel, was established in India.

Father Dominic guided the Restored French Carmel for nearly twenty years. In 1859, he was elected Definitor General and took up his residence at Rome. He was not, however, lost to France. In fact, he could now do for the French Carmel what he could not have done earlier. The Chapter of May, 1865, elected him Superior General of the Carmelite Order. Meanwhile, the French Carmel continued to spread yet more - Saint-Omer, Tarbes, London, India. In 1867, the Restored Carmel was divided into two provinces, the existing province of Aquitaine being split into those of Aquil-

taine and Avignon. In Father Dominic's plan, the latter would later be divided into the province of Avignon and that of Paris.

To this period, Father Dominic's term as Superior General, belongs also the foundation by Mother Veronica of the Third Order of Carmel for India. The inspiration for this work had come to her in that mission land from Father Marie Ephrem, originally of the French Carmel, and it was he who had put her in touch with Father Dominic, who had worked hard as Superior General, to promote the missions of the Order. Little wonder, then, that he should be actively and enthusiastically involved in Mother Veronica's undertaking.

Her novitiate in Carmel Mother Veronica had made alone, with the prioress, Mother Elias, was her novice mistress, because the novice mistress of the community, Sister Thérèse Marie, was too embarrassed to have her among her novices. Of Sister Thérèse Marie, Mother Veronica says: "she was too humble, at least for a proud person like me... When I knelt down before her to talk to her or to ask for some permission, she also fell on her knees at once. Dear Mother Elias, seeing that this embarrassed me, said, 'Well, be calm, I shall be your mistress myself.'"^{*} Mother Elias was to be much more to her novice than a novice mistress in the years ahead. From the very beginning, Mother Veronica took to this great woman for her noble qualities which she describes enthusiastically:

What a mother; what a mistress was this incomparable Mother Elias! Holy Mother Elias! as she was

^{*} Autobiography, Part II, p. 1.

*called by Monsignor La Croix, Bishop of Bayonne. She possessed not only all the virtues but also all the qualities required to make a person perfect. She had a distinguished education, together with an intelligence above the ordinary. What won all hearts to her was that perfect evenness of mind in all circumstances, that gentleness, that unalterable patience combined with a firmness which did not come in the way of her kindness and maternal tenderness. She was one of those rare persons whom authority does not harden... and there are so few of this stamp. On the contrary, Mother Elias seemed made to govern... I never saw her lose her patience in anything, or the poise which she possessed in an eminent degree ... She had a great discernment of minds, a pleasant way of talking, an enchanting-smile... She was not only a perfect Carmelite, but a perfect Prioress. **

These few months, from June to December, 1867, had been filled with spiritual consolation for the novice. When she had received the Carmelite habit on the feast of the Visitation, 2 July, she had felt a great sense of fulfillment and peace. "At last my longings and desires are fulfilled," she writes to a priest, probably Father Joseph of St. Louis, O.C.D., in Rome.

Our Mother of Carmel has obtained for me the grace to be vested in her holy habit... I pleaded with our Holy Mother Teresa, to accept my ardent desire to be numbered among her daughters and to obtain for me the grace never to dishonour it (the

^{*} Ibid.

*habit)... look! the good God helps us to surmount all obstacles when He wishes a thing.**

This day, 2 July, she had received great graces. "I was, as it were, beside myself with joy," she recalls, "and for several days afterwards I had beside me the intellectual presence of our Lord, who spoke to me and directed me in everything, as if I saw him. Our Mother, St. Teresa," she reminds us, "speaks of this grace as one of the greatest that a soul may receive."** She remembers that this grace of spiritual delight had been granted her also when she had received the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph., Now again, as then, prayer was her joy. "I had almost no distraction," she confides. "Sweet tears flooded me. Praying the holy office was my happiness." Her health, too, which had always been very weak, improved. She had never, before this, been allowed to fast or to deprive herself of meat (which she detested). But now she could observe, without ill effects, the fasts, abstinence and bodily penances of Carmel. Indeed, she had a great attraction for penances.

"So here you are, clothed in the white habit of Carmel," wrote Father Marie Ephrem.

*Oh, how much you have longed for this moment! Through how many contradictions and trials of every sort you have passed to reach the goal of your desires. When at Calicut in 1863 you spoke to me of your intentions, who would have said that it would be at Pau that you would receive the habit so dear to me. How mysterious and wonderful are the ways of God! ****

* Letters, 25 June, 1867.

** Autobiography, Part II, p. 8.

*** Letters, 13. 8. 1867.

Mother Veronica has scarcely arrived in Pau, when she begins visualizing plans for the foundation of the Third Order Regular. To the same Carmelite priest in Rome mentioned above, she writes :

Now... about our projects and plans... You know that the Rev. Father Marie Ephrem desires to have cloistered Carmel sisters as well as some Tertiaries for the schools. All will live in the same house and share the same chapel. This will be of great advantage, as those who work will have the spiritual help of the cloistered religious.

So she sees a close connection between contemplation and action. She then talks about candidates :

I have already found three or four young persons who wish to devote themselves to the active work. But it is necessary that we get together in one spot where the Bishop of the diocese is ready to support us.

She has spoken, she says, to the bishop of Annecy, who seems favorable and particularly interested in the work, and asks what her correspondent thinks of this possibility for the Third Order Regular. As for the "necessary means," the money for the project, she knows how to find it, if he obtains for her the permission of the Father General. She has it all planned out, as we shall see, capable woman of business that she is. "We could busy ourselves," she goes on, "with forming these candidates for our work for some time before leaving (for India), and then we could embark for the voyage altogether - five Carmelites of the Reform and four or five Tertiaries, along with the good nephew of the bishop of Annecy who wishes to be our escort."

So, Mother Veronica takes it for granted that she will be of the number to go to India. She even plans a ruse for the purpose: "I thought that in order that our friend the Cardinal B. may not make objections to my being a subject, I could change my name, leaving out 'Veronica,' and calling myself Sister Mary of the Passion." *

To Father Marie Ephrem she writes most ardently :

*Oh, my Father, I beseech you, beg Our Lord and His holy Mother that everything may be so ordered that I myself might come soon, I am destined for India. I am there in spirit. As much as St. John de Britto felt drawn to the mission of Madura... I, too, must return to the mission of Malabar. Nothing will prevent me - not even hell and all it contains... God wills it... He will help me to overcome all the obstacles that bar my path to India... Were an angel from heaven to say to me, 'You shall not go', I should reply, 'Yes, I will - without any doubt, I will.'***

There will be moments, however, when the pull of the contemplative life will be so great that she will look forward to the time when, her active work done, she can re-enter the cloister of Pau: "Do you know, Father (Father of St. Louis), that I already practice almost the whole of the Holy Rule and when Father Marie Ephrem has no need of me for his Tertiaries, I think I shall retire into the cloister to end my miserable days in the peace of the Reformed Carmel." For the present, she is ready to be professed as a Tertiary, but it will not be forever!

* Letters, 25 June, 1867.
** Ibid., 8 Nov., 1867.

"You see, I have nothing else to do at the moment but make my profession in the Third Order... I still await the day when I shall make my profession in the Reformed Carmel."**

This charism, this healthy tension between activity and contemplation, will be the most important legacy that Mother Veronica will bequeath to her daughters - activity that is both nourished on union with God in prayer and flows from it, prayer that leads to fruitful activity and activity that needs to return to prayer for its sustenance:

*To enter Carmel is to be immersed in its spirit of prayer, to be drawn to seek God above all things, through all our activity, as the single purpose of our lives. His overflowing love fills us with prophetic zeal to share this love with all, receiving even as we give it, through education and other apostolic works.***

If Mother Veronica is filled with apostolic zeal, Father Marie Ephrem, on his part, is not less so. "Now let us come to the business of the Third Order," he says ;

*I begin by telling you that I must have sisters here for the education of girls. I must have them absolutely. Lately, they have got down from England for Triuvandrum a lady teacher who is doing all she can to make our young people Protestants. I am doing all I can to counteract her. If I had sisters here who knew English, I am sure that within a month she would not have even ten pupils.****

* Ibid., 25 June, 1867.
** The Apostolic Carmel Constitutions (1979), Art. 2.
*** Letters, 13. 8. 1867.

Letters from both Father Dominic and Father Marie Ephrem constantly stress the need for English and Irish vocations, for the work in India needs religious who know English. In one of his very first letters, Father Dominic advises Mother Veronica to "Try to procure as many English novices as (she) can." And Father Marie Ephrem writes: "Do all you can to procure some English or Irish ones (subjects)... To succeed we must have sisters capable of teaching both English and French." And again, "Have you any vocations? Do you hope to have any English ones? You know that in this country English vocations are necessary."****

Father Marie Ephrem also brings to Mother Veronica's attention the question of the Rule:

*As to the Rule of the Third Order, I have no time to do it. You have the time; draw up one for me based on our Rule, the Constitutions for Tertiaries engaged in Education and Works of Charity. Send me these Rules and Constitutions by post. I will go over them and then it will be necessary to get them approved by the Bishop of the Diocese where the Third Order is to be founded. I am pressing the affair of our Foundation with Rome. *****

Just as well that the novitiate in Carmel was for Mother Veronica "like a second spiritual childhood," for she would need all the spiritual strength she could muster to sustain her in the many trials that awaited her. God was preparing her for what lay ahead. What is more, he gave her in advance an insight into what was

* Ibid., 2 Nov., 1867.
 ** Ibid., 21 Jan., 1868.
 *** Ibid., 22. 8. '68.
 **** Ibid., 13. 8. '67.

in store for her. On Christmas Day, ten days after leaving Pau, at a village near La Roche, she was at prayer in the little church. It was nightfall and the church was deserted. "I found myself," she relates, "as it were, in a desert, quite barren, with a huge cross erected in front of me, to which I clung as my only support." And she adds the significant comment, "It was indeed the bare cross which was awaiting me in Savoy."*

The one friend that Mother Veronica could always count on was Mother Elias. She took interest in the project as if it were her own – as, in a way, it was, for was it not just another shoot of the garden of Carmel that was being planted? While Mother Veronica was still in the novitiate, Mother Elias had written to the Carmelite General, Father Dominic, to tell him that her novice was about to complete her novitiate and asking what he wished her to do for the foundation of the Third Order Regular. Unfortunately, the letters that passed between Father Dominic and the Carmel of Pau at this critical period, though carefully preserved at the time, were later burnt in a fit of spring cleaning by a sister who had been given charge of the archives. "I must say," comments Mother Veronica, "that I was quite astonished that one could destroy papers which would be necessary to prove that this work of God was entrusted to me only by obedience, by the first superior of the Order."**

Father Dominic replied that, on completion of her novitiate, she would be professed in the Third Order Regular which she had to found. The Carmelite Prior at

* Autobiography, Part III, p. 9.
 ** Ibid., p. 6.

Bagnères, or another Father appointed by him, would receive her profession in the Father General's name. On receipt of this letter, Mother Elias advised the foundress-to-be to begin her retreat of thirteen days in preparation for her profession, which she made in the hands of Father Robert, O.C.D., on 15 September, 1867. During the profession ceremony, when Mother Veronica, according to the Carmelite custom, prostrated herself in the form of a cross on the carpet in the middle of the chapel, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, who was present, saw a great cross hovering over her.*

Soon after her profession, Mother Elias advised her, as she had the God-given ability and in accordance with Father Marie Ephrem's request, to begin writing the Constitutions for the new Third Order Regular for the Missions. "I did it," she records, "on the model of those of St. Teresa, while modifying and curtailing what was not conducive to external works."** The Divine Office, for instance, would have to give place to the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, fasts and abstinences would have to be modified.

Reflecting on her own experience, Mother Veronica found that the austerities of Carmel were a delight to her – silence, solitude, fasts, abstinence, vigils. And yet she had been happy doing the works of charity of a sister of St. Joseph. "I was astonished," she remarks, "at the two vocations, so different and yet so marked."***

Again it was her charism of the active contemplative. If she could have looked forward a century and

* *Ibid.*, p. 7.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*

witnessed the vivifying spirit of the sisters of the Apostolic Carmel, the spirit of contemplation in action inspired in them by her as their foundress, she would have understood, as we do today, the meaning of her two vocations – that God was working out His plan for the Third Order of Carmel, not only through her toil for it, but through the very circumstances of her life.

As we have already seen, before Mother Veronica left for Pau, it had been decided, in consultation with Monsignor Howard and Monsignor Magnin, Bishop of Annecy, to make the foundation at Annecy in Savoy. Now, Mother Veronica knew a priest there, a relative of the bishop, on whose help she thought she could count. She received from this priest a very enthusiastic reply to her letter, whereupon Mother Elias, despite her loving concern for Mother Veronica, was anxious that she should leave Pau immediately. In vain did Mother Veronica beg to be permitted to stay on ten days longer till Christmas. Mother Elias believed that, obedience to the Father General precluded it, as he wished that the foundation be started without delay. So, Mother Veronica set out in the middle of December. She had just enough money to pay for the long journey, no more. There was winter all around and winter in her heart. To tear herself away from her beloved cloister of Carmel was an immense sacrifice. Her Carmelite habit was her consolation, together with Mother Elias's promise that, her work done, she would again be received into the Carmel of Pau. She felt that, by her work and her sacrifice, she would be filling up "an emptiness" that existed in the Order of Carmel.

On her way to Annecy, Mother Veronica stopped at Montpellier, where the Carmelite Fathers, to whom

Mother Elias had recommended her, were very kind to her. "I remained for 3 days with the good Father Gratian," she writes to Father Dominic. "I was received as a guest by the secular tertiaries there with true fraternal charity (they actually made a collection for her.)* I was truly enchanted," she continues, "to find a Monastery of the Third Order Secular there. Perhaps it may be there, finally, if Your Reverence agrees, and if the foundation at Savoy cannot be made, that we make our beginning. But what gave her greater pleasure, was to meet the Father Prior, Father Gratian. "By the way," she comments, "he has a great desire to devote himself to our dear Missions if obedience permits him to do so,"** and she proceeds forthwith to put in a strong and protracted word for him to the Superior General. Two years later, he does indeed accompany the band of Cloistered Carmelites and Carmelite Tertiaries to India.

At Annecy, Mother Veronica at first thought she was fortunate to meet Monsignor Magnin himself, who was on a visitation of the Monastery. But what was her disappointment to find that he knew nothing of her arrival and, as for the new foundation, he felt he could not give permission for it to be established at Annecy, where there were already too many convents. If she wished, he said, she could try to found it at La Roche, a small town, six hours from Annecy, hidden away in the valleys of Savoy.

"Arrived at La Roche, which seemed," Mother Veronica says,

* *Carmel in India*, p. 12.
 ** *Letters*, 31 Dec., 1867.

*to be nothing but a barren and icy rock (symbolic of what her life here was to be!), neither the curé nor any of the priests showed any interest in me, and none of them seemed willing even to hear my confession on Christmas Eve, so that I was obliged to go twice to a neighbouring village, where at last I was absolved by the Rev. Father Guardian of the Capuchins, who took pity on me.**

To Father Dominic she enumerates all her problems, including the difficulty of finding a house, candidates, funds. In all this, she says, "I see the will of His Divine Providence who wishes that the first foundation of the Third Order Regular be made where He would desire it, with the permission of Your Reverence."**

From the time Mother Veronica had spoken to Bishop Marie Ephrem about her call to Carmel and he had been inspired to suggest that she found a Third Order for the Missions, he had stood by her and would continue to do so for a good part of the way. He would give her his support and help – by contacting the Carmelite General and authorities at Rome and Pau, besides giving her spiritual advice and encouragement, as well as material aid. Earlier, while she was still with the Sisters of St. Joseph, he had judged it prudent for them not to correspond, but once she entered the Carmel of Pau, he kept in constant touch with her. He would be happy, he tells her, if the Third Order could be founded in France, from where, in future, sisters would be available for the missions whenever needed. This was not to be, however, In God's inscrutable de-

* *Carmel in India*, p. 13.
 ** *Letters*, 31 Dec., 1867.

signs, the several attempts to found an ongoing feeder for the Apostolic Carmel in Europe proved abortive. The Congregation seemed destined, beyond the cradle stage, to receive nourishment and to flourish on native soil. "I think," Father Marie Ephrem continues, "our Father General would greatly approve your Third Order in Toulouse... If you cannot do it there, try the foundation at Annecy... But...while the matter is being settled, do a little noviceship... Meanwhile, I am going to have the building put up; but I need a little time, as money is necessary for that."^{*}

Father Marie Ephrem's understanding and encouragement meant a great deal to Mother Veronica. "You ask me for a word of encouragement," he writes,

*a word from me to say you are acting under obedience. This word, my dear child, I send you; and I send it to you with all my heart. I am pleased with you, I approve of what you are doing and bless it and I pray to God, who alone has power to make what we undertake for his glory prosper and succeed, to bless you and strengthen you in the midst of the difficulties you are encountering. Have no misgivings about the way you are walking in, or about the work you have undertaken. You will succeed in doing what Our Lord wants, as He wants it and when he wants it.***

That Father Marie Ephrem, in fact, considered himself a co-founder with Mother Veronica is amply evident from his correspondence:

^{*} *Ibid.*, 14 April, 1868.

^{**} *Ibid.*

*...since I know that the very Reverend Father General has given you his blessing and mandated you to found our great work, I am satisfied... let us also pray to St. Francis de Sales to bless our budding work.**

*You are in the way of Obedience and I want you to continue working for the foundation of the Third Order. Keep me informed about everything. Write to me about what you are doing, what the good God does for us, and the trials our work passes through. I am doing what I can to back you in Rome... let us work then for the success of our project and especially let us pray to Jesus, who can do all things and will bring everything to a favorable conclusion... will this satisfy you? I do not ask whether you trust me, for you have always done so. My daughter, believe that if I do not do more, if I do not press harder, it is through prudence and so as not to allow our natural impatience even for a good cause to spoil God's work by wishing to make everything come right before the time willed and fixed by providence.***

*I am very happy at the news you give me of our work or rather of the work of Jesus through you.****

La Roche was hardly the place for the foundation of a new congregation. Where could Mother Veronica get recruits in this place, buried as it was in the mountains? And yet, to go out of Savoy, she would need the permission of the Father General. However, she went and spent Christmas in a village near La Roche. Then she

^{*} *Ibid.*, 21 Jan., 1868.

^{**} *Ibid.*, 14 April, 1868.

^{***} *Ibid.*, 1. 10. 1868.

rented a small apartment and waited for candidates. But only one girl was found "and she was disfigured and a little silly." Neither she nor Mother Veronica knew the simplest cooking and might have been condemned to nothing but bread and cheese, had it not been for some good souls, like Mme. Polinge (her family, by the way, was closely related to St. Francis de Sales), who sent them dinner all cooked and ready.

Mother Veronica stayed on five months at La Roche. Here, she doffed her disguise and wore only her Carmelite habit. It was a very lonely life of unrelieved isolation, the only rays of consolation being the affectionate letters of advice from Mother Elias, which encouraged and sustained her. To make matters worse, her mother, in her great solicitude for her daughter, thinking perhaps that she was "not properly lodged," arrived at La Roche with her maid to see things for herself. How could Mother Veronica make her at home in the small apartment she shared with her "disfigured girl?" So she begged Mme. Polinge to keep her as her guest at her castle for a few days and Mother Veronica would spend the day with her. Mrs. Leeves was very upset to see her daughter in such poverty and utter destitution, but, since there was nothing she could do, she went away to Geneva as fast as possible.

Mother Veronica had written several times to Father General apprising him of the situation, but had received no reply. We can imagine her plight. In addition to her personal suffering, she was blocked where her work was concerned. No candidates were presenting themselves. But she could neither move forward nor go back. Nor could she predict when this state of affairs would end. It all depended on a reply from the Father General.

She longed to be back in Pau. "I left our dear Carmel of Pau with deep regret," she writes to Father Dominic, "... leaving there my heart, for it is there that I have found my goal, there I am in my element. In fine, there is my paradise on earth. Ever since I left it, I feel like a poor vagabond, an exile, and I feel as if all my bones are dislocated." But she acknowledges that "no great work of God was ever carried out without the Cross and without sufferings, and (she offers) herself voluntarily for all that He asks of (her), hoping that this work will be for His greater glory and that of (their) Holy Order."^{*}

Ready acceptance of suffering is for Mother Veronica not only the necessary concomitant of success in a work willed by God, but also the asceticism that accompanies contemplation, closeness to Jesus. Thus she says: "Be close to Jesus.... As for me, He places me on the cross always - it is my place until the end of my poor life. May His holy Name be blessed!"^{**}

Finally, after five months of trying and waiting unsuccessfully for candidates, the crucial letter arrived, with an apology for the loss of time incurred by the delay. Father General had been ill in Germany and had not received her letters. Now he wrote telling her to leave La Roche immediately and "pass through the Carmels of Lyons, Montpellier, Carcassonne, Agen and Bordeaux, where he prayed the Reverend Father Priors to do their best to help (her) start the Third Order Regular for the missions, for which it was necessary to work as promptly as possible."^{***} "You will present this letter to the priors of these houses," he wrote,

* Letters, 31 Dec., 1867.

** Ibid., 18 Jan., 1871.

*** Autobiography, Part III, p. 10.

*and I am requesting all the Fathers of our Order to help you to make a success of this foundation that is so necessary for our Missions and that I am keen on with all my heart. On the way, at Carcassonne, you can also say a word to Rev. Father Provincial. Finally, if nothing can be done, you can return to Pau and there await what Divine Providence will arrange.**

As a proof of the authenticity of her mission, Father Dominic had written the letter entirely by hand and had duly signed it. Unfortunately, he had forgotten to affix the seal of the Order and this gave the unwilling a loophole to treat Mother Veronica as "an adventuress."

But, at last, she could leave La Roche and move onward in search of greener pastures.

* Letters, 29 April, 1868.

Chapter 10

STILL SEARCHING

On her way from La Roche to Lyons, Mother Veronica stopped at Geneva. Here she found a rumour afloat that she was a runaway Carmelite nun. Fearing that she was giving scandal, the Carmelite Fathers, newly established there, had probably even begged the bishop, Mgr. Mermillod, to send her away. Mother Veronica went to His Grace and, showing him the Father General's letter of authorisation, explained everything. He directed her to the Carmelite Fathers, who, on hearing her story, were reassured.

She had arrived at her mother's house in Geneva with a pain in her side and no treatment her mother gave helped. Lying on a good bed brought no relief. But, strangely enough, while kneeling without a support she did not suffer at all and, later on, in her travels, when she was advised to lie on the floor, she found she could sleep very well. In her day, when medicine was less advanced, this behaviour of the malady was inexplicable and might even have been interpreted

as a spiritual experience. Nowadays, we can guess that there must have been some injury to the backbone, so that only certain bodily postures and a hard bed could relieve the pain. However, given the ignorance of how to deal with the problem, the pain must have been real and very severe.

At Lyons, she was given no hope and was advised to push on to Montpellier, where, as before, she met with great warmth and generosity from the Fathers, especially Father Gratian. This time, at Montpellier, she stayed with a lady who was a Carmelite tertiary, at whose house she met several young women interested in joining the Third Order Regular, as soon as the foundation was started. When Mother Veronica left Montpellier, another Carmelite tertiary, Mme. Barbière, as well as a young uneducated girl, accompanied her, with the intention of being with her and helping her, but they soon left. Mme. Barbière found that her health could not stand this sort of life and from Toulouse she had to return to her estate. But she continued being Mother Veronica's benefactress, often sending her food and money. Mother Veronica's other companion, being discouraged by the constant setbacks that the foundation had to face, left her at Pau, some time later, to return to Montpellier.

At Carcassonne and Agen she had no better luck. Though the Fathers were kind, they had no help to offer. So, after Pentecost, she started for Bordeaux. Everywhere, she had shown Father General's letter, but in Bordeaux, the Fathers, seeing that there was no seal of the Order, took her to be a fraud. The prior, therefore, received her coldly, after keeping her waiting a long time in the parlour. So, she returned to the home

of her host, a chair-maker, resolved to leave the next morning for Pau. She felt very depressed at the lack of sympathy shown her by the Carmelite Fathers, whose Order she loved so much and in the service of which she had left Pau to make the new foundation. She was making final preparations to leave, when one of the Fathers, Father Athanasius of the Immaculate Conception, and a lay brother were ushered in by the chair-maker. Father Athanasius was very interested in Mother Veronica and the work she had been commissioned to do for the missions. He prevailed on her to stay a few days longer, introduced her to people who were helpful to her later on and promised that, as soon as she had a house, he would send her candidates. And he was as good as his word.*

There was nothing further for Mother Veronica at Bordeaux, so she returned to the home she was longing for, the Carmel of Pau. What a story she had to tell Mother Elias! It was not the brazen twentieth century but the easily-shocked mid-nineteenth century. People would have looked askance at any woman, let alone a nun, roaming the country, as she had been forced to do. The past weeks and months had meant just trudging from place to place, and had brought nothing but embarrassment, humiliation at being suspected as an

* This was the same Father Athanasius who continued for many years to be a friend to the Carmelite Third Order of Mangalore. He was appointed extraordinary confessor to the new community when it was finally founded at Bayonne. There are letters from him dating up till the end of the century, from which we see that he followed with affectionate interest and concern the vicissitudes and the triumphs through which the congregation passed down the years. Sister Marie des Anges, one of the first candidates for the new congregation, was sent by him and he always kept up a correspondence with her. She became the first Superior General of the Apostolic Carmel at Mangalore.

"escaped nun," poverty to the point of destitution, loneliness, anxiety and suspense, discouragement, rejection and bodily pain. Six months on the road and she had returned empty-handed, battered, downcast and completely beaten.

To Father Dominic she wrote :

I arrived here in the evening of the day before yesterday after having passed through Carcassonne, Toulouse, Agen and Bordeaux.

*At Toulouse I went to see Mlle. Muzons, who has changed her decision and does not wish to think any more of the Third Order.**

It was an oft-repeated disappointment. One prospective candidate after another backed out. For the six months of travelling and searching, Mother Veronica had nothing to show – neither candidates, nor house, nor even a place, absolutely nothing. It must have been disheartening indeed to be back exactly where she had started. Two rays of hope, however, that she mentions to the Superior General, are Father Athanasius and Father Gratian :

Rev. Father Athanasius... is taking a keen interest in our work and he has promised to do everything in his power to help us... Rev. Father Prior of Montpellier (Father Gratian)... I found very well disposed when I left him. At least in him I have a support, a helper, a person on whom I can count for counsel and to work with me.

* Letters, 7 June, 1868.

"But in the place where I am," she adds, "left alone to work on this project, I definitely cannot do anything." *

She had hoped to get a house in Pau, near the Carmel, which a rich baron had offered her. But, on her arrival, she had found it let out already. So, again she finds herself nowhere. If she is to look out for something in and around Pau, she will have to get the permission of the bishop of Bayonne, "but it is very painful," she says, "to go there all alone, a poor Carmelite in disguise.... I appear like a vagabond before bishops and important personages, without anyone to support me or to accompany me."**

Mother Elias listened while she talked and, no doubt, poured the balm of consolation on Mother Veronica's wounded heart and broken spirit. However, she also held out a faint glimmer of hope. Mother Veronica could try Bayonne. There was a Carmel of the Second Order there, and quite close to it was a house which, in the past, had served the sisters provisionally. Mother Veronica could go to the bishop of Bayonne, Monsignor La Croix, and see whether the work could be started there. But, before starting on her way again, Mother Elias advised her to rest for some days. Mother Elias had an understanding heart, but she was also a very practical woman. If Mother Veronica were admitted into the enclosure, she would find it difficult to do all that the success of the work demanded. So, the prioress suggested that she stay in an apartment adjoining those of the *tourier* (extern) sisters. In her present overwrought state, this was a great blow to her, a pro-

* *Ibid.*
** *Ibid.*

longed heartache – to follow all the exercises of the community, to hear the sisters chanting in choir and not be able to join them. They came to the parlour to be with her during recreation, but she would only weep. Nor did the community confessor bring her any comfort.

At this moment, feeling completely broken, she writes to Father Dominic in deep anguish :

In order to work in India, to dedicate myself, I would give my life... but if I must still remain on for an indefinite period of time outside my beloved Carmel to go around alone, I confess very humbly to Your Reverence that I do not have the least attraction for this life. May Your Reverence have the charity to consider in what a sad plight your poor daughter finds herself. Our Holy Mother Teresa when travelling to make her foundations was never alone... but I am quite alone...

How can I go and present myself where I do not know anyone with nothing to settle or propose? Without anyone to accompany or support me? No one encourages me at all here in Pau (in her anguish, she seems hardly to know what she is writing. She surely does not intend to belittle Mother Elias!). And, besides, I feel so sad here in Carmel in the midst of the tourist sisters, while formerly I felt interiorly the joy and happiness of being already at the gates of paradise. I do not know if I can resist this any longer.

I beg of Your Reverence most humbly to command me as to what you would have me do now. Holy

Obedience is my only support. I am extremely sad here. I have never felt like this anywhere before. I have lost all my energy because my heart attracts me in such a way to the interior that I feel I can do nothing.

I have exposed my feelings in all truth to Your Reverence, who, I know, will judge me as you think just before God.

Then, in a postscript, she adds that she has received a letter from Monsignor Howard with his blessing and this has cheered her, though she has "not reached the end yet. I think I shall leave for Bayonne tomorrow," she concludes.

Obedience and a spirit of faith in superiors was Mother Veronica's tower of strength. Like Jesus, she could say, "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me," or "I come to do your will, O God," and this Divine Will was manifested to her through her superiors. She was quite 'modern,' as may be seen in the letter just quoted, where she bares her soul to her superior, with all its repugnance for the task appointed, yet asks him to command her still, for 'Holy Obedience is (her) only support.' Repeatedly, we find her coming back to this major theme in her life, as to that of suffering, and often, for her, the two are intimately connected. At one moment, her pain is that she is not quite sure what obedience asks of her :

What is painful is the thought that I am abandoned, that I am left to do what I think best, while I ask

only to obey, and it is this that prevented me from giving up, for I kept saying to myself, 'It is obedience that brought me here and I shall leave only through obedience.'^{*}

At another time, obedience gives her courage : "I do not fear the obstacles and difficulties I might have to encounter when I follow the directions of my superiors."^{**} And again: "I have encountered many difficulties and they are far from being smoothened out, but now, relying on the words of Your Reverence, I shall go ahead with new courage."^{***} When things go wrong, when failure overtakes her efforts, obedience is her consolation "...as I was aware that, in everything, I had no other intention than to follow holy Obedience, and since I could, despite all my miseries and sins, give this proof of having always obeyed in whatever concerned this foundation, from the smallest thing to the greatest, I was soon consoled."^{****}

It was this virtue in Mother Veronica, no doubt, above every other consideration, that prompted, first Father Marie Ephrem and then Father Dominic, to recognise in her the fittest instrument for the work of God in the foundation of the Third Order. They expressly approved her dedication to obedience and, at opportune moments, strengthened this virtue in her through exhortation and encouragement. "I see with satisfaction," writes Father Marie Ephrem,

that you are always guided by holy obedience. However little the success you may have had at La

* *Ibid.*, La Roche, March 1, 1868.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*

**** *Ibid.*, 6th Nov., 1869.

*Roche, it will always be a great gain to you and the work, that you are able to say to yourself, 'I have obeyed.' So have confidence.**

And again,

*Father General has taken the affair in hand. Obey him; do whatever he may tell you; go wherever he may send you; and rest assured that God will be with you.***

She left for Bayonne at the beginning of June, 1868. "I cannot express," she says, "the oppression of heart that I felt in leaving once again my Carmel of Pau, but the remarkable thing is that, as I was approaching Bayonne, a heavy weight seemed to be lifted from me."^{***} She went straight to the Carmel, where the prioress, Mother Dosithea, and the whole community assembled to welcome her warmly and make her feel at home. They told her that their temporary house was, for the moment, occupied by tenants, but would be vacant in a month's time and she could have it at 500 francs per year. She was invited to go and see the house to make sure it suited her. It was adjacent to the Carmel. As Mother Veronica entered the courtyard, she felt that it was here that she had to start her foundation. "Joy and peace filled my desolate heart," she says, "and a new courage to work for the glory of God and the good of our holy Order in the missions of India, gave me a strength which I had lacked totally before this."^{****}

* *Ibid.*, July 11, 1868.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Autobiography*, Part III, p. 13.

**** *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The response of Monsignor La Croix, Bishop of Bayonne, seemed to set the seal of God's approval on Bayonne as the cradle of the new Order, for, although he was not usually favorable to new foundations, he received Mother Veronica with paternal kindness and granted her all the permissions she needed to establish the Third Order – to use the temporary house of the Carmelites, to receive candidates, to make the necessary repairs, to set up a new community with the episcopal enclosure. He even gave her permission to enter the Carmelite enclosure at Pau while awaiting the vacant possession of the house. On her return to Pau, Mother Elias received her with open arms and did whatever she could to make up to her in affection and concern for all that she had suffered in the past months.

Meanwhile, Father Dominic had received Mother Veronica's epistle of anguish and pain and, disturbed by it, wrote :

*I awaited with anxiety your letter from Bayonne, as your previous one grieved me greatly. However God may have wished to try you, He has soon come to your aid.... since His Divine goodness has enabled you to begin the work, His Providence will do the rest.**

In a previous letter, Father Dominic had given Mother Veronica the good news that Father Marie Ephrem was to receive his nomination as Vicar Apostolic of Quilon towards the end of June and later be consecrated bish-

* Letters, June 11, 1868.

op. This circumstance would, of course, be a gain to the new congregation in India. So, Father Dominic adds : "You see that, with confidence in God and with perseverance, one accomplishes everything.*"

Mother Veronica, overjoyed, hastens to felicitate this father of her soul and her co-worker :

I had begun this letter and this evening I received one from Our Very Reverend Father General giving me the good news. Now I need not call you only my Father but also Monsignor. But I know you are too much my Father for this to make any difference towards your poor unworthy daughter... Our Very Reverend Father General is very pleased and so are we. We must say the Te Deum to render thanks. God be praised. Now you will be more free to do good and to put into execution our projects for the foundation.

Felicitations done, Mother Veronica goes on to describe all she has been through and how she could not have gone on with the work except for obedience, how she had said to Jesus:

*Lord, I am eager to do nothing but Your Holy Will. Obedience is now my only guide. But for it, I would not resist any more..... But Father Marie Ephrem, who has always spoken to me in your name, has clearly told me, 'I want you to work at this foundation for our Third Order.' Our Very Reverend Father General wishes it also. So I dare not re-enter behind these blessed grilles.***

* Ibid., June 8, 1868.
 ** Ibid., 13 June, 1868.

She then tells him about Bayonne and gives him a detailed account regarding the arrangements for the foundation there.

By the time Bishop Marie Ephrem's reply is received, it is October, and Mother Veronica is pretty well settled in Bayonne with her postulants and novices. He has been too busy, probably, to write sooner, much as he may have wished to, for the business connected with becoming a bishop must have delayed his taking up his pen. But, of course, as will be seen later, he was delighted that the foundation had, at last, materialised.

To go back a few months, it now only remained for Mother Veronica to make the last minute preparations for the opening of the new and first house of the Apostolic Carmel. In this, as in everything she had attempted during the last few months, Mother Elias was Mother Veronica's unfailing ally. She set aside all that could be given away from the sacristy and the hermitage at Pau to make them available for the new foundation at Bayonne.

It was during this month of waiting that Mother Veronica had the privilege of witnessing what God was doing in Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified during one of the two darkest stages of her life, one at Pau, the other at Mangalore, when the devil was permitted to take her by surprise. Mysterious as it may seem, these were occasions, of "real diabolical possession."* In the book on Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified written by Mother Veronica later,** she would add to her own account

those of other eye-witnesses. In her *Autobiography* she writes :

*The devil had received the power to torment her, to obsess her and even to take possession of her. This monster tried to kill her and put in her food bits of pointed glass, bent pins etc. that she might be choked while taking her soup. Once, when this happened, she was almost choking to death and was taken to the infirmary. I saw that when a lunette from the monstrance was placed on her, she immediately spat out a bit of glass, sharp as a razor. She took it from her mouth perfectly dry.**

Mother Veronica then goes on to narrate something that happened to her personally. Sometimes, Satan would assume the form of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and torment the other nuns. "On one of these occasions," relates Mother Veronica,

I thought it was Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified who made a sign to me to accompany her to the little terrace on the roof of the monastery. There she asked me to sit down and she sat beside me. She spoke of several things connected with the proposed foundation, showed me great affection, took my hand and kissed it. Then she started showing me a number of bottles which contained various distilled waters - essence of orange, flowers etc. She boasted that she had made them herself and insisted that I taste them by pouring a little in the hollow of my hand. I refused, saying that we could

* Amédée Brunot, *Mariam, "The Little Arab"*, p. 51 et seq.
** *Vie Merveilleuse de Soeur Marie de Jésus Crucifié.*

* *Autobiography, Part III, p. 13.*

*not eat or drink without permission between meals. She still insisted saying : 'But it is just a little.' Then I replied, 'I am astonished that you wish me to break the Rule, but I do not wish to.' The sham Sister of Jesus Crucified put back the bottle in its place and, saying she had something to do, went inside. I followed her, looking this side and that, but saw no one, and thought to myself, 'But where has this child gone ? She has been very brisk.'**

This was before it was known that the devil had the power to take her form, so as to deceive the sisters and make them think ill of her. He himself confessed it later. And, among other things, he said he had deceived "that wicked Sister Veronica, taking the form of the 'little nothing' and leading her to the terrace on the roof."

A third incident that Mother Veronica records of this period is a new characteristic of the stigmata that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified experienced. For a number of Fridays following the 24th of May, 1868, "her heart bled and the letters OJZ were impressed on the linen used to soak the blood."** Mother Veronica herself, on one of these Fridays had gone to Sister Mary's cell, knowing that she was suffering very much. On enquiring how she felt, Sister Mary, taking from under her cot, some cut pieces of cloth, which she had been using to soak the blood, asked, "Mother, look what does this mean ?" And Mother Veronica saw that on practically all the pieces were marked in Sister Mary's blood, smudged and irregular but quite clear, the letters OJZ.

* *Ibid.*, p. 14.
** *Ibid.*,

Pretending to be indifferent, both to protect Mary's humility and because she shunned those who venerated her, Mother Veronica answered, "I think that means the name of Jesus but there is an S which I don't quite understand." Mother Veronica managed to get two or three of the clearly marked pieces, which she preserved and took with her to Bayonne. One of them she later gave to an English priest, Father Kenelm Vaughan (the brother of Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster), and it was instrumental in curing him of a chronic ailment of the chest.*

It was now time for Mother Veronica to leave for Bayonne. Two postulants from Nimes, whom she had met earlier, would arrive on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and she must be there to receive them. So, on the 14th of July, 1868, she again left her dear Carmel of Pau, this time really to begin the foundation of the Third Order Apostolic of Carmel at Bayonne.

* *Ibid.*

Chapter 11

THE LITTLE CARMEL

"I thank the good God," Father Dominic had written, "for all the progress He has deigned to grant to our apostolic work. I read your last two letters to Mgr. Howard and he is full of enthusiasm. So carry on bravely!"* Just three days later, having presumably heard about the definite arrangements regarding Bayonne, he wrote: "I very readily grant you permission to set up the foundation at Bayonne. Thank His Lordship in my name."**

Needless to say, Bishop Marie Ephrem is overjoyed and praises God for the graces showered on Mother Veronica personally and on their joint work:

He has led you into the pure and holy light of his beloved Church. And not content with this, He has chosen you out of ten thousand to be His loved bride and the instrument of his designs in the Or-

* Letters, 8 June, 1868.

** Ibid., 11 June, 1868.

der of the Apostolic Carmel. God be praised for having looked with an eye of mercy on this our work, which is also His... I can't help considering this work as that of both of us. For the last five years, we have been following up the plan across a thousand obstacles and oppositions, and both you and I have been obliged to cross the ocean, to arrive at God's appointed time in Europe, to exert our last efforts for this project and to surmount the last obstacles.

*Do not forget, my daughter, the good Monsignor Howard, who has helped us so much; let us also unite in our intentions and prayers the Bishop of Bayonne, your good Superior, and our dear Sisters of Pau. Let us likewise count among our friends and supporters all those who have caused us opposition or created difficulties and obstacles, for they have been with the best intentions, God's instruments.**

Other well-wishers were not wanting either. "So it is at Bayonne," wrote Father Martin, O.D.C., Provincial of Aquitaine,

that Our Lord wishes to place the cradle of the family that obedience orders you to set up. How many difficulties have already cropped up in the face of this enterprise! How many obstacles still to overcome! But these make me forecast very favourably: there lies the mark of God's works... The kindly attitude of His Lordship, the Bishop of Bayonne, the house large enough for the budding community are

* Ibid., 12 Dec., 1868.

THE LITTLE CARMEL

*evident marks of God's protection... As you remark, 'God is a banker who never fails.'**

On her arrival at Bayonne, Mother Veronica was received with warmth and affection by the sisters of the Cloistered Carmel there, and the first two nights she spent in the quarters of the *tourières*, so that she could make the most necessary arrangements before shifting into the new house, which was to be termed the Little Carmel. The two postulants she was awaiting, both from Nîmes,** arrived at 10 o'clock at night on 15 July, the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. After the High Mass on the feast, the three new inmates took possession of their house. The superior of the Carmel of Bayonne, Abbé Inchauspé, was to be superior and confessor of the Little Carmel as well. He gave himself wholeheartedly to the work of the new foundation and even regretted that he could not set aside all his money towards its maintenance, having his old parents to look after. Mother Veronica attributes the success of the foundation in great measure to

*the charity, the zeal and the devotion of this worthy and holy priest, who during the work of repairs not only gave all the orders, made plans, and directed everything with as much charity as intelligence, but even paid for many things out of his own pocket; so that all those who are concerned in the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel owe him a lasting remembrance.****

* *Ibid.*, 17. 6. '68.

** One of them, later to be known as Sister Agnes, would be among the early Apostolic Carmelites to come to India.

*** *Carmel in India*, p. 33.

A STRANGE DESTINY

Abbé Inchauspé came from quite a long distance every morning to supervise the labourers at the repairs they were engaged in. And the repair work must have been something formidable, to judge from Mother Veronica's description of the state of the house:

Certainly nothing could be less attractive – he few rooms which had formerly been occupied by tenants were somewhat clean, but the lower part of the house, paved with stone, was overrun by all the animals one finds on a farm.

*The old chapel of our sisters had become a cow-shed; pigs, rabbits and hares ran freely everywhere in all the rooms, which looked like cellars, so low and ill-kept were they.**

"There you are installed in your little Bethlehem," Bishop Marie Ephrem had written,

*very poorly, very uncomfortably, cramped for space. So much the better, so much the better. This is the way God's works begin.***

*I am praying for our dear work, for you the cornerstone of it, for our dear children who are its groundwork, for your worthy Superior who is its builder.****

The house had not been built to be a convent, but, as far as possible, it was arranged like the houses of the Cloistered Carmelites. The chapel was separated from the sisters' choir by a wooden carved grille, in the

* *Ibid.*, p. 29.

** *Letters*, 1. 10. '68.

*** *Ibid.*, 12 Dec., '68.

middle of which was a little grille for communion. There were stalls on both sides and a big curtain which could be drawn to hide the sisters. The priest entered by an outer door which led into the sanctuary and there was also an outer sacristy. The chapel was dedicated to St. Joseph and a statue of the saint holding the Infant Jesus stood in a niche behind the tabernacle, dominating the altar. The enclosure was perfect even to the point of having *tourières* for outer business, as in the Second Order.

When, some weeks later, Father Dominic, true to his promise, arrived at Bayonne, he went over the entire convent, as well as the Constitutions, which Mother Veronica had drawn up for the nascent congregation. He met and blessed the novices and postulants, impressed upon them the importance of the foundation stones of an edifice and set the seal of his approval on everything, with the words: "Now you will have the episcopal enclosure; later on, we shall see about giving you the canonical enclosure."* And Mother Veronica ruminates "I could not wish for anything better... if we had been able to fulfil this desire of our holy and excellent Father General, the Little Carmel would still exist."** Would it? On this point, Mother Veronica seemed short-sighted indeed, to visualise an educational order with a canonical enclosure. Time and events would show her that it was an anomaly, at least as others concerned would see it. She would obey, but apparently she would never be convinced, to judge from the above regret recorded in her *Autobiography* nearly twenty years later.

* *Autobiography*, Part III, p. 20.
** *Ibid.*

For Mother Veronica and those who collaborated with her, the experiment of the foundation of a Third Order was so new, that it would have to be a matter of trial and error, with much heartache in the process. When Mother Veronica showed Father Dominic the Constitutions she had drawn up at Bishop Marie Ephrem's order, he approved most of it, but changed the First Constitution to read thus :

*The Religious of the Regular Third Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel shall be under the obedience of the Bishops of the dioceses where they are established - as well as under the very Rev. Father General of the Discalced Carmelites.**

Little did he or Mother Veronica realise what far-reaching and far from salutary effects this Constitution would have on the Congregation ten years later.

While the chapel was getting ready, the inmates of the Little Carmel attended Mass with the sisters next door. One day, the Bishop of Bayonne, Mgr. La Croix, paid them a surprise visit. He was staying at the major seminary closeby, where a retreat for priests was in progress. He was charmed with the chapel and promised, "as soon as it is finished we shall place the Blessed Sacrament there." Mother Veronica was delighted, of course, to have her desire fulfilled even before expressing it. She and the young sisters were also touched by the homeliness of the bishop. As they happened to be at their dinner, he would not let them rise, but spoke to them walking up and down in their refec-

* *Carmel in India*, p. 34.

tory. Mgr. La Croix was as good as his word. He came himself to offer the first Mass in the chapel, reserved the Blessed Sacrament there and demarcated the episcopal enclosure.

While Abbé Inchauspé saw to the material building work, Mother Veronica was engaged primarily in giving shape and form to human material – no easy task, as she relates. Many priests from various places sent her candidates and they turned out to be quite an assortment, as one might imagine. Here was a new congregation, with no traditions, no reputation, meant for the missions in far-away India. It would require a strong and special call for truly genuine people to be ready to take the risk. Others who came would, naturally, be those who could find no place, for some reason or other in better known congregations. On the other hand, Mother Veronica knew exactly what she wanted. Although she was willing to give all a chance, she was not prepared to accept anyone below the standard she had set. No wonder she could say later : "During the five years that I remained at the Little Carmel of Bayonne, I had to send away 24 or 25 subjects, of whom four or five were novices."*

She describes her experiences with a few of these, which indicate that Satan was certainly as busy undoing her work as she was busy building it up. There was, for instance, the girl whose father was a butcher by profession. She was an independent character and could not live in community or obey. So, Mother Veronica had told her that she would have to go home,

* *Autobiography, Part III, p. 22.*

which she was reluctant to do. Pretending one day to be sick in bed during prayers, she used the time to get a huge kitchen knife up to the dormitory. It is frightening to imagine what she might have done if it had not been discovered. Of course, she was sent away immediately. Then, there was the girl who went off her head and had to be sent to the hospital, where the sisters had to put clothes on her forcibly. But none could beat the person sent by Abbé Sempe. She had already been in another congregation and, even before she arrived, the reputation had preceded her that she was led by extraordinary ways. Her guardian angel, she had told Abbé Sempe, made her rise from her bed on Friday nights, gave her the discipline and sent her back to bed. It was at this time, Mother Veronica reminds us, that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was still undergoing at Pau the 40 days' possession of her body by Satan. "... as Satan acts like a monkey and imitates God," she adds, "he wanted to begin something of the same kind at the Little Carmel, which he detested, as much as he did me, whom he called the wicked Sister Veronica."* Every Thursday and Friday, convulsions and contortions alternated in the novice with peaceful raptures, and Mother Veronica had to remain all alone with her, because she did not want the other novices and postulants to see her. Abbé Inchauspé tried exorcism on her, but to no avail. The test of these states came, however, when she was challenged to humility, obedience, charity – a real difference between her and Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. This caused Mother Veronica to doubt her authenticity. One day, she took in her hand the discipline made of thick iron wire, which was hanging on the bed of the novice, and raised her hand

* *Ibid., p. 18.*

to strike her with it. But, at that moment, the discipline crumbled and fell on the ground, only the handle remaining in her hand. Whereupon, says Mother Veronica,

*The novice with a satanic appearance, sat on her haunches and cried like a possessed person, 'What! do you wish to beat me?' 'Yes, and I wish that you keep silent, that you remain quiet,' and I gave her a slap on the face. Alas, she got up, leapt down from her bed and holding me by the shoulders began to jump right round the room, dragging me along with her, while I continued to strike her as best I could. Returning at last, near her bed, after the satanic dance, I pulled myself up with all my strength and threw her on the mattress and, while covering her with her blanket, I said, 'In the name of the Father, I order you to keep quiet and remain calm!' She gave a kind of grunt and did not move any more.**

Mother Veronica understood from this incident that the novice was only an instrument of Satan, who wanted to put disorder and confusion at the beginning of the Foundation. The next morning she was divested of her habit and sent away.

Mother Veronica informed Father Dominic about this unwelcome episode, to which he replied :

Thank you for your beautiful letter. It is generally the case with works undertaken for the glory of God, that they are proved and tried by contradictions, especially at the beginning; and so the embarrassment sent you by the evil one is a fresh proof that God

* *Ibid.*, p. 19.

*wishes to make use of this foundation for the good of souls, and above all for the conversion of infidels. Continue to work with courage, for God is with you.**

He advised her, however, not to receive any postulants from other congregations, as they find it hard to forget what they have learnt there and are always "a source of anxiety and embarrassment."

But there were really good subjects, who also presented themselves. One of the two from Nîmes was a very good religious who, after her profession, was sent to India, Sister Agnes. Others, who went to India and there became the pillars of the Apostolic Carmel, were Teresa Devine, Irish, in religion Sister Elias; and two girls from Bordeaux, Marie Françoise Duchon, in religion Sister Marie des Anges, and Justine Juge, a lay sister, in religion, Sister Mary Joseph.

In India, too, there were many vocations just awaiting the arrival of the sisters from Bayonne. Bishop Marie Ephrem writes: "You have postulants here who are all impatience for the arrival of the sisters. I have already four you can count on, I believe. Once you are here, others will follow. Pray to the good God to keep them in their vocation."**

Reminded of the interest in this work which had been evinced by Father Athanasius, of the Carmelite Monastery of Bordeaux, Mother Veronica asked Father Dominic to have him as extraordinary confessor of the Little Carmel and, with the bishop's permission and in

* *Letters*, July 7th, 1869.

** *Ibid.*, 11 July, 1868.

consultation with Father Martin, Provincial of Aquitaine, it was arranged. Father Athanasius came on Ember Days and gave the little community a great deal of spiritual help. He was also instrumental in introducing really good vocations for the Apostolic Carmel. As we have seen, Father Athanasius kept alive his interest in the Apostolic Carmel even long after the Little Carmel was dissolved, being in contact by letter with Mother Marie des Anges, Superior General of the Congregation in India.

In the beginning, the sisters of the Little Carmel wore the same habit as that of the Great Carmel, except that the material was lighter, the black veil was of wool instead of yarn, and they wore brown stockings and shoes. Each sister had a "cell". She slept on a hard mattress and used sheets and pillow-cases made of linen or cotton. The community abstained always because of poverty, receiving vegetables, fruits and other things from the sisters of the Bayonne Carmel. Later, when the Little Carmel was better off, meat was served on three days a week.

Considering that this was to be an active congregation, the Constitutions Mother Veronica had drawn up earlier were too strict to be practical, as we can see from a few of the articles :

*Flesh meat cannot be used unless in case of ill-health and that not in the common refectory but in a separate place.**

Fast days, besides, according to the Constitutions, must be kept every Friday, and on the eves of Corpus Christi, Exaltation of the Cross and feasts of

* Constitutions, 1870, Chapter XII, Art. 2.

*the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. Thomas, St. John the Baptist, All Saints, 9 days preceding Christmas, Pentecost, Mount Carmel, St. Teresa, 3 days previous to Quadragesima**

Although professed as a Tertiary, Mother Veronica was imbued through and through with the spirit of the Great Carmel and, as such, there were two areas in which she considered strictness essential to religious life - penance and enclosure - areas in which she would, in future, clash with others concerned, including Bishop Marie Ephrem, on account of her reluctance to compromise.

On the other hand, she made ample provision for relaxation and recreation, for she believed that,

*As soul and intellect require relief at intervals, and as God is willing to be served cheerfully, there ought to be recreation betimes between meditation, prayer and work.***

The community, as already stated, were in great poverty, having no income from any source. Nor did the novices who were received bring any dowry. "But", says Mother Veronica, "our hearts were content and joyful, and Providence sent us each day what we needed." During the year 1870, the community passed through many trials. They were: "so poor and neglected that sometimes (they) were forced to gather roots in a neighbouring field for the community dinner."*** One after another fell ill. They still had a big debt that had been contracted for the repairs of the house. And, on top of

* Ibid., Art. 13.

** Ibid., Chapter XIV, Art. 1.

*** Carmel in India, p. 46.

THE LITTLE CARMEL

all this, they were accused, of all things, of having caused a priest who came to say Mass for them, to go out of his mind with pity at seeing their misery. Mother Veronica describes the aftermath thus :

*The month of March passed; we were more and more in distress; so on the 1st of April I put a large black veil over our good Father's (St. Joseph) statue. That same evening twenty-five francs were sent to us, and during five days following, twenty francs came to us each day. On Holy Thursday, which was the sixth day, some charitable ladies made a collection for us which amounted to seven hundred francs, and before the end of the month someone, quite unknown to me, gave me seven thousand francs, with which I paid half our debt and we found ourselves in easier circumstances.**

St. Joseph certainly seems to be one of those lovable saints who enjoy a joke in the process of exercising their heavenly power. The rest of the debt was paid a few months later by Bishop Marie Ephrem.

So eager was Mother Veronica to begin the work in the missions, that she proposed to leave for India with her daughters a year after starting the foundation at Bayonne and, to this end, she set about making arrangements for a substitute for herself at the Little Carmel. Bishop Marie Ephrem, however, had other plans :

You propose to start yourself this summer : Well, I tell you that is not possible. In the first place, you know it is very imprudent to traverse the Red Sea in

* *Ibid.*, p. 53.

A STRANGE DESTINY

*June, July, or August, especially for those who have never left cold climates, and above all, for Carmelites, in their woollen clothes. Were there no other reasons than these, I forbid you to start before September; but there is another, namely, I intend to leave Trivandrum myself in July to embark at Madras about August 27th. You would not find me here, and I wish to be on the spot when you arrive, to receive and establish you myself; therefore you must wait.**

And in another letter he writes :

*Do not be in a hurry, my daughter: you know that the works of God begin in poverty, and are formed slowly. You have tasted poverty in the beginning, and trials also, now wait patiently that all may be done in God's own time... Wait in silence and in hope ; you remember those words of our holy Rule, 'In silentio et spe erit fortitudo vestra' (In silence and hope is our strength). Wait also in prayer and in those virtues which make a good religious.***

And, as for her charges, the bishop tells her : "Form our children of the dear convent of Bayonne in obedience, in humility and in mortification."***

It is about this time that the name, 'Apostolic Carmel', begins to be used. Mother Veronica uses it in a letter to Bishop Marie Ephrem, dated 29 September, 1869, inviting him to Pau for the profession of the first novice, Sister Agnes. And we find it earlier in a letter of Bishop Marie Ephrem dated 12 December, 1868. That

* *Letters*, April 8th, 1869.

** *Ibid.*, May 18, 1869.

*** *Ibid.*

It was originally Mother Veronica's idea is borne out by Bishop Marie Ephrem when he writes to Mgr. La Croix, Bishop of Bayonne, referring to the Third Order for teaching or 'Apostolic', as Sister Veronica wished it to be called.**

As we have seen, in July, 1868, Father Marie Ephrem had been appointed Vicar Apostolic and, later in the year, consecrated Bishop of Quilon. Soon afterwards, he left for Europe to attend Vatican Council I. But before the opening of the Council, he planned to visit Bayonne and sent his Vicar General, Father Lazare, to announce his visit. It was arranged that, while in Europe, he would officiate at the profession of Sister Agnes, whose vows he himself wanted to receive. It was indeed a great day for Mother Veronica, to receive this visit from her spiritual father, whose inspiration it was that had prompted her to bring the Little Carmel into being, and who would nurture in India the sapling that would soon be transplanted to that physically and spiritually risky clime. God's ways, however, are not our ways, and things were to turn out very differently. But all that was still in the future. Now, Bishop Marie Ephrem discharged the debt of 7,000 francs on the repairs and visited the whole convent. More practical than either Father Dominic or Mother Veronica, he was not at all happy about the strict enclosure and suggested several changes. It would always be on such points that Mother Veronica and he would disagree. Judging at this point of time, when the whole picture is before us, it would seem that, in the matter of the Apostolic Carmel, which was each one's pet child, he pulled too much in one direction and she too much in the other,

* *Ibid.*, 22.4.1872.

and that neither was ready to listen to the other. God would use this very tension between the two co-workers to permit the work to be practically destroyed before raising it to life from the fire, like the phoenix, in greater splendour.

That Bishop Marie Ephrem had suggested other changes as well, is evident from the following letter written to him by Mother Veronica, and that everything had not gone smoothly between them can be read between the lines:

I cannot express the pain I felt today when, after having sent word three or four times to the Seminary Fathers to find out where Your Excellency had gone, I finally learnt that you had returned to Pau to remain there up to Wednesday. My Father, see, it is because you know that it is Sister Veronica that you act thus. At least, if I had had the time to see you! You haven't even had the time to meet our Superior, Mgr. Inchauspé : nothing has been settled here. You spoke to me of changes – in dress, in food. Your Excellency is not pleased with our cloister. And without settling anything or even giving me time to speak to you about it, without even informing me where I could address a letter to you, you set out for Pau, where I am sure our Mothers have no need of you, as I have, your poor daughter, who, you know, my Father, looks on you as God for her. Your Excellency knows that this work is not mine. I am nothing but an instrument. I could well have stayed on in my beloved Carmel of Pau, were it not for you, my Father, and for your mission. I do not seek to be considered a foundress. I do not abhor the very name. I am only a poor Carmelite who would like to

go and hide herself in India, and there devote herself body and soul to those dear people... I have a horror of anything that might give me prominence or make me singular. My attraction is to remain hidden and follow the ancient customs... to obey the rules and constitutions as I have found them and not make new ones. I have already set about changing our headdress, but this cannot be effected in a day, for our toque was designed by our holy Mother (Teresa) to be worn inside not outside (the scapular). It isn't the same as the wimple of teaching congregations. In addition, we have to change the cut of our scapular, as a result. But, my Father, you know that Obedience is my life. I have written to Father Athanasius to send me an old cowl and scapular of our Fathers. With these we shall have some sort of a pattern... We are all rigged up funnily since you left, for we changed immediately. We do not lack goodwill, but have pity on our weakness... And so, my Father, will you be returning? or do you wish to abandon your children?*

One senses in this letter that Mother Veronica's feelings are deeply hurt, her pride wounded. She makes an effort to placate the bishop and to obey, though it goes against the grain. In her attachment to her own way of doing things, she had probably rubbed the bishop up the wrong way. However, we are also tempted to question his way of dealing with the situation – quitting the place without leaving any message for her. Another letter she writes to him the following day throws some light on this development in their relationship.

* Ibid., 25th Oct., 1869.

The epistle takes her four days to complete. "I have written this letter," she says, "with several breaks. I have prayed and reflected long in writing it. I beg of you, Monsignor and my Father, to think over the matter."* It is a very long letter, but even extracts from it reveal much :

... Your departure was so sudden that I realised only later that you were dissatisfied with many important things in our observance, about which I am convinced you have been greatly misinformed. Father Manaudas told me that Your Excellency is pleased neither with our enclosure nor with our fasts and abstinences, that you have spoken about this to Mgr. La Croix who agrees with you.

Apart from herself, the person who could best have explained matters, she goes on, was not Abbé Manaudas, who was hardly known at the Little Carmel, but Mgr. Inchauspé – and the bishop had left without meeting him. Then she explains the circumstances under which the Bishop of Bayonne and the Carmelite General were responsible for granting to the Little Carmel the Blessed Sacrament in their chapel and first the episcopal enclosure with a view to granting them the canonical enclosure later on. "I wanted it (the canonical enclosure), yes," she acknowledges, "for I dreaded parlours without grilles, where visitors come to waste our time," but she had not asked for it. Even the feasts and abstinences had been fixed in consultation with the Father General. Then the letter continues :

However, I have always explained to and inculcated in my daughters that this strict cloister and the fasts

* Ibid., 26 Oct., 1869.

are only to prepare us, even as Jesus set an example during the thirty years of His hidden life, for the life of labour and apostolate. What are we doing here? Neither teaching, nor vigils, nor hard work. We do not even work to earn our living because we cannot find work. We must, however, remember we are Carmelites and wear the holy habit. In India, the fatigues of the classroom, the tropical climate, the prickly heat, will amply compensate for the cloister, the fasts etc. and my daughters know and understand it well. I wish Your Excellency had asked them about what they think of the life I am preparing them for.

She next defines the merits of the life of the active contemplative that she envisages for her daughters :

*Remember, Monsignor and my Father, that the two extremes meet and it is those who are most united with God by a life of prayer and even of contemplation, who are the most perfect and zealous missionaries. It is those who know best to make penance for themselves and for others who win most souls for Christ. St. Francis Xavier is our model in this. Finally, it is those who in solitude and retirement taste the sweetness of the Lord, who yearn to shed even their blood to make him known and 'savoured' by others.**

Mother Veronica's main cause of resentment is that Bishop Marie Ephrem has not taken the trouble to talk to the right people and get his facts straight. He has seen things, jumped to conclusions and acted on

* Ibid.

them. This weakness of his will explain in the years to come other still more critical situations which he will be responsible for bringing about.

Bishop Marie Ephrem's reply to Mother Veronica's letter had exasperated her, due to his refusal to understand that she was ready to relinquish fasts and abstinences in India. She writes to him to this effect, but this time, though she lets go canonical enclosure, she still pleads strongly for episcopal enclosure :

*I feel more and more determined - I do not desire a cloister like that of Carmel - that would be impossible and ridiculous. But I request that Your Excellency should give us before leaving a promise that you will grant us at least episcopal enclosure for all our houses that will be established in India, namely, that except for parlours, neither seculars nor ecclesiastics should enter the interior of the monasteries, except in those cases in which the rules of enclosure allow it.**

In the years and decades ahead, the letter of the law would be periodically modified in many ways to suit the vocation of active religious in changing times. But the emphasis on the spirit of the cloister (silence, solitude, recollection), of asceticism (mortification, obedience, sacrifice, the cross) and of contemplation (union with God in prayer) would never be relinquished. It would remain as the vivifying element of the apostolic life.

Before Bishop Marie Ephrem visited Bayonne, Mother Veronica had been very submissive to him in

* Ibid., 6th Nov., 1869.

everything. They had never disagreed. But now that Mother Veronica finds her views on the religious life for the Apostolic Carmel differing from his on important matters, she does not keep silent. "You know you have the right to say to me what you please," she says, "and I, with all the respect and reverence I bear Your Excellency, must tell you what I think."* Woman though she is, and a Victorian woman, she will not for that reason forgo her right to speak – be it even to a bishop, which till very recently would have been considered highly scandalous.

It was already November and scarcely a month later the Vatican Council opened. Bishop Marie Ephrem had to be in Rome. And so had Monsignor La Croix, who took with him Abbé Inchauspé.

Chapter 12

EN ROUTE TO THE MISSIONS

On December 6th, 1864, Pius IX had made known his desire of convoking an Ecumenical Council as an extraordinary remedy for the evils that troubled the world. He had requested the Cardinals to send him, in writing and separately, what they considered, after reflection and prayer, the most pressing needs of the time. The replies had been sent and the Council was opened on December 8th, 1869.

Many important questions were dealt with and decisions taken, but the subject that was considered crucial was that of Papal Infallibility. The doctrine had already been accepted in 1854. The question now was whether it was expedient and opportune to promulgate it publicly, considering how matters stood in the world and especially in Rome, and bearing in mind, moreover, the Christians separated from the Church. A few bishops were against its promulgation, but the majority were for it and it was passed. The Pope formally confirmed the decree and the *Te Deum* was sung, followed

* *Ibid.*

by Pontifical Benediction. Thus, "a conflict which for centuries had troubled the peace of the Church" was brought to an end and, with it, the Fourth Session of the Vatican Council closed. It was July 18th, 1870. But, despite this triumph, all was not well with Papal affairs.

Victor Emmanuel (1820 - 1878) was the last king of Sardinia and the first king of Italy. Before the high Middle Ages, the question as to whether the Pope ought to be ruler of a given territory in Central Italy had never arisen. It had been taken for granted. It was raised for the first time by Pierre Dubois in the fourteenth century.

Victor Emmanuel was himself a sincere, if superficial, Catholic and esteemed Pope Pius IX. At the same time, he hoped to become king of a united Italy and, to this end, tried to negotiate peacefully with the Pope to agree to the incorporation of the States of the Church into a new Italy, with Rome as its capital and the Pope as the governor of the central portion. Pope Pius IX turned down the king's request and refused to abdicate his sovereignty.

By its very nature, it is impossible to treat the Papacy on a purely regional and temporal basis. At the same time, it is hard to draw the line between the spiritual and temporal responsibilities of the Pope, considering his international character. All through the later centuries, therefore, and especially from 1815 onwards, bickerings on this matter had been going on.

Up till now, Victor Emmanuel had been prevented by the power of France, the ally of the Vatican, from seizing Rome. On the very date, however, when the

dogma of Infallibility was defined and promulgated, 18 July, France declared war on Prussia and the French troops were recalled from Rome. In this war, the French army was defeated and France temporarily paralyzed.

Victor Emmanuel seized his opportunity and attacked Rome. The small Pontifical Army put up a gallant resistance, but was unable to cope, and Rome was forcibly captured by the King's troops. This sacrilegious seizure of Rome forced the Pope to interrupt and suspend the Vatican Council, and the bishops returned home hurriedly.

In his capacity as Carmelite Superior General, Father Dominic of St. Joseph had been one of the Council Fathers. An expert canonist and theologian, his services had been requisitioned for the preparatory work of the Council, into which he had thrown himself with his customary enthusiasm and zeal. The Council opened in December, 1869, and Father Dominic attended the earlier sessions. In June of the following year, he became seriously ill, much to the consternation of his friends in the Council. For a while, he seemed to rally, but the hope was short-lived. He took a turn for the worse and died on 12 July, 1870, scarcely a week before the promulgation of the dogma of Infallibility. On 15 July, Bishop Marie Ephrem, the first bishop that the French Carmelite Province had given to the Missions, officiated at the funeral Mass. About a month later, the remains were transferred to Broussey, the novitiate and first formed house of the Restored French Carmel - the fittest resting place for him who had initiated the Restoration.*

* Alexis - Louts of St. Joseph, O.C.D., op. cit.

When the Vatican Council was suspended, Bishop La Croix and Abbé Inchauspé returned to Bayonne, while Bishop Marie Ephrem proceeded to Pau. It had been decided that, at the same time that the sisters of the Little Carmel would leave for India, a group of six sisters from the Carmel of Pau would accompany them, to open a new Carmel of the Second Order in Mangalore. Among this latter group, would be Mother Elias, who had been such a good friend to Mother Veronica, and Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, still a novice. Abbé Inchauspé, having spoken to Bishop Marie Ephrem, had sent a written message from Rome to Mother Veronica to prepare three sisters of the Apostolic Carmel to go to Pau, from where the party of sisters of both Carmels would leave, with Fathers Lazare and Gratian, for Marseilles, *en route* to Mangalore. The only sister who had been mentioned by name in the message was Sister Elias. Presumably, the other two could be of Mother Veronica's choice. So, she chose Sister Marie des Anges and Sister Mary Joseph and prepared their clothes and whatever else they would need.

When Vatican I closed abruptly, and the bishops all returned to their dioceses, Abbé Inchauspé, who had just come from Rome, brought another message from Bishop Marie Ephrem. He wanted four sisters of the Apostolic Carmel and one of them had to be Sister Agnes of Jesus. It was the last minute. Bishop Marie Ephrem and the Fathers were already at Pau waiting to start. How could Mother Veronica, with so little time at her disposal, get Sister Agnes's outfit ready? The material for the habits had to be of lighter stuff and would have to be tailored. There simply was no time.

So, Mother Veronica, taking the three sisters who were ready, started for Pau, hoping to explain her predicament to Bishop Marie Ephrem, while promising to send Sister Agnes at the earliest opportunity. But, if she thought she could get off so lightly, she was mistaken. She found that this was not the "Father" she had known. Bishop Marie Ephrem had set his heart on taking Sister Agnes along and Mother Veronica had to withstand the repeated onslaughts of his "fiery indignation". "My God! What a night I spent!" she exclaims. "For until one o'clock in the morning I remained with Monsignor in the outer parlour. His voice could be heard all over the convent."* Fortunately for Mother Veronica, her friend, Mother Elias, was waiting just inside. She very gently interrupted that terrible scene and took Mother Veronica inside the enclosure. The effect on the two women of such a reaction on the part of the bishop is best told in Mother Veronica's own words:

*I fell on my knees and she did the same. We remained in that embrace for some time without a word, for it was the Great Silence. Hot tears rolled down on both sides. I was broken and crushed by the scene that had just occurred. I did not recognise any more my Father Marie Ephrem, and I said to myself, 'If he has changed so much towards me, who had been his blessed child, what will happen to my children, young and inexperienced in India, alone and without a mother.'***

In the morning, she went to explain the situation to the bishop in the confessional, where "He at last asked (her) why (she) had not obeyed to the letter what he

* Autobiography, Part III, pp. 23-24.

** Ibid., p. 24.

had written to (her) about the four sisters that he wanted." The letter had never reached Mother Veronica. So this was how the misunderstanding had taken place – and she had had to pay the price. If only Bishop Marie Ephrem had taken the trouble to get his facts straight in the beginning! "My poor, dear Sister," Father Gratian had written to her some months before, "trials come to you from every country: from France, from England, from India, from Rome, and from hell as well as from heaven; but," he had consoled her, "tempests do not last for ever."* True, tempests do not last for ever, but such tempests can affect relationships and hinder good work.

In the light of what happened that night, an earlier letter from Father Lazare (Bishop Marie Ephrem's Vicar General) to Mother Veronica, which seems mysterious at a first reading, becomes somewhat comprehensible. "Willingly would I have gone to Bayonne to take lessons in English," he says,

*were it not for reasons which I will make known to you when we meet... God alone knows how dear the Apostolic Carmel is to me. If, at times, I appear forgetful, it is only to be able to serve it better. As soon as I know how to speak English a little better, rest assured that I will come and help you, encourage and defend you if it is necessary, and if I am able to do so... May Our Divine Master some day grant me the grace to lighten for you all the crosses which come to you from all quarters.***

Father Lazare of the Cross, O.D.C., (Jean Bayle),

* Letters, March 10th, 1869.

** Ibid., January 30th, 1870.

was destined to play an important role in the life of Mother Veronica and of her congregation. Born in 1828 at Condat, diocese of Agen, France, it was only at the age of thirty that he decided to give himself completely to God in the Carmelite Order. His request to go to the missions was granted in 1858 and he had already worked for some years in India when, in 1867, he was assigned to the vicariate apostolic of Mangalore. Ill health, however, forced him to return to France, but three years later, he and Father Gratian of St. Anne met Bishop Marie Ephrem and were chosen to accompany the pioneer band of Carmelites to Mangalore. The bishop, who loved Father Lazare very much, nominated him Vicar General.*

To go back to Pau, that afternoon, the bishop, in the presence of Father Gratian, read the letters of obedience of those who were leaving and the sisters renewed their vows in the hands of the bishop, promising him obedience. Mother Veronica also wished to renew her vows promising obedience to Bishop Marie Ephrem, but he did not permit her to do so for the reason that she was not going to India just yet.** A time would come in the near future when Mother Veronica would indeed be grateful to Providence for preventing her from promising obedience to Bishop Marie Ephrem.

There were among the party of travellers six Carmelites of the Second Order and three of the Third Order. Mother Elias of Pau was in charge of the sisters. Fathers Lazare and Gratian would travel with them. The bishop would accompany them as far as Marseilles,

* Father Lazare of the Cross, O.D.C., 1828-1907 (I Letters, Bk VIII).

** Ibid., Bishop Marie Ephrem to Bishop La Croix, April, 1872.

where they would board the "Guyenne". They left Pau on the 19th of August, 1870. Sister Marie des Anges speaks for the sisters :

*The journey was attended with more than ordinary - fatigue and inconveniences - more so to our three sisters who, it may be said, had no one for them but the Lord; for the other religious had enough to do to look after themselves, and all were so sick and exhausted, that they could do very little towards comforting and consoling each other... In the Red sea the heat was excessive.**

In fact, it proved to be "a disastrous voyage", to use Mother Veronica's term.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified dictated the diary of the trip** in the form of a long letter to her spiritual director, Abbé Manaudas. She tells how at Marseilles, before embarking, they all went to pray at the sanctuary of Notre Dame de la Garde. The Mediterranean crossing went well, even though they were seasick. One day, while they were sailing on the Red Sea, Sister Stephanie, a young sister of Pau, said to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified :

This morning after Communion, Jesus showed me the needs of France and India. He asked for five victims. Sister Euphrasie and I have already offered ourselves, and I had the impression that Mother Elias, Mother Sub-Prioress and you were also necessary.

* Mother Marie des Anges, *History of the Apostolic Carmel*, pp. 4-5.
** Amédée Brunot S.C.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

At that moment, Sister Mary experienced something extraordinary and understood that Jesus had accepted these two and that they were going to die. The next day three sisters became ill and that night the remaining two. Father Lazare offered himself instead of them. "It would be impossible," Sister Mary says, "to express to you Father Lazare's grief." Sister Stephanie died and they had all to disembark at Aden, where the sister was buried. There Sister Euphrasie, a lay sister, also died. After Sister Euphrasie's death, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified contracted the dread disease of swelling of the legs and feet. The utter simplicity and drollness of the narration of what follows renders Sister Mary's predicament almost humorous. "I went," says Sister Mary,

to Sister Euphrasie's grave and said to her : 'Listen, Sister Euphrasie, I did not ask you for your sickness; take back your disease.' Immediately, my Father, I was no longer ill, and I was able to do the cooking the whole time we remained at Aden.

Mother Elias was one of those who had taken ill and, to give her time to recoup, Father Gratian remained behind at Aden with the Carmelites of the Second Order, while the sisters of the Little Carmel proceeded to Madras, disembarking at Pondicherry. From Madras, they went to Vellore, where the sisters were offered hospitality by the Good Shepherd nuns, while awaiting the arrival of the others, and Father Lazare went on to Calicut. To quote again from Mother Marie des Anges:

At Pondicherry they (the Apostolic Carmelites) met Father Moncourier who was just about to return to his station at Vellore after a Retreat... Seeing the

helpless condition of the sisters, he invited them with great charity, to come and rest in the convent of Vellore with the nuns of the Good Shepherd, which invitation Father Lazare accepted with gratitude. On their way to Vellore, they passed by the Presentation Convent at Madras, where they were charitably entertained for three days... From Madras they proceeded to Vellore and remained there one month, awaiting the arrival of the Great Carmel sisters... They found the convent of Vellore a picture of charity and regularity and were very much edified on witnessing their (the sisters') piety... The silence that reigned in the convent, notwithstanding the great number of children – boarders, orphans and day-scholars – was really wonderful. Such a deep impression did this exemplary conduct of these religious make on the minds of our sisters that 'even to this day', said one of them, 'I preserve a sweet memory of that community'... This was a true rest – both for wearied limbs and sorrowing spirit.*

Mother Veronica had been worried about her daughters. She had wondered how they would fare in their relations with the bishop.

"These shocks (she had written to Father Kenelm Vaughan S.J.) come nowadays from the children God entrusted to my care. It's not because they are not responsive, but they were taken away from me at a time when they were, so to say, still unsteady on their feet, and I cannot help being uneasy.

... You know, Father, I have just sent three of my

* Mother Marie des Anges, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

*daughters to the Indian Missions. They left together with Rev. Mother Elias of the Cloistered Carmel of Pau, and five cloistered nuns, one of them being my holy child, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. My heart and soul are with my beloved children.**

She wrote these lines when her daughters had just reached Madras. Little did she dream what shocks their young inexperienced hearts had sustained on the voyage and what more was still in store for them !

Sister Elias, writing almost daily from Vellore to Father Lazare, on behalf of the group, their "poor secretary", as she calls herself, gives us many interesting insights, as much into the warm concern of their hostesses as into the personalities of the three young sisters of the Apostolic Carmel, hardly yet in their twenties. "I can't tell you," she writes, "how attentive the dear Mother (Mother Mary Thomas) is to all our wants. She has our dear sisters take baths, medicines, refreshing drinks, and watches to see what we may be in need of."** And again, with a humorous dig at her own Irish origin, "We become more and more edified with our sisters of Vellore who, notwithstanding their Irish birth, are models of piety and charity. I am trying, dear Father, to profit by such good example." Writing details regarding the health, physical and spiritual, of each of the others, her dashes of playful humour are often in evidence. Sister Marie des Anges was ill and was being treated with foot-baths, camphor oil, laudanum. "Very fortunately," Sister Elias adds, "her mouth is not affected, so that she can take sufficient nourishment,"***and

* Letters, Sept. 2, 1870.

** Ibid., 6 Sept., 1870.

*** Ibid., 26 Sept., 1870.

again, "I don't believe there can be two more charming little sisters than mine. Sister Joseph, however, gets sometimes cross with the gnats and Sister of the Angels has resolved to pick a quarrel with her own ears which she declares she intends to box without pity the next time they pain her."^{*}

Sister Joseph promises to eat well according to Father Lazare's instructions, and to correct herself of her faults, "but finds all days are alike." ^{**} Father Lazare's English is not spared. "The second pronoun of reflexive verbs," she points out, correcting a grammar mistake in Father Lazare's letter, "must be always accompanied by 'self'... You should say : 'talk of yourself' and not 'talk of you'. The general rule for adverbs is that they follow the verb, e.g. 'don't hold your tongue too much', not 'too much hold your tongue'." Before concluding, she makes a semblance of regretting her chatter and asks him to forgive her.^{***} Sister Elias is concerned no less about her correspondent's health, about the untidiness of her letters, about her own spiritual failures, but all with an attitude of childlike simplicity and trust in a God who is a Father. She is very open about her attitude to Mother Veronica's treatment of her while she was a novice. "In my letter to Mother Veronica, I said that I told you how much she mortified me during the novitiate, so that I am now at ease, having said all the truth."^{****} But she as openly avows her faults against humility and charity. And a few days later she writes :

I feel ashamed of having spoken of our dear Mother

^{*} *Ibid.*, 25 Sept., 1870.
^{**} *Ibid.*, 2 Sept., 1870.
^{***} *Ibid.*, 3 Sept., 1870.
^{****} *Ibid.*, 6 Sept., 1870.

*Veronica in such a harsh way. God only knows what good she has done to me by humiliating me and making me feel my misery. I bore it all along, exteriorly at least, and though often discouraged by the severe trials she made me undergo, still I was forced to acknowledge in my heart that it was not half what I merited. I abhor the very shade of hypocrisy, dear Rev. Father, but I am obliged to avow that I possess this vice to a great degree.**

Father Lazare probably replied with regard to Mother Veronica, for Sister Elias writes :

*I wrote to our Mother Veronica everything you read in the letter, but said it more politely and respectfully. Poor Mother ! It is only now I see all the good she has done me and if I am devoid of religious education, it is owing to my own inaptness to profit by her instructions.***

The simplicity, spontaneity, vivacity, exuberance, humour, frankness of these letters captivate the reader and bespeak a charming personality. Yes, Sister Elias must, indeed, have been a delightful person to know.

They had been almost a month at Vellore before the other party arrived and they could push on, revived and enthusiastic again, after the care the Good Shepherd sisters had lavished on them. With regard to the second party, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified narrates that the crossing from Aden to Madras was good, and all the sisters, including Mother Elias, got quite well. Staying a day at Madras, the party pushed off to Vel-

^{*} *Ibid.*, 26 Sept., 1870.
^{**} *Ibid.*, 30 Sept., 1870.

lore, where they spent five days with the Good Shepherd sisters. Then the whole group proceeded to Mangalore, stopping at many places on the way. Bishop Marie Ephrem, having heard in Europe of the plight of the party who had set out for Mangalore, hastened to India and caught up with the travellers at Madras. A great deal more, says Mother Marie des Anges, was in store for "the refreshed soldiers of Jesus Christ" ere the goal was reached...

*the company of the Bishop was no addition to their comfort, not because he was for an instant wanting in kindness to them – but because his mind was wholly taken up with the four that were in all respects more worthy of our attention. Our three sisters felt themselves as three poor orphans, fatherless and motherless, and besides, being of the Third Order, they were not reckoned as on the same footing with the others, and they were worried hearing themselves called by no other name than Tertiaries. They were all three very young in religion, not one of them having been more than a year and a half in the convent; there to gather strength for bearing such trials as they now had to endure.**

After a week of fatigue and discomfort, they arrived at Calicut, where Mother Elias got ill again, and this time there was no recovery. "She died like a saint," to quote Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, and was given a solemn funeral by the people of the town. The convent in Calicut had been founded by Mother Veronica when she had come to India as a sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition. It was the convent too where the seed of

* Mother Marie des Anges, op. cit., p. 7.

the Apostolic Carmel had been sown by Bishop Marie Ephrem in the heart of Mother Veronica, where the two of them had planned for its survival and growth. In a way, then, Calicut was a fitting place for Mother Elias to die, she who had been Mother Veronica's trusted confidante and unfailing support in all the trials she had passed through in founding the Apostolic Carmel. Bishop Marie Ephrem had not been present when Mother Elias passed away, having been hurriedly summoned to Mangalore. But, seeing the milestones on the route to India thus marked with three victims, he wrote: "I now believe that our foundation is assured. It is made on the rock of the cross.**"

At Calicut, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition were still running their institution and their works as efficiently as they had done five years ago in Mother Veronica's time. Now, Mother Mary Perillon was the superior. When the Carmelites arrived, they found a warm welcome awaiting them and, notwithstanding that the sisters of St. Joseph were heavily overworked, they ministered willingly to their guests, even when Mother Elias fell ill and passed away. Says Mother Marie des Anges :

*The Sisters of the Calicut Convent were really good and worked hard to entertain (their guests) comfortably. But what could they do, a community of four religious, three of them very sickly... having to keep their school and the children of the house. It was apparent that their (guests) stay had overburdened them, but it could not be helped.***

* Amédée Brunot, S.C.J. op. cit., p. 68.

** Mother Marie des Anges, op. cit., p. 7.

At Calicut, the cross hit also the Apostolic Carmel Sisters, for Sister Marie des Anges received news that her mother had died of a broken heart on hearing that her daughter had gone to the Indian mission.

Having stayed about twenty days at Calicut, the group pushed on to Mangalore, a journey still worse than any they had hitherto experienced. For now, "They were all stuffed into a *patimar*, and driven to and fro during eight days before they reached Mahé... So glad were they to land there, that according to the expression of our Sister Mary of St. Joseph, 'the land seemed heaven and the governor, God.' "Staying there a fortnight, the travellers left for Tellicherry by carriage. Here, they met Father Alphonsus, who introduced them to a little community of Carmelites who had been trained by Bishop Michael Antony. "On seeing them (the Apostolic Carmel Sisters)," Mother Marie des Anges informs us, "they could not contain their joy, for they had for years sighed after this happiness. And now they would all leave their newly founded house and go along with them to recommence their novitiate under their direction." *

At Cannanore, their next stop, there was a community of Sisters of St. Joseph. Although the number was the same as that at Calicut (two professed sisters and two novices), here the sisters were strong and healthy. "The whole community served them charitably," according to Mother Marie des Anges, "and seemed to like their company very much, though they (the guests) were the cause of so much additional trouble, on account of their sickness. "But," Mother des Anges continues,

* *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

*the best event to be recorded of this community is how they readily wished to enter into the little congregation of the Third Order. Our Blessed Lady seems to have drawn them... the Superioress told them that it was long since she had been thinking of leaving the Congregation she then belonged to, and that now she felt most happy to meet with such an excellent opportunity.**

From Cannanore, the travellers from Europe entered upon the last lap of their long and tragic journey, reaching Mangalore on 19 November, 1870. Of the nine sisters who had left Pau, only six reached their destination – three Cloistered Carmelites and the three sisters of the Apostolic Carmel.

The sisters went from the jetty (Bunder) straight to the Cathedral (at Bolar), where they were welcomed with great rejoicing by Bishop Marie Ephrem and the people of Mangalore. After the Solemn High Mass of thanksgiving and the *Te Deum*, a procession was formed of the ladies, gentlemen, children, clergy and the bishop himself, to lead the sisters to the convent, the children, according to Indian custom, sprinkling them with scent all along the way. At the convent, which had belonged to the Sisters of St. Joseph, but which they had left a few years earlier, another small group of Bishop Michael Antony's Carmelites were eagerly waiting to welcome the newly-arrived sisters. It was this convent which was to be St. Ann's, the motherhouse of the Apostolic Carmel.

Despite their scanty means, the Indian sisters had

* *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

managed to give the house and its environs a festive look.

*The gate was ornamented with plantain trees waving their long leaves, and among them hung clusters of fruit; while in the interior of the convent, the floor was smeared with cow-dung. One of them read the welcome address very gently and they sang a hymn expressing their joy.**

Indeed, they did their best to make the newcomers as happy and comfortable as possible.

Bishop Marie Ephrem had indeed every cause for rejoicing, for this day his vision of a Third Order of Carmel for education in the Indian missions was realized. As for Mother Veronica, her toil and struggles, her anxieties and tears had at last borne fruit, but she was not to be present to see it. She writes to Father Vaughan,

*You say, dear Father, that I must be feeling sad to be left behind. 'Amor fatigatus non lassitur,**' is what my favourite chapter of the Imitation says. Besides it is inevitable that I should find crosses everywhere and all the more when I near the happy goal, which, alas, I have not yet reached. O, you may be sure that my heart receives many rude shocks.****

It was a prophecy, whether she knew it or not. As the years passed, God would continue to ask for more sacrifice, and yet more, from her "whom He called to found

* Ibid., p. 9.

** Love feels no burden, considers nothing laborious.

*** Letters, Sept. 2, 1870.

a 'Carmel for the Missions'*** The call to sacrifice, to the Cross, would be her life-long vocation. She would have to become progressively detached from the fruit of her labours. She would have to live to the full the Apostolic Carmel charism, the all-sufficing love of God- "we become increasingly conscious of our insufficiency and come to the realisation that God alone suffices."***

* The A.C. Constitutions, 1979, Art. 1.

** Ibid., Art. 5.

Chapter 13

THE INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SCENE

The India to which Mother Veronica came in 1862 was a land completely dominated by the British. The East India Company, which had gained a foothold in India in the mid-eighteenth century (1757), was directly interested in nothing but increasing its dividends, but indirectly it succeeded in effecting something much more lasting and far-reaching—the establishment of British supremacy in India. Among its servants were mercenaries, adventurers, unscrupulous men, but also a few good soldiers and administrators. Thus it was that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the commercial monopoly of the East India Company ended and the British assumed administrative, police, and educative functions. Warren Hastings, William Jones, Thomas Munro, Charles Wood, William Bentinck became household names. British subjects could obtain licences to come and go freely and to settle down in India. The first railway was started in 1853, the first telegraph and modern postal system in 1854. Queen Victoria was reigning in England and Britain was undoubtedly mis-

trous of the Indian situation, including even the Indian princely states.

In fairness, it must be admitted that the British actively encouraged education and culture. Warren Hastings established, as early as 1781, the Calcutta-Madrassa, an Urdu School. William Jones organized in 1784 the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal; in 1817, Ram Mohun Roy started Hindu College (later called Presidency College), Calcutta; Serampore College, the first missionary institution of higher learning, was opened in 1818.

On comparing the institutions run in the vernacular and in English, it was judged, rightly or wrongly, that the future did not lie with Oriental education. Ram Mohun Roy himself pleaded for English. Hence, the next step was the anglicization of Indians and of Indian education — forcible de-orientalization certainly, but no doubt well meant. Missionaries were not only permitted, but even encouraged, to open English medium schools for children from the youngest class upwards. Not that these were the very first private schools with English as medium. As early as 1717, such a school had been opened in Madras, and in 1718 and 1720 in Bombay and Calcutta respectively. But these had been isolated instances. At so early a date, the future still belonged to Oriental education.

In 1835, T.B. Macaulay presented to Lord William Bentinck his lengthy, and now famous, "Minute", in which he made a plea for spreading western education in India through English, especially among the upper classes. It was his hope that, through English education, an intellectual élite could be formed, "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in

morals and in intellect." Accordingly, in the same year, 1835, the British Government, through Lord William Bentinck, resolved to provide funds for promoting Western literature and science among the Indians. At first, the fascination for English education was almost wholly in Calcutta, but it very soon spread West and South.

Sir Charles Wood's Despatch in 1854 stressed the importance of primary education, a special rate on land being levied in order to provide means for its promotion. A system of scholarships was instituted to encourage higher learning, and educational institutions run by private efforts were provided with grants from public funds. The Despatch (of 1854) was the first document to recommend the adoption of a regular scheme of grant-in-aid. Accordingly, the Education Departments framed grant-in-aid codes and began to inspect and give financial assistance to private schools. Emphasis was laid on mass education, education of girls, training of teachers. Such encouragement naturally favoured the growth of a number of educational institutions ranging from the primary to the collegiate, run either by Government or by private bodies, with or without a government grant.

Schools and colleges over the length and breadth of India enabled Indians to learn to read and speak and comprehend English – and in time even to write on a literary level. Poetry, prose and oratory flourished, and even the first glimmerings of fiction could be recognised. Although Macaulay and Charles Wood gave a definite direction to English education only after the thirties, English literary activity had actually been in progress already from the 1820's and, continuing through the century, featured Indian names like Ram

Mohun Roy, H.L. Derozio, Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Toru Dutt and others. English writing was only one of the manifestations of a creative urge that was already moving writers in the Indian languages – a phenomenon that has come to be referred to as the Indian Renaissance.

As the century progressed, Christianity had begun to attract many Indians and, by way of reaction, there appeared efforts to revive and popularize the Hinduism of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Some of the reformers concerned sought to fuse East and West, while others worked for a return to Hinduism in its pristine simplicity, undiluted. Eminent among the former – for the most part, well-educated, 'anglicized' men and women – were Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Keshav Chander Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Kashinath Telang, M.G. Ranade, Annie Besant, Ram Krishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. Their English education enabled them to be broad enough to consider both East and West in their work. They were responsible for the well-known socio-religious movements, some of which are still alive and flourishing today – Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthna Samaj, Theosophical Society, Ram Krishna Mission.

Between 1835 and 1870 (the year the Apostolic Carmel came to India), Christian schools were sprouting all over the country. The Jesuits started St. Xavier's and St. John's at Calcutta in 1836 and 1859 respectively; St. Joseph's at Negapatam (later moved to Trichinopoly), in 1844; St. Paul's, Belgaum, in 1856; St. Stanislaus and St. Mary's in Bombay in 1863 and 1864 respectively; St. Vincent's, Poona, in 1867. Loreto House was opened at Calcutta and the Convent of Je-

sus and Mary at Agra, both in 1842; the IBMV Sisters opened St. Joseph's, Patna, in 1853, the Good Shepherd sisters their school in Bangalore in 1854; and, in 1859, the De la Salle Brothers (Christian Brothers) and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition (Mother Veronica's Congregation) began schools at Mangalore; the Daughters of the Cross opened St. Joseph's, Bombay, in 1863. As for colleges, St. Xavier's, Calcutta, came into being in 1862 and St., Xavier's, Bombay, in 1869. Thus we see that, like the other missionary congregations engaged in education, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition were part of the intensive anglicising process of this period in the history of the Indian sub-continent – and so, naturally, was Mother Veronica, for, it will be remembered that she worked in India, at Calicut, from 1862 to 1864.

Looking back from this point in the twentieth century, we question the wisdom of this anglicizing process and there are those who would say that missionaries would have done better not to have entered into it at all. But, if there is something to be said against it, it has much also to its credit and, while it is true that Indians have lost in one way on account of it, they have gained in another. The history of a country is the history of a continuous struggle between creativity and criticism. What one period creates, another criticizes, and only through this healthy tension are progress and balance achieved and maintained.

Mother Veronica, as a Sister of St. Joseph, had arrived quietly and unobtrusively in Mangalore in February, 1862. She had received a loving welcome from her little community of sisters, performed her task within two years in the branch house of Calicut, to which she

had been sent, and departed even more quietly and unobtrusively. Now, in November, 1870, on the contrary, her daughters, arriving as Apostolic Carmelites, were given a rousing ovation by the bishop and the people of Mangalore. Indeed, much had happened in the intervening years to explain this change in the external expression of welcome. The education of the children had suffered many vicissitudes and Bishop Marie Ephrem had allayed the anxiety of parents by holding out to them the hope that all would be well when the sisters of the new congregation, the Apostolic Carmel, arrived. So, the people were eagerly awaiting them.

As it turned out, the history of the Apostolic Carmel, at least in its early decades, was destined to be closely interwoven with the history, culture and aspirations of the people of this seaport town of Mangalore. Mangaloreans looked to the nuns for the education of their children and, on this account, in those days when everything was on a smaller scale, as compared to our time, there was a great deal of give and take between the sisters and the Mangalorean people. After a few years, the mothers of the families, all women who had studied with the Apostolic Carmel sisters, continued to cherish the ties they had established with the nuns, whilst the men (the fathers), ex-students of Apostolic Carmel kindergartens, still revered the teachers of their childhood. The children were present students. Thus, whole families became attached to the sisters. It was inevitable, too, that the indigenous vocations (there were no more forthcoming from Europe) to the Apostolic Carmel should be drawn, at first exclusively* and,

* The first Mangalorean vocation, was Rita Coelho, Sister Lucy. (A.L.P. D'Souza, *History of the Catholic Community of South Kanara*, p.61.

later, as the congregation spread, still in large enough numbers, from the Mangalorean families. As a result, again inevitably, a sort of Mangalorean culture came to predominate in the congregation. All these factors contributed to give the people of Mangalore a family feeling, even a possessive attitude, towards the Apostolic Carmel, to make them look on the congregation as their own, and to enter with deep involvement into the joys, sorrows, difficulties and other affairs of the sisters. Needless to say, that other aspect of family feeling – criticism, healthy and not so healthy – was not lacking, to complete the picture.

Mangalore, the capital of South Canara, has an interesting history. It is said that Afonso da Albuquerque, the great Portuguese Admiral, resided there before he conquered Goa in 1510. Although there must have been some priests during this very early period ministering to the people (since there were already some Portuguese settlements in the area), it was in 1526 that a regular mission was established there, and churches built which exist to this day – Rosario Cathedral and Milagres Church. Mangalore, therefore, is a very long standing seat of Christianity.

The Christians claim that they owe their faith, as well as other gifts, to the great St. Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies.

Tradition has it that he not only gained them to God, but translated all the prayers and doctrines into their language, setting them to easy tunes, quickly caught and retained. Moreover, it is maintained that the picturesque dress of the women especially was conceived in his mind. It aims only at

*cleanliness and modesty, leaving no room at all for vanity. The woman never leaves her house without being closely veiled from the top of her head to her feet, so that you see absolutely nothing of her.**

True as this may have been up to 1900, when these lines were written, Mangalorean dress has, in our century, kept pace with the times, though the graceful Indian saree never dates.

During the time that Canara was under Vijayanagar and Bednore, Goan Christians flocked there, as the rulers of these two States, prizing them as agriculturists, granted them many privileges to induce them to settle in their country.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Portuguese power declined and the Mahrattas became very hostile. As the foreign priests were in danger, they were recalled to Europe and the Mission of Canara was spiritually impoverished. Some priests were sent by the Archbishop of Goa, to help out, among them the Venerable Joseph Vaz, a very apostolic, self-sacrificing man, who worked in Mangalore for four years, 1681-1685.

The Christians continued to enjoy the favour of the rulers, but when the fort of Mangalore was taken by the English in 1768, Hyder Ali, the successor of the kings of Bednore, suspected the Christians of betrayal. They succeeded in proving their innocence, but Hyder Ali's son, Tippu Sultan, noting the sympathy of the Christians towards the European settlers, felt threatened and treated them very cruelly, sending them in thousands into captivity in Mysore, where they remained till 1799.

* "The Carmelite Sisters and their schools in Mangalore," (Anonymous), *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, (New York, 1900) p.428.

This brings us to the nineteenth century and the years preceding Mother Veronica's work in India. In the Church, the thorny question of jurisdiction, involving the Padroado and the Propaganda, persisted all through the early years of the nineteenth century. By the constitution, 'Multa Praeclare' of 1838, which was meant to provide a solution, the whole of the Malabar coast, from Cape Comorin to North Canara, comprised one vicariate, that of Verapoly. But, as it proved too unwieldy, it was divided, in 1845, into three provinces - Quilon, Verapoly and Mangalore - and in 1853, these provinces became three separate vicariates. The Carmelite, Father Michael Antony of St. Luis Gonzaga, was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Mangalore, the centre of Canara. He was consecrated bishop in Bombay on 18 May, 1853, by Bishop Athanasius Hartmann, O.F.M., Cap., Bishop of Patna, at a moment which was historic for Bishop Hartmann, on account of the struggle of double jurisdiction still raging in Bombay. Bishop Michael Antony took charge of his see on 3 September of the same year. Nine years later, he would be Mother Veronica's bishop.

Bishop Michael Antony's first and highest priority was the education of youth, and he set about providing proper schools for the purpose. With the encouragement of the British Raj, of administrators and educationists like Macaulay and Munro, the influence of Protestant missionaries had begun to be felt in India, and as close to Mangalore as Travancore and Cochin the Anglican Missionaries of the Missionary Society of London had set up their educational work. Naturally, this encouraged the Vicars Apostolic to open their own schools, so as to take advantage of the impres-

sionable years of childhood to educate their flock and to implant in them the Catholic faith.

With the cooperation of the leading people of the town, Bishop Michael Antony drew up an agreement to provide funds for an Anglo-Catholic school in Mangalore. He would pay a certain sum and the Catholic community the rest. The project did not work. There were complaints about money, teachers were appointed without the bishop's permission, and the committee proved very insolent. What was worse, a school for girls was opened, with a non-Christian as headmistress, all without the bishop's knowledge. The bishop had to compel the founders, under penalty of excommunication, to close the school overnight.

His educational plans so far having failed, Bishop Michael Antony decided to entrust the education of the children of Mangalore to religious. Accordingly, he sent his Vicar General, Father Andrew, to France, in 1857, to invite the Brothers of Christian schools of de la Salle to take over the boys and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition the girls. By 1859, besides the Brothers, there were four French nuns and one English nun, Mother Teresa Mackenzie from Malta, ready to run schools.

The Sisters of St. Joseph were lodged in a fine big building called "The Bungalow" (on the grounds of which now stands St. Ann's Convent, the motherhouse of the Apostolic Carmel). Mother Mackenzie started a small boarding house and a large orphanage, besides the school, which was carried on in the spacious "Dancing Hall." The children were, for the most part, children of the European Civil Officers as well as

of the European Commanders of the regiments, for Mangalore, by this time, had become an important military station. The boarders were chiefly from English-speaking homes and from the more refined families of the locality. Thus, a foundation of idiomatic English and correct pronunciation in the school was easily laid.

As fresh recruits from Europe were difficult to spare, the superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph obtained permission from the Holy See to open a novitiate for Indian novices. This news was hailed with great joy in Mangalore and five postulants presented themselves, of whom, however, only two persevered.

Now Bishop Michael Antony decided to open a second house of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and this at Calicut.* It was Mother Veronica who was sent as pioneer of this house. She arrived in Mangalore from Europe on 7 March, 1862, and wrote to a priest acquaintance in Rome :

*I have not yet made the acquaintance of Monsignor. I only saw His Lordship for two minutes when the boat in which he was, passed us when we were disembarking at Mangalore, for on the very day we arrived here, he left with two sisters to make a new foundation at Calicut... I shall leave for Calicut as soon as possible. Monsignor has left orders that I should go there.***

* In 1860, Bishop Michael Antony had bought a house for Rs. 4000/- in Calicut from a Mr. Pstel and fitted it up as a convent for the Sisters of St. Joseph. Thirty years later, this same house would be bought for Rs. 6000/- from the Mission by Father Michael Monteiro and presented to the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel. (Sister Candida, A.C. Seed Time, p. 31).

** Letters, 29 March, 1862.

At Calicut, Mother Veronica set to work with zest. A school was started and an orphanage, which soon became inadequate for the demand. "Our work is prospering," she writes, "... our children are increasing in number. They are more and more a consolation to us, but what we need most now is the extension of our convent building."* She complains of lack of "support and favourable assistance,"** from superiors, both by way of personnel and of funds,** and hence, is opposed to new foundations. In a letter to Monsignor Bernardino, Archbishop of Verapoly, she writes :

*I have heard that Monsignor Michael Antony wants to found another house in Cannanore and desires that I go there. However, I have written to Monsignor Howard, who knows all the circumstances, if possible to dissuade our Mother General from making another foundation in this vicariate, so that the present administration last, because we are the cross of all those who have the grace to be interested in us.*****

We have already seen that the convent of Calicut came to be the most important place, historically, for the Apostolic Carmel, as it was here that the idea of founding the congregation was conceived. But almost before Mother Veronica could achieve anything appreciable in the work she had begun at Calicut or spell out a strategy for founding the new congregation, she was transferred. In 1864, she was sent to Burma.

Mother Germaine replaced Mother Veronica as su-

* *Ibid.*, 22 Dec., 1862.

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*, August 21, 1863.

**** Letters, 17 Oct., 1863.

perior of St. Joseph's, Calcutt, and was in turn succeeded by Mother Mary Perillon. Mother Perillon was a capable administrator and under her guidance the school prospered in every way. But soon the problem of personnel arose and requests to the motherhouse in Europe brought the reply, 'None to spare'.

In Mangalore, the Sisters of St. Joseph with their boarders and orphans had been housed for seven years in "The Bungalow," with the addition of a spacious two-storeyed block put up by Bishop Michael Antony. During the monsoons one year, a gable of "The Bungalow" gave way, but no one took notice. Then, on 21 June, 1866, while the children were reciting the rosary in a classroom, there was a terrific crash and the roof fell in. One girl died and several were injured, but the casualties could have been heavier. After this tragedy, "The Bungalow" was demolished, the whole establishment was shifted to Jeppu, another part of Mangalore, and the school closed temporarily.

Meanwhile, at Cannanore, Father Martelli, O.D.C., a man of commanding stature, combining dynamism and an iron will with a kind, gentle, affable disposition, had found great success in running a boys' school with the help of the Christian Brothers. He now turned his attention to the girls. As will be seen, the tragedy in Mangalore turned out to be, both for him and for Bishop Michael Antony, a blessing in disguise. In February, 1867, Father Martelli invited the Sisters of St. Joseph from Mangalore to come and take charge of the girls' school at Cannanore.

Cannanore, a seaport town about 67 miles south of Mangalore, has behind it a fascinating history and sev-

eral inspiring legends – as a result of which spots of interest for tourists are not wanting. In 1498, Vasco da Gama landed in Calcutt and, when he came to Cannanore, being well received by the Raja, he had a factory built, around which a Portuguese colony grew up. The colony church is still to be seen in the fishing village of Thayil. Half a century later, about 1544, St. Francis Xavier visited the place. The chapel put up to commemorate his visit was unfortunately demolished when the railway was built. The following legend is connected with that church: on board the ship, the saint tried to make friends with a man of high rank but evil ways and to get him to talk about religion. But in vain. The man would utter only oaths and blasphemies. On reaching Cannanore, Francis led him to a palm grove and, baring his own shoulders, began to scourge himself to blood. The man was jolted back to his senses and converted. He realised that this penance was for him, as Christ's sufferings had been. Falling on his knees, he confessed his sins before the saint. It was to commemorate this victory that the chapel was built in Camp Bazaar and dedicated to St. Francis.

In 1776, Cannanore was captured by Hyder Ali and, in the time of his son, Tippu, was hallowed by the blood of martyrs. It is said that Tippu wanted to deport the Christians to his palace in Seringapatam (Srirangapatnam) in order to make them apostatize. He had many of them fastened to the legs of elephants, so that they were trampled on by those huge beasts.

In 1784, the town was captured by the British, under whose rule it had, at times, two and sometimes three British regiments with artillery and cavalry stationed there, and the military chaplaincy was the chief

in the Mission. After 1877, the extensive barracks were considerably reduced and only a few companies of soldiers remained.

The ancient fort, Fort San Angelo, near the sea, had a chapel made of materials brought from Europe, one of the oldest chapels built by Europeans in India. The walls still exist, but the place is no longer used as a chapel, having been later converted into a guardroom. In Portuguese times, when Cannanore was an important settlement, it is said that there were as many as three churches, which, however, disappeared under Dutch rule.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Church of the Most Holy Trinity came up, behind which again there exists a legend : On the beach was a little chapel served by the priest, Father Pascal. One day, the *Santissima Trinitade*, a small Portuguese ship, put into port after a terrible storm at sea. A nobleman, Dom Jose D'Almeida, had vowed, with his thirteen fellow passengers, to build a church if they were saved. On hearing their story, Father Pascal pointed out to them a site near the village of Barnacherry, where the church was erected and dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity. This church stood where stands the transept on "the Epistle side" in the new church built by Father Martelli sometime between 1866 and 1876.

To go back to education in Cannanore, through Father Martelli's efforts, St. Joseph's School, Cannanore (now known as St. Teresa's), became the first school in the diocese to be placed under the Grants Results System (1867) as an aided school. Father Martelli was also the first to work for government aid for school

buildings. He was supported by the capable superior and headmistress, Mother Magdalen Lubis, under whom the school progressed by leaps and bounds, and the Director of Public Instruction, Mr. Garthwaite, not only willingly sanctioned grants for expansion, but suggested that the brighter students be sent up for the Government Departmental Examination. The first of those to be sent up, Mary Pia Rozario,* completed the examination successfully in 1870, the year the Apostolic Carmel was established in India. At Cannanore, too, however, personnel soon became a problem and, as with St. Joseph's, Calicut, the motherhouse gave the same answer.

Meanwhile, in 1867, Bishop Michael Antony, hard pressed for teaching sisters, drew from among the Anglo-Indian orphans and boarders, left behind by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Mangalore, the first recruits for his Carmelite congregation. He was very earnest in giving them a good Carmelite formation, acting himself, not only as their immediate superior, but also as their novice master. They, on their part, were fervent and generous, and the bishop had rather to restrain them than to urge them on. They followed the Rule of the Second Order, modified to enable them to teach in schools. But they kept the enclosure and other observances of the cloistered Carmelites.**

It would require a couple of years to train them. Bishop Michael Antony used the time to overhaul completely the old tumbledown building where "The Bun-

* In the designs of Providence, she was to become Mother Aloysta of the Sacred Heart, second Superior General of the Apostolic Carmel.

** Sister Candida, A.C., op. cit., p. 87.

galow" had been and called it St. Ann's. He then transferred his sisters there and started a small school. These were the same sisters who, when the Apostolic Carmelites arrived in Mangalore in 1870, would welcome them to St. Ann's Convent.

Bishop Michael Antony also opened a small school at Tellicherry in 1869, with three more of his Carmelite sisters. Thus, when the Apostolic Carmelites arrived, there were schools at Mangalore and Tellicherry run by Bishop Michael Antony's Carmelites, and at Calicut and Cannanore run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The sisters in all four institutions, however, were, for one reason or another, incapable of carrying on much longer. They were just holding the fort till the arrival of the Apostolic Carmelites, a situation of which the latter had become aware when they broke journey at Calicut, Cannanore and Tellicherry on their way to Mangalore.

For a time, three years to be exact, after the catastrophe of June, 1866, there was no Catholic school at all in Mangalore, and even when Bishop Michael Antony's school was started, the sisters, young and inexperienced, as they were, scarcely out of school themselves, could hardly be expected to carry on education efficiently. Parents were becoming restive. In this light, Bishop Marie Ephrem's urgent pleas to Mother Veronica, first while she was at Pau and later at Bayonne, are quite understandable :

*Now let us come to our affair of the Third Order. I will begin by saying that I want sisters here to instruct the young girls. I have absolute need of them.**

* Letters, 13 Aug., '67.

*There is nothing further to do except pray hard for its (the Third Order) success, set to work with courage and wait patiently for the moment to come for you to send us sisters... do all you can to get some English or Irish ones with the French. All the better if there is one who knows Drawing and can teach it. Here, people are ambitious for their daughters.**

*Our dear work of the Third Order is going very slowly ! May the holy will of God be done ! Here, they are constantly asking me if the sisters are going to come soon.***

While seeking to fulfill immediate needs in education, it was wise to look ahead as well - "One must think of the future," as Bishop Marie Ephrem says, and so he does :

*I wish greatly that we could found in France a Third Order for teaching, because in that way we could bring out subjects for our Missions later, as we need them.****

Little did Monsignor know that, in God's plan, there were to be no more recruits from Europe after the first group. But he also looks closer home, in India itself.

*I have some good recruits here waiting impatiently, poor dear ones, they are so eager to see the sisters arrive and to enter the convent.*****

and again:

* Ibid.
 ** Ibid., 22 Aug., 1868.
 *** Ibid., 16 Sept., 1867.
 **** Ibid., 12 Dec., '68.

*I have several excellent vocations and I am afraid of losing them. Several times they have begged me to let them go and join a convent in Bombay. So far I have been able to make them be patient a little, but will I be able to hold them back much longer?**

Following their arrival, the Apostolic Carmel Sisters had many problems to face in settling down. So they could do no more for a time than just keep the little existing school and orphanage going. To begin with, they had no proper accommodation. The country too, with its climate, its people, its language, its customs, was new to them. They had to get acclimatized, especially to the heat, which, considering the comparatively heavy clothes they were wearing, was all the more oppressive, and affected their health. Nor had they any experienced European sisters in the community to break them into the new physical conditions or, for that matter, considering their youth, into the religious life of a new congregation just getting on its feet. Apart from Sister Elias, the only one who knew English, they could not even communicate with Bishop Michael Antony's sisters, who formed part of the community. And there was no one but they to see to the administration both in the community and in the school. Considering these many hurdles, it naturally took some time for them to adjust to existing conditions and take in the needs of the educational situation. All this time, Mother Veronica followed their progress and, through frequent letters, continued to guide them in every aspect of their personal, community and mission life.

While the Apostolic Carmel community at Manga-

lore was thus slowly getting ready to shoulder the full burden of the educational apostolate, what was happening in the other institutions? At Cannanore, the Sisters of St. Joseph had been suffering, as we have seen, from a lack of personnel in their school. So, when the Apostolic Carmel sisters had arrived there from Europe, accompanied by Bishop Marie Ephrem, Mother Magdalen Lubis had begged the bishop to send Carmelite sisters to help her. Accordingly, on his arrival at Mangalore, His Lordship sent two of Bishop Michael Antony's sisters to Cannanore and, for the time being, the problem in the school was solved. Encouraged by Mary Pia Rozario's success in the Departmental Examination the previous year, Father Martelli himself coached up two more students in 1871, who also emerged successful. As a result, the Government Grant was raised (1871) and the school prospered.

A similar situation regarding personnel prevailed with the Sisters of St. Joseph at Calicut. So, Mother Mary Perillon also asked the bishop for Carmelites. Two more of Bishop Michael Antony's sisters were sent there, to begin with, and six more followed by the end of 1872. At Calicut, the number of pupils was increasing, so Father Michael Montelro, the Assistant Vicar, put up a school building, half the cost being met by Government and the other half by the Mission. At the same time, Mother Perillon, solicitous for her poor people, appealed to friends and, with the help of contributions from them, put up, as the years passed, a building for one hundred poor catechumens for whom she also provided employment. Their children lived with them and attended the school. The women spun thread and made coir rope and mats, as well as beautiful household linen. The men wove cloth on the eight

* *Ibid.*, 22 Aug., '68.

looms constructed for them, making their own garments, as also bedsheets, tablecloths, serviettes and other articles.

As for Tellicherry, the school begun by the three Carmelites of Bishop Michael Antony was in its infancy and could not hope to make much headway without better qualified administrators. When the Apostolic Carmel sisters arrived from Europe, the Tellicherry trio were eager to close down and follow them to Mangalore, there to make their novitiate again under them. But they had to hold on for a while. Their wish was fulfilled only on 19 October, 1872,* when the school at Tellicherry was closed down, to be re-opened again only many years later.

Such was the state of girls' education in the vicariate of Mangalore in 1872, two years after the arrival of the Apostolic Carmel sisters. About twenty years later, there appeared an article in a Carmelite periodical published in Brussels, of which the following is an extract:

We read in fact in the Annals of Carmel (August 1883, p.259) that in 1882, they (the Apostolic Carmel) had three establishments (at Mangalore, at

* In all, twelve sisters trained by Bishop Michael Antony joined the Apostolic Carmel: Catharine Waters (Sister Mary of the Incarnation), Louisa Rebello (Sister Mary Magdalen), Regina Silva (Sister Mary Ann), Pauline D'Costa (Sister Genevieve), Sophia Manilla (Sister Veronica), Catharine Roberts (Sister Ann Teresa), Anna Maria Lobo (Sister Francine), Francisca Taveira (Sister Gertrude), Louisa Rasquinha (Sister Euphrasia), Joanna Mascarenhas (Sister Mary Margaret), Anna Noronha (Sister Mary Teresa), Seraphine D'Souza (Sister Agnes). Of these, four did not persevere in the congregation, Sisters Mary of the Incarnation, Mary Magdalen, Veronica and Ann Teresa (Apostolic Carmel Admission Register)

*Cannanore and at Calicut). All the religious of this infant congregation are indigenous except the Superior General who is French. They devote themselves in the first place to education and, to succeed in this with greater prestige, they do not fear to face public examinations. To the trained teachers, the British Government grants an annual subsidy in accordance with the grade. Since then they have prospered increasingly. Actually this Third Order of Carmel has (it is 1893) 4 schools in Mangalore, 2 in Cannanore, 2 in Calicut and 2 in Tellicherry and one each in Verapoly, Trivandrum, Quilon, Tangassery, Ernakulam and Alleppy -16 in all.**

This progress is all the more remarkable if we consider that the events connected with the First War of Independence of 1857** proved to be something of a setback to missionary educational enterprise. There had been an agitation in England against missionary activities being encouraged, as a result of which the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 had "adopted a policy of strict neutrality in religious matters and (given) an assurance to the people that government had neither the right nor the desire to impose Christianity upon India."*** Thus, between 1858 and 1882, "the policy of the Department was marked by an unsympathetic attitude to mission schools, and the officials... made it difficult for the missions to work either within the system or without it."****

* *Letters*, n.d. 1893. (referring to an article in the *Chronicles of Carmel*, Alost, Brussels, Jan., 1893, p. 317).

** Known to the English as the Indian Mutiny.

*** Naik and Nerullah, *A Students' History of Education*, p.158.

**** *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

Still, the Apostolic Carmel found favour with those in power. This mustard seed planted in the soil of Mangalore would grow into a huge tree spreading out its branches in all directions. But it had first to die.

Chapter 14

MOTHER AND GUIDE

For seven months after their arrival, the Apostolic Carmel sisters formed a single community with the sisters of the Cloistered Carmel, who had travelled with them from Europe. Then, the two-storeyed block, overhauled by Bishop Michael Antony and known as St. Ann's, was handed over to the cloistered sisters, together with the adjoining ground floor wing, which the Indian Carmelites had occupied in the past and which, much later, became the boarders' quarters. The five Apostolic Carmel sisters (Sisters Agnes and Cecilia had joined the first three) with the six Indian Carmelites, who were now part of their community, lived in the collection of huts that remained on the property after the collapse and demolition of "The Bungalow." These huts

had become a rendezvous for cattle. Moreover, (they) could not be closed as the door shutters would not meet. But, worse than all, the former tenants refused to relinquish their rights and obstinately returned to their shelter. The sisters managed as best they could, with four dilapidated cots, three very old tables, four benches to match and a broken chair...

*Whatever else these quarters fell short of, they did not lack light for the wide fissures in the walls admitted more light and ventilation than the occupants cared for.**

Despite these and other inconveniences, classes were held. Also, the bishop, realizing the plight of the sisters, had extensions and repairs set under foot. But expansion of the educational institution was out of the question for the present. Sister Elias, educationally the most capable, was appointed headmistress, while Sister Agnes was made prioress and Sister Marie des Anges mistress of novices. "His Lordship wrote to me," Mother Veronica relates,

that he was quite satisfied with my children, and they too were perfectly happy in being able to do and suffer something to gain souls for Our Lord.

*...during the first six months Sister Elias wrote to me that they had sixty (children in the school) and some orphans, but their accommodation was limited and boarders could not be received. Also, English sisters were needed, as the French ones are almost useless in India.***

That up to December, 1871, Mother Veronica was at peace with the state of things in India, may be gauged from a letter to Bishop Marie Ephrem :

I am much comforted to know that you are pleased with my dear children - poor little ones. The good God watches over them and gives them the graces they need to make themselves useful, although they

* Sister Candida, A.C., op. cit., p. 97.
** Carmel in India, pp. 57-58.

*have such little learning (with the exception of Sister Elias) in all human sciences. I believe also that those dear children have indeed gone through a period of temptation for the past three years. At present the good God has driven Satan off and they have more grace. They have written to me that you are very good to them, as also all our Fathers. May God show you the kindness that you show them and may they be more and more worthy of this affection.**

How could Mother Veronica have dreamt that the time was very near when all this would be drastically changed ?

Being in far-away Bayonne, Mother Veronica's heart and mind were naturally very much with her daughters in India, and she kept in constant touch with them through letters, in which she treats of all the aspects of their lives. Her motherly heart is all concern for their physical well-being. "I am very happy," she says, "that our lay sisters wear their white veils (presumably on account of the heat)... Do you have baths?-as I told you, by wetting yourselves." Or, "Answer these questions," she will require:

*How are you shod?... Tell me whether the new cells are convenient... I wish little by little to make a collection of different things. Have you kitchen and table linen? Does your mail arrive in good condition? and with no breakages of fragile articles?... Are you suffering much from the heat and pimples?****

And here is the up-to-date nurse, a worthy contempo-

* Letters, 10 Dec., 1871.
** Ibid., June, 1872.

rary of Florence Nightingale, educating her sisters in precautionary medicine :

How is my little Mother Agnes with her diseased hand and foot ? Great precautions should be taken in tending wounds: always to wash them well, not to touch dressings except with pincers meant for the purpose. As far as possible, one should not touch rags from foul wounds for you risk catching infection, especially from children, young as you are.

To which her understanding heart adds this comment: "How will you know all this ? It is not surprising that you make some blunders."^{*}

The needs of the schools are always in Mother Veronica's mind. Thus, she writes to Sister Elias : "I send you many little things for the school etc. I hope they will divide them and send you some."^{**} And to Father Lazare, "I am sending for my children a packet of little things for their schools... Could you, my dear Father, send these letters *yourself* to their address?"^{***}

No detail is too trivial for her to enquire about or attend to." I have ordered two pieces of light stuff for the holy Habit," she informs them, "as desired by Monsignor. They will be prepared only in the month of October... What prayer-books have you ? Have you books in English ?"^{****}

At times, Mother Veronica will have a little joke at the expense of one or two sisters :

^{*} *Ibid.*, 13 Sept., 1871.

^{**} *Ibid.*, 6 Feb., 1872.

^{***} *Ibid.*, 1 Feb., 1872.

^{****} *Ibid.*, Sept., 1871.

*I exhort Sister Cecilia (a lay sister) to be converted and not to be so ill-natured towards the poor little Indians as she was latterly with her companions in the kitchen of the Little Carmel at Bayonne. You will do well to prostrate, naughty child, and rub your nose on the floor, red or black... That will make you grieve somewhat for your sins – you have great need of this. Just see how she laughs without a jot of contrition !**

Or, Mother Veronica will bring the practical experience of daily living which she gained in India to bear on the advice she gives:

*... take care that they return to you every week whatever linen you give them, for I warn you that the custom in India is to soil the linen or dusters until you cannot touch them and then throw them away !! Take good care, for I know these dirty habits – like the servant of Monsignor Marie Ephrem, who dried the plates on the pants of the Fathers !!***

Sensitive to the nostalgia the European sisters must feel for Bayonne, their erstwhile novice mistress keeps them posted on the latest developments in the Little Carmel :

Since you left, we have made a little hermitage in the garden in the corner where the two walls join. The first is opposite the window, but the door of the hermitage overlooks the alley which runs along the wall where the vines grow. At the lower end, we have had a little rustic altar built with a niche in which is the (statue of the) Blessed Virgin which belonged to Sister Mary Joseph...

^{*} *Ibid.*, May (feast of the Ascension), 1871.

^{**} *Ibid.*, n.d., (probably 1871).

We have also installed two large barrels coated with tar under the tin pipes which carry the water from the roofs. This provides us with water for our poor little garden. Since the hermitage will be covered with creepers, it will look quite pretty.

A good and pious Spanish lady comes often to see us. She is a widow and has just lost her son. She wishes to provide material for clothing our little orphans at Mangalore.*

If you know how fervent and charming our two novices are... What we need now is some English girls. I ask our Father St. Joseph – He must send some soon.**

In one of her letters, she mentions the prospect of a visit from her mother, and describes the sort of excitement it has created among the young people of the Little Carmel.

My mother will soon arrive at Biarritz and last evening at recreation we enjoyed ourselves in imagining the ceremony of her Baptism in our choir – one (sister) said that Monsignor would come to perform the ceremony and that he would give her First Communion and confirm her.

And her convert daughter adds fervently : "Think of the joy! and then I would say my *Nunc Dimittis*."*** A few days later the visit is a *fait accompli* and we hear about it :

* *Ibid.*, 1871 (probably to Mother Agnes and her community)

** *Ibid.*, 20 Nov., 1871.

*** *Ibid.*

My mother has come from London to spend the winter in Biarritz. I got permission to bring her to our place and she slept here one night. What struck her most, she said, was to see ten women living together happy and without quarrelling !!! But she is so bigoted against our holy religion...*

So, Mother Veronica's *Nunc Dimittis* is nowhere within sight.

Her missionary heart longs to work for the missions, in which, as we see here, she includes not only India, but also Ceylon. Replying to a letter in which Sister Agnes, who had just arrived in India, had described her journey, she writes :

At the next departure I shall get ready a little parcel of church articles for Jesus in this poor church (Point de Galles). I have a great desire to do this since I love Ceylon and its missionaries.

Oh, my God, when shall I see again this earthly paradise ! I shall see it quite close when my pilgrimage ends. So patience.**

Mother Veronica had stayed at Point de Galles for eight days on her way to Mangalore in 1862. Although she never came again personally to India or Ceylon, it was very much in the fitness of things that her desire should be fulfilled in a different way. Strange as it may seem, the Apostolic Carmel opened foundations in Ceylon as early as 1922, even before it spread to other parts of India beyond South Canara and Malabar (Kerala). How the heart of this foundress would have been

* *Ibid.*, 10 Dec., 1871.

** *Ibid.*, Feast of the Ascension, May, 1871.

torn, were she alive, to see the violence and bloodshed that is wracking the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) today !

The youth and inexperience of the sisters, whom circumstances have forced their foundress to send to the missions on their own, without her, is an important reason why she is waiting anxiously to come to India. The thought is ever at the back of her mind. "Make a note of what you need most," she writes, "what you lack as you settle down... send me a list. I shall try little by little to get things and send them to you... or perhaps bring them myself, who knows ? As God will! Meanwhile, constant patience!"* In a letter to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified of the Cloistered Carmel, to whom she is very close, she writes more intimately, feeling heavily her responsibility as mother and foundress:

*I am so completely left to myself, so swallowed up in the darkness and ocean of my sins and my infinite miseries that it is a miracle God works to keep me from despair. The only thing that sustains me is that from the depths in which I am, I have an unlimited confidence in the mercy of God and that He will direct everything for me according to His holy will, which urges me always towards India. It is not a question of whether Sister Agnes or Sister Elias is more capable or worthier than I – that is quite certain – those souls are pearls, but they have neither experience nor age nor have they suffered; and I am their mother although infinitely unworthy. And we must not tempt God, even though we know well He can work a miracle...those in charge should exercise prudence, then God will bless what is done.***

* *Ibid.*, Sept., 1871.

** *Ibid.*, n.d. (probably late 1871).

Mother Veronica also addresses the sisters on practical points of conduct. "It is better," she cautions, "to keep silence about persons who are not appreciated; you will bring more trouble on yourselves than you have at present"* – presumably if they try to shield or praise such persons. Or, "...in a hot country, where everything leads to neglect, to laxity, to idleness.. unhealthy relations can corrupt good manners."** Hence, there is need of a spiritual cloister. "One must always wage war, do violence, be always watchful, fearful, always reserved with everyone, be always on one's guard, so that the old serpent does not surprise you with his wiles." The most powerful weapons she has to offer, ever and always, are those of prayer and humility:

Above all, be constant in prayer and humbly mistrust self. Put your trust in God alone, not in men...

*...pray and make the children pray for this intention...Address yourselves especially to the Sacred Heart of Jesus that He might be pleased to bring about order and make you a fervent little community of true religious.****

She had, after all, trained them at Bayonne to prayer and solitude, bearing in mind that "The Little Carmel was a hidden garden in which these little plants should take root in solitude and silence before being strong enough to be later transplanted in India to spread the good odour of Christ among infidels."****

She takes every opportunity to exhort her children

* *Ibid.*, June, 1872.

** *Ibid.*, n.d. (probably 1871).

*** *Ibid.*

**** *Ibid.*, 10 Dec., 1871.

to humility. "Always be very humble and very charitable," she says, "united among yourselves. Let each one remember this beautiful maxim : 'I am nothing, I can do nothing!' This path is very sure and filled with sweetness and light."** Or again :

*You, my children, Sister Agnes and Sister des Anges, who are in charge, hold fast to your nothingness by reflecting on what you are – nothing but little ignorant children - recognise this simple truth and you will not lack humility. The only ambition of a Carmelite should be to surpass the others in humility.***

Mother Veronica goes on to recommend this virtue especially to Sister Elias, "since (presumably as headmistress) the good God gives her the blessed grace of having more occasions to put it into practice."****

Another favourite subject, to which the foundress returns again and again, is suffering. Mother Agnes had heard that her father was ill. Mother Veronica's tender heart understands the young nun's anguish. However, her advice is calculated not to encourage depression, but to strengthen :

I saw from your last letter, my poor child, that you were quite worried and disturbed concerning your father, but I think a little reflection will calm your poor little heart.

*You are still too young... one learns several things as one grows older... One must say over and over again, 'Let nothing trouble you. Let nothing frighten you. All passes away... God alone suffices.'*****

* Ibid., June, 1872.

** Ibid., Feast of the Ascension, May, 1871.

*** Ibid., May (feast of the Ascension) 1871.

**** Ibid., 20 Nov., 1871.

To Sister Elias, she writes :

*Yes, my child, He (Jesus) loves you with a love of predilection since He lets you share a little in a drop of His chalice which is the most precious of all – the contempt of creatures – that is the summit of all perfection. 'To suffer and to be despised for you!' But it must be understood.**

Or again, she exhorts Sisters Agnes, "Courage, my very dear child: Suffer in peace for some time. After the storm comes the calm."***

In another epistle, suffering and humility go hand in hand, as indeed they often do in life. "I cannot... thank God enough," she writes to Sister Agnes,

*for the beautiful sentiments, courage and peace which He gives you to suffer all – or the love of this sweet Saviour of our souls. My children, prize this grace very much : of suffering contempt and persecution. It is the grace of graces, if you can profit by it. Be humble, my daughters. Be always little. Keep silence. And submit always to all the misery that Jesus permits.****

If Mother Veronica regrets the suffering a daughter of hers undergoes, it is not for the sister's sake for "Jesus (is) glorified by it." She regrets it "only for those who have been the instruments of her trials."****

Although she urges the sisters to accept suffering meekly, as a means of being more deeply united with

* Ibid., May, 1871.

** Ibid., April, 1872.

*** Ibid., Easter Sunday, 1872.

**** Ibid., 1 June, 1872.

the Passion of Our Lord, she does not encourage them to bow weakly under oppression. Quite the contrary. Thus, she writes to one of her daughters, probably Sister Agnes, when, as superior, she has to withstand the onslaughts against the little Apostolic Carmel :

*I am very pleased with you, my dear child, and you are more precious to me since you are slighted and afflicted by men for the love of God...than when you were honoured. Be of good courage, my child, but always with humility and sweetness. Be firm and fear nothing. Take a strong stand regarding good order and religious observance. Remember you have promised to be Carmelites of the Third Order Regular and not...of the Third Order Secular.**

And to Father Lazare, regarding Sister Elias who, in taking a stand, is going through a conflict, she affirms authoritatively: "Let her not fear that she is offending the good God, let her act boldly, courageously, freely, but always with humility and a spirit characterised by politeness and decorum." The foundress goes on to strengthen her daughter by citing her own example, the way she had acted in a similar situation. When she was on the point of leaving the Generalate of the Sisters of St. Joseph for the Carmel of Pau, Mother Melanie had tried to delay her departure. "I replied to her firmly and with perfect calmness," says Mother Veronica, "Nothing in the world will keep me. I have taken my decision and I must leave;" and without another word, without wishing to listen to anything more, I bolted."** It is significant that she never speaks of taking a bold,

* *Ibid.*, 1871.

** *Ibid.*, 10 June, 1872.

courageous stand without, at the same time, exhorting her sisters to combine courage with humility, refinement, politeness : "one must act with calm, with dignity, without saying anything, one must behave with distinguished politeness."*

She urges her sisters, as we have seen, to live together in humility and charity. But these virtues take second place to truth. Or, rather, they cannot exist, where truth is absent. Humility is truth. Also "... truth cannot be sacrificed for charity. Oh no! Even Holy Mother Teresa upheld that."** Here, she explains in a letter what truth means to her :

*The sentiments you have for truth, the only good, are mine as well. God has impressed on my soul this love for truth from my childhood...I said a word to Mgr. Marie Ephrem in the parlour of the Carmel at Pau on that memorable night when I arrived with my three poor children...that word had mortally offended Monsignor who wanted to make me say something which was not so and which I had not done. 'Monsignor,' I said to him, 'I cannot say that it is so, because I shall lie and I cannot lie either to please you or anyone else.' How many times Monsignor has reproached me for telling the whole truth and for being too frank. Well, Father, I honour and I love truth and all those who love it.****

We get an inkling here that Mother Veronica, like the rest of us, had the defects of her good qualities. While truth is a virtue to be upheld at all costs, being "too

* *Ibid.*

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*, 3 July, 1871.

frank" may mean unnecessarily rubbing people up the wrong way. Mother Veronica certainly succeeded in doing this to Bishop Marie Ephrem on many occasions and perhaps to others, as she went through life.

She indeed exhorts her children to suffer bravely, but not without her support. Her tender mother's heart suffers with them and for them: "If you knew, my poor children, all the pain and anxiety I go through because of you! One has to be a mother to understand it."* And again: "Alas, my God, how my poor heart is in anguish at times when I feel or know that my children whom Our Lord has given me are suffering or in anguish!"**

Her closeness in spirit to her children seems to give her a telepathic knowledge of their suffering. She senses that there is some trouble among the sisters themselves: "My heart cries out to Jesus for you night and day," she writes. "Before your letter of Holy Week arrived, and for a long time, I suffered for all of you and with you, for my heart had a presentiment that my dear children were going through temptations and trials. I cannot tell you what anguish I suffered. Oh, my children, may humility reign with charity among you!"***

For Mother Veronica, humility must lead to deep trust in God. She reveals this to Father Lazare with reference to her own personal life:

Oh, Father! If you only knew what a desperate fight the devil wages here! Truly it would be difficult to fight him without that confidence in God which

* Ibid., 1871.

** Ibid., 1 Feb., 1872.

*** Ibid., Feast of the Ascension, May, 1871.

says always, 'Even if you slay me, Lord, yet shall I trust in you!' It seems to me that Jesus cannot resist this abandonment to His pity, His mercy. The more I feel and see my total misery, my sins past and present, well, Father, the more I cling to Jesus, to his heart! What else can I do? To whom shall I go? All would reject and push me away if they knew what I am. Jesus knows it and that better than anyone else and He never rejects me. On the contrary, the more wicked I am, the kinder He is. I cannot say it enough. How happy one feels when one trusts in Jesus! If only I could succeed in being a little – a very little – sweet and humble of heart like this heart, model of all hearts! Will I never arrive at it? I feel a desire for it, an immense need – unspeakable...

*In spite of it all (my horrible infidelities which may bring an insurmountable obstacle to bear on those entrusted to me) I hope always – I am even, as it were, sure – that Jesus will have mercy on me because I cannot refrain from trusting in Him with an unlimited confidence. Perhaps that is because of my hard-headedness, as I have a reputation for it. Well, on this occasion, it will serve a good purpose.**

Patience is another offspring of humility. Thus, Mother Veronica writes to Sister Elias:

The time will come... when you will say, 'It is good for me, Lord, that Thou hast humbled me.' It is very difficult to drag on a weary existence, when it seems as if God has withdrawn His grace from one's soul. But wait in patience. The season of trial

* Ibid., 1 July, '72.

*will pass and your soul will be full of light. And then you will look back with regret, perchance, that the season for gaining so much merit is passed... this is only a very crucifying state of trial which God sends to purify your dear soul and make you wholly His, to burn up self in you that Jesus alone may live... Have patience, for our dear Lord will not permit you to live always in this way. How difficult a lesson is this blessed patience to the unbroken human will ! It chafes and rears and kicks like a young colt, but after all it needs must submit, and the sooner the better, for then the Master will gently lead the new lamb-like creature into fair and green pastures.**

Young and inexperienced as were the sisters of the Apostolic Carmel, who had perforce to be at the helm of affairs in Mangalore, they needed all the advice they could get from Mother Veronica. And, to add to it, almost as soon as they had taken charge, storms burst upon their young heads in all their fury.

* *Ibid.*, 20 July, '72.

Chapter 15

STORMS: SISTER MARY OF JESUS CRUCIFIED

The Cloistered Carmelites, as we have seen, had, as yet, no place of their own. For twelve years they lived in their own community, but side by side with the Apostolic Carmel, who were housed in the same campus. It is from here that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified would play the historic role marked out for her in the annals of the Apostolic Carmel.

As for the spiritual welfare of the two communities, "His Lordship," writes Mother Marie des Anges,

*had appointed Father Lazare superior of our little convent, when about to leave for Malabar on his first pastoral visit. The Reverend Father Lazare was goodness itself. He was at the same time director of the cloistered nuns, where there was at that time an Arab novice, about whom we must say that she was the author of a little revolution in our little Carmel.**

* Mother Marie des Anges, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

On 27 March, 1871, Sister Agnes, on account of whom Bishop Marie Ephrem had stormed at Mother Veronica on that memorable night at Pau, arrived in Mangalore with Sister Cecile, a lay sister, and was immediately nominated by the bishop local superior of St. Ann's, while he made Sister Marie des Anges mistress of novices. The Apostolic Carmel stage was now set for drama, with Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified as the "heroine," the other important characters being the Bishop, Father Lazare, the Mother Prioress and the Novice Mistress of the Great Carmel. Supporting actresses were Mother Agnes and Sister Marie des Anges. Other nuns of the two communities took minor roles, for or against the "heroine." And Mother Veronica was a distant, but very much involved, commentator, being, as she was, so closely connected with Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified.

It is interesting to note what was thought and said and written about Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified in 1872 and what is thought and said and written about her today, over a century later, when she has been beatified. And yet, after studying the case, we must ask, "Can we blame those of her contemporaries who misjudged her?" Her life presented a phenomenon unheard of in the history of the Church and great was the responsibility of those charged with the duty of pronouncing on it.

To draw again on the chronicles of Sister Marie des Anges :

It will be remembered that Mother Veronica had taken with her to the Great Carmel, a postulant of the congregation of St. Joseph. This one came with the other sisters to Mangalore. She pretended to have direct communication with God, the Blessed

Virgin etc etc. She also had visions and ecstasies and pretended to read the secret thoughts of others, even to make predictions of the future. As she was so very cunning, not only did she make the whole community believe her, but even turned Father Lazare entirely in her favour. He looked upon her as a great saint...

When she came out of the enclosure to be examined before her profession, she paid a visit to our sisters, speaking to each one in particular, flattering highly the Reverend Father Lazare, Mother Agnes, Sister Elias and one of the postulants...

*...Here it must be avowed that the Reverend Father Lazare was a holy religious and endowed with a very good heart, but he had the weakness of believing almost blindly all the witchcraft of the Arab novice... She uttered terrible menaces against all those who put no faith in all those comedies. The convent, as may be seen, was, in the beginning, assailed by such hellish temptations. Besides the four European sisters, there were a professed sister, two novices and three postulants. All these, instead of doing their duties seriously, set about discussing and admiring the actions of the miserable visionary. The little school in consequence... was... much neglected... while the convent was going on in this way and all agreed very well together, there was one, Sister Marie des Anges, who seemed to be in the way, a trouble to others simply because she could not believe in all these celestial visions which then used to take place - everyone felt a celestial odour which exhaled from the "crucified," as the unhappy nun was called.**

* Ibid., pp. 13 - 15.

Mother Marie des Anges then goes on to describe the Profession Day of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, 21 November, 1871, specifying the messages she had for each of the major actors, as, one by one, she met them, and received their congratulations. She also tells how, the very day after her Profession, the bishop turned against her, how she threatened to leave the convent and actually went outside the enclosure, how she blamed Sister Marie des Anges for "having betrayed her before His Lordship and excited everybody to be against her." Sister Marie des Anges breathes a sigh of relief as she concludes with the triumphant announcement that, in October, 1872, she was sent back to her convent of Pau in France :

*Thus our good God freed our little convent from the source of all troubles, because... she led those to do ill who meant to do well and by her cunning gained so much influence over them that they allowed themselves to be guided altogether by her diabolical counsels.**

It was indeed ironical. Mangalore was thankful to God at that time to be rid of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, and today, the cell she occupied in the convent then has become a shrine. Truly, God's ways are inscrutable.

Interestingly enough, there is a reference to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified twenty years later, in a letter to Mother Marie des Anges from Father Athanasius, whose acquaintance we made earlier, as having introduced Mother des Anges as a postulant to the Apostolic Carmel at Bayonne. By this time, the aggressive attitude of the Apostolic Carmel superior has apparent-

* *Ibid.*, p. 17.

ly toned down. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified has been dead fifteen years. Says Father Athanasius, writing from France :

*With regard to the little Arab you have taken the right stand – that of saying nothing. And avoiding all conversation on her manner of acting. If you had the chronicles of Carmel, published... by Emile Ver-nimmen.... you would see on p. 186 of the October issue, 1889,... 'We learn today from particular letters that this very eventful life has had characteristics, the mysterious nature of which raises legitimate suspicion and calls for a final verdict from the Holy See.**

In 1983, less than a hundred years later, this verdict has been given – in favour of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified.

Mgr. La Croix, Bishop of Bayonne (and of Pau), had always shown complete trust in Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and had recommended her to Bishop Marie Ephrem. According to Mother Veronica, the latter had exclaimed at Pau before bringing the novice to India : "O Lord, what have I done that you give me such a child !"" Before her profession, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had written to Bishop La Croix in her happiness, "The Little Carmel of Mangalore is blessed by the good God. Mother Elias... is protecting us from heaven."" The novice had been unanimously voted for by the sisters. At Mangalore, she had also again been favoured with the grace of the stigmata, Mother Veronica tells us, and with many other heavenly gifts which the

* *Letters*, 30 July, 1892.

** *Autobiography*, Part III, p.27.

*** *A Brunot, S.C.J. op.cit.*, p.69 .

Rev., Mother Prioress and her mistress of novices continually pressed her to declare to them. On 15 July, 1871, Bishop Marie Ephrem had written from Calicut to Father Lazare, her confessor :

I am happy to see that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified has at last been delivered from the enemy... We must form her in the ways of humility and obedience. As long as she walks in this way there is no fear of illusion.

*I forgive her from my heart all that she has made me suffer... since she had given you the charge of asking me for pardon, well, tell the poor child that she has been pardoned for all.**

Before her profession in November, the bishop, hesitating a little because of the unusual things that were happening in the spiritual life of the sister, had her make a retreat of twenty-one days. The director of the little novice was Father Lazare. To quote Amédée Brunot, S.C.J.:

*He was then forty-two years of age and manifested great experience of life and of the cloister, great delicacy of soul under a rough exterior, and a will of iron that he was to show in some dramatic circumstances : an authentic disciple of Elias, an energetic Carmelite.***

Now, Father Lazare had been greatly opposed to the charismatic, not appreciating "this extraordinary thing," as he termed it. But during the voyage from France to

* Letters, 15 July, 187.

** Amédée Brunot S.C.J., *op.cit.*, pp. 68-69.

India, he had changed his mind and at the time of the death of Mother Elias at Calicut, he said : "I saw that the good God was there.**"

At the end of the retreat, the bishop, having seen her practically every day and examined her carefully, announced: "I had some doubts before, but I assure you that now I have none... No one any longer has any doubt about it. Ask the Mother Prioress if this is not true." At the Profession ceremony, 21 November, 1871, the bishop gave a glowing homily :

You called Jesus with all the powers of your heart... you asked the sea and the mountains for Him ; you asked the sky and the stars for Him; men and angels for Him; but none gave Him to you... He, from His place on the heights of the holy mountain, called you with His most tender voice and said to you like the Spouse in the Canticle :

*'Come from Lebanon, my spouse, come from Lebanon and you shall be crowned.' And you, my dear child, you have heard the voice of the Beloved from your earliest childhood, and you have come from the mountains of Lebanon. Oh, how this divine Saviour has overwhelmed you with His mercies !***

It was her Palm Sunday. Good Friday was not far off. It all started on the day following her profession, from a message Our Lord had given her : "Tell everything to your confessor and to the bishop if need be. Say nothing to anyone else."*** It probably concerned the prediction of the devil's return, the second of the

* *Ibid.*, p.68.

** *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

*** *Ibid.*, p.71.

two terrible periods of possession by the devil. She spoke to Father Lazare, but Bishop Marie Ephrem, after reflection, said to her : "If Our Lord does not wish it, I forbid you to tell me anything."* Thus did he himself blind his vision for the future. What was his reason ? One can hardly guess. We are told that he reflected before imposing the command on the sister. So we can only conclude that God permitted, for his own reasons, all that followed.

And what about the prioress and the mistress of novices, who now no longer received the confidences of the young professed? Her silence, Mother Veronica tells us, turned them against her, and they succeeded in persuading the bishop that she was under the influence of Satan, so that from then on the bishop's treatment of her became very severe. The two nuns with the bishop were a formidable trio indeed. All three turned against her. As for the novice mistress, Sister of the Infant Jesus, Mother Veronica informs us that : "she has written letters to our Father (Inchauspé) and to the Mother Prioress (of Pau) in such a funny tone, as if she had been transported to Mangalore in order to bring to light by her light the deceit of Satan in this dear child whose mistress they made her. Truly, Father," Mother Veronica comments,

we have been marvelling at the self-confidence of this little religious and how she settles this question and in what spirit she guides my saintly child and still more that she thinks one must be a [fool] to think otherwise. It seems that this phrase is the one

* *Ibid.*, p.71.

*that has often been used in her regard by the con-
clave down there.**

It was scarcely two weeks since her profession, when she had been overwhelmed with praise by her bishop, who had examined her most carefully. Now, suddenly, without an interview, without an explanation, he attributed to the devil all that he had earlier attributed to God. The sister's long and darkest night was just beginning.

About this time, Mother Veronica wrote to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified :

*Mgr. M. Ephrem is a saint. No one has had better occasion than I to appreciate and love his person, his virtues, his heart – and over and above that, the graces that God fills his soul with. I have seen the great good he does to souls, but God sometimes allows saints to give pain to others. If we know to profit by this, all will turn out to our good and our sanctification, even our own sins and miseries which are more painful to bear than all the crosses which might come from others.***

From the vantage point of time, one is tempted to exclaim at the short-sightedness of the superiors at Mangalore who had to deal with Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. Even in her own day, she was understood and respected as a holy person, by bishops, priests, sisters, not only in Pau but later on also in Bethlehem. Indeed, even in Mangalore, there were those who believed in her. Despite this, however, Mangalore earned

* *Letters*, 18 June, 1872.

** *Ibid.*, n.d., (probably late 1871 or early 1872).

for itself the dubious distinction, when her cause for beatification was taken up, of having provided practically the only important devil's advocates in Bishop Marie Ephrem, Mother Marie des Anges, the two Cloistered Carmel superiors and one or two others. And yet, persons in authority might well have faltered in their judgment under the circumstances.

In Mangalore, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was passing spiritually through one of the two most crucial periods of her life, if not the most crucial – periods of diabolical possession and obsession, "two seasons in hell."

Amédée Brunot describes the two seasons, one at Pau, the other at Mangalore, at the same time comparing and contrasting them:

(Satan) waited until her arrival at the new monastery in India to launch his skilful strategy. At Pau, he had predicted... 'The little nothing is going to be tempted so hard and so horribly for three years that she will no longer be able to obey!' The scenes of Pau were renewed with an unbelievable refinement of malice. At Pau, the little one had been able to rely completely on the support of her bishop, of the Abbés Saint-Gully and Manaudas, and of all the nuns. At Mangalore, Satan succeeded in casting an atmosphere of mistrust and even of hostility over the bishop, several priests and a good number of the nuns, especially the prioress and the mistress of novices... her Carmelite director, Father Lazare, was prevented from seeing her (his bishop had transferred him to Mahé). Alone, in the centre of a hostile circle, the little one was again possessed; she

was even driven by a mysterious force, to commit reprehensible actions. Outbursts of anger, temptations to run away, disobedience were repeated. Obviously, Satan brought on a temporary loss of liberty...

Whereas she used to lament her slightest imperfections, now she did not experience the least remorse for certain grave faults. Later, when alluding to this period she said: 'I always felt something impelling me to leave. I fought as much as I could to do just the opposite, and to stay : impossible !'

*The devil knew how to find the weak spot. One day he impelled the little one to go out of the enclosure door to go to the chapel. Another time, August 3, 1872, he constrained her to leave in order to bring her to the convent of the Carmelite tertiaries (Apostolic Carmelites) that adjoined the Carmel... After her return to Pau, she confided to her prioress, 'When I remember that I went out of the enclosure in the Carmel of Mangalore to run away, I can feel no regret. On the contrary, I thank the Lord a thousand times for it and I cannot do otherwise. I was forced to do it in spite of myself. Before God, I cannot think differently !!'**

Mother Veronica, however, never lost faith in her, whatever reports she heard : "And that one," she writes,

–the most dear of all, my precious new spouse of Jesus Crucified. I am not astonished at anything painful that might happen to her, nor at anything

* A. Brunot, S.C.J. op.cit., pp. 54-56.

*that might be said against her. That should be so, and it shall be so always, otherwise she would not have a real resemblance to Jesus. But the more they say, the more I shall be interiorly assured that Jesus is with her and in her.**

Again, some months later, in a letter to Father Lazare, she expresses her faith in the Arab sister still more ardently:

Your Reverence knows and feels how much Sister of Jesus Crucified is my child. I have confidence that she will die in my arms...

*I am so certain that, in spite of my unworthiness, Jesus wishes that I be united with this soul, beloved of his heart, who himself guards her and keeps her, that I have never even a doubt regarding her. Besides, my conviction is so strong that I believe that if I doubted the work of God in this soul, I would also doubt the existence of God Himself. This is a strong saying, but it is to express to you the feelings of my heart. In all, I submit and will always submit to what the Holy Church our Mother will decide.***

And again,

This child is a part of myself, no matter what they say or do, and at what distance she is. Jesus has put a tie between the two of us from the first moment that we met each other, which I believe in spite of my misery and unworthiness, will never be

* Letters, 1 Feb., 1872.

** Ibid., 1 June, 1872.

*broken. She has obtained for me infinite graces even though so far away.**

A couple of days later, Mother Veronica again mentions Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified in a letter to Father Lazare :

*What makes me very happy is what you tell me about my dear child, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. Yes, God alone knows at present the truth regarding her ! Some days ago, they congratulated themselves for having discovered the devil and one had to be a fool, according to them, to doubt that all did not come from him. What weathercocks. !***

As for Bishop Marie Ephrem's estimate of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, Mother Veronica considers it the result of inconsistency and inexperience. It is again to Father Lazare that she writes :

*You are perfectly right in saying that he (Bishop Marie Ephrem) will not write to Mgr. La Croix. Our bishop has too much experience at his age on all sorts of things to be taken in by the hasty decisions of a bishop so young as Bishop Marie Ephrem and not sufficiently deep on a subject so delicate as mysticism. Monsignor Marie Ephrem is shrewd enough to realise this.****

Meanwhile, at Mangalore, events followed one another rapidly. Other circumstances, added to the affair connected with Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, led to the resignation in December, 1871, of Mother Agnes,

* Ibid., 18 June, 1872

** Ibid., 5 June, 1872.

*** Ibid., 3 July, 1871.

and her departure, shortly afterwards, for Europe; the nomination as local superior of Mother Marie des Anges; Father Lazare's removal from office as Vicar General (February, 1872), his transfer to the parish of Mahé, and finally his departure, as well as that of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, for Europe (end of 1872) – all events, the decisions for which lay in the hands of Bishop Marie Ephrem.

In April, 1872, Bishop Marie Ephrem, contrary to Mother Veronica's expectations, did write a long and detailed letter to Bishop La Croix of Bayonne, attempting to explain his stand with regard to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and to justify his condemnation of her. He started by stating that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had begun to prophesy only when she saw that Father Lazare was consulting her on everything. It was at this time too, he added, that she began giving dogmatic opinions regarding the Third Order :

*They told me that she had announced and Father Lazare had repeated that Our Lord was tired of the Great Carmel of Mangalore and that He had turned His face from it. You may be sure that this was because of those who respected the authority of the Bishop rather than hers.**

The last sentence is the sort found scattered throughout the letter, leaving the impression that the bishop is being defensive. It could hardly, in any case, bias Bishop La Croix, who knew the sister so well. Bishop Marie Ephrem continues :

An incontestable fact is that Sister Mary of Jesus

* Ibid., 22 April, 1872.

*Crucified and all who believed in her or were under her influence, showed especially after her profession, alienation, opposition and some even scorn for their lawful superiors and for authority. This is a fact that all of us can attest, and which was unhappily evident to all who were right-minded and unprejudiced.**

Again, the last is one of those sentences that raises a question: *which* party was prejudiced and which not. Each party would consider the other prejudiced and itself right-minded. Bishop Marie Ephrem goes on:

...During November I noticed that I was being treated somewhat like a stranger; they did not consult me on anything; the sisters, except two or three, avoided coming before me. However, I said nothing in order not to embarrass anyone. I seldom went to the "Little" Carmel. Finally, it was the day for the profession of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. It was especially since this day that the situation grew tense...

*Then the prophecies and visions multiplied : Our Lord was displeased with the Great Carmel and especially with its superiors. Matters connected with the Third Order were to be regulated by Father Lazare (who in turn was ruled chiefly by Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified). As a result, believing that they were obeying God's orders, they set me aside and did everything without me.***

What had those in the other camp, including

* Ibid.
** Ibid.

Mother Veronica, to say about these events? "Our Father (Inchauspè) has said," reports Mother Veronica, "on the question of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and of Monsignor: 'This child sometimes tells truths to people'," after which she goes on to add the comment: "this is very true. She has no human respect at all. She perhaps said some of those unpleasant truths that have not been well accepted! and so the poor little one has been condemned."^{*}

As for Father Lazare, he is very sure of his position vis-a-vis his penitent. "I am sure," he asserts,

*they would give ten years of their life that I might be of their mind in condemning Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, but I would lose twenty of mine, unless something happens to enlighten me. I shall defend her always. The more I apply myself to the notes I have taken, the more I am convinced that she was on the right path. If they have not dishonoured her, it is not due to them; they have done all they could to achieve this.***

At Pau, the sisters who had cherished Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and reluctantly let her go to India, were not ignorant of what was happening to her, as we learn from a letter of Mother Veronica to Sister Agnes:

Be at peace regarding my discretion on your account - I assure you that those to whom I speak of you, my children, will not do you harm before Monsignor Marie Ephrem. The dear Mother Prioress of Pau knows something about it, but she has the

^{*} Ibid., Patronage of St. Joseph, 1872.

^{**} Ibid., 8 July, 1872.

*same sorrows with regard to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified as myself. She is not told anything - they do not allow this dear child to write either to her or to me. I assure you that that causes us great pain. Monsignor and our sisters (the two superiors of the Great Carmel, Prioress and Mistress of Novices, and perhaps also Mother Marie des Anges) are altogether under an illusion regarding her and they imagine that this saintly child is deceived and possessed by an evil spirit, but all that does not astonish us. She had foretold that it would be so - it is then only one more proof of her sanctity.**

To go back to Mother Veronica's Autobiography:

When Monsignor Marie Ephrem sent Sister of Jesus Crucified back to France, she told him that soon he would die miserably... 'Monsignor, you are planning to send back Father Lazare (she said). Well, within six months you will die in anguish and you will remain in purgatory until the first Mass that will be said in the Carmel of Bethlehem.'

Six months had scarcely passed, before Monsignor died in Mangalore almost suddenly and alone. He had already sent away Father Lazare disgraced and dishonoured.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified left Mangalore in November, 1872, accompanied by Sister Alphonse and Sister Cecile. This last sister had been termed a 'hidden gem' by Monsignor Marie Ephrem, and so she proved to be. Sister of Jesus Crucified was already

^{*} Ibid., Patronage of St. Joseph, 1872.

quite ill before leaving and during the voyage she became so much worse that she could take no nourishment except a little broth. But Sister Cecile spared herself no pains in ministering to her patient and succeeded in restoring her somewhat. When they arrived in France, Sister of Jesus Crucified did not know whether they would accept her at Pau. Her fears were, however, soon set at naught, for the sisters were awaiting her with great eagerness and love. Mother Veronica had come to Pau from Bayonne to take Sister Cecile. "I shall never forget," she tells us, "the expression of pain depicted on her face (Sister of Jesus Crucified), and the heavy tears that fell from her eyes, as she pressed me against her heart. She had suffered so much, poor child."* But the prioress and sisters at Pau tried now to make up, by their affection, for all that she had had to bear undeservedly at Mangalore.

Meanwhile, the internal affairs of the Apostolic Carmel in Mangalore were far from healthy. Mother Marie des Anges had replaced Mother Agnes as superior and would have all she could do to steady the little barque, so tossed by the storms that were raging and would continue to rage, both within and without, that it seemed as though it could hardly survive. Some blamed Bishop Marie Ephrem, others Mother Veronica. Says Mother Marie des Anges of the period that succeeded :

Now the reader must be prepared to hear of nothing but contradictions, disturbances and scandals... our sisters of the Third Order may see what severe trials the infant Congregation was subjected to, not

* Autobiography, Part II, p.27.

*by strangers or the civil authority, but by the very Foundress herself, who began thus early to destroy with one hand the work she was doing with the other. This is why our trials have been of a more painful nature than those of most others.**

Thus does Mother Marie des Anges, lay the blame for all the trouble squarely on Mother Veronica's shoulders. Whether, and to what extent, her judgment was valid, will be revealed in the following pages.

* Mother des Anges, op.cit., p.3.

Chapter 16

**MORE STORMS:
"MIXTURE OF CONGREGATIONS"**

Bishop Michael Antony had drawn the first recruits for his Carmelite congregation from among the Anglo Indian orphans and boarders left behind by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Mangalore. This Carmelite congregation, the bishop knew, would be in his hands to dispose of according to the needs of the diocese, without the complexity and delay necessitated by having to consult superiors in Europe. He set aside a portion of his residence in Jeppu for the sisters, and himself directed, both them and the friars, whom he founded at the same time. Although he laboured earnestly with them, his many duties as bishop would presumably make it difficult for him to give them all the attention they needed. Which is why, perhaps, he kept holding out to them the hope of the arrival in the near future of the tertiaries Mother Veronica was forming in Europe. Thus it happened that they were eagerly awaiting the sisters from Bayonne.

To welcome the newcomers from France, the Indian sisters had, as we have seen, given St. Ann's a festive appearance and done all in their power to make the sisters comfortable and happy. The European sisters, for their part, found in their Indian counterparts all the religious virtues they could desire. Despite this initial success, however, and the never-failing good will on both sides, misunderstandings arose. There were several barriers that could account for this situation – language (except for Sister Elias, the European sisters did not know English); an inferiority complex on the part of the Indians; oversight in some matters, which appeared like discrimination, the Indian sisters, for instance, never being called to table with the others. However, Sister Elias, with whom alone the Indian sisters could communicate, realised what was happening, and soon matters were smoothed out and all the sisters settled down peacefully as a family.

Mother Veronica continued to guide her daughters in important practical matters through her letters: "...always reserve for yourselves," she writes,

the right to open and read letters addressed to you, as well as to write without asking permission of the Fathers or of Monsignor, since this does not come under their jurisdiction, and I see much trouble and unbearable annoyance following when a superior of a community in her youthful and inexperienced confidences without reserve, gives permission to open and read her letters before they fall into her own hands. I have experienced this also, and then when one is in trouble there is no means to get out of it if such a thing is allowed. Similarly, in everything, if

the Fathers get into a wrong way of dealing with you all, it will be very difficult later to remedy it.

*The conclusion is to start aright.**

In her advice regarding correspondence, Mother Veronica might be Post Vatican II, and her remarks on the possible treatment by the Fathers sound like those of a modern religious woman working in one of our Indian mission stations or engaged in helping women to take their rightful place in the Church. Nor was her advice premature or superfluous, for the time was not far distant when both the problems treated of here would, in fact, come upon the little Apostolic Carmel band.

A few months later, we find Mother Veronica writing to them:

*I have told you the reason why I write only in general and I shall continue doing so, since from what I know of you, I am at a loss what to believe – whether you are free to write and to receive my letters without their being inspected by anyone and whether you do not show them to others besides our much loved mothers and sisters. You know, I believe, that a mother should and can say certain things to her children which would not be understood by strangers.***

Another point Mother Veronica takes up in these early days is that of cloister. It may surprise us to note the very ordinary things and the small details she mentions, till we remember that she is talking to very young women hardly out of their teens and, moreover, about

* Letters, n.d (probably early 1871).

** Ibid., 23 July, 1871.

the religious life, of which their experience is minimal. "There is one thing I desire with all my heart for you," she warns.

*It is quite necessary and the first thing that should be attended to. Things must be so arranged that the door of your monastery can be closed. If you have a door by which all who come in or go out have to pass, you will never have order... At least, let the dormitory have enclosure. Have you separate cells or do you sleep in a common dormitory?... try to have a wooden fence made or a temporary enclosure, if you wish, and a door which can be closed at night as well as by day and appoint someone as portress.**

Practical woman that she is, she goes on to give detailed directions on how to make the fence. Then she continues:

*You will fix a gate like the wooden fence with a padlock and a bell to announce any arrival... Little by little, gently, put in a word and make them understand that you do not ask for walls or the like, but only to feel you are in your home and safe from nocturnal visits, at least, since you are sure that our Fathers, and Monsignor in particular, with the prejudices they have against our cloister, would be angry if you began making demands – still, Monsignor had promised me in writing the Ursuline cloister.***

It will be recalled here that Mother Veronica and Bishop Marie Ephrem had seriously disagreed at Bayonne

* Ibid., 23 July, 1871.

** Ibid.

over this matter of cloister. So, Mother Veronica, wishing to spare her children the pain she had suffered, cautions them to be tactful. She herself, having made her novitiate in the Great Carmel, had indeed tended to overdo the cloister for the Apostolic Carmel, an active order. Her Great Carmel training betrays itself in this letter, even in her terminology, as we see – words like "cell" and "monastery," for instance. But neither may the cloister be entirely done away with, as Monsignor and the Fathers might think fit. So the foundress impresses on her daughters the necessity of enclosure, both for physical safety and for separation from the din and bustle of "the world". For cloister, as far as Mother Veronica is concerned, is not only external. External cloister facilitates cloister of the heart, prayer, contemplation, the final goal.

Meanwhile, at Cannanore and Calicut, there were in existence, as already mentioned, convents of the sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Mother Magdalen Lubis was superior at Cannanore and Mother Mary Perillon at Calicut. Both were French women and able administrators, in whose hands the schools and other apostolic works were running well, but, for lack of reinforcements, they could not hope to carry on for long. When, at this juncture, the sisters of the Apostolic Carmel arrived from Bayonne, Bishop Michael Antony's Carmelites, who were working in Tellicherry and Mangalore, twelve in all, joined them (though the three Tellicherry sisters could not immediately leave the school there and join the novitiate). The sisters of St. Joseph were faced with a choice – either to return to Europe or join the Apostolic Carmel. Most of them

chose the latter course. Having been released from their Order, they applied to Bishop Marie Ephrem for admission, received the habit and came by turns to do the novitiate in Mangalore under Mother Marie des Anges.*

Mother Emilie Julien, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph, had decided to withdraw from Mangalore and transfer her sisters to Burma. There is, in the records of this time, a magnanimous letter written by Mother Emilie Julien to Bishop Marie Ephrem in November, 1872, over a year after Mother Magdalen Lubis and others had received the Apostolic Carmel habit. It reads:

Since the health of Sister Perillon does not permit her to go to Burma with her companions, I cannot demand that this beloved sister risk her life to stay in the bosom of the Congregation which esteems her profoundly. Your Lordship has increased his religious family by four distinguished for their knowledge and piety. I congratulate you while uttering a very pained 'Fiat' before the Throne of the Eternal, for our sisters have never given anything but consolation.

Mother Emilie goes on to add: "Our sisters may remain with what they possess and certainly we shall claim nothing." A recent archivist of the Congregation of St. Joseph, Sister Genevieve Tardy, comments: "That is how our sisters played quite a part in the foundation of the Apostolic Carmel in India."** Indeed, they gave to the Apostolic Carmel a foundress, as many as five professed nuns, besides their novices and postulants, and

* In all, there were five professed sisters who were received, two French and three Indian. Of these, two persevered – Sister Philomena (Mother Aloysia's sister) and Sister Teresa of Jesus.

** Genevieve Tardy, *Digging in the Archives*.

a heritage of educational work, flourishing and well-established, on which to build, not to mention material property – no small donation.

With surprising lack of foresight, Bishop Marie Ephrem permitted immediate amalgamation into the Carmelite ranks of Mother Perillon, as he had of Mother Lubis a year earlier – the two superiors of the sisters of St. Joseph. This mistake he and others would rue for many a day. The convents at Cannanore and Calicut immediately became Apostolic Carmel convents; Mother Lubis and Mother Perillon, having changed into Carmelite habits and received new names, but made no novitiate, remained as superiors, how Apostolic Carmel superiors; and transfers of sisters were freely effected between Mangalore and the convents at Cannanore and Calicut. Thus was laid the foundation of another crisis in the fragile infant congregation of the Apostolic Carmel. It can be well imagined, notwithstanding the good will of these superiors, now *Carmelite* the community spirit could have been in these two convents, Cannanore and Calicut, and the utter disorder that came to reign there in subsequent years was but the natural outcome.

Bishop Marie Ephrem had apparently forgotten what he had written to Mother Veronica in the early days: "... don't be in too much of a hurry. Before coming, lay the foundations strong and deep. We will manage to wait for the hour to strike."* Or again, "Let us not be in a hurry, my daughter. You know that God's works begin small and go on slowly."** Or yet again,

* Letters, 18 May, 1869.

** Ibid., 12 Dec., 1868.

"One must think of the future; I would rather wait six months longer and leave behind me a work established."* The dramatic irony was that, at his death, the Apostolic Carmel was in a sorry mess. If only the bishop had not been in such a hurry! If he had only waited long enough to permit Mother Lubis and later Mother Perillon to make their novitiate before making them *Apostolic Carmel* superiors, the history of Mother Veronica's daughters in India might have been very different.

Mother Agnes, it will be remembered, was the local superior of St. Ann's, Mangalore, appointed in April, 1871. Her reign, though smooth at first, came to be marked by nothing but trouble. No doubt, teething troubles are to be expected in a new congregation, but under the direction of Father Lazare, her confessor and superior, she saw that the infant institute could not survive at all unless strict measures were resorted to. No doubt, she had often verbally remonstrated with the bishop regarding Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, but still more in connection with the admittance to profession in the Apostolic Carmel ranks of some of the sisters of St. Joseph, without insisting on a novitiate first. She knew what careful training Mother Veronica had given her novices at Bayonne, and so did Father Lazare. But Bishop Marie Ephrem was no longer concerned with Mother Veronica. Working closely with her had shown him, perhaps, that she was not a woman to be easily influenced and made to toe the line with him, come what may. She had in her the makings of the strong independent English Protestant woman, whom no man could just lord it over. Had he been English like

* Ibid., 16 Sept., 1867.

her, he might have known how to deal with her. As matters stood, she was better out of the way. This is perhaps one of the reasons why he never called her to India, although it had always been understood that, having formed a few young people for the congregation, she would come out to the missions herself. This is again, perhaps, why, later, when Mother Veronica's letters arrived full of anxiety for the Apostolic Carmel and its inexperienced superiors, the bishop told Mother Marie des Anges not to answer the letters. "Leave Mother Veronica alone," he wrote. "Perhaps it would be better not to answer her. You are not answerable to her for anything, neither should you let any letter go out concerning her - no matter to whom it may be."* Cruel indeed, considering that it was she and not he who had toiled and worried and agonized to give birth to the child whose life he was now handling so callously.

Mother Veronica had written to Father Lazare :

And still more (my poor heart is in anguish) at present when I know that my poor sheep are dispersed among strangers, and that they have even brought them into their peaceful little convent of Mangalore !

*Imagine what my sentiments were when I heard all that was done to my poor children, who are used to a different life and who have a vocation from God.***

Mother Agnes took a strong stand. At Father Lazare's dictation, she wrote a letter to Bishop Marie Eph-

* Ibid., 3 April, 1872.

** Ibid., 1 Feb., 1872.

rem explaining to him the dangers she saw to the very existence of the Apostolic Carmel, in view of which, she said, she thereby submitted her resignation as local superior. Her resignation was accepted, and on 30 December, 1871, the bishop nominated Mother Marie des Anges local superior of St. Ann's in addition to her duty as mistress of novices. Two months later, Sister Agnes was transferred to Calicut. Sister Elias was already at Cannanore. Before the transfer of the latter, Mother Veronica had written: "I should like to know... whether you are really going to Cannanore under Sister Magdalen Lubis. I hardly think this will be a good plan, to mix you up with the sisters of St. Joseph without their making a proper novitiate."* Let us read the account of the whole situation in Mother Veronica's words:

Some months later, I sent to Mangalore, where the first three tertiaries were fixed up, Sister Agnes of Jesus with Sister Cecile of the Infant Jesus... as soon as they arrived, Monsignor Marie Ephrem nominated Mother Agnes prioress of the little community. The Reverend Father Lazare was their superior. With such a superior, little Mother Agnes, who was perfectly submissive to him, succeeded marvellously in her government. They began to teach in school, there was peace and union among them and I was quite consoled to hear from Monsignor himself that he was very happy with all my children.

Unfortunately, that did not last long. Monsignor wished to amalgamate the Sisters of St. Joseph,

* Ibid., 16 Nov., 1871.

who were already in the mission, with the religious of the Third Order Regular. He made them change their habit and then, without novitiate, without forming them to the life and spirit which my poor children had been used to, he gave them authority over them, and even made (them) supervise Mother Agnes and her religious.

The poor Third Order was shaken at its foundation. Could it be otherwise? Fortunately, Father Lazare was there. He had been nominated superior by Monsignor himself and he made Mother Agnes write a letter to him, which he dictated himself, where the little Mother represented to Monsignor that, in those conditions, the Third Order Regular could not exist, and gave her resignation. Monsignor accepted it and immediately nominated Mother Marie des Anges to replace her. Soon after, he sent Mother Agnes back to France and, relieving Father Lazare of his office as Vicar General, sent him to Mahé. All this was the result of what happened with regard to Sister of Jesus Crucified.*

Presumably, the bishop, considering the youth of Mother Agnes, had set the older erstwhile Sisters of St. Joseph to "supervise Mother Agnes and her religious." As events proved, supervision of the young Apostolic Carmel superiors was hardly a move that was called for. Both Mother Agnes and, later, Mother Marie des Anges evinced a wisdom beyond their years. Whether resignation on the part of Mother Agnes was the wisest decision in the circumstances may be ques-

* Autobiography, Part II, p. 25.

tioned. Perhaps it required a woman as tough as Mother Marie des Anges to keep the Apostolic Carmel from crumbling completely. This is to speak in human terms, for what God has ordained in his Divine Providence, no human weakness can prevent or destroy.

Mother Marie des Anges took up office at the end of December. A month later, Mother Veronica wrote exhorting her daughters to humility, obedience and patience under the trying circumstances through which they were passing:

I have heard of your dispersion, my dear children, with much grief. These mixtures cannot succeed, but I beg of you... overcome evil with good. Let holy humility and sweet and gentle patience be the continual rule of your conduct. Obey in all things that are not against your conscience and be quite confident that although those who command may err, a humble obedience will always receive its reward....

*How difficult a thing is patience to the human spirit! This restless self-sufficing spirit galls and chafes under the bit of patience, which keeps in this miserable unquiet spirit of ours, which is always rushing onwards and far outstripping the calm slow steps of the Master, of Jesus, in whose footprints we have put our feet. Oh... If we could only rein in this fiery spirit and become saints by holy patience... but how difficult it is to acquire this virtue! "What a wee scrap at a time one practises and how much impatience and murmurs are mixed up!"**

* Letters, 29 Jan., 1872.

Sister Agnes, now in Calicut, receives from Mother Veronica a letter encouraging her in her suffering and also approving the stand she has taken. "Count it as a singular grace," she says,

*an extraordinary honour to be able to suffer and to be despised for Jesus. Be always humble and obedient but very firm in your duty and hold on to the Spirit of our holy Order—that which was given to you in your cradle. All these novelties are only pretexts — the little fuss one makes of little observances, neglecting the first and the important things which are the base and foundation of the religious edifice, that is, a solid novitiate. It is exactly what our Lord reproached the Pharisees for, when He told them that they made much of a gnat, but swallowed a camel **

Here she is again on the same subject a couple of months later:

*You will see, my children, that if you are too much in a hurry to give the holy habit to the postulants in India and, even more, if you are in a hurry to let them make their profession, you will have more than one scandal and more than one defection.***

To a priest (probably Father Lazare), about the same time, Mother Veronica comments on the state of affairs :

Please continue your good offices and give me news if you can. Father, I perceive very clearly the

* *Ibid.*, Patronage of St. Joseph, 1872.

** *Ibid.*, June, 1872.

situation and, as I know perfectly the little (or the big) weaknesses of Monsignor, who always wishes to be a "unique" father, I understand how His Grace has been wrongly influenced and how he treats these poor children. But God is just and have confidence that he will protect the feeble who trust in him, and the time will come when it will be given to me to take away my poor children from this hornets' nest to enable them to follow the true vocation to which they are called..Meanwhile, not one from here will join them, God forbid...

*What astonishes me is that all our sisters of the Great Carmel should be so enthusiastic, so blinded, that they seem to see and hear only one person, only one voice. Even this lamb, my little darling, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, is worth nothing any more. But it is good that it should be so. She has Jesus !**

We sense here Mother Veronica's deep disappointment with Bishop Marie Ephrem and the sisters of the Cloistered Carmel, her concern for her children (as for Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified) and her decision to try to take them away from "this hornets' nest" when an opportunity presents itself. And she acts on that decision — how successfully remains to be seen.

* *Ibid.*, Easter Tuesday, 1872.

Chapter 17

THE FOUNDRRESS ASSERTS HERSELF

By Easter, 1872, we note that the situation in the Apostolic Carmel has considerably deteriorated. Realising this, Mother Veronica, her responsibility as foundress weighing heavily on her shoulders, immediately takes charge. We have seen already that, once she decides on the necessity of a course of action, nothing can deter her. Intelligent, learned, experienced, practical and courageous, she goes forward undaunted. Few women would have stood up in her day, even for principles, against a bishop. In fact, hardly anyone, man or woman, would have dared even to entertain the thought that a bishop might be wrong. Not so Mother Veronica. With her logical and objective mind and her matter-of-fact, forthright manner, once she sees what is needed, she does not hesitate. This was her strength, but it was also her weakness, for she antagonized people. "My hard headedness," she called it. "I have a reputation for it."* No wonder she found herself at loggerheads with Bishop Marie Ephrem !

* Letters, 1 July, 1872.

Earlier, on 20 February, Mother Veronica had written to Bishop Marie Ephrem the following letter, remarkable for its courage, frankness, logic and objectivity combined with the humility and deference due to a bishop :

I was very much touched by what you have been pleased to give me an account of – the unfortunate affair of which, in truth, I had had some news but no details. I begged our Lord to give me the grace to reply to your Excellency according to the Spirit of His Heart.

I am deeply pained that my children have been wanting in respect, in reverence, in deference towards yourself and your sacred dignity... all except Sister Elias are very ignorant, young and badly brought up...

As for Sister Elias, I cannot recognize her at all in what you tell me of her. She has always shown herself so submissive to the authority of superiors, so ready to ask pardon and to humble herself.

I would like to tell you something else and I pray Our Lord to guide my pen that I may speak only according to His Heart. It seems to me that this trouble and these dissensions are the result of two very contrary elements that have been brought together and mixed up. It is not for me to find fault with the intentions and the behaviour of a bishop in his diocese, but to tell you the truth, I would have been more surprised if the fusion of those sisters (of St. Joseph) and my dear children of the Third Order had been brought about without difficulty than I am

at the trouble they have had because of it.... allow me.. to ask you very humbly how you would expect peace and union between these children and the Sisters of St. Joseph without the latter having been formed by any taste of a novitiate.

Pardon me if I make bold to ask you once again whether you consider our little sisters in your vicariate as forming part of the Third Order secular or rather of a Third Order Regular...

If they are to be considered as a community or congregation, regular and genuine, with the hope of one day being approved by Rome, they should be required to make a novitiate, and no one should be admitted to profession except those subjects who have undergone the test required by the Church. Without this, what could be expected of this Third Order? Nothing but disorder.

Do you remember Monsignor, the letter of praise of all and of each of these children that you wrote to me just two months ago, dated 29th October? At that time, they were all together and lived in union. But at present alas! they are all dispersed.

This letter will perhaps displease you, my Father; but I have written after much reflection and according as my conscience dictated it. I have also prayed much that our Lord would inspire me to say what I should for the good of His work which He has been pleased to entrust to the care of the most miserable and the most unworthy of His poor creatures—and just because of that, I feel much liberty of spirit to tell Your Excellency all that I have already said,

while assuring you of the complete respect that I owe your person and from which I do not ever wish to depart.*

Some time after receiving this letter the bishop wrote to Mother Marie des Anges :

*With regard to Mother Veronica, send me at once all her letters recently received in Mangalore. Poor Mother Veronica, I think she will ask you for a copy of Sister Agnes's letter to me. Tell Mother Veronica that you have not the courage to copy such disrespectful and even insolent words addressed to your superior. Add too, that you have no copy of the letter, but that she may apply to me if she wishes to.***

And to Father Lazare, "I received by the last mail from Europe a letter from Mother Veronica which Christian charity does not permit me to qualify as it deserves."***

It was, moreover, this same epistle of hers to the bishop (that of 20 Feb., 1872) that Mother Veronica is alluding to when she writes to Father Lazare: "This letter... has been the cause of sending away the little Mother Agnes (to Europe)"****

As for Mother Agnes's letter to Bishop Marie Ephrem, Mother Veronica did ask for a copy of it. "I want to know," she says, "what is so 'disturbing' about it, as Father Manaudas says."***** In the letter, Mother Agnes had told the bishop that he was "sapping the

* Letters, 20 Feb., 1872.

** Ibid., 31 March, 1872.

*** Ibid., 23 July, 1872.

**** Ibid., n.d. (probably May or June), 1872.

***** Ibid., Patronage of St. Joseph, 1872.

little Apostolic Carmel to the roots by admitting subjects without having them pass through a novitiate." Having perused the contents of this epistle, Mother Veronica writes to Father Lazare, with reference to a letter she is sending to Bishop Marie Ephrem : "I have added that I have read the 'closed' letter and that I do not find anything reprehensible in it, because everything is true."^{*}

Now Mother Veronica even plans to take her daughters away from Monsignor Marie Ephrem's jurisdiction and found elsewhere. Father Lazare had probably asked Mother Veronica to send Sister Elias to found a convent at Mahé. Sister Elias was one of those who had suffered intensely at Cannanore. Mother Veronica decides against it, for "... poor Sister Elias has need to recover away from the scene of her anguish and where Monsignor has nothing to do with her." Then she addresses herself directly to Father Lazare: "Will you please release her from her vow (of obedience to Bishop Marie Ephrem)?" and adds, "Mgr. La Croix has said that Mgr. M. Ephrem has no right to oblige her to remain with Sister Magdalen (Lubis) outside her own community (Neither Mother Veronica nor, apparently, Mgr. La Croix consider Mother Magdalen an Apostolic Carmelite, despite her habit) and that I should use all my authority over her as my daughter to make her leave that house, where she does not fulfil the obligations which she has undertaken at her profession."^{**}

With Bishop Marie Ephrem her tone is decisive, even peremptory :

^{*} Ibid., 10 June, 1872.
^{**} Ibid.

We have received with joy our little Mother Agnes who arrived in Bayonne in excellent health on the 23rd of May...

Now, Monsignor, I come to claim two others of my daughters from Your Grace, namely, Sister Elias and Sister Cecile. I think you will have no difficulty in giving them to me, particularly Sister Elias, since her conduct displeases Your Grace so much... I beg of you to be kind enough to permit Sister Elias and Sister Cecile to leave your Vicariate and to go to a safe place while I settle something definite for them.

*I authorize the Rev. Father Lazare to act on my behalf with regard to my daughters.**

Mother Veronica sent a copy of this document to Father Lazare with a covering letter to him, in which she heaves a sigh of relief : "After I am detached from Monsignor Marie Ephrem, I have great liberty of spirit and nothing frightens me." A little further on, she explains: "I keep very carefully the letters of our Father General. It is he who is the founder of our Little Order and not Monsignor Marie Ephrem. His Grace only arrived when everything was ready."^{**}

The opinion of Monsignor La Croix regarding a bishop's powers was in keeping as much with the Canon Law of his time as with ours today, and so was Mother Veronica's request that Father Lazare dispense Sister Elias from her vow of obedience to Bishop Marie Ephrem, made in the Chapter Room at Pau before leaving for India :

^{*} Ibid., 4 June, 1872.
^{**} Ibid., 5 June, 1872.

*Regular confessors, approved for the hearing of confessions by the local Ordinary, can dispense the faithful from private non-reserved vows, provided that the dispensation does not infringe upon the vested rights of others.**

*The just case requisite for a valid dispensation from a vow may be the good of the Church or the state, the good of a family, a notable difficulty in fulfilling the vow...***

That Mother Veronica is well-informed on what is in keeping with Church law and about what is right and wrong with regard to the situation in Mangalore is evident in the guidance she gives her daughters. She tells Sister Agnes, "Jesus is not at all offended that you wrote to me, your poor spiritual mother, for after all, it is He Himself who has bound the ties between us and nothing but He Himself can break them, I hope.***" And to Sister Elias,

*... I wish you to tell me everything... Father Lazare will find someone to send you my letters, and you can be without any scruple on this subject, for surely you did not have the least intention of including in your vow of obedience the Sister Superiors of the Congregation of St. Joseph. You are perfectly free to write to me if you find the means.*****

Elsewhere, she instructs Sister Agnes on what ex-

* Mercian J. Mathis, O.F.M., JCD and Nicholas W. Meyer O.F.M., STD., *The Pastoral Companion*, p. 426.

** *Ibid.*, p. 210.

*** *Letters*, Easter Sunday, 1872.

**** *Ibid.*, 23 April, 1872.

actly is the position with regard to the Third Order in the context of Church organization :

We are religious and Carmelites of the Third Order, and Monsignor is not at all our highest superior and not even our superior at all. Have you, my poor child, renewed your vows to Monsignor or to God? I think he has made the newly-professed make their profession with this formula. But remember, my child, all that is irregular. The Archbishop of Verapoly is your first superior in India. He is the religious superior of the whole "Order" of men and women religious of the Third Order and if I were there, I would ask to be released from the vow of obedience to Monsignor Marie Ephrem. It is false... A bishop cannot be a superior of an order, because of the rules of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Otherwise, we cannot be approved by Rome, which is my heart's great desire.

Mother Veronica did actually make some effort in this direction through Monsignor—now Cardinal—Howard. But the political climate in Europe was very tense at the time (1872) and there were, besides, other snags which required that the Mangalore situation be sorted out first. Mother Veronica goes on:

...I spoke for a long time to Monsignor La Croix and told him everything (Mother Veronica continues)... What interest this venerable bishop takes in you! He says that, if you wish, you could join the community again, and that Monsignor Marie Ephrem will have nothing to do with it, that you can even tell him because he has no right to prevent it. But you are all children (Mother Veronica sighs),

*and they make you do what they wish because you have no experience. He (Bishop La Croix) says that all this affair has always seemed to him very imprudent and that he would wish you were repatriated.**

In the covering letter to Father Lazare, Mother Veronica adds :

...other people in high position here also fear that Monsignor Marie Ephrem is under an illusion with regard to several things...I am sure that His Excellency compromises so as even to condemn our dear and holy child (Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified) and has written to our bishop, he tells me, for what will be a witness for the future ! Against whom ?

Whatever Mother Veronica may have meant, this concluding question sounds ironical today, in the light of subsequent events.

A few weeks later, she again writes to Fr. Lazare a letter in which we see her detachment side by side with her pugnacity :

*You, Father, can be a thousand times assured that it is not at all right in the sight of God or of our Holy Mother Teresa that this little order be dependent on the whims of a single individual even if it be a bishop. We wish and God wishes that we be Carmelites and not Marie Ephremites. Every man, whoever he be – and, for that matter, even our Little Order – leaves me perfectly indifferent, except in so far as I am convinced that this is the work of God.***

* Ibid., Easter Sunday, 1872.

** Ibid., 1 June, 1872.

And what are Father Lazare's comments on all these happenings ? Replying to a letter from Sister Agnes early in February, 1872, when they had just come under the cloud, he writes :

*Let us bow our heads under his merciful hand. As you say, my daughter, we are guilty of many other things, if we are innocent of what we are accused of today. Let us expiate the past by the present. We cannot do it except by kissing the hand that strikes us.**

And again, some days later, "let us not be troubled any further about these things. Let us entrust them entirely to Our Lord. He will know to sort out falsehood from truth."*** In the same letter, Father Lazare informs Sister Agnes that he will shortly be leaving for Mahé. "Ask Jesus," he says, "that I might profit by it and never be lax. He is always quite alone in the churches at Mahé. I hope greatly to be with Him sometimes."**** His next epistle to her is in answer to her question whether she should write a letter of apology (presumably to the bishop). He advises against it because "it will serve no purpose. Christ suffered more than we, but he did not apologize to men. All He said in addressing his Father was, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do !' Let us do likewise."*****

In diametrical contrast to the gentle tone of these letters to Sister Agnes are those written by Father Lazare to Bishop Marie Ephrem. Indeed, the correspondence between the two brings out very clearly the fact

* Ibid., 6 Feb., 1872.

** Ibid., 29 Feb., 1872.

*** Ibid.

**** Ibid., 19 April, 1872.

that Father Lazare was sent to Mahé as parish priest under a sort of sentence of condemnation, almost of solitary confinement. As he expresses it in a letter to Sister Agnes, after she has returned to Europe :

*What shall I tell you of persons and events ? I do not know anything...no one writes to me and I write to no one. I have entrusted all to God. I admit, however, that sometimes I feel that I have had enough of this vicariate.**

A month later, he comments in another letter to Sister Agnes on the attitude and action of the bishop, who had sent a full report (in April, 1872) of his views on Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified to Bishop La Croix. In this letter, Bishop Marie Ephrem had also tried to justify his action with regard to giving the Apostolic Carmel habit to the Sisters of St. Joseph without insisting on a novitiate first. In this context, Lazare writes :

*Superiors and the Pope would say that Mgr. Marie Ephrem was right in justifying what he has done, but I still maintain that His Excellency has violated the promises of nine years ago in acting with regard to your Order as he has done and, consequently, I am right in not approving of it. Thanks to the good God, I am more than ever disposed not to defend myself with regard to whatever is personal; but never shall I change with regard to you in connection with all that happens here.***

This and his unshaken belief in Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified seem to be the explanation for the relentless

* *Ibid.*, 10 June, 1872.

** *Ibid.*, 8 July, 1872.

epistolary battle Father Lazare kept up from Mahé with his bishop, the likes of which, considering that it took place over a century ago, must have been not only rare, but even shocking. Father Lazare does own, regarding these letters of his, "I am sometimes so indignant that I may be too severe," and again, "although they (his letters) contained only the truth, they were too strong."*

Whatever blame might attach to his tone in these letters, he never seems to lose his poise, however much the bishop might badger him into yielding. He concludes the above letter to Sister Agnes by confessing :

*I have had some very unpleasant moments, I even feel very sad at times, but not for long. Jesus compensates for them with such tenderness that I would not surrender them for the whole universe. Since my novitiate, I have never enjoyed such deep peace.***

He urges Sister Agnes to tell Mother Veronica all that has happened, as a duty.

A fortnight later, on 23 July, the bishop, infuriated by Mother Veronica's letter, authorizing Father Lazare to act for her with regard to her daughters, forbade him,

*In virtue of holy obedience and under order, and also under penalty of suspension, to have any kind of communication or correspondence, be it direct or indirect, with Mother Veronica and Sister Agnes of Bayonne and also any religious who are under my jurisdiction.****

Finally, charged with many failures, including those against obedience and poverty, Father Lazare was sent

* *Ibid.*

** *Ibid.*

*** *Ibid.*, 23 July, 1872.

back to Europe in disgrace and dishonour.

In defence of Bishop Marie Ephrem, it may be said that his allowing the sisters of St. Joseph to join the Apostolic Carmel arbitrarily, as he did, was meant to be a temporary arrangement, as he explains in detail in his long letter to Bishop La Croix. The school at Cannanore was going through a crisis and the fort had to be held at all costs. Mother Magdalen Lubis could not be spared to make her novitiate. One might ask why the haste to invest her with the Carmelite habit. It would probably have been the lesser evil for the Carmelites to help out temporarily in a non-Carmelite community than to be put under a superior who was Carmelite only in habit and name.

It is, in fact, extremely difficult from the letters, particularly those of the bishop and Father Lazare, to sift the actual truth of the matter. Each is convinced that he is right and each one's decisions and conduct can be justified by the arguments he gives. So we can only judge from the consequences and from future events. Given that each was acting in good faith, it appears that the problems were really those of prejudice and faulty communication, and seem to have arisen chiefly because of the misunderstanding regarding Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. Bishop Marie Ephrem, at least, in his epistle to Mgr. La Croix, lays the blame for everything squarely on the sister :

Up to that time, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had hardly prophesied or given dogmatic opinions, but when she saw that she was being consulted on every question—or nearly all—by Father Lazare, and that her decisions were taken for oracles, she be-

*gan to prophesy. The bishop was not responsible for the Third Order; it was Father Lazare who decided everything. Everything depended on him and rested with him, and since Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was his oracle, it was definite that....Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was the great directress of the Third Order.**

And there is much more in this vein. The sarcastic tone of this letter astonishes us, betraying, as it does, the bishop's wounded feelings, his sense of being cornered and his consequent lack of objectivity. It is this tone, together with the citing of trivial examples and incidents, that robs this important document of its credibility. One gets the impression that the bishop needs to convince even himself of the justification of his conduct.

What was blameworthy, then, was the bishop's prejudice against Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and Father Lazare, and his lack of proper communication with Mother Agnes and more especially with Mother Veronica. Her daughters were communicating with their foundress and, knowing their youth and inexperience, she was naturally becoming alarmed. One view might be that Mother Veronica would have done better to have left things to people on the spot to settle, especially considering the great difficulty and time involved in communication between India and Europe. On the other hand, one can understand Mother Veronica's anxiety, with such a precious work at stake. Also, it was taken for granted that, some day in the near future, she would come to India to take charge of it herself. Be-

* *Ibid.*, 22 April, 1872.

sides, in acting, she did so prudently, after consulting Father Inchauspé, superior of the Little Carmel and her confessor, as well as Bishop La Croix, from whose vicariate the Tertiaries had been sent.

Bishop Marie Ephrem had no excuse for slighting her the way he did. Mother Veronica perceives his manner of acting as "tyrannical and unpleasant and false towards all of us."* That he himself saw nothing wrong, but everything right in his behaviour on all counts, including that of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, is evinced by his letter to Bishop La Croix referred to above. Had Bishop Marie Ephrem lived, it is just possible that he would have put right the trouble about "the mixture of congregations." As things turned out, in less than a year he was dead. We are told that

*the little Arab's departure... did not reestablish peace in the Carmel of Mangalore. Bishop Marie Ephrem developed a severe case of scruples. What if he had been mistaken? According to one of the sisters, he was trying to reassure himself regarding the motives that had inspired his decision.***

We are reminded here of Mother Veronica's prophetic words in a letter to one of the sisters: "Poor Monsignor! I believe that a day will come when he will see many things with a different eye than at this moment - I understand that he condemns the spirit of Sister of Jesus Crucified."***

Monsignor Marie Ephrem died on Maundy Thursday, April 10, 1873, scarcely forty-six years of age. Sis-

* *Ibid.*, 3 July, 1871.

** A. Brunot, *S.C.J., op. cit.*, p.74.

*** *Letters*, 25 April, 1872.

ter Mary of Jesus Crucified had left for Europe the previous November and Father Lazare soon after. Just before the Easter triduum, Bishop Marie Ephrem had not been feeling too well. During Lent, while on his pastoral visitation, he had been stricken with malaria at Shirva. He returned to the Cathedral at Mangalore by Wednesday of Holy Week, in order to prepare for the ceremonies of the following day. But that night he became so seriously ill that he made a general confession and received the Last Sacraments. By morning, although much better, he was unable to officiate at the ceremonies, but he persuaded his priests to attend the High Mass, assuring them that he could be left alone. When they returned, however, he had become unconscious and was praying inarticulately. On hearing the news, Mother Marie des Anges and Sister Teresa of Jesus hurried to his bedside for his last blessing. But it was too late. He was incapable of giving them this consolation. He only opened his eyes and looked at them. Then, having received the Papal Blessing, he returned his soul to his Maker.

Mother Marie des Anges was privileged to wipe away the last tear and close the bishop's eyes. But the Cloistered Carmel received a still greater privilege. At the embalming of his body, his heart was removed and placed in a niche in their oratory, from where, later, when the sisters moved to their new convent, it was transferred to the Carmel at Kankanady. The bishop's remains were laid out in the Cathedral (near St. Ann's Convent), for three days, for his people to visit. Then, they were interred in the sanctuary and marked by a marble slab, which may be seen there today.

Bishop Marie Ephrem, like the rest of us, had his

defects. He may at times have been prejudiced, misguided, tempestuous, precipitate, autocratic, lacking in prudence. But no one, not even Mother Veronica, who knew him so well, ever questioned his motives. Human nature is such that it tends to remember what is recent at the expense of what is past, and to emphasize the weaknesses of a person to the point of forgetting his strengths. We have seen that Bishop Marie Ephrem had virtues numerous enough to outweigh his weaknesses. Besides, Christ had favoured him with an excessively tender heart and with it a generous share in His master's chalice of suffering. According to one biographer:

The life of Bishop Marie Ephrem was a long martyrdom, the sufferings of which are known only to God and the few friends whom he admitted to his confidence. So tender was he that the griefs of his friends became his own. As for the sufferings of Holy Mother the Church, they moved him to tears. Once at Mahé pointing to the little verandah of his house, he said, 'How many tears I have shed in that place over the sacrilegious invasion of the Pontifical States.'^{**}

Whatever be the judgment we pass on Bishop Marie Ephrem's part in the early vicissitudes of the Apostolic Carmel, we would do well to remember that God's judgments are not always ours. He uses His instruments for diverse ends and writes straight even with crooked lines. Reflecting in faith, at this distance of time, first on the stormy events of these two years and then on subsequent happenings, we realise that the

^{**} Sister Candida A.C., *History of the Apostolic Carmel.*, p.74.

parts played by both Mother Veronica, the foundress, and Bishop Marie Ephrem, the co-founder, were providential. God had used them initially as instruments to sow the seed and water it. Now He used them each in his or her own way, the co-founder to prune the growing plant, the foundress to strengthen it to withstand the cleansing storms. The salvific growth was, no doubt, appreciably assisted, moreover, by the suffering these committed co-workers themselves underwent, not the least of the pain being that which they inflicted on each other in the tug-of-war, which all but tore apart the child they had both been instrumental in bringing into being. That it still lived, and continued to wax strong and straight and sturdy, only goes to prove that the Apostolic Carmel was and is the work of the Divine Architect and not of human beings.

Chapter 18

CLOSING DOWN THE LITTLE CARMEL

"The affairs of our Third Order Regular in India", reports Mother Veronica,

*went on very badly. Two of my children, Mother Agnes and Sister Cecile, had returned to Bayonne; one, Sister Mary Joseph, died at Cannanore; the poor Sister Elias also at Cannanore, was under obedience to a Sister of St. Joseph - who was dressed up in their holy habit (Carmelite) without novitiate - and suffered unspeakably; Mother Marie des Anges remained in Mangalore, the only European. Monsignor Marie Ephrem was dead. I was firmly resolved not to send any more subjects to that mission where my poor children suffered so cruelly.**

We can well imagine the effect on Bishop La Croix of the repercussions of the Mangalore events. Both

* Autobiography, Part III, pp. 29-30.

Carmels which had sent subjects to India were from his diocese and, moreover, the Little Carmel was a new venture, the establishment of which he had permitted at some risk. First came rumblings of trouble, followed by the return of Sister Agnes to the Little Carmel. Then, the long letter from Bishop Marie Ephrem, the return of others of both Carmels and, finally, the return in disgrace of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, in whom Bishop La Croix's faith had never faltered and did not falter now. His reaction was a drastic one. He forbade any Carmelite from his diocese to go to Mangalore thenceforth - and thus the doors of the Apostolic Carmel in India were closed, once and for all, to Mother Veronica.

Her resources in the Little Carmel were very low. In fact, she was in debt. In the past, she had relied on Bishop Marie Ephrem for money. Now, even had he been willing, he could not help. He was dead. There was no one to whom Mother Veronica could turn for resources. Earlier, in 1872, she had sent two sisters across France to collect funds to construct the buildings. This had alienated Canon Inchauspé and he kept away from Mother Veronica for some time. He found these projects on Mother Veronica's part foolish. "Being the director of the house," he explained, "I would be held responsible for these actions and I withdrew completely. I went away like a crow out of Noah's Ark." Such behaviour on his part pained Mother Veronica very deeply, for she had always held Canon Inchauspé in great esteem and had depended very much on him. One is tempted to ask what made him treat her so? Was it that she was not approachable, not amena-

* Letters, 18 Oct., 1876.

ble to reason, too self-willed? Even if she was, Canon Inchauspé had known her and worked amicably with her for a long time. Or, was she a woman ahead of her times, more at home with the assertive women of the twentieth century? Canon Inchauspé was possibly one of those men, the other extreme from Bishop Marie Ephrem, who, fearful of the assertive woman, run both from her and from the situation. Bishop Marie Ephrem had tried to become master of the situation by ousting Mother Veronica. As for the Carmelite Fathers in Europe, who had been her friends, "Do you know," she writes,

*that I find our Reverend Fathers, almost all of them, so queer in their manner of behaving towards us that I believe it is better to have the least possible to do with them. I cannot say why, but they do not know how to deal with religious women. I, who was so devoted to the Carmelites, now feel extraordinarily detached.**

It is only the secure man who can accept and work with the assertive woman. A third reason for alienation from Canon Inchauspé may have been, as Mother Veronica indicates in another context, that her disappointment, anxiety and frustration were finding expression in irritability. And there may have been still other reasons. Be that as it may, Mother Veronica felt completely deserted, especially by those closest to her – with Canon Inchauspé gone and the sisters of the Cloistered Carmel at Bayonne, who had always been so kind, turned cold against her.

* *Ibid.*, 1 June, 1872.

The only friend who continued faithful to Mother Veronica, when all others had withdrawn from her, was Madame Gil Moreno de Mora. Mother Veronica relates how she came to be such a good friend. Madame Gil was Spanish. She had come to Bayonne following a series of very deep sorrows. Her husband had been one of the first bankers of Paris, but he had just died and his death had been followed, soon after, by that of their eldest son, Louis. Madame Gil's mother and brother had also been taken away from her by death and she was left alone with her younger son, Pedro, a child of eleven, for the sake of whose health she had come to Bayonne in the early months of 1872. Hearing of the poverty of the Little Carmel, she had come and left there a gift of 25 francs. Mother Veronica had been away at Pau on that day, but when she returned to Bayonne, Madame Gil came to see her with her little son. "From the first interview," states Mother Veronica, "a friendship started between our two hearts which God alone brings to birth and which never ceases."^{*} Madame Gil, needless to say, was very rich. She was also generous and thus became a willing and constant benefactress of the Little Carmel, often sensing their needs and supplying them. Besides the frequent gifts of money - "This dear lady never came to see me without leaving some alms, which was at least 25 francs-"^{**} she bought a field adjoining the Little Carmel, so that the sisters might have a place to walk in and get some fresh air. She also had the wall of the enclosure built and a hermitage, as well as a Gothic chapel, put up in honour of the Sacred Heart. The garden was planted

* *Autobiography*, Part III, p.28.

** *Ibid.*, p.28.

with a number of fruit trees, vines and vegetables, a well dug for irrigation and a beautiful cow installed in the stable. The sacristy, moreover, was replenished with chasubles and copes, embroidered by Madame Gil herself, and with bouquets for the altar. She would plan little surprises for Mother Veronica. Thus it was that, when Mother Veronica was away in England visiting her sick mother, the cow had been installed in the stable.

Sometime after the death of Bishop Marie Ephrem, Mother Veronica had an experience which she describes thus :

One night after Matins, I went to sleep in my cell, when suddenly I believed I saw a shadow. It was Monsignor Marie Ephrem. He had a sad appearance and suffered horribly. He asked my pardon for the manner in which he had treated me and said he had done the same to Sister of Jesus Crucified and that he would be in purgatory until the work which he had destroyed was repaired. Until then I had been very indignant with him because of all he had made Sister of Jesus Crucified and my poor children suffer, but from this moment, seeing him so humiliated as to come - him a prince of the Church - to ask pardon from my poor miserable self, I could only find pity and affection in my heart for the soul of this Bishop in anguish, who was detained in purgatory. The next morning, the Abbé Manaudas, who was our confessor, came to see me and brought me a letter which had been written to him from Pau, saying that Monsignor Marie Ephrem had appeared to Sister of Jesus Crucified, had asked pardon for the manner in which he had treated her

*and several other things. I told him what had happened to me on the eve. He was very much struck and I not less so.**

In the nineteenth century, that is, before psychology had made such giant strides, this would certainly have been a strange and mystifying experience. In the light, however, of our modern knowledge about the subconscious, it should be easy enough to explain it. We might say that Mother Veronica's guilt feelings with regard to the indignation she had been harbouring against Bishop Marie Ephrem - "till then I had been very indignant with him" - were resolving themselves in this way. She states that her indignation was changed into "pity and affection." Counsellors, nowadays, might use similar techniques to those in Mother Veronica's experience, to bring about forgiveness. They might ask a client to reconstruct the image, feelings, possible words of the "enemy," in order to inspire the compassion that leads to forgiveness. In the case in question here, we might have said that Mother Veronica used these techniques on herself instinctively. But how explain the similar and even simultaneous experience of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified? Both were not only sincere, but also holy, women. Such experiences, attested to by such persons, can hardly be a coincidence.

A little before Pentecost of 1873, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had asked someone to write to Mother Veronica, on her behalf, that "all would be swept off." The latter was used to such messages from this 'child' of hers and knew that the significance of these par-

* *ibid.*, p.30

ticular words would be revealed in due course. Meanwhile, Mother Veronica began her annual retreat to finish on Pentecost Sunday. At the first meditation, she relates, she was in choir, not sleeping, when, in a sort of dream, a vision passed before her. "It seemed to me," she writes,

*that I was in a place where I had to pass on a little road cutting across all kinds of dangers. Beasts, serpents, precipices were on both sides of this road. I arrived at last at the end of this dangerous passage and I found myself before a kind of hole or underground passage where I entered, but there was no outlet on the other side – it was an impasse. This part of my journey was much shorter than the first one – and at last I found myself at the foot of a black rocky mountain, which I had to climb and descend on the other side. With great difficulty I crawled up the very difficult little path to the summit, and at the foot of the mountain, on the other side, I saw a black and deep river. The descent was soon done but at the bank of the river there was no boat nor other means of transport. Nevertheless, I had to pass to the other side of the river. I could see the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary like a bright resplendent star – that was heaven. I advanced to put my foot in the water and in an instant without any effort I found myself on the other side of the heavenly country! I came back to myself in the joy of having arrived at the end of my exile.**

At that moment, Mother Veronica did not understand the meaning of this vision, but later, she tells us, an

* Ibid., pp. 30-31.

explanation was given her. The journey was her life, supposedly since her entrance into the Catholic Church for, before starting the journey, she had found herself poised on an unshakable rock in the midst of billows. This was the rock of Peter, the will of God. The first part of the narrow road in the midst of so many dangers was her life as a sister of St. Joseph and "God knows the immense dangers I went through," she reflects. The impasse at the foot of the mountain stood for her five years at the Little Carmel of Bayonne, "where in reality there was no outlet nor going forward." The mountain was that of Carmel, which she "crawled up amidst rocks and thorns and unheard-of sorrows, but arrived at the summit. Oh, what a view spread before me!" she exclaims, "the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, my pole star!" She had still to cross the black river, death, but she did not feel its bitterness. "I had only to put my foot forward and the stream was crossed without my being aware of it."*

So much for the interpretation of the vision given her by someone else. Mother Veronica herself hesitates to make any pronouncement or prediction. She merely informs us that many years before she had consecrated herself solemnly to the Heart of Jesus through that of Mary, and always carried on her person this consecration in its written form stitched to her little scapular. Every Sunday, she made the exercises for a good death, to which she had added from the time of her conversion, the prayers of the recommendation of the soul to obtain a good and holy death, as St. Gertrude used to do. She was in the habit of asking for this

* Ibid., p. 31.

grace everyday at the sixth station of the Way of the Cross and also for that of final perseverance and "to be Veronica of Jesus to console His Heart."^{*}

Considering Mother Veronica's information, we have no difficulty in interpreting this "dream" (or was it a trance, since she says she was not asleep?) psychologically. A very fascinating aspect of dream psychology – and, presumably, it would hold good for other psychological states like the trance—is that, in our dreams, all of us are poets and storytellers. Our desires and aspirations, our fears and frustrations express themselves in the form of symbols that make up a story. A little initiation can help us to interpret these symbols and the story for ourselves, and find solutions to our own conflicts. In Mother Veronica's dream, her subconscious presents her with a series of symbols in a certain order which builds up a story – a journey, a rock, the narrowness of the road, dangers, an impasse, a mountain, thorns, a beautiful view, a resplendent star, a black river. Then, with the help of a friend, who is evidently a born counsellor (since dream psychology had not yet been heard of), she is able to recognise the story of her life and interpret it for herself.

A question that comes to mind is : if this was a psychological experience, could it have been also a God-experience ? We often tend to forget that God is the Lord of psychology, as of everything else, including every other science. That man came to discover dream psychology in the twentieth century does not mean that God did not use that science before we could under-

* *Ibid.*

stand it. In fact, we know from the Bible, that God did use dreams from earliest times to inspire or lead individuals as well as His Chosen Race to accomplish his designs. It might very well be, then, that God was here giving Mother Veronica an insight into the future and into the peaceful death she would die.

Meanwhile, she had begun to feel that there was something more radically wrong with the Little Carmel than just material poverty. As a community, they did not have "the same grace any more...as in the first years." There was not the same union, the gaiety in their poverty, the cordial affection and the charity as of old, and Mother Veronica adds, "I must say, to my great regret, that I treated my poor children very harshly, which estranged them from me, at least some of them."^{*} Presumably, in spite of herself, she yielded to the only outlet that presented itself for the pent-up disappointment and frustration of the past two years. One by one, the sisters left, till only eight remained.

Mother Veronica could see now that the Little Carmel had served its purpose. Bishop La Croix and Abbé Manaudas also advised her to close it down. Founded to send sisters to the missions, Bishop La Croix's recent decision, that no Carmelite from his diocese would go to India, had taken away its very *raison d'être*. Sister Agnes, who had been appointed sub-prioress, became ill and Mother Veronica feared that she would lose her head. On the advice of the doctor, she sent her back to her home at Nimes, herself accompanying her up to Lourdes.

* *Ibid.*, p.31.

On her way back to Bayonne, Mother Veronica went for a little consolation and advice to the Carmel of Pau. She must have missed Mother Elias there, the prioress who had always entered into her sufferings. However, Mother Marie and her community also received her warmly, and it was decided that, as soon as she could settle the future of her sisters of Bayonne – either placing them in communities or sending them back to their families – Mother Veronica would definitely return again to the Carmel of Pau, never to leave it.

"These last days at Bayonne," she confides, "were really an agony for me and for the poor children who were left to me."* One went to the Ursulines at Pau, three returned to their families. Of the lay sisters, one remained at the Carmel of Bayonne and Sister Cecile went with Mother Veronica to the Carmel of Pau, but left later and returned to her family. Taking away the habit from those who were returning home reluctantly gave Mother Veronica much pain. Monsignor La Croix had already dispensed them from their vows. Thus, Mother Veronica could see this community, which had cost her so much, being destroyed. Those who were leaving were desolate. "My heart suffered so much," she confesses, "that it seemed to become insensate. One had to have a special grace not to succumb under it, and God gave me that grace."**

No one was interested in Mother Veronica or the Little Carmel any more. Madame Gil, as we have seen, was the only friend who remained faithful. Although she had already spent a great deal of money on the

* *Ibid.*, p. 31.

** *Ibid.*, p.34.

Little Carmel, it was she who took charge of the expenditure of shifting everything that could be carried away from Bayonne to Pau. To spare Mother Veronica fatigue and sorrow, for she was already broken in body and spirit, Madame Gil sent some packers and all that was necessary. In the last few days, she came herself to supervise the workers and completed the job by even paying the railway freight. When everything had been seen to, only the last Mass remained to be celebrated and the last host consumed. Madame Gil came with Pedro, and his tutor celebrated the Mass, with Pedro as server. After giving everyone communion, the priest consumed the remaining sacred hosts and, from that moment, the Little Carmel became empty, for Jesus was not there – and neither could Mother Veronica remain there any longer.

The same evening, as it was getting dark, Madame Gil came with a vehicle to take Mother Veronica and the three sisters who remained to spend the night at her place, so that they would not be noticed while leaving the convent, for Mother Veronica had no desire to say good-bye to anyone, not even to Bishop La Croix or Abbé Manaudas, who were at the major seminary closeby, where a priests' retreat was in progress. "I could never express the tenderness, the delicate charity of Madame Gil in these heart-breaking moments,"* she says, touched with emotion.

The next morning, Madame Gil** took the nuns to

* *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

** The kindness of Madame Gil to the Apostolic Carmel is perpetually enshrined in the stained glass panel above the high altar in St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore. The panel depicts the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Saints Peter and Louis (of France), the patron saints of Madame Gil's two sons.

the railway station to catch the train to Pau, "where at last," says Mother Veronica, "I was going to re-enter for good my dear Carmel. It was the 10th of October, 1873. I had been in Bayonne a little over five years."* Mother Veronica was fifty years old.

"*Tout est balayé*, everything is swept off now, as Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had predicted. What about the future? "This is not a question for the heroic daughter of St. Teresa... Henceforth, her life will flow in the shadow and in recollection, in a forgotten past, and above all in prayer and sacrifice."** "The parent stem of the poor little Apostolic Carmel was dead, but the tiny branch in the foreign soil of India, watered and nourished by the tears of Mother Veronica, waxed strong, budded and blossomed."*** But this springtime was not yet to be. Indeed, it would be long in coming, for the prolonged winter was not yet over. The little plant would totter for quite a while longer. Blown about by the gales of circumstance, it would all but fall to the ground. But, slowly the winds would die down, spring would come and then the plant would rise, fresh and beautiful.

As for Mother Veronica, in truth, her optimism amid her great trials and sufferings for five long years at Bayonne would not be in vain. But she would not see the buds burst forth or the fruit ripen. Hers was to be the path of 'Nada'. The child for whom she had suffered birth pangs would be taken out of her hands forever, for others to nurture and guide. For thirty years, hers would be the silent, but powerful, role of providing

* *Autobiography*, Part II, p.34.

** *Mère Veronique* (Contributed by P. Grech, S. C. J.)

*** *Sister Candida, A.C., Seed Time*, p.104.

spiritual nourishment to the Apostolic Carmel *from afar*, through prayer and "the royal road of the cross"— a strange destiny indeed for a foundress! Not that she will lose touch with her daughters. No, through her interest and her letters, she will be very close to the sisters in India and follow all their doings. But there her involvement will cease.

It is clear that, for all Mother Veronica's desires to go to India, she had no alternative but to give up the idea, in obedience to the decree of Bishop La Croix. Looking at it from a different viewpoint, we might even say that God was, at last, bringing to fulfillment in Mother Veronica the attraction and call he had given her repeatedly from the very start of her religious pilgrimage. Ever since the days when she had thought of becoming a sister of Dr. Pusey's Order, she had felt drawn to silence and contemplative prayer. Periodically after that, and especially at significant milestones, the attraction had surfaced, only to be deferred at God's own bidding. He seemed to be playing with her, as we do with a child, holding the prize just beyond her reach — as when he drew her to be a Sister of St. Joseph rather than to the cloister, or at her visit to the Ursuline contemplatives on the occasion of Mary Ann's profession, or when, at Calicut, the call to Carmel was heard so clearly and yet had to be put off. When leaving the Carmel of Pau, to find a cradle for the Apostolic Carmel, her whole soul had shrunk from relinquishing the contemplative delights she had savoured for six months. But *his* time had not yet come. "My attraction, my vocation," she says, "was for the Cloister, and God only knows the immense sacrifice I was making in leaving it." * At Bayonne, it is this attraction which leads

* *Ibid.*, p. 105.

CLOSING DOWN THE LITTLE CARMEL

her to frame a Rule too austere for an active order and brings about the first clash between her and Bishop Marie Ephrem.

Although we realize that it is in the fitness of things, judging from human prudence, that she should be with her daughters in India, and although the tug towards them will be there in her heart till the end, still there is a feeling within us that she does not belong in an active congregation, and when she closes down the Little Carmel of Bayonne and returns to the contemplative life of the Carmel of Pau, we realise that here she will, at last, be in her element, she will find peace once and for all, for here, when all is said and done, is where God wants her.

Chapter 19

THE CARMEL OF BETHLEHEM

Mother Veronica, as stated earlier, was fifty years old when she closed down the Little Carmel of Bayonne and re-entered for the second time the Cloistered Carmel at Pau. This time, her health had suffered from all the physical and mental hardships she had sustained and she was no longer able to observe, as she had earlier, all the austerities of the Rule. On account of the humidity of the house at Bayonne, she suffered from rheumatism in all her bones, particularly on the right side, and to attempt to bend her knee was torture. She could not kneel at all and could sit only with her leg stretched out. On account of the physical weakness from which she suffered, she was exempted from abstinence, and the prioress, with great sensitivity, made her take daily "a good cup of tea in the English way". Mother Veronica, being English, loved tea, especially when she was suffering or unable to eat.

According to the promise of the late Mother Elias, she was indeed received into the community, but now,

since she could not keep the Rule in all its rigour, she came as a benefactress. Mother Marie of the Immaculate Conception, the prioress, had received her with open arms, and all her sisters, aware of the difficulties and sufferings she had gone through in closing down Bayonne, overwhelmed her with their sympathy and love. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, in particular, who, as mentioned before, was a member of the community, could not do enough to make up to Mother Veronica for the recent painful past.

In addition, Jesus gave the older nun many graces through the visionary while she was in ecstasy – as, when on the day after Mother Veronica's arrival, Sister of Jesus Crucified told her, "The Lord wishes that you be called Sister Marie Thérèse of Jesus and no more Veronica of the Passion. Be always very little; for little ones there is always place."* Was the change in name one more sign, on the part of God, that Mother Veronica was not to involve herself with the Apostolic Carmel any more, that she was to leave it behind with her old name, lest it become another obstacle to her progress in humility and union with him? On another occasion, Mother Veronica, noticing that the young sister was avoiding her, accosted her. After much hesitation and very reluctantly, she reported: "Our Lord said to me that you should not have tea any more and I avoided you because I did not want to tell it to you." Of-course, Mother Veronica immediately put her at her ease, assuring her that she was ready not only to give up the tea but even her very eyes, if Jesus asked for them. Sister of Jesus Crucified seemed to be able even to

* *Autobiography, Part III, p. 35.*

read Mother Veronica's thoughts, through "Lights which could only be supernatural." For instance, one day Mother Veronica had been speaking to her novice mistress about her Ursuline sister, who was very poor and would be glad to have for her orphans some material (if no one could make use of it in the Carmel) which Mother Veronica had brought from Bayonne and which originally had been meant for India. After recreation that night, Sister of Jesus Crucified, while in ecstasy, called Mother Veronica and told her that she "should not think of disposing of anything which (she) had brought, for all belonged to God and not to (her) and that (she) should remain in complete indifference and poverty . . ."

Since Mother Veronica's return, there had always been talk at Pau of the foundation of a Carmel at Bethlehem, where, Sister of Jesus Crucified predicted, she herself would die. The Bethlehem Carmel was a project of hers, and Mother Veronica, having heard of it while still at Bayonne, had offered for this new foundation all the inheritance she expected, as well as anything that might be left to her after disposing of the Little Carmel. She herself had already, even then, been chosen to be one of those who would go to Bethlehem. There seemed, however, to be numberless difficulties in the way of this foundation, and Sister of Jesus Crucified wished for a sign that God really willed it. She took a simple leaf of a pink geranium, poked it in an earthen flower pot and asked God to let it sprout, as a sign that he wanted the Bethlehem foundation. It did, in fact, give out a shoot – thus does God spoil his loved

* *Ibid.*

ones! – but, as Sister of Jesus Crucified did not know how to look after it, it nearly died. So, she entrusted the little "Jeremie", as she called it, to Mother Veronica, after which it grew into a beautiful, tall, healthy geranium covered with flowers.

A few days after Mother Veronica's arrival at Pau, she had been given the white veil of the novice and had embarked on her second novitiate in Carmel. The first time it had been a shortened novitiate. This time it extended over a longer period. At the end of that time, she was admitted to profession, but, as she was not able to keep the Rule in its entirety, she omitted from the formula for profession the words, "which is without mitigation." She had asked St. Teresa, as a sign that she wanted her as her daughter, to obtain for her the grace to be able to kneel while making her profession, and this favour, Mother Veronica tells us, "she gave me visibly... After the ceremony," she adds,

*I went up to the choir and, on my knees near the communion grille, it seemed to me that I could see my dear and holy Mother Elias, accompanied by Sister of the Holy Heart of Mary, Sister Euphrasia and Sister Stephanie. Mother Elias embraced me, saying, "Happy suffering, which produces so much joy!" During the preparatory retreat for my profession, I had suffered all kinds of interior sorrows, but that day I was filled with graces and with joy. I could remain on my knees without trouble for a long time before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. My request was granted.**

* Ibid., p. 39.

At such moments and in such ways, notwithstanding all the suffering he sent her, God filled Mother Veronica's soul with spiritual consolations, as a pledge, no doubt, that she was not only where she wanted to be, but where he wanted her.

Shortly after Mother Veronica's profession, on the 12th of December, her mother died. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified said to her, a little before 5 p.m. on that day, "Your mother is dead, but her faith has saved her."* Two days later, she received the news from her sister, Catharine, that her mother had indeed died at that hour and on that day. One day, soon after the death of Mrs. Leeves, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, while in ecstasy, sent for Mother Veronica and said, referring to her Mother !

The little nothing has prayed for her. She has asked me to tell you not to do your own will, to be very grateful for all that God has done for you; you are not grateful enough for being here. She asks your pardon for not having left anything to you (in her will). If she had known, she would have left everything to you and would have come on her knees to kiss the dust on the threshold of the door.

Mother Veronica then asked her about the other members of her family. "Yes, both of you," she replied, "are where God wants you. You are more favoured than your sister, but God is with her. Your mother prays that the other sister (Catharine) follow your example". Regarding the salvation of the Reverend Henry Daniel Leeves, she raised her eyes and sang, "Heaven", in an

* Ibid., p. 40.

enchanting voice. All these revelations naturally filled Mother Veronica with deep joy. "I retired," she says, "full of joy and gratitude."*

When the will of Mrs. Leeves was opened, it was found that she had, in fact, left nothing of what was hers to Mother Veronica and her Ursuline sister. After the death of Catharine, the money was to go to a niece. Such a disposal of her inheritance on her mother's part must have caused Mother Veronica much pain: it was virtually a rejection of the daughters by their mother and, besides, Mother Veronica had depended on the money for the Bethlehem foundation. What the sisters had inherited from their father, however, came to them intact. Mother Veronica put the money, nearly 40,000 francs, in the hands of her prioress to build the chapel of the Carmel of Bethlehem.

And so the time came for the immediate preparations for the new foundation. Nine sisters were to go and one novice, among whom were Mother Veronica and, of course, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. Mother Anne was chosen prioress. Father Bordacher, Father Estrate and Mademoiselle Dartigaux would accompany the nuns to help them to settle down. Father Bordacher was a middle-aged experienced priest, Father Estrate a young priest of thirtyfive, of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Betharram. Mademoiselle Dartigaux was forty-five, but looked much younger. She had inherited a big fortune, which she spent in good works. She had great confidence in Father Estrate and he became her director, as much in temporal affairs as in

* Ibid., p. 41.

spiritual matters. He had been her mother's confessor and, at her death, she had entrusted her daughter to him, distinguished as he was for his piety and talent for preaching. Father Estrate introduced Mademoiselle Dartigaux to Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, who called her "Soeurette" and guided her in virtue till her own death.

Very early on the 20th of August, 1875, the little band set out from Pau for Bethlehem, stopping at Lourdes for Mass and Communion. Then they proceeded to Montpellier, where they spent three days. Here, Mother Veronica and Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had the great happiness of seeing Father Lazare again, and Mother Veronica writes :

*It was the first time after the sad events in India. He could not get over the joy of seeing his dear child, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, for whom he had suffered so much. He had an expression of sadness on his face, but now at least he was perfectly reinstated in the community and in the whole order. His superior, who could judge the tree by its fruits, had seen that his ignominious return from India was a crying injustice. Soon after, this good Father was elected prior at Montpellier.**

From Montpellier, the party proceeded to Marseilles, where they paid a visit to the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. How happy Mother Emilie was to see Mother Veronica and her "little Marie" ! Then, after recommending themselves to

* Ibid. p.44.

Notre Dame de la Garde, they embarked for Jaffa. On board the ship, Father Bordacher took charge of their affairs, seeing to everyone's comfort, temporal as well as spiritual. "He also had experience of the world," Mother Veronica observes, "and the prudence necessary in preserving decorum without any familiarity during a voyage, which people are so ready to interpret badly when it is a question of priests and nuns."* Father Estrate, on the contrary, seemed to Mother Veronica impolite and imprudent, busying himself with no one but Mademoiselle Dartigaux. They would both sit on easy chairs while most of the sisters squatted on the floor around, Father Bordacher making himself comfortable on a corner of a bench or on a coil of rope, and speaking to the other passengers as well as to his own group. The conduct of Father Estrate irritated Mother Veronica and made her feel ashamed before the other passengers. So she never joined their group.

Could this attitude on Mother Veronica's part be termed judgmental or snobbish? It was probably rather her personal weakness, perfectionism, being brought to bear on this situation, or her English passion for propriety. Considering the situation in itself, the others too probably disapproved of the insensitivity and exclusiveness of the occupants of the easy chairs. That Mother Veronica reacted in such an extreme fashion as to cut herself off from the group, reminds us of other occasions when she carried her passion for sincerity and frankness so far, as to appear singular or conceited, or to offend people needlessly. She was probably unaware that, what was in itself a virtue, sometimes

* *Ibid.*

manifested itself, in her case, so negatively. This can be gathered from the tone of her narration, which comes across as bordering on self-righteousness.

As for Mademoiselle Dartigaux, although haughty by nature, when Father Bordacher sometimes teased her, she accepted his remarks, says Mother Veronica, with humility, gentleness and good humour. When the ship touched at Alexandria, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified took some of the sisters to the place where the religious in the blue habit (the Holy Virgin) had hidden her after her martyrdom. They arrived at Jaffa in the evening on 5 September, 1875, and the next morning Father Guido helped them to disembark and took them to the hospice of the Franciscan Fathers at Jerusalem.

They were in the Holy Land and their hearts were overflowing with emotion, tears of joy and gratitude pouring down their cheeks. With Father Guido for guide, they started the same evening for Jerusalem, where they would stay for some days, while visiting the Holy Places. Mother Veronica describes in detail and with deep feeling her overwhelming experience of each of the spots so intimately connected with the life of Jesus - walking along the Way of the Cross, the place where Mary was born, the Holy Sepulchre, the prison where Jesus was held, the Cenacle, Gethsemani, the mosque on the spot from where Jesus ascended into heaven, the places where he wept over Jerusalem and where the angels spoke to the apostles. Mother Veronica was especially touched by the word, "Hic" (Here), in the prayers to be found at every station of the Cross, ending with "Et hic crucis subire tormentum" (Here He submitted to the torment of the Cross).

On Saturday, the 11th of September, the party left for Bethlehem, again accompanied by Father Guido. Mother Veronica could not walk, so she was sent in a carriage accompanied by Father Bordacher. The others walked the distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, which took one and a half hours. They all met at the grotto of the Nativity, where they prostrated themselves in awe at the thought that here Jesus was born.

For fifteen days, they stayed at the hospice of the Franciscans, that is, till their temporary house could be got ready. Then, the Patriarch came from Jerusalem to see them settled in their makeshift abode and to demarcate the enclosure. It was the 24th of September, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. In white mantles and long white veils (not yet lowered over the face, as they were still outside their enclosure), the sisters assembled with the others at the Crib. In a touching address, Father Bordacher entrusted the sisters to His Excellency, the Patriarch, and then the procession began – the Franciscan lay brothers, the French Consul and the Patriarch, with their suites, the Franciscan Fathers, and the sisters two by two, preceded by the cross carried by a sister, and then many other people. At the house, the Patriarch celebrated the first Mass and reserved the Blessed Sacrament. Father Estrate celebrated the second Mass, after which all were served lunch. After lunch, the enclosure was demarcated by the Patriarch and the guests dispersed, leaving the sisters to their solitude. Five days later, Father Bordacher, Father Estrate and Mademoiselle Dartigaux left for France.

At last, the Carmel of Bethlehem had become a reality. What if the sisters were not yet in a proper convent building? A convent is made up of persons and the

quarters are only secondary. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified must have been filled with the deepest joy at this fulfillment of her dream, while Mother Veronica and the other sisters rejoiced, no doubt, to live so close to the scenes of Christ's life on earth.

The plot for the new Carmel was bought in almost a miraculous manner, for the numberless proprietors of the place refused to come to an agreement about selling it to the sisters. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had seen the place of the future Carmel as well as the building, while in ecstasy. They nestled on the slope of a hill on the western side of Bethlehem, facing the Crib and separated from it by a deep ravine. The ground was almost bare, with just a few fig trees here and there, and was made up of only rocks and precipices. As for the building, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified knew what it would look like and Father Matthew, the parish priest, undertook to supervise the work. But there was neither architect nor plan. The architect who undertook the building would have to be guided by the inspirations of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. Which architect could be expected to do this? So Mother Anne, the prioress, refused to send for an architect. Father Matthew was at a loss. And no wonder! When was it ever heard that a convent – any building of some sophistication, for that matter – was put up without a proper plan or a qualified architect? What a set of simpletons these nuns must have been, we are tempted to exclaim. But the sisters believed in their little visionary and she, in turn, was convinced that God was directing her. Faith is indeed mysterious. The real variety has little or nothing tangible to go by, yet it is strong and unshakable and the reward is in the outcome, though even that may not always be measurable in human terms.

Seeing Father Matthew's helplessness, Sister of Jesus Crucified proposed making a model of the future convent and Mother Veronica agreed to cut out the cardboard for it. But even after a pretty good model was made, it was of no help to the workmen. They needed measurements – height, breadth, thickness of walls. So a drawn plan was absolutely necessary. Again, Mother Veronica's talents were commissioned. But she had never drawn a plan for a building, so she was understandably diffident. Besides, she had not even seen the site. However, trusting in God's help, she agreed to try, and asked very fervently after communion for the gift of understanding. As she set to work with a sheet of paper and her compass box, she heard the number 30 and understood that it was to be the diameter of the tower. The convent was to be in the shape of a tower, with another adjoining building housing the chapel, parlour, infirmary and choirs. When Mother Veronica had finished, Father Matthew said it would do. And so it happened that no human being could boast of being the architect of the Bethlehem Carmel. Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified marked the place for the chapel, the altar being on a spot where the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph had stopped during their flight into Egypt. On the 24th of March, 1876, the foundation stone of the convent was blessed by the Patriarch. It happened to be a Friday and the feast of the Five Wounds of Our Lord.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified did not attend the ceremony. She was at home in ecstasy. The stigmata too had reappeared that Lent and today, Friday, it was bleeding. Mother Veronica, drawing near her, saw that she was eating something white, like an almond. The sister allowed her to take a little from her lips. But, as

the older nun did not want to profit from this celestial food alone, she shared it with the sub-prioress, Mother Teresa of Jesus. Having eaten it, says Mother Veronica, "I felt inebriated by this fruit from Paradise". On Good Friday the same year, Mother Veronica again had the privilege of tasting the heavenly food. Sister of Jesus Crucified gave it to her with the words, "It is the fruit of sweetness," and Mother Veronica says, "I ate this food with devotion and happiness, for surely it was nothing from this world. It had a sweet taste and seemed to crunch like an almond, but not like the almonds of the world. I think I have been the only one to receive this favour in Bethlehem."* This is not surprising, considering that the spiritual ties between Mother Veronica and this saintly child of hers had grown ever stronger and deeper over the years.

The building took seven months to be ready for occupation, even though not quite finished. The 21st of November was fixed for the solemn entry into the new convent. The Patriarch celebrated the first Mass, at which were present many sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, as well as other distinguished guests.

After the festal dinner, when the guests had all left, His Excellency demarcated the solemn enclosure of the Carmel in this new convent. It was at this first Mass that, according to the predictions of Sister of Jesus Crucified, Bishop Marie Ephrem's soul was to be delivered from Purgatory. "How happy we were," exclaims Mother Veronica, "to find ourselves in a real monastery once again – the solitude and silence of our dear cells seemed to be a real luxury, after having lived, as it

* *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

were, in public for more than a year in the temporary house."^{*}

It was soon after this that Mother Veronica read the life of a holy Jesuit, Father Clement Cathary, who had made the rare vow of humility and had succeeded in observing it until his death. Now, she too felt particularly inspired to practise humility and even, like Father Cathary, to make the vow he had made. Humility, Mother Veronica confesses, was

*quite contrary to my character... and, so to say, to my whole being. For a long time, I had tried to combat pride in me – even from the beginning of my conversion but I think I made very little progress in the virtue of humility. ***

She wanted to make the vow and, at the same time, she feared she would not be able to observe it. She spoke about this conflict to Father Guido, the extraordinary confessor of the community. After some time, he permitted her to make the vow, but only for short periods – about eight days at a time. "I think that has helped me," she says.

At least, I had the good will of working with all my heart to acquire that virtue so contrary to my nature. But, as one cannot acquire it except by patience, that is, by humiliations, Our Lord seemed to have taken charge of sending them to me until I was ground in such a way as to be a grain of dust under the feet of all. And, still more, He gave me the grace of being able to thank Him for them with all my soul.

^{*} *Ibid.*, p. 61.

^{**} *Ibid.*, p. 62.

We find Mother Veronica returning repeatedly at various moments of her life, to her great need of humility, and to the fact that her temperament and background presented so many obstacles to the practice of this virtue. Most often it is about herself that she speaks in this connection, but on occasion she counsels her daughters too to strive after humility and, now and again, we sense her anxiety lest Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified should be tempted against it – though the latter also, as we have seen, placed a high value on this virtue.

It has been mentioned already, that the land around the convent was a mass of steep rocks, of ascents and descents, over which it was hard to walk. It was necessary sometimes to crawl or to hold on to rocks or branches of the fig trees that were scattered here and there. One day, as Mother Veronica was gathering flowers for the chapel, she fell and dislocated her hand at the wrist. The priest, who practised medicine, did not succeed in setting it properly, and she spent fifteen days in great pain, walking up and down in the dormitory at night. After several months, an Arab woman was called to reset the wrist. Mother Veronica describes the primitive operation :

*She pulled my arm roughly and, in order to succeed better, she put her foot against my chest and, pulling my arm with both hands, tried to put the bone in place. But it was already set. She did nothing but torture me and make me suffer much. **

Mother Veronica must have suffered the most extreme

^{*} *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

pain on this occasion. We can well imagine what she means when she says the Arab woman "did nothing but torture me and make me suffer." The first operation by the priest of setting the wrist was painful enough, according to Mother Veronica. Resetting, extremely troublesome at the best of times, must, under the crude primitive practitioner – "she put her foot against my chest and pulling my arm with both hands tried to put the bone in place"!! – have been truly excruciating. The end result was that she remained always crippled, the wrist being out of place. Also, the fingers turned stiff, so that Mother Veronica could not use them as before. She could not hold the Breviary or use a knife. Hence, for a long time after the accident, she was prevented from following the exercises of the community. Just as well it was the left hand; and Mother Veronica found consolation also in the slight resemblance this accident gave her to "our Mother St. Teresa."

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was in ecstasy one day, when Mother Veronica asked her what Jesus wanted of her. "He wishes you to follow the community," she said, "that you who are old, give good example to the young ones."* From that day, Mother Veronica was able to return to the refectory, where only her bread was cut for her. But she never kept the fast, for she was considered too feeble. From the day she had returned to Pau the second time, she had been at the special table kept for those who did not abstain. "The truth is," she confides, "that I had hardly any appetite and consequently little strength." If she forced herself to eat, she fell ill. She felt that she would never be

* *Ibid.*, p. 63.

able to keep the Rule. Commenting on this fact, she finds "all the more remarkable the grace (she) received later, of being able to observe the Rule entirely without any mitigation, for six years, in spite of (her) age and infirmities."

About a year after the community had moved into the new convent, Mother Veronica's sister, Catharine, came on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Mother Veronica describes her as being at this time "a bigoted ritualist" and also as having "too much pride." When she visited the Carmel to see Mother Veronica, Sister of Jesus Crucified spoke to her for a long time, but nothing seemed to change her. Then, when Sister of Jesus Crucified was in ecstasy, Mother Veronica asked her what would open the eyes of her sister. The reply was, "when humility is lacking, God cannot force the soul, but you make the acts of humility and she will have the light."* Mother Veronica never really knew if she changed. In fact, sometime later, she married again and "went still further in her ritualistic fanaticism." Considering the high value Mother Veronica placed on the grace of the Catholic faith, it must have been a cause of deep sadness to her to see her sister so untouched by it.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified would die at Bethlehem. So she had predicted. Her death would take place, she said, before three years after her arrival there, and Our Lord had told her that her last illness would be short but very painful. One day, as the three years were coming to an end, Father Chirou teased her:

* *Ibid.*, p. 65.

"Well, you see you are not yet dead. You are keeping well." And she replied, "Let it be, Father, you will see. The three years are not yet over."^{**}

Meanwhile, almost all the nuns in Mangalore, who had misjudged her and sent her away, had realized their fault and written her touching letters of repentance, begging her to pardon them. It was 1878 and the mission at Mangalore was soon to pass into the hands of the Jesuits, as Sister of Jesus Crucified had predicted.^{**}

One day, she was carrying a bucket containing drinking water for the workers. Walking along the steep path to their place of work, she fell and fractured her left arm in several places. An Arab bone-setter was called and, although it was supposed that the bone was set properly, she suffered terrible torture day and night for two days. She knew the end was near. Gangrene set in, but, by the time it was discovered and a surgeon, Mr. Carpani, sent for, it was too late. Nothing could be done. Mother Veronica relates:

*I approached the dear child who showed me her arm, which had turned fully black. In an instant, I saw what it was... She looked at me fixedly without saying a word. I too could say nothing. My heart was broken and, by a sign which she understood well, I pointed to heaven – that was all I could do, for I could see that in a few hours we would have her no more.^{***}*

The suffering increased till she could not take any

* Ibid., p. 71.

** Vide Letters, 15 June, 1879 (Mother Veronica).

*** Autobiography, p. 73.

position, but lying on the floor gave her some relief from the coolness of the flagstones. Despite the burning night wind of the desert, all doors and windows were left open in the hope that it might help her. But in vain.

At last, the prioress noticed that it was time for her to receive Our Lord in Viaticum. She did so, lying on the floor, conscious all the time. After her thanksgiving, she wanted all to leave the room so as to rest a little. She wanted only two sisters to remain with her—the infirmarian and Mother Veronica. But the prioress, knowing how tired the latter was, said to the sick sister, "No, Sister Marie Thérèse must go and rest a little." Whereupon Mother Veronica, approaching her, said softly in her ear: "My dear child, you will not leave unless your old mother who brought you to Carmel is with you." "No", she said, "I promise you. Go and rest. I will wait for you."

Mother Veronica was up before five o'clock and had hardly dressed, when the clapper sounded hastily. She was the first to arrive at the infirmary. Sister of Jesus Crucified was sinking. Sister Elias was helping her. Her eyes were on the door. Mother Veronica entered, and she and Sister Elias made the sick sister sit on a chair near the door, Sister Elias holding the chair at the back and Mother Veronica on her knees in front. The sister was already in her agony. She fixed her eyes on something on her right, higher up, with an expression of rapture and astonishment. They gave her a sip of broth mixed with wine. Then, she was led back to the bed, and helped to lie on it. Father Chirou, knowing that the end had come, raised his hand, amid tears, and

gave her the last absolution. He said, "My God, mercy." and she responded, "Oh, mercy" – her last words.

Suddenly, she brought up the broth and wine and fell dying in Mother Veronica's arms. Dom Belloni asked for the stole to say the prayers for the agonizing. As Mother Veronica was sacristan, she went to get it, and immediately returned to her post at the head of the dying sister. In a few moments all was over. It was the 26th of August, 1878, towards 5.30 in the morning. The prioress closed one eye and Mother Veronica the other.

Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had foretold all the details of her death in addition to the place and time. She had said that the chair on which she sat would be supported by Mademoiselle Angèle (Sister Elias) and Mother Veronica, and that she would die in Mother Veronica's arms. Everything had happened as she had prophesied.

She had often expressed the wish that her heart be taken back to Pau. So they sent for Mr. Carpani to remove it. The operation was performed in the presence of many witnesses – both sisters and priests – to whom the scar of a wound* was clearly visible. The grave was dug at the entrance, to the right of the door of the choir, so that each time the sisters entered the choir, they would pass before it.

It was as much as Mother Veronica's legs could manage to go to the end and see her child buried, and then she could stand no more. She was crushed, over-

* While a novice, the heart of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, like that of St. Teresa, had been pierced with a dart. (R.P. Estrate, *Vie de Soeur Marie de Jésus Crucifié*, Preface, p. XXIII)

whelmed with grief, with fatigue, with the oppressive heat. She dragged herself to her cell and threw herself on the tiled floor, unable to move, semi-conscious. When the sisters missed her towards evening, they came to look for her and found her in this state. The infirmarian, seeing that she had hardly eaten anything the whole day, brought her some chicken, after which she went to bed.

"My God!" she exclaims, "What a void I felt in my heart... This child of grace ! I had led her to Carmel !! She was dead and I was still in my exile. How I longed to get away also ! to follow her. I could not live longer on this earth. ** Lying on the dead sister's bed in the place and position in which she had died, brought some consolation.

While Sister of Jesus Crucified was alive, the sisters changed duties every year, according to the order she had received from Our Lord. For instance, Mother Veronica was first wardrobe keeper and then sacristan. It was Sister of Jesus Crucified again who inspired cordial relations between the Carmel of Bethlehem and that of Pau. The communities wrote to each other and they were "of one heart and one soul." Among the sisters of Bethlehem, too, there reigned great charity and union of hearts, despite the little vexations which are found everywhere in a group. If any sister, including the prioress, made others suffer, Sister of Jesus Crucified, Mother Veronica tells us, "under the influence of the Spirit," would take her to task severely and in such a loud tone that we could hear her voice in the whole

* *Autobiography*, Part III, pp. 82-83.

monastery.* Later, realizing what she had done, she would reproach herself for being a "bad religious" and do penance for scandalizing the community. But the lesson went home to the person concerned.

At such times, Mother Veronica, too, not knowing what had taken place earlier, blamed her interiorly for finding fault with the prioress and disturbing the silence of the house. She said nothing to her, but Sister of Jesus Crucified knew what went on within her and understood her. In her maternal solicitude for the younger sister, Mother Veronica was very anxious to guard her humility. "When she was persecuted and ill-treated," says Mother Veronica, "I supported her and protected her with all my strength. But when I saw her exalted, I feared for her and I never lent a hand in exalting her – at least in her presence. On the contrary, I thwarted her."

About two months after the death of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, Father Estrate and Mademoiselle Dartigaux, who had been informed by telegram, arrived. One day, during their stay in Bethlehem, they sent for Mr. Carpani, to examine the heart of the dead sister in order to find there the letters OJS, which all expected to see. The Patriarch of Jerusalem was also present. Although the heart was cut in two places, the letters were not discovered. This was enough for Father Estrate to lose faith in the sanctity of the Arab sister. But Mother Veronica was not shaken. "I am not at all sorry," she asserted. "It is perhaps not the moment to find the letters. I cannot believe less in that dear child."**

* Ibid., p. 64.

** Ibid., p. 84.

Mademoiselle Dartigaux and Father Estrate carried the heart back to France in a jar placed in a white bag. On the way, the heart was examined at Rome by several doctors and other specialists, Mother Veronica informs us. Although several circumstances relating to the death of the young Carmelite were found extraordinary, nothing was made public – a fact that Mother Veronica attributes to the great prudence exercised in Rome before the Church has spoken. Since then, as we know – in 1983, over a century after her death – the Church has spoken.

Chapter 20

INDIA : THE SECOND CRISIS

Meanwhile, what was happening to the little Apostolic Carmel plant in India? It is important to know, for, although Mother Veronica was hardly involved at all, being cut off and, therefore, very much in the dark, still the events of this period throw light on much that was to take place later on in her life.

Already torn by strife, the little congregation had been, as we have seen, all but stifled when Bishop Marie Ephrem died in 1873. The Little Carmel at Bayonne had had to be closed down, Mother Veronica had re-entered the novitiate of the Carmel of Pau and, as far as anyone could see, no personnel from Europe would be forthcoming. Indeed, any moment, it seemed, the Apostolic Carmel flame, already burning so low, would be snuffed out. But Providence had not yet finished its work of destruction on the little sapling.

The Tertiaries had taken a vow of obedience to the bishop, but for three years after the death of Monsig-

nor Marie Ephrem, there was no bishop. Father Paul, the Vicar General, was acting. The Apostolic Carmel convents at Mangalore, Cannanore, Calicut and Quilon (opened in 1875) were all independent of one another, like the convents of the Cloistered Carmel, each having, in addition to its own superior, a priest who was chaplain, manager and confessor, and who had altogether too much say in convent affairs. The three sisters trained by Mother Veronica were not in the same convent. Mother Marie des Anges was local superior at St. Ann's, Mangalore, while Sister Elias and the lay sister, Sister Mary Joseph, were members of the Cannanore community. Given the "mixture of congregations" and the fact that the priests tended to appropriate all the powers, the scene was set for pandemonium - which erupted soon after Father Victor of St. Anthony was appointed Pro-Administrator and Vicar General in 1876.

At Cannanore, in 1875, Mother Magdalen Lubis had opened a novitiate, received two novices and clothed a postulant. Good intentions notwithstanding, this was a grave irregularity and other irregularities too were rife, as we see from a letter of Sister Elias to Mother Marie des Anges. "Would they," she asks, "give the same privilege (going home when the sisters wished and in secular dress) to the sisters of the Cloistered Carmel? If not, please tell me, dear Mother, if the sisters of the Third Order are just so many secular persons, dressed as are boarders in a costume which they may put off on going home."* It will be remembered that, as superior of St. Joseph's Cannanore, Mother

* *Letters*, 4 May, 1877.

Magdalen Lubis had asked, in 1871, to be admitted into the Apostolic Carmel, and Bishop Marie Ephrem had agreed to a change of habit and name, postponing the novitiate to a more relaxed time - which had never come. She had continued as superior but soon after Father Victor assumed office, she resigned superiorship and Father Martelli, the chaplain, took up the reins of government, with another sister stepping into Mother Magdalen's shoes.

At Calicut, Mother Mary Perillon was superior of St. Joseph's. There, the apostolate was succeeding well, but she found it impossible to maintain religious discipline and order in her community, or to check abuses. Thus, Father Alphonse, the manager of the school and the confessor of the community, found it quite easy to take a liberty, which few prudent men would have dared to assume, and to introduce many irregularities into the convent. He took it upon himself to change superiors and to be present at the community recreation. He spent much time in the convent parlour, converting it into an office-room to transact the business of the school and the parish. When he found that ladies often came to talk to the superior, he pushed his office-room further into the convent. Mother Perillon, realizing that seculars would be shocked to see a priest emerging from the convent at any time of the day or night, remonstrated with him several times regarding the unseemliness of his conduct. His reaction was to accuse her, in a letter, of several irregularities herself and to advise her to do penance by retiring to some other convent. He concluded by saying, "I could not in conscience give you absolution, even in *articulo mortis*."⁴

* Sister Candida A.C., *History of the Apostolic Carmel (1873 to 1928)*, p. 35.

Faced with this impasse, Mother Perillon, confiding the contents of the letter to two senior members, Sisters Philomene and Gertrude, and after consulting Father Victor, the Pro-Administrator, who happened to be in Calicut, left for Mangalore. Sisters Philomene and Gertrude wanted to go too, but Father Alphonse, coming to hear of it, permitted Sister Gertrude, but forbade Sister Philomene to go. He then took up the government of the community himself and ordered the sisters to vote for a superior in place of Mother Perillon. Their choice fell on Sister Margaret, who, finding herself a puppet in the hands of Father Alphonse, and feeling incapable of the office thrust upon her, appealed to Mother Marie des Anges for help.

Mother des Anges, in response, paid a visit to Calicut and was warmly received by Mother Margaret and the sisters there. No doubt, she suggested some remedies to the situation. Soon after her departure, Father Alphonse called a meeting to point out "the irregularities of the new regulations", at the same time expressing his surprise that Father Victor had, "without reflection", put his signature to them. He got a few of the sisters to join him in his opposition, thus enkindling a deadly spark of division in the community.

Naturally, much trouble ensued and there was an interrogation by the Bishop of Verapoly, to whose vicariate Canara, and hence the Apostolic Carmel, had become attached after Bishop Marie Ephrem's death. Bishop Leonard and all the Apostolic Carmel superiors and sisters were present at the meeting. As a result, Father Alphonse was not to have anything to do with the convent and Father Polycarp was appointed confessor, under whom peace once more reigned.

Mother Veronica, it will be remembered, was at this time in the Carmel of Bethlehem and there is no evidence for some years to show that she had any inkling of what was taking place in the Third Order in India. Rather, the contrary. After the closing down of the Little Carmel of Bayonne, all correspondence with India ceased for a prolonged period of time. Now Mother Veronica "hardly speaks of her past and still less of her work. She has no news of the Third Order Regular. She has every reason to believe that it is finished. However, it lives in her spirit. It makes her heart beat."* Had she known what was going on, it would certainly have caused her much grief. But would she have interfered, as she had done earlier? Probably not, for, the Little Carmel being closed down, Bishop Marie Ephrem dead, and herself unable ever to join her sisters, her responsibility for the order had ceased. It would be left to her now only to pray for its welfare.

The first thing Father Victor of St. Anthony did, as soon as he was appointed Pro-Administrator, was to begin improving the organisation of the Apostolic Carmel. He started by nominating mother Marie des Anges Superior General of all the four convents, with St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore, as the motherhouse. Next, he drew her attention to the need for collecting and preserving material for the history of the congregation - details regarding the departure from France, the arrival in Mangalore, starting new foundations, maintaining of registers of professed sisters, novices, postulants, with records of significant events, such as dates of entry, clothing, profession, appointments of superiors. "If

* "Mère Veronique" (contributed by P. Grech, S.C.J.).

there are no registers, get them made," he advised. "Have copies made of documents...we could keep the files and send them when they are needed."** Here, he probably had in mind the establishment of archives in the Head House.

Father Victor also turned his attention to the revision of the Rule and to getting the approval of Rome for the congregation:

*I am doing all I can to get our congregation approved, and I hope you will send me a petition to that effect signed by all the sisters. Send it to me by post at Rome. I shall also see if there is any means of getting a Cardinal Protector. Perhaps Monsignor Howard will be prepared to accept the duty.***

This important work was, however, destined to be accomplished by other hands than Father Victor's.

Notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, things were by no means settling down in the Apostolic Carmel. The canker that had been slowly eating into the communities kept making its appearance intermittently over a number of years, taking toll of work, personnel and edification. It would indeed take a great deal of time, patience, tact and firmness on the part of superiors to exterminate it completely.

To go back to Cannanore, in 1877, Mother Marie des Anges went there for her first visitation. Intending to put right what was wrong, Mother des Anges drew up a set of rules, one of which stated that the chaplain (Father Martelli) should not attend the community recre-

* Letters, 1 Feb., 1877.

** Ibid., 20 March, 1878.

ations. He refused to submit and some of the sisters sided with him. This caused a split in the community and, finally, Cannanore broke away from the mother-house – a break which lasted till the arrival of the Jesuits to take over the mission, December, 1878.

Already, in 1858, the Catholic community of Mangalore had petitioned the Holy See to hand over the Mangalore Mission to the Jesuits. Moore's *History of the Diocese of Mangalore* describes their efforts thus :

*There was a great deal of dissatisfaction among the people of the Vicariate over the way things were going...Despairing of redress under the Carmelite régime, they began as far back as 1858 to petition the Holy See, through the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, to have the mission transferred to the Society of Jesus. Four times in 1858 and three times in 1859 they approached Cardinal Barnabo with petitions and memorials. No direct reply was received to these representations, but it does not follow that they were unheeded. Rome moves slowly...In 1869 a modern resource of civilisation was had recourse to and we find that telegrams were sent to Pope Pius IX... Monsignor George Talbot was twice appealed to in Rome, in the same way, and Cardinal Antonelli once...There were in all nine telegrams despatched to Rome between April 23rd and December 24th...Here, in India, the Rector of St. Joseph's College, Trichinopoly, was telegraphed to in August.**

Among the motives behind the repeated requests were

* J. Moore, S.J., *The History of the Diocese of Mangalore*, p. 133.

cited the want of an institution for the higher education of the Catholic boys of the district, and the neglect of religious instruction and of the missions.

During the time of Bishop Marie Ephrem, the agitation subsided. However, on the very day of his death (April 10, 1873), the following telegram was despatched in the name of the Catholic Committee to Bishop Meurin S.J., Vicar Apostolic of Bombay: 'Bishop Ephrem died this afternoon (sic); assist petition to transfer Mission to the Jesuits.' Another telegram was sent direct to Pope Pius IX himself by Mr. Joachim J. Rebello, Secretary of the Committee, on May 2nd...Your Holiness's children lament Bishop's death. Deign pity their education and other wants and grant Jesuits prayed in several memorials.* It is evident that the Mangaloreans concerned had learned quite thoroughly the lesson of the Gospel parable, where the judge yielded to the insistent woman, not so much out of goodwill, as to put an end to the annoyance. Whatever might have been the attitude of the Church towards the repeated requests, the upshot of the Mangalorean perseverance of twenty years was that the Holy See finally sanctioned the transfer of the diocese to the Jesuits on 27 December, 1878.

*On that date, Pope Leo XIII, by a brief separated the Canara Mission from Verapoly and entrusted it to the Jesuit Province of Venice... The first batch of Jesuits landed at Mangalore on the 31st December, 1878, and on the same day they took charge of the Mission from the Carmelites.***

* *Ibid.*, p. 169.

** M.D. Sa, *History of the Catholic Church in India*, Vol. II, p. 368.

The change-over of the Vicariate from Carmelite to Jesuit hands played, as we shall see, a crucial part in the affairs of the Apostolic Carmel. Loyalties were divided. A few sisters felt that their duty, even their charism, required that they follow the Carmelites to Malabar. The Apostolic Carmel, they argued, had been founded to help in the Carmelite missions. Others thought and felt differently. They saw no reason why they should leave the work they were doing just because the mission had changed hands. Also, the fact that (at the time) the Apostolic Carmel sisters made a vow of obedience to the bishop of the place where they worked, while at the same time being subject to a central authority, could become a serious block to the spiritual life and to the apostolate, as events would show.

Before going further, it is interesting and rewarding to consider the attitudes of the two men's congregations to the change with regard to the Apostolic Carmel. Doubtless, the Carmelite Fathers regretted deeply having to relinquish their connection with the Mangalore Apostolic Carmel, but this feeling did not carry over into their attitude towards the Jesuits. Rather, what comes through is an innate nobility. The outgoing pro-Vicar, Father Victor, writes to Mother Marie des Anges, six months after the arrival of the Jesuit Fathers :

Fear not, I am convinced that you will always be happy under the Jesuits and that they will not fail to do their utmost to help towards the prosperity of your work. You say Father Pagani has promised to help you. I can testify to his having told me that he was very glad to find you established there, and

*that he never thought of replacing the native sisters by Europeans.**

Father Polycarp, the last confessor at the convent of Calicut, seemed to feel the loss more than most, for he was a deeply affectionate man. Thus, he confesses: "Oh my God, you know how much I love the Third Order...The loss of Mangalore has acted on me in a very singular way. I give myself to God and abandon to Him all, all, all. If He no longer wishes me to serve the Carmelites, Fiat."** Yet, he writes to Mother Marie des Anges soon after the change-over : "Many thanks for the good news regarding your little congregation...May God be blessed a thousand times if only you have found peace and security for your future existence."*** A little later, after going to Verapoly, he makes this observation by way of excuse for the Carmelite Fathers : "if the Carmelite Government had its inconveniences, it was for you a government of *family* and not official."****

Indeed, with all their affection and goodwill, this was precisely the weakness of the Carmelite Fathers. Father Victor and a few others excepted, most of them were far from business-like. They lacked administrative ability, and a few of the less prudent, in their capacity as confessors and chaplains, carried the familial relationship too far, leading the weak sisters astray and sowing the seeds of discord and rebellion. As Father T. Gallo, S.J., puts it, "if I am to say what I think, the sisters who caused us trouble are less culpable than

* Letters, 16 May, 1879.
 ** Ibid., 31 Jan., 1879.
 *** Ibid.
 **** Ibid., 27 March, 1879.

the fathers who have contributed so much to make them go astray.** Father Martelli O.C.D. was still in Cannanore for a few months after the Jesuits took over. Monsignor Pagani S.J., the new Vicar Apostolic, says of him : "I regret that I have none to place at Cannanore instead of Father Martelli at present. He is a good man but has no idea of the business. However, I recommended very strongly the part he must take with them, namely, that of exhorting to obey."**

When, in 1878, it became known that the Jesuits would be taking over the mission of Mangalore, there was naturally a feeling of insecurity among the sisters of the Apostolic Carmel. With so many European congregations, well-established, to choose from, would the Jesuits have any use for an Indian congregation just getting on its feet ? But Monsignor Pagani immediately set their fears at rest. "You may rest assured," he wrote,

that I take the greatest and most lively interest in the prosperity of your congregation. In fact, when I left Bombay, I was very much requested by both orders of nuns, especially by the Daughters of the Cross...to bring them here. I replied that finding another order established here, I thought it my duty to foster them in every respect and not think of establishing a competition by their side.

"When I came to Mangalore," he continues, with shrewd insight and even foresight :

after observing the good religious spirit dwelling in

* Ibid., 4 July, 1880.
** Ibid., 1 March, 1879.

*your house, I was pleased with it and thanked God that I would not be tempted to bring another religious order here to compete with you. But the devil is jealous and will do his best to sow dissensions and divisions among you.**

Father Victor O.C.D. will also remark on the training and spirit imparted by Mother Marie des Anges to the sisters at Mangalore – and, let us not forget, Mother des Anges owed her own training to Mother Veronica. "Console yourself with the thought", wrote Father Victor, "that there is not a single Vicariate Apostolic in which Indian nuns have succeeded as well as you have..."** But elsewhere he warns, "take care you do not lose your primitive spirit. If you do, everything will be destroyed."***

A few months later, Monsignor Pagani, to counteract some rumours that were afloat and hearing that the sisters were still apprehensive, again reinforces much more emphatically what he had said earlier :

I beg to give you by this a written document for your consolation and peace of mind. I...assure you with my solemn word that I never conceived or expressed the thought of bringing another religious order in your stead...I told Rev Father Victor repeatedly that I preferred to have the natives of the country for the education of the female sex...Besides, you must give me the credit that, since I came here, I have endeavoured to foster and protect your liberty of internal government perhaps better than my predecessor, which ought to be a pledge for you of

* Ibid., 11 Feb., 1879.
** Ibid., 16 May, 1879.
*** Ibid., 26 Jan., 1881.

*the interest I take in your welfare, and that I would never be so mad as to drive away from my vicariate the children of my own beloved flock.**

Monsignor Pagani continues at some length in the same strain, entering with sensitivity into the fears and insecurities of his correspondent and of the other sisters, before concluding solemnly :

*not only shall I not send you away from this vicariate, but I shall prohibit and I do prohibit you even now, in virtue of Holy Obedience which you vowed to me, to meditate or execute such a resolution. I beg of you, besides, Reverend Mother, never to communicate such rumours to the other nuns because it will only disturb the good spirit reigning among you.***

And, true to his word, from the day of his arrival in Mangalore till the day of his death, seventeen years later, 'the children of (his) own beloved flock' in the Apostolic Carmel remained close to his heart.

Father Nicholas Maria Pagani S.J. was born on 9 August, 1835, into a noble family of Nocera Dei Pagani in the Kingdom of Naples. At the tender age of sixteen, having completed school, he joined the Society of Jesus and, surprisingly, was ordained just ten years later. He came to India in 1861 as a member of the Bombay Mission and after working there for nineteen years, was chosen to head the Jesuit Mission band of nine priests assigned to the new mission of Mangalore.***

* *Ibid.*, 6 April, 1879.

** *Ibid.*

*** "Bishop Nicholas Pagani, S.J., 1835 - 1895".

In June, 1879, Mother Marie des Anges received from Bethlehem a long letter from Mother Veronica, after a silence of six years, a letter filled with loving concern, for Mother Marie des Anges had been ill. "I feel the need of writing to you," Mother Veronica explains, deeply moved,

*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 when she suffers and is in pain than when she is in prosperity.**

She has probably, by now, heard something of the happenings of the intervening years, for she continues on a note of compunction

*I often feel sorry, my poor child, that my sins and my pride have been the cause of suffering to my children in India. If I had known to form you better in the virtues of religious life and, above all, to give you the example of holy humility which is the foundation of all things, they would not be what they are now. But you know what I have told you very often at the Little Carmel of Bayonne: 'My children, do what I tell you, but don't do as I do'. However, Jesus has had pity on his poor servant and has placed me in this dear paradise of the Carmel of Bethlehem, where, quite old and worn out, I await with patience, or rather with impatience, the call to go and see Him.***

Mother Veronica had learnt of the coming of the Jesu-

* *Ibid.*, 15 June, 1879.

** *Ibid.*

its and, sensing the insecurity her daughters must feel at the change, encourages them, reminding them again that humility conquers all:

*The good God has wished, for reasons known to Him alone, that the Carmelite Fathers should make place for the Jesuits. You are in the midst of strangers. You have to deal with Fathers who do not understand you. You do not know how to conduct yourself, whose side to take. Well, my child, permit your Mother who loves you to repeat to you: 'Make yourself small, and remain very small, for there is always place for little ones.' Inculcate this in all your sisters. Let it be the refrain of your daily song to Jesus, and you shall be welcome everywhere, and blessed by God and by men.**

When the Jesuits took over the charge of the mission, things in the Calicut community were peaceful enough. Father Polycarp had been a tactful man. Monsignor Pagani, at his first visit to St. Joseph's, Calicut, "found the community going on in a truly religious spirit of union with the Motherhouse."** In addition, charity reigned among the sisters and harmonious relations between them and the parish priest. Works too multiplied and progressed smoothly. Now, under the wise and prudent guidance of the Jesuit Fathers, the lives of the sisters were rendered still more tranquil and happy.

Not so with Cannanore. Of this community, Monsignor Pagani remarked that "it is easier to make a new coat than to mend an old one." Monsignor Pagani, who had taken over as Pro-Vicar from Father Victor, re-

* *Ibid.*

** Sister Candida A.C., *History of the Apostolic Carmel*, p. 53.

appointed Mother Marie des Anges Superior General, as his predecessor had done. Neither had asked the opinion of the other convents - Cannanore, Calicut, Quilon. The superior of the Cannanore Community wrote to Monsignor Pagani congratulating him as Pro-Vicar, as if Cannanore belonged to a different congregation. Monsignor Pagani replied, stressing the need of submitting to a Central Authority. The Cannanore community refused to submit, on the pretext that they had not been consulted in the appointment of Mother Marie des Anges. Monsignor Pagani called the superior to Mangalore and though, at first, she was loathe to submit, later, with the help of Father Stein, confessor of the Mangalore community, she apologised and asked to join the ranks in Mangalore.

Meanwhile, Mother Marie des Anges had written the Cannanore community a stiff letter, demanding that each sister express her submission individually, failing which she would have to leave the congregation. Monsignor Pagani visited the community soon after. He found the sisters unnerved. "I had a private talk with each sister," he writes to Mother Marie des Anges,

*because great despondency, sadness etc was with the community in general. I encouraged everyone as well as I could, and showed them the justice of your dealings and assured some that expulsion would always be the last resort. It seems the devil has put into some heads that they would or might be expelled for trifles or little faults.**

Appointing a superior for Cannanore was a difficult task, but Monsignor Pagani, Mother Marie des Anges,

* *Ibid.*, 1 March, 1879.

Sister Elias and a few others consulted together and chose Sister Mary of the Incarnation.

All this time, Mother Magdalen Lubis had continued at Cannanore as a sister in the ranks. She now applied to the Pro-Vicar, Monsignor Pagani, for permission to change her vicariate and go to Verapoly, where the Carmelite Fathers were still in charge. Her request was considered legitimate, in the light of the understanding some sisters had that the congregation had been founded to aid the Carmelite missions in their work. On the 6th of May, 1879, Monsignor Pagani testifies that he grants

*permission to Sister Mary Magdalen, religious of the Third Order of Carmel, to pass to the other Vicariate as per her request. Sister Mary Magdalen has been superior for many years...in the Third Order. Therefore, although we feel her departure, we thank her for all the good that she has done in the Third Order, and we wish her God's blessing and all good wishes in her future career.**

Sister Magdalen Lubis went to Alleppey in response to an invitation to help implement a design of establishing a convent and an English medium school there.

At Cannanore, still more scandalous things began to happen. Sisters flagrantly flouted the Rule. They walked in and out of the convent as they pleased, with or without the habit, and in other ways exhibited a lamentable laxity in the religious spirit. Indeed, Mother Mary of the Incarnation (superior of the house) and Sis-

* Cyriaco, O.C.D., "Mission of Discalced Carmelites of Verapoly and Mangalore".

ter Stanislaus were caught disposing of convent goods. Monsignor Pagani, usually so calm and self-possessed, was profoundly shocked, as one of his letters to Mother Marie des Anges indicates :

I wrote, as you know, a strong letter to the Sisters Mary of the Incarnation and Stanislaus.

I have been so kind to them. I considered them as my own children and they have betrayed me so cruelly by looting the convent, an action most disgraceful and dishonourable to any Christian woman, much more to a Christian virgin dedicated to God, and to a superioress of a house !!! I have never heard of a similar action before this, but if the sisters will confess what has become of the stolen things (I cannot use any other word, as it was a real theft to your house), then only am I ready to pardon them, and if you wish to allow it, and the superioress of Quilon accepts them, I have no objection to sending them to Quilon...

If you think you are able to put them right at Mangalore, I am ready to assist you by being very good to them, forgetting all the past...

*In Mangalore, under your eyes, such persons can be managed; but not so far away from you. Besides, boarders should not be so familiar with every sister, as we see by sad experience that it is through them that prohibited correspondence is carried on.**

For all Monsignor Pagani's readiness to pardon the

* Letters, 18 Nov., 1879.

sisters, they refused to confess their fault. So he wrote to Mother Marie des Anges :

I authorise you to dismiss them. However, before dismissal, obtain from them some confession of how they disposed of the goods of the convent. This is important, as I wish to proceed against the accomplices.

*Don't let them go with the habit. If they dare to do this, they are excommunicated and you must try to inform the superiors of other orders so that they may not be cheated.**

After such a drastic step, the community of Cannanore, which had broken away from the motherhouse, asked for pardon and returned to communion with Mangalore. The sisters settled down under the new superior, Sister Teresa of Jesus, a sister of St. Joseph, who had made the novitiate in the Apostolic Carmel – the same sister who, later, from 1892 to 1895, was sent as novice mistress, at the request of Bishop Medlycot, to train the sisters of the Syrian rite in Kunaman in his vicariate.

Turning to Quilon, let us see what was taking place there. This house was now in a different vicariate and still under the Carmelite Fathers. Mother Marie des Anges in a letter to Father Gallo S.J. written from Mangalore much later, but undated, relates that, as a few sisters had been asked for at Quilon to instruct the girls in Catechism and sewing, the local superior of Calicut, Mother Mary Perillon, having been obliged to come to Mangalore and finding the climate very trying

* *Ibid.*, 15 Nov., 1879.

to her health, had for that reason been sent to Quilon, in 1875, with two sisters. In January, 1877, continues Mother Marie des Anges, she had visited Quilon, as both superior and sisters had begged her to "come and see their misery." They said that they suffered much from the indifference of the Fathers and that it was impossible to observe the Rule and Constitutions as at Mangalore. "Every one of them," Mother des Anges adds,

*wanted to come back with me to Mangalore..They told me that they were determined to return to Mangalore as soon as the affairs of this mission were settled. When the time came, however, and I gave them this information, the Fathers became attentive to their wants, so that the sisters thought no more of leaving Quilon.**

Immediately after the Jesuits took over Mangalore in December, 1878, Mother Marie des Anges had occasion to write to the community at Quilon, finding fault with them for not keeping to the Rule. In reply, Mother Perillon pointed out "...our Superiors (meaning the Bishops of Mangalore and of Quilon) must agree. Otherwise, what can we do? You know, dear Mother, we cannot serve two masters; the Superiors must agree and then you will meet with no difficulties from us."*** And again, six months later, she writes: "If you could send a sister here to replace me and get the consent of my superior at Quilon, I am quite ready to set out for the mission of Mangalore. ****"

* *Ibid.*, n.d., (probably 1880).

** *Ibid.*, 12 Jan., 1879.

*** *Ibid.*, 24 June, 1879.

If the difficulty were only one of jurisdiction, it would be legitimate enough, but "...it was precisely at this time," Mother des Anges tells Father Gallo, "that they began to correspond with the sisters at Cannanore and encourage them to leave the mission."*

Loyalty to the Carmelite Fathers was one hurdle in the path of unity in the congregation. Now here was another. Since the sisters vowed obedience to their bishop, there were bound to be personal interior conflicts as well as external clashes with superiors, if they worked in different vicariates and yet were administered by a central religious authority. Further expansion of the congregation would demand autonomy in matters of internal religious administration. That is why the Jesuits became keener even than Father Victor O.C.D. had been, to get the Apostolic Carmel Rule drawn up properly and approved by Rome.

To revert to the Quilon situation, at Monsignor Pagan's advice, Mother des Anges wrote directly to Bishop Leonard of Verapoly (and Quilon). The result was that Quilon severed its connection with Mangalore, and thus with the Apostolic Carmel, in April, 1879. Sister Elias had earlier been transferred to Quilon. From there in November, 1879, she went to Trivandrum where she founded in 1880 the Holy Angels' Convent, motherhouse of yet another Carmelite family, the Congregation of Carmelite Religious (CCR).

The characteristic difference in the new administration at Mangalore is evident from Monsignor Pagan's very first letters – business-like, logical, firm, but also

* *Ibid.*, n.d., (probably 1880).

kind, concerned, affectionate. And the Jesuit Fathers—Stein, Gallo, Eyrie, Muller, who were appointed as confessors, chaplains, managers in the convents at Mangalore, Cannanore and Calicut – were of the same stamp. They treated the sisters like adults, helped them with their apostolate, directed them spiritually on sound lines and were affectionate, and concerned about them, without interfering in their internal affairs – so that the communities settled down and both their spiritual life and their apostolate flourished.

Jesuits seem to have contributed in a special way to the Apostolic Carmel charism. To explain: as spiritual directors, they played a prominent role in Mother Veronica's spiritual life, especially at crucial moments when she was called upon to make radical decisions—her conversion to Catholicism, her vocation to the Sisters of St. Joseph, her call to Carmel. In this connection, we recall the names of Father Giuliani, Father Seagrave, Father Villefort. And later, in Mangalore, when her infant congregation was all but dead, the Jesuits were called on to vivify, steady and strengthen it. That Mother Veronica had met other Jesuits in her life, we learn from her letter to Mother Marie des Anges :

*I shall also tell you that I know many Jesuit Fathers. I have seen them and I admired and appreciated them very much in their missions. They are according to the heart of Jesus. And if you, my dear children, are small, the good Fathers of the Society of Jesus will be fathers and protectors to you.**

* *Ibid.*, 15 June, 1879.

INDIA: THE SECOND CRISIS

As for Mother Marie des Anges, she cherished an affection for the Carmelite Fathers in general. However, in her reply to Monsignor Pagani's letter quoted above, while appreciating the administration of two or three Carmelite Fathers, she states that, on the whole, they lacked firmness :

*I confess that Your Reverence showed more firmness than our Reverend Carmelite Fathers towards the end of maintaining order and regularity in our convents, and we are both happy and satisfied to remain and work in the Mission under your wise and prudent direction.**

In fact, both the Carmelite Fathers and the Jesuits were truly interested in the sisters and wished to do their best by them. But it was a case of complete difference of outlook. The Carmelite Fathers were apparently typical men - of their times and even of ours - considering women weak and incapable, and treating them like children. The Jesuits, with greater breadth of vision, dealt with them respectfully as adults and the Mission reaped the benefits of their attitude.

In 1890, Mother des Anges was to write:

With regard to the spiritual welfare of our convents, I leave it to all the religious to judge for themselves the devotedness and zeal with which the Fathers of the Society of Jesus have laboured for our advancement and perfection in our religious life. As for myself, I acknowledge that, though comparisons are odious, yet, judging from the present state of our

* Ibid., 7 April, 1879.



The Carmel of Pau



The Little Carmel, Bayonne

PAU



Bishop La Croix of Bayonne

and

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The Little Carmel-Arch and Staircase



Father Dominic of St. Joseph, Carmelite Superior General.



1870



1902



Quadrangle, 1898

**ST. ANN'S
CONVENT
MANGALORE**



Chapel, 1896-98



Today



THE



Mother Elias Devine

APOSTOLIC CARMEL:

EARLY DAYS



The Bunder, Mangalore, where the first, Apostolic Carmel sisters disembarked



Bishop N. Pagani, S.J.



Rosario Cathedral, Mangalore



Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified



Father Lazare of the Cross, O.C.D.



Oratory of the Discalced Carmel Sisters (St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore), where Bl. Mary made her First Profession.

BLESSED MARY OF JESUS CRUCIFIED



The Cell of Blessed Mary, Old St. Ann's, 1871



Bust of Bl. Mary, St. Ann's quadrangle (erected on the spot where she was found in ecstasy).

Auth No. VI A. 1 / 1978

Regulation for the Nuns of the
Third Order of St. Teresa
Mirasaula

1. — The Third Order of St. Teresa, is an exact figure of the convents founded by our Secular Mother.

2. — With the exception of some slight circumstances for some particular country or individuals, the Third Order observes the very spirit and rules of St. Teresa through out.

3. — The ends of the 3rd order is twofold: 1st self-sanctification by means of Meditation and Application of the senses 2nd to work for the salvation of souls by prayer and by educating the girls.

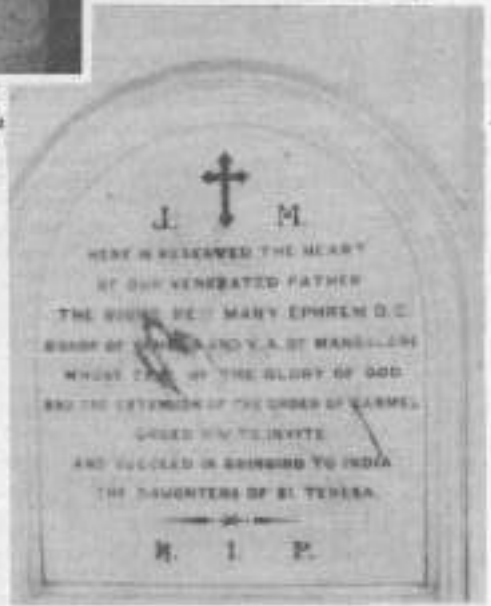
4. — Most of these, as precisely put in the

The first page of the earliest Apostolic Carmel Constitutions drawn up by Mother Veronica and written in her own hand.



The tomb of Bishop Marie Ephrem O.C.D., Rosario Cathedral Mangalore

IN MEMORIAM



Plaque marking the place where Bishop Marie Ephrem's heart is preserved (Cloistered Carmel, Kankanady), Mangalore.



Infirmary, Carmel of Pau, France,
where Mother Veronica died.

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Mother Veronica's grave, Pau, France.

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A STRANGE DESTINY

*convents, I prefer a thousand times to be under the direction of the Jesuit Fathers than we were formerly.**

The little congregation had indeed come out of the woods, and it had emerged greatly purified and strengthened, as the forthcoming years would prove. What Mother Veronica had written to Sister Agnes in her days of tribulation, she could have addressed to the whole group of faithful ones as they passed through the crucible :

*Remain in peace — in silence and in hope shall be your strength. Our Holy Mother Teresa herself would not say anything but the same to you. This is her spirit. I pray to this good and holy mother to obtain it for you in abundance. She wishes it. She wishes that this little Apostolic Carmel imbibe her spirit of Carmel. It also must be purified by tribulation, that finally the chaff be separated from the good wheat.***

* Mother Marie des Anges, op. cit., p. 42.
** Letters, Easter Sunday, 1872.

Chapter 21

THE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT

The next period of Mother Veronica's life is a night of great darkness. It all happened after the death of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified.

One day, after communion, an Interior voice said to her, "Prepare yourself for suffering." And, after some days, she heard the voice again repeating the same words quite distinctly. The third experience, a few days later still, was of a different type, one of those mystic 'touches' she had known before, a painful one this time, which she describes thus:

It was as sudden as a flash of lightning. It seemed that God had abandoned me – had left me entirely to myself – I was overwhelmed, annihilated, under the weight of my sins and the anger of God! Pure suffering had taken up my whole being and I could see only my sins which were the cause of it. It seemed that I was going to die. I could see a huge

A STRANGE DESTINY

*mountain of my sins which stood between me and God.**

Nothing seemed to alleviate her suffering – neither confession to Father Chirou nor Communion. When Mother Veronica closed down the Little Carmel of Bayonne and entered the Carmel of Pau, it could have been expected, naturally, that her life would flow in smoothness and tranquillity. But it was not to be. Her respite lasted for just five years. Her life before had been full of suffering – bereavement, illness, poverty, disappointment, anxiety, frustration – a Night of the Senses. But through it all, she had possessed her God and that was enough. She had had peace of mind and strength of soul. Now, in the Bethlehem Carmel, God deserted her and she felt completely lost. She felt herself, as it were, hurtling downwards, with nothing and no one to cling to, no consolation whatever. It was, no doubt, the Night of the Spirit, that comes to those who have covered a good part of the Ascent of Mount Carmel.

In such utter confusion, she found herself incapable of any balanced judgment. Thus, if anyone accused her of any fault, she not only accepted it, but even believed it without questioning. "My soul," she says

*was in such a state that I believed all they said to me. They said I had calumniated (someone). I believed it, without knowing in what way... I was in such a state of darkness and torture of soul, that I believed I was guilty of all they accused me of.***

* Autobiography, Part III, p. 96.
** Ibid., p. 97.

Now fear took hold of her – even panic. She felt she was damned. She could not sleep or eat. At night, she woke with a start. There was neither God nor mercy for her – and, what was worse, she thought she did not care. It was torture. Night and day, she did nothing but examine herself. She went from sister to sister to ask if she had said anything against anyone, begging them to remind her of it. Everybody kept away from her and left her alone. "I didn't know what I was doing," she owns.*

In confession, Father Chirou tried to calm her, seeing nothing solid in her accusations, but, at each confession, she repeated the same things. "My God, my God," she cries, "in what terrible distress my soul found itself!" He commanded her never to repeat these accusations again and to remain very tranquil.

Meanwhile, she prayed as well as she could, begging God to forgive her her sins, especially those of pride, for which she thought this state was a punishment. "I shall never be able to describe all I suffered during this time," she says.

*I did not know and did not understand that it was God who had put me in this pit and that it was He alone who could relieve me. I thought that perhaps by speaking to someone or other, I would get relief. But I saw that creatures did me more harm than good. No one understood me.***

At last, Father Chirou, unable to help her, advised her to profit by the visit of the Patriarch to make her

* *Ibid.*, p. 97.
** *Ibid.*, p. 100.

confession to him. "He is your superior", he said "therefore he has the grace of state for you. Besides, as bishop, he has the plenitude of the Holy Spirit."*** In fact, Father Chirou even made it easier for her by contriving matters in such a way that His Excellency himself asked for Mother Veronica.

Many years before, she had made a vow of doing the most perfect thing, and had renewed it, from time to time, with the permission of her confessors, the last time being at her Great Profession in the Carmel of Pau. On that occasion, the priest who had given the retreat, had encouraged her to renew this vow, and not only in great things, but also in little things.** She had also made the vow of humility, but that was limited to short periods of time. Now, these two vows added to her torture. From the vow of humility, she was dispensed by Father Guido, who had permitted it temporarily. The other vow was permanent. Only the Patriarch could dispense her from it. His Excellency, however, did not think there was sufficient cause to dispense her from the vow. On the contrary, after asking Mother Veronica several questions, he ended by telling her that she should observe it as well as she could, without tormenting herself. And, although she brought up the subject several times later, he never dispensed her from the vow. The last time, after reflection, he even said, "It will help you." With that, all doubt vanished forever. "I can never forget," says Mother Veronica, "with what compassion he listened to the account of my distress, the balm of consolation which he poured on my frightened and tortured soul."**** He told her to write to him

* *Ibid.*, p. 99.
** *Ibid.*
*** *Ibid.*, p. 100.

when she had something to tell him and, from that day, the state of her soul improved. After this, Mother Veronica wrote several times to His Excellency to give him an account of the state of her soul, and he replied giving her necessary advice. Thus, according to St. John of the Cross,* does God give some respite, a short lull, brief enlightenment, to the soul walking in the dark night of the mystic way, before the next, perhaps more terrible, onslaught of the storm.

There was at this time a controversy in Europe with regard to the Constitutions of Discalced Carmelite nuns. St Teresa's Primitive Rule for Discalced Carmelites had taken shape between 1562 and 1567. Within a few years, there appeared two slight variations of these constitutions,** that of 1588 being followed by the Carmelite nuns in France, and that of 1592 by those of Spain and Italy. Each group held that their version was the most authentic, closest to the original Rule of St. Teresa.

Peter Bérulle,*** the famous Cardinal, spiritual writer and founder of the Congregation of the Oratorians, was among those who introduced the Carmelite nuns into France at the beginning of the seventeenth century. As there were no Carmelite Fathers in France at the time, Bérulle (and his successors) were entrusted by Pope Clement VIII with the government of the Carmelite nuns there. It is believed that the monasteries of the Bérulle tradition, which followed the 1588 Constitutions, were rather strict on some points of discipline,

* Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pp. 342-343.

** Berthold-Ignace de Sainte Anne, *Anne de Jésus et les Constitutions des Carmélites Déchaussés*, pp. 316-318.

*** *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualita*, pp. 243-244.

though not Jansenistic. In Spain and Italy, the nuns followed the 1592 Constitutions and were under the jurisdiction of the Carmelite Fathers.

During the French Revolution, 1799, all the monasteries in France were suppressed and the religious dispersed. When the religious houses were again revived, the jurisdiction of the Carmelite nuns in France passed to the bishops, non-Carmelite priests being appointed superiors of the monasteries.

The dispute regarding the Constitutions continued and was at its height during the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly the last thirty years. Berthold-Ignace defended the 1592 Constitutions, as being the complete ones, approved by the Church through the two Popes, Sixtus V and Gregory XIV. Others, guided by the Carmelite Monastery of Paris, defended the Constitutions of 1588. Only in 1926, would all the Carmelite nuns of the world accept the same Constitutions – those of 1592, revised according to the new Canon Law.

In such an atmosphere of contention, it is not surprising that individuals or groups should come out with various interpretations and even with their own reforms – as did actually happen in several Carmels in Europe at this time, even requiring, apparently, that the bishops take them to task. "Monsignor Fleury Hottot," we are told, referring to a time ten years later (1888), "has written a letter to the three Carmels of his diocese, where he decides that all the three should follow the usages etc., which they used to follow from their foundation."⁴

⁴ *Letters*, Jan. 1, 1888 (Mother Veronica to Father Lazare).

In the Carmel of Bethlehem, too, there began, in 1880, according to Mother Veronica, "the sad movement called the Reform."* No doubt, those who originated it were in good faith and had the best of motives. They certainly believed that they were helping the nuns to be more holy – like those other Carmels all over Europe, which were probably vying with one another to follow a Rule as close as possible to the original one of St. Teresa. Notwithstanding their good intentions, some of them may have gone too far, the Strict Observance becoming much too strict and even Jansenistic. Not even the Carmel of Pau, it seems, escaped without a tinge of this Jansenistic fervour.

That Mother Veronica suffered from the rigours of the Reform is amply evident. What is less apparent is whether the external circumstances that allegedly occasioned her suffering were exactly as she saw them. Research on this matter has so far failed to yield any conclusive evidence, one way or the other, regarding the objectivity of her narration. This study must, therefore, limit itself to the attempt to enter into Mother Veronica's experience, without in any way judging other persons involved or the attendant external circumstances. Every person is unique and the way one reacts to life around is what constitutes his or her experience. The same set of circumstances may be positive or negative, for the individuals involved, depending on the various factors that go into the make-up of the human personality. Mother Veronica's experience of the Reform must be viewed in this light.

* *Autobiography, Part III, p. 103.*

As is well known, the life of Carmel was characterized to an appreciable extent, at least up till Vatican Council II, by long and rigorous fasting and abstinence (from meat), manual work, penances, disciplines and other external austerities. Apart from the strictness of the Rule, as such, the effect these austerities had on an individual sister depended on her physical health, age, temperament, state of mind, earlier experiences.

Mother Veronica was in her mid-sixties and carried with her, moreover, physical scars of the past. She was, by nature, as we have noted, proud and haughty, weaknesses she continually bemoaned and strove against. She had, in addition, recently passed through a phase of acute scrupulosity and depression, which had, no doubt, taken toll of her psychological stamina. All these factors may have clouded her vision and affected that objectivity of expression which was one of the strongest characteristics of her literary style. It is possible that she reacted disproportionately to external circumstances. Be that as it may, we are left in no doubt as to her intense suffering, both interior and exterior.

In Mother Veronica's autobiography written for her confessor and spiritual director, we are permitted glimpses we would not otherwise have had into the very human depths of her tortured soul. In one place, she tells of the physical hardship she suffered when she had "to carry big baskets of mud and the watering-can full of water, which were beyond (her) strength. I could hardly lift that weight," she adds.

and in the heat of summer, we were drenched with

*perspiration in the sun...On laundry days, we had to first fill the cisterns by carrying water in big buckets, and then wash all the linen. I thought I would not reach the end of it, for already I was not strong and working hard and living only on bread and water was too much for an old lady.**

The minute prescriptions of the Rule in matters of dress, devotions, choir ceremonial, times and places of silence, were to her so many additional burdens that irked her downcast spirit. She suffered, moreover, from the cold, for lack of warm clothing. Added to this were penances, like fasting and disciplines, that were imposed or undertaken for what was interpreted as infringement of the Rule.

Mother Veronica's sufferings during these nine years at Bethlehem were very real. Hard on anyone, the physical sufferings were harder on her because of the infirmities she carried with her as a legacy of past skirmishes in life. As for the discipline, it was not the physical part so much as what she saw as the human indignity of it that engendered rebelliousness and pain. No doubt, her innate "weaknesses" – her ability and willingness to think for herself, her outspokenness, her confident, perhaps even haughty, bearing – lent themselves easily to the rigorous treatment of the Reform. In fact, things might have been even worse, had she been someone else. But it was known that she was a foundress and, besides, she had a commanding personality. As such, there is evidence to show, that she was regarded with a certain awe.

* *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Finally, in 1887, during a Canonical Visitation, Mother Veronica asked the Patriarch to allow her to return to the Carmel of Pau. He readily acquiesced and told her to write on the spot to the prioress there, promising to recommend her case himself. He assured Mother Veronica that, since she was a chapter member of that Carmel and had left her dowry there, they could not refuse to receive her.

The letter from Pau soon arrived, welcoming Mother Veronica to the community, and she left Bethlehem at the end of April, 1887, accompanied by two other sisters, Father Chirou escorting them as far as Jaffa.

Now, at last, for Mother Veronica, the terrible night of purification, which had lasted nearly nine years, was over. In one of her last talks, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, wishing to put Mother Veronica on her guard against the trials which she foresaw about to assail this valiant soul, had 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,' and the gentle and poetic Oriental nun added this delightful metaphor by way of comparison, 'The little birds will sing in the depths of your heart as in a grove! She meant to say, 'You will enjoy peace and joy in the midst of your suffering.'**

And, indeed, this had been the case. Barring the first few months, when God seemed to have abandoned her, for the remaining years, though the physical and

* Sister Madeleine, C.D., "Mother Veronica's Last Days at Pau" (Carmel of Pau, Souvenirs and Recollections).

emotional suffering had been intense, Mother Veronica's soul had been calm. Back in her beloved home, the Carmel of Pau, never to leave it again, she would remain in peace and tranquillity and deep union with her Lord, for the next nineteen years, till her death.

Chapter 22

DAWN

Father Chirou accompanied Mother Veronica and her companions from Bethlehem up to Jaffa, where they spent the night at the monastery of the Franciscan Fathers. Next morning they made their confession to Father Chirou and received Communion from his hands. They were, indeed, grateful to this dear Father, who had been their friend.

They embarked on board *The Alpee* on 29 April, 1887. There were many religious on board, as well as other Catholics, and the Carmelites were treated with the greatest regard. At Port Said, they attended Mass and received Communion, and were given breakfast by the Good Shepherd Sisters. The next day at Alexandria, the Sisters of Charity gave them shelter for the night. For several months, Mother Veronica had had no news of her sisters, but, in a conversation with the doctor of *the Alpee*, she learned that he had just travelled in Greece with an English lady, who turned out to be Catharine, on her way to see Mary Ann, their Ur-

sulline sister, at Tinos. Naturally, this discovery gave Mother Veronica great joy. She was also deeply touched by the kindness she and each of the other Carmelites received on board. "It seemed," she says, "as though God had inspired them to make up for all we had suffered at Bethlehem. Everywhere, we were welcomed and treated as though we were angels come down from heaven."^{**}

On arriving at Marseilles, they went to La Capelle to see the Sisters of St. Joseph, where again they met with great warmth and hospitality. From here, Mother Veronica had written to inform Father Lazare of their arrival and they were overjoyed to find him waiting for them at the Montpellier station. "You know, my good Father," Mother Veronica later reminisces,

*what sympathy we found in you, specially myself. God gave my soul into your hands and you accepted it, not in a human but in a divine and deeply spiritual manner. And it is in obedience to you that I write this account of my poor life.***

The sisters remained at Montpellier for three days, staying with the tertiaries, where they were treated "like queens". They felt very much at home, being with the Carmelite Fathers again. Moreover, they were within easy access of Father Lazare and could relate everything to him. He even accompanied them to Pau. At Lourdes, where they stopped to honour our Immaculate Mother, "I had the happiness," Mother Veronica records,

* *Ibid.*, p. 145.
** *Ibid.*, p. 146.

*of opening my heart, which was full, to Father, who gave me advice I will never forget. He told me that, if in future, I were not happy, he would place me in a Carmel directed by Carmelite Fathers.**

At Pau, they were received with great cordiality on their arrival. There were just three or four sisters there now whom they had known when they had left for Bethlehem twelve years before. All the rest had joined Carmel later.

Some months after Mother Veronica's arrival in Pau, her spiritual twin sister, Mary Ann, died, leaving Mother Veronica, naturally, broken-hearted. But she could not afford to indulge her grief, for she felt she had a mission to fulfil in France - to support the cause of "our saint", Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, and to answer the need of keeping her memory alive. "I had left her dear tomb," she says, "but I was going to find her heart at Pau. And, as almost all the old sisters of the community who had known her were dead, I promised that I would do all in my power that she might not be consigned to oblivion." ** There is ample evidence that she worked at this mission, not only by looking after the vault in the wall, where the heart of Sister of Jesus Crucified was enclosed, and decking it with flowers, but also by wielding her pen in this cause. While ordering Mother Veronica to write the story of her own life, which she began in October, 1887, Father Lazare had asked her "above all to give details of all the circumstances and events connected with our dear saint, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, for the glory of God and

* *Ibid.*
** *Ibid.*

the honour of His Servant,"* which the saint's "first Mother" gladly carried out. In addition, she wrote a life of Sister of Jesus Crucified in three volumes called *Vie Marveilleuse de Soeur Marie de Jésus Crucifié*, which was published at Montpellier in 1903.

Mother Veronica had arrived at Pau in May, 1887. The Bethlehem movement, had found its way here also, though in a lesser degree than at Bethlehem. Many important things had been changed and along with them other lesser practices, which nevertheless contributed to the simple joys of community living. Of the latter, Mother Veronica quotes one example, which was, till recently, a beautiful Carmelite way of ushering in Christmas – that of doing away on Christmas Eve with the bell or clapper to awake the sisters. Instead, the prioress and sub-prioress carried the statues of Mary and Joseph respectively around the convent, a few sisters singing a suitable hymn. A simple joy, but one that enkindled true devotion at the reflection, thus made concrete each year before Christmas, on the symbolic journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

Mother Veronica's first task was to decide whether she wanted to stay on here or to go to another Carmel. Rome, she writes in a letter to the Bishop of Bayonne, Mgr. Fleury Hottot,

had not yet pronounced on what it considered to be 'the true mould of Carmel'. But after the Decree which the Holy Father had just addressed to the Carmelites of France, regarding the Constitutions 'given by the Cardinal de Bérulle' and the Constitu-

*tions approved by the two Popes, I could no longer hesitate between the two.**

Mother Veronica loved the Carmel of Pau as her first Carmelite home. At the same time, for the peace of her soul, she could never again associate herself with the Bethlehem reform. Her conflict appears in a letter to Father Lazare:

*Oh Father, how much I need you to help me settle my affairs. I confess to some and also to others, but no one is Father Lazare to me... Monsignor Fleury Hottot has written a letter to the three Carmels of his diocese making known his decision that all the three should follow the usages etc which they used to follow from their foundation. As for Oloron and Bayonne, it is very easy, for they were never changed, but with Pau it is another matter, as you know... I do not know how the others feel about it, but as for myself, I have written to Monsignor directly telling him about my aspirations... I have already told him that you have promised to find me a place so that I can die in peace under the Rule of the Order – as lived by our Mother Teresa and the Carmelite Saints who came to found Carmelite Monasteries in France.***

In her letter to the Bishop of Bayonne quoted above, Mother Veronica asks to be permitted to live in a Carmel where the Rule is followed as Mother Teresa had it and under the guidance of Carmelite Fathers. She quotes Bethlehem as an example of guidance by non-

* Letters, Jan., 1888. The 'Decree' is that of Leo XIII dated 27 Aug., 1887. The Pope here gives freedom to follow either of the versions of the Constitutions (cf. *Memoire des Carmélites Déchaussées*, Vol. III, Carmel of Paris, 1894, p. 970).

** Ibid.

Carmelites. She is seeking 'the true mould of Carmel.' If she cannot get it at Pau, she seeks permission to go to another Carmel, much as it will cost her.

But belying all Mother Veronica's fears, the Carmel of Pau resolutely took up what she was looking for, and there was no need for her to leave her beloved 'home'. "You seem to think," she writes to Father Lazare,

that our community is against the authority of Monsignor because of his letter, which wishes us to take up all the ancient usages. Do not believe it.

...The whole community is working since last Sunday to take up again as far as possible all the ancient usages and ceremonies in the choir which... had (been) abolished six years ago, and I believe everybody feels that there is grace in returning to this day, where one can walk without being troubled in conscience.

*We were entirely derailed before this and, I assure you, Father, that I was so sick of it, that I could bear it no more. Now it is not the same thing.**

The Carmel of Pau was not, however, left alone. Six years later, we are told, "The Prioress of Bethlehem has written.....to our good dear Mother." But the Prioress of Pau did not yield; "she was firm in rejecting all the innovations in our Holy Rule, constitutions and usages...Oh, how I render thanks to God all the days of my life," Mother Veronica exclaims, "for having brought me back to my dear Carmel of Pau."**

Gradually, she settles down in peace, her main pre-

* *Ibid.*, 20 Jan., 1888.

** *Ibid.*, Wed. after Easter, 1894.

occupation now being heaven. "Oh, if you knew," she exclaims, "how beautiful was the homily last evening...which fell to me at the Office!... Every time I read it, I am enchanted by it. It speaks of heaven and describes the ravishing beauty and the joy of happiness that await those who get there."* And again, "I recommend myself, good Father, to your holy prayers, during my Retreat, for two things: 1) that I may do God's will in everything; 2) that Jesus may give me His love until He takes me to love Him as much as He wishes and I desire, up there in the Fatherland after which I languish with all my soul."**

In the above epistle to Father Lazare, we have the first mention, after fifteen years, of a letter she has received from India. "My dear child, little Mother Elias of Trivandrum," she writes, "has asked me to present her filial remembrance and respect to you." But, from now on, the ties on both sides are renewed and continue unbroken till Mother Veronica's death. Writes Mother Marie des Anges some time later in her historical notes: "It is two years since we have begun to keep up a regular correspondence with our first Mother Mary Veronica of the Passion." She records how overjoyed Mother Veronica is at this contact and how she replies to each sister's letter with surprising promptness. Mother des Anges mentions also that she has sent the sisters at Mangalore "the History of the Origin of our Foundation together with the letters of our Reverend Father Dominic, General of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel... and of the other Fathers."*** The letters, she adds, are in French.

* *Ibid.*, 13 April, 1888.

** *Ibid.*, 19 July, 1888.

*** Mother Marie des Anges, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

Although Mother Veronica is in contact with the Mangalore Apostolic Carmel, for a time her letters show her fear and disappointment that the Carmelite spirit has been relinquished by the Mangalore sisters in choosing to stay in a diocese run by the Jesuits. She never became quite reconciled to the fact that the Mangalore branch "adopted the Rule of St. Augustine as being more suited to their way of life than that of St. Albert."* Had not her three daughters, whom she had sent out from Bayonne with Monsignor Marie Ephrem in 1870, renewed their vows into his hands instead of into those of the Carmelite Father General? They were thus committed to work with the Carmelite Fathers in India. Prudence, she observes, precludes her giving her opinion openly. It is best for her to remain silent. But she finds this detachment extremely difficult, as we shall see, deeply involved as she is with this spiritual child of hers – the Apostolic Carmel.

What Mother Veronica is referring to here is the matter of the Rules of Life for religious. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council, to avoid confusion in the Church, forbade the drawing up of new Rules of Life. Thenceforth, founders of communities were to adopt one of the four rules already approved – those of Saints Augustine, Basil, Benedict and Francis.

About 1209, however, Brocard, prior of the Carmelite hermits on Mount Carmel, had received a Rule of Life from Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem. As it was dated from before the Lateran Council, Honorius III (1226) and, later, Gregory IX (1229) gave it their approval. In

* Letters, 11 March, 1902.

1247, when the friars moved to the West, Simon Stock, the English Prior General, received approval from Innocent IV for the same Rule adapted to the West. This adapted *Rule of St. Albert* came to be known as *Regula Innocentiana*.

In the general decadence of religious life in the fourteenth century, this *Primitive Rule* was mitigated by Eugene IV and called the *Mitigated Rule*.

It was to the Primitive Rule, the Rule of St. Albert, approved by Innocent IV, that St. Teresa turned, three and a half centuries later, for the basis of her Reform. Today, St. Teresa's Reform is followed by all Discalced Carmelites.

There is nothing pretentious about this Rule -

*The familiar unadorned phrases take their hearers back to those modest hidden gropings after the All on the slopes that had been sanctified in distant ages by the Prophet of God, that first cluster of rude huts and caves where those unknown, unsung forbears of ours dwelt day and night, pondering God's law and attending to their prayers, keeping the devil at bay with the toil of their hands and the stillness of their tongues, their fasts, their privations, their watchings and the faith and love burning in their hearts that gave purpose and meaning to it all.**

To go back to Mother Veronica, it is the relinquishing of this Rule that she is lamenting. By way of com-

* Bede Edwards, O.C.D., "The Carmelite Rule" (*Carmelite Digest*, Winter, 1987), p. 20.

ment, it may be pointed out that the Rule of St. Albert (that of St. Teresa) was drawn up for strict contemplatives. For active contemplatives, naturally some modification of it was necessary which, presumably, was provided, for the Apostolic Carmel, by the Rule of St. Augustine.

Father Athanasius tried, through his letters, to convince Mother Veronica of this, with little success. But, however much she may have antagonised him in his sympathy for Mother Marie des Anges, his final verdict expressed to his protégée is that he wishes "Mother Veronica were not deceived, but she has made you good little Apostolic Carmelites."* In 1890, with the visit Monsignor Pagani paid to Mother Veronica at Pau, her whole attitude to the Mangalore sisters changed. But that is to anticipate.

* *Ibid.*, 31 May, 1895.

Chapter 23

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

The year 1888 marked another milestone in Mother Veronica's life. The first biography of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified by Lady Herbert was written, though it was published only ten years later, in 1898. Mother Veronica had had an appreciable part in this work, by way of encouraging the writer and also providing some material. She quotes Lady Herbert in a letter she writes to Father Lazare:

If you think that the great life should be written immediately, could not Father Lazare give me his notes? I shall be delighted to put them together, if he has not time to do so... I shall be very grateful if you (Mother Veronica) could put together those notes and you could also add other documents you have at the Carmel of Pau.

To which Mother Veronica adds her own comment: "When you come here, Father, I hope we shall be able to speak of all that. I will also give you what I have writ-

ten. It is not little... But to finish it, I need to speak to you."^{*} That the biography was complete by 1888 is evident from a letter in which Mother Veronica complains that Father Lazare had not told her that he had received the Life of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified which Lady Herbert had sent him.^{**} There is also a reference to the Life in the *Chronicles of Carmel* of October, 1889.^{***}

Something that strikes the reader in the letters of this period is Mother Veronica's great esteem and affection for Father Lazare, a friend who had suffered in the two causes close to her heart – Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and the Apostolic Carmel – and who had, moreover, supported her in her other trials. She knows that he is very much besieged by works and by those who need "(his) heart and (his) advice", but "I often say to myself," she writes to him, "If only I could visit Father Lazare once, it would do me good," for to tell you the truth, after my return, though I am very happy and in peace, there is a corner where no one but you enter."^{****} In April, 1888, the election of Carmelite priors was to take place. Father Lazare, who was prior of Montpellier, would probably go out of office. "What will happen to our Father Lazare?" Mother Veronica asks in a letter, probably to the prioress of Montpellier. But then she realizes that "what God wishes will happen", and prays that "whatever happens, it may be for the good of the Order." She reflects that Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified "used to say that this Father was destined to uphold our Holy Order", and adds, "I believe it – and I ask for it, this Order of the Holy Virgin, *par ex-*

^{*} *Ibid.*, n.d., (probably late 1887 or early 1888).

^{**} *Ibid.*, 13 April, 1888.

^{***} *Ibid.*, 30 July, 1892 (quoted).

^{****} *Ibid.*, August, 1887.

cellence, for he has been humiliated very much."^{**} Soon, however, Father Lazare seems to have fallen again into disrepute with his congregation, a situation in which Mother Veronica compares him with Jerome Gratian, St. Teresa's confessor, "who found calumniators among his own sons." But now she encourages him in her turn: "...my dear Father, rejoice that you are worthy to suffer such trials for the love of Jesus. It is not the first time, so you know how to bear them. Meanwhile, my heart suffers like that of our Holy suffering Mother."^{***} It is only in one of Mother Veronica's last letters, about fifteen years later, that she is able to rejoice that Father Lazare has been exonerated and reinstated, that "instead of being chased away from the Order, as (he) feared.... Reverend Father General (had) taken in hand the cause of Sister of Jesus Crucified and approved her spirit and writings. This (was) indeed a great event."^{****}

Monsignor Pagani, now Bishop of Mangalore, had gone to Rome and other places in 1890 and, responding to Mother Veronica's request, had given her the pleasure of visiting her at Pau. Needless to say, it had been a red-letter day for her, for, at last, she could get first-hand information about her daughters at Mangalore. She writes to them at length after the visit:

I have had the pleasure and consolation of seeing your excellent bishop, Monsignor Pagani, and of talking to him about you all – of many even by name and separately – and, in order to rejoice and encourage you, I must tell you, that your good bishop and father is pleased and contented with you and

^{*} *Ibid.*, 13 April, 1888.

^{**} *Ibid.*, 17 May, 1889.

^{***} *Ibid.*, 4 May (about 1906).

with the manner of your working for the glory of God and the good of souls in his diocese.

*Now, my beloved children, let me exhort you to do all you possibly can to correspond to the affectionate interest your good bishop has for you all. Oh, let me say, he knows each by name and has interest in each.**

Enclosed with this letter of hers is a copy of one she has received from the Carmelite Father Athanasius, which is meant to set at rest her fears regarding the Carmelite spirit of her daughters in Mangalore – disposed as she is, after Monsignor Pagani's visit, to judge more kindly of the Jesuit jurisdiction. Writes Father Athanasius:

I am glad to see that you are quite happy at the visit of Monsignor Pagani and with good reason. Your daughters are doing well. The bishop is satisfied with the services they render him, and perhaps in studying more closely the true origin of this Congregation, which circumstances have forcibly placed under Episcopal jurisdiction, His Lordship will be brought to allow them to be and to remain Carmelites. They are, in fact, Carmelites by an order from on High which brought forth this branch from the trunk of the Carmelite Vine and which, notwithstanding all her misfortunes, is still fertile and full of life. A vine branch planted out and separated from its Mother Trunk does not for this reason cease to be a vine. A house of Carmelites, because it passes under Episcopal jurisdiction, does not for this reason cease to be Carmelite, and sometimes they are

* Ibid., 6 Nov., 1890.

even the more faithful to their Order, as they are more religiously submissive to their bishop.

...That some special point from the Rule of St. Augustine should have been introduced. Well! One might have foreseen that this could be the case. But does that hinder them from being Carmelites at bottom? I think not. It belongs to the heart of those religious to give an answer to this question. Your daughters of Mangalore have only to say out plainly: "We are Carmelites under Episcopal jurisdiction." Their bishop can in no wise be vexed at this.... Besides, assuredly Bishop Pagani is himself a Carmelite in some sort, for no doubt he wears a Scapular.

*...They (the sisters) have no other Origin and Starting Point than that branch of Carmel reformed by St. Teresa. It is for them to remember their origin, their first cradle and all the care which has been given them by the Order.**

Despite these lines of Father Athanasius, however, Mother Veronica would take a long time to become really quite convinced. In her comments on his letter, we feel she is trying to believe in spite of herself. "Of course, you are Carmelite Teresians," she says, "and if anyone questions your being daughters of St. Teresa, you may answer, 'If we are not her daughters, at any rate, we are her grandchildren, for our first Mother Veronica is her daughter to all intents and purposes.' *** Even while exhorting her daughters to be faithful and obedient to all the orders and desires of "your good Bishop and Father and the dear and kind Jesuit mis-

* Ibid. (Quoted).

** Ibid.

sionaries, who take such care of you, both in spiritual and temporal things," she hastens to add, "but also remember you are Carmelites."^{*}

As late as 1902, that is, after twelve years, she is still disturbed about the Mangalore branch, as we see. She wonders, she says, whether it is

*following the tradition there inculcated by me, who had received orders from the Head of our Holy Order of Mount Carmel to found the Third Order for the Missions. Those of my children who are under the Jesuits are cared for by them and are working for God. The Very Reverend Father General of Discalced Carmelites has granted them letters patent of affiliation and aggregation, and I can do nothing further for them than leave them in the hands of those whom God has given them for Superiors. How can I interfere ?***

One wonders if Mother Veronica's persistent disquiet in this matter was not perhaps the result of an intuition. The Jesuit Fathers had indeed helped to put the tottering congregation on its feet in the spiritual, administrative and apostolic spheres, and guided it through its later difficult years, till it was recognised by Rome. They were excellent spiritual directors, able administrators, affectionate friends. But one thing they seemed to lack – the ability to guide the sisters in the path of Carmelite prayer. Their own formula for prayer, "The Jesuit apostle...is a man called by his vocation to be 'a contemplative in action' ",^{***} could hardly be un-

* Ibid.

** Ibid., 19 March, 1902.

*** *Companions on a Mission (Excerpts)*, p.111.

derstood in the context of the contemplative dimension that was peculiarly Carmelite. Nor, supposedly, could the Jesuits be expected to guide the sisters on those lines. Bishop Cavadini, who succeeded Bishop Pagani, told Mother Aloysia, the second superior general: "Don't trouble yourself if you have not much material time for prayer. Do what you can and then try to keep yourself united with God in all that you do."^{*} The result was that through the years, in the congregation as a whole, prayer tended to stop at the intellect and the affections, instead of using these faculties as a spring-board to interior solitude and silence – "the cloud of unknowing", "God-awareness". It was in the process of "going back to the sources", in the post-Vatican period, that this deviation, deficiency rather, in the original spirit was recognized, and resolute steps taken to rectify it.

The letters patent of affiliation and aggregation, mentioned by Mother Veronica above, had been given by the Carmelite General in 1892. By this document, the Apostolic Carmel was recognised as a member of the Carmel of St. Teresa, thereby being granted affiliation and aggregation to it as well as a participation in all the spiritual benefits of the Order. Father Athanasius had written to Mother des Anges at the time: "So you have been acknowledged as indeed a branch of the Teresian Carmelite Order ! "Ironically, the document of affiliation had been addressed 'To the very observant Tertiary Sisters of our Order, residing in the diocese of Mangalore'. Father Athanasius explains that, strictly, this would refer only to the sisters residing in the diocese of Mangalore, but believes that, as the sisters in

* *Letters*, 7 Aug., 1909.

Malabar have "a common origin" with the Mangalore branch and as "today you are separated from the same episcopal jurisdiction only by a major force completely independent of your will," justice demands that the spiritual favours be shared by both branches. However, he advises that the matter be clarified with the Carmelite General.* This was probably done by Mother Marie des Anges, who was in Europe at the time, for Father Athanasius again refers to the subject a few months later. "I hope that Monsignor Leonard (Archbishop of Verapoly) will appreciate, as your good bishop has, the document that you obtained from our Father General for all the Tertiary Sisters who came from Bayonne and those who are united to them in the East Indies." Father Athanasius rejoices that this document alone, if nothing else, has made the voyage of Mother des Anges to Europe worthwhile, for God "is love itself and the bond of hearts, not a source of their division.**"

During the years when the Apostolic Carmel had been going through its first crisis involving Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and "the mixture of congregations", relations between Mother Veronica and Mother Marie des Anges had become highly strained. Both women were courageous, forthright, resolute, capable. At the time, Mother des Anges had been in sympathy with Bishop Marie Ephrem. Mother Veronica had opposed him. So the superior general had completely written her off, blaming the first crisis on Mother Veronica's obstinate self-will and reluctance to obey. It may be noted here that, when an occasion presented itself, Mother des Anges did not herself hesitate to oppose strongly the decisions of the bishops of Verapoly and Quilon,

* *Ibid.*, 4 Oct., 1892.

** *Ibid.*, 10 Feb., 1893.

which she considered prejudicial to the institute. Be that as it may, so far did she discount Mother Veronica that when, in preparing the Rule and Constitutions for the approval of Rome, she was called upon to give Father Gallo S.J. an account of the origin of the Institute, she made no mention whatever of Mother Veronica – thereby being grossly unfair to the Foundress. What could have been the reason? Was it a case of like poles repel? Of two strong women each with a mind of her own, unable to see eye to eye? Or was it a case, so often permitted by God, as we see, of the foundress being rejected by her own, for reasons beyond anyone's control – short-sightedness, for instance, or lack of a full knowledge of the case. Had Mother des Anges had access to the different points of view, "the thoughts of many hearts", through the letters and other documents in our possession today, her verdict would probably have been very different.

The Apostolic Carmel, indeed, owes a great deal to Mother Marie des Anges. Only a woman of her mettle could have tackled the critical situation during the two crises the congregation had passed through, and almost forty years of unbroken leadership helped, not only to stabilize the congregation, but also to consolidate and strengthen it, once the turbulent years were over. For all that, Mother des Anges, no doubt, came to realize that, had Bishop Marie Ephrem been willing to heed and reflect seriously on Mother Veronica's objections, the congregation might have been spared the second and infinitely worse crisis – of which, notwithstanding the support from Monsignor Pagani, Mother des Anges had to bear practically the whole burden.

Mother Marie des Anges went to Europe in 1892,

by which time normal relations had been established between the Mangalore sisters and Mother Veronica. According to the latter, Mother des Anges "came on a visit of health to Europe for a few months, for after twenty-two years in India she had great need of a little change." She went over to Pau to visit Mother Veronica and it was, no doubt, a joyful meeting. She "then returned to her dear Mission," Mother Veronica adds, "where she is still working for the glory of God and the good of souls."*

For all her misgivings, Mother Veronica kept unbroken and affectionate contact with the sisters of Mangalore as with those of Trivandrum. It was to the Trivandrum sisters, at the request of Mother Elias, that she wrote the series of delightful letters from 1892 to 1899 giving the story of her life up to her entrance into Carmel. As for the sisters of Mangalore, she would write most often to Mother des Anges, but also, at times, to the other sisters, individually or as a group. Her letters show personal interest in the sisters, practically none of whom she had met, as well as interest in details, small and big, connected with the community, the school buildings and the apostolate. Thus, she writes:

I have received the picture with all the names. That has given me much pleasure, but I see that they are not the same, at least a great number...I suppose that they have gone to the other convents...

And your new chapel? How is it progressing? I came to know lately that the stained glass windows

* *Carmel in India*, pp. 72-73.

are put up. I am so happy to think that, after all these years, when it (the stained glass) was there unused in our verandah, they are using it at last for a house of God for the Carmelites...

*...Sister Ursula had told me once that she had secured the 5th rank in the examinations. Does that mean Matriculation or the Training School?**

To a Trivandrum sister she writes :

*I have not heard anything about Mother Elias after Marseilles. Tomorrow she will arrive at Madras, God willing. From Trivandrum I get letters from my dear children telling me again and again that they await their beloved Mother very impatiently.***

To Sister Aloysia of Mangalore :

Thank you for all the details about your dear Reverend Mother's arrival... I do trust she has had no return of those spasms which are terrible.

...I suppose you must be in your holidays by this time and that the exams are over...

*I do not wonder that your dear Reverend Mother carried away with her a favourable impression of the Carmel of Pau. Everyone says the same of our dear monastery!****

When Mother Veronica had had to close down the Little Carmel of Bayonne, neither she nor others had relinquished the conviction that a small house in Europe

* *Letters*, 17 April, 1894.

** *Ibid.*, 4 Jan., 1892.

*** *Ibid.*, New Year's Day, 1893.

was needed to prepare a few subjects for the Indian mission and, over the years, several attempts were made to found such a house. The Mangalore branch made one such attempt, but their plans were evidently not God's plans. Just before the Jesuits took over, Mother Marie des Anges, with the help of the Carmelite Father Polycarp, had arranged that a Sister Gertrude, an ex-nun of a Carmelite congregation in Spain and co-founder of another, which, according to her, had been closed down on account of the Revolution, should train European superiors for the Apostolic Carmel. Both Mother des Anges and Father Polycarp believed that "we must have Europeans to govern our communities", even though in another letter, Mother des Anges acknowledges that the Indian sisters "are not inferior to Europeans in intelligence, capacity, devotedness and piety."* When, a few months later, Monsignor Paganl took over the mission and was apprised of the project, he did not approve of it, for several reasons. He found Sister Gertrude unsuitable to be entrusted with the foundation. And, as for the purpose behind it, that "of forming superiors for Mangalore, it appears to me," he says,

*that it will be a community of novices dreaming, from the very beginning of their religious life, of being the future superiors of Mangalore. Hence, when they come here, in case you find them unfit to be superiors, they will be discontented and will spread discontent and disunion among others.***

So, the idea was abandoned and no more thought was ever given to the recruitment of expressly European vocations.

* Ibid., 19 Aug., 1879.

** Ibid., 14 Aug., 1879.

We have seen that every time Mother Veronica had, in the course of her life, come up against any sort of oppression, notably oppression of women by men, she had put up a struggle. Here again, in her declining years, in 1899, we find her vociferously ushering in the century of Women's Lib. Apparently, some sisters had organised what we might today call a raffle to collect money. In the wake of it, the age-old paternalistic attitude of ecclesiastical authorities had come into play. The letter that Mother Veronica writes, to a priest regarding the matter, is a classic, eminently topical today, and might pass as a memorandum against the oppression of women in general and an indictment of those outdated clergy who still use a patronising attitude in dealing with religious women. The epithet, 'outdated' is advisedly used, for it must, in fairness, be acknowledged that awareness has come, and things in the Church, as elsewhere, are changing. "Your Reverence must surely know", Mother Veronica asserts,

all about the lottery money collected for the (convent), and with what charity the gentlemen of (the town) have placed it or invested it for the benefit of the community. Is it not astonishing how the ecclesiastical authorities find fault with this charity and wish to get the money into their own hands?! saying that women are not fit to handle money! What would the communities of France or England etc think and say of this absurd announcement?... Such a thing is unheard of in Europe, for the Bishop of the Diocese to have the nuns' dowries paid into his hands! It is like keeping slaves...

My poor children in India are entitled to 'the liberty of the children of God', as we are in other portions

of the Church – and I tell (the superior) to hold on and to stand firm for her lawful rights, as our Mother St. Teresa did, who when necessary stood against Bishop and Provincial, and I add... 'there is nothing a man is obliged to respect more than an undaunted woman who fearlessly and respectfully maintains her lawful rights and stands her ground without flinching.' For, after all, dear Father, these men who try to oppress and frighten poor women into yielding to their unjust claims are only cowards and dare not carry out their threats when opposed calmly and respectfully.*

Towards the end of Mother Veronica's life, everything for her seems to be falling into place. She is completely reconciled, and even deeply satisfied, with Mother Marie des Anges. "The dear Mother", she says, "has a particular tact for exercising her office, and her numerous daughters hold her in love and veneration."*** She has also realized, and is even deeply convinced (she is no longer trying to believe in spite of herself), that the Mangalore branch had done God's will in choosing to remain under the jurisdiction of the Jesuits. In 1895, we find this observation in her little book, *Carmel in India*: "Since the arrival of the Jesuit Fathers in this Mission, both the temporal and the spiritual interests of our Carmelites are cared for with the utmost zeal and charity."*** We sense her deep satisfaction that, where both branches are concerned, all has turned out according to God's plan. She sends them both copies of the "History of the Third Order until the end," and of important letters from the Carmelite Gen-

* Ibid., 20 Sept., 1899.
 ** *Carmel in India*, p. 67.
 *** Ibid.

eral, presumably those authorizing the foundation of the Little Carmel of Bayonne. In 1901, her request for a special letter of affiliation to the Carmelite Order for the Trivandrum sisters was granted. Now her cup of joy is indeed full and what she writes to Mother Elias holds good for both branches. "Oh, thanks be to God and our Lady," she breathes fervently.

*I trust that God will finish the work He has begun and that the approbation of Rome will come to crown the works for which you have laboured so many years in India and suffered so much. You will be rewarded even in this world by seeing that our dear little family is taking solid root.**

Although the charism of both congregations is the same, it has over the years found somewhat varying expressions. Approbation by Rome of the Rule and Constitutions was conferred on the Mangalore branch in 1949 and on the Trivandrum branch in 1950. In Mother Veronica's last years, she could not doubt that this, her life's work, had been God's work. He had allowed it to pass through many vicissitudes, but it had at length come into its own. It had become stabilized and begun to take "solid root". She could justifiably "rejoice to be able to say (her) *Nunc Dimittis* in peace and thankfulness unspeakable."***

Once, long ago, in the midst of the first crisis, Mother Veronica had spelt out for Father Lazare what she, in consultation with Bishop La Croix and Father Inchauspé, envisaged for a teaching Carmelite: "We

* *Letters*, 12 Dec., 1901.
 ** Ibid.

are convinced that we should be true religious and not pious teachers."* At the time, this goal had been lost sight of, but, later, things had fallen into perspective. "Now (they) are beginning to see (their) labours crowned with success," the happy foundress can write to Father Lazare in 1902.

Truly, the mustard seed that had fallen into the ground at Bayonne and died, had grown into a mighty tree and would spread its branches far and wide over the Indian subcontinent and across the seas. Mother Veronica had indeed sown in tears, but now in her last years, she was reaping in joy. "Meanwhile, the work goes on. God is better known and loved in her dear Mission in India. What a sparkling pearl in her crown!"**

* *Ibid.*, 16 Sept., 1872.

** *Carmel of Pau, Souvenirs and Recollections* (Sister Madeleine, C.D.).

Chapter 24

LAST DAYS

Since her return from Bethlehem in 1887, Mother Veronica had busied herself, among other things, with literary work. She had written several books, beginning with her *Autobiography*, which occupied her between 1887 and 1889. *Carmel in India*, an account of the origins of the Apostolic Carmel,* was published in 1895. *The Marvellous Life of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified*, in three volumes, appeared in 1903. She also wrote a book, *A Grain of Dust*, and a biography of her sister, Mary Ann. As for her letters, they are a work of literary art in their own right.

Mother Veronica was, as we know, a well-educated and extremely versatile woman. In addition to being a writer, she was an excellent musician, and was also skilful with the needle, the brush and the pencil. She knew several languages, among them Latin, French, Italian, German and Greek, besides her mother tongue,

* Begun as early as 1871, at the request of Father Lazare.

English. What is more, her proficiency in these languages extended to writing as well as speaking. Greek she spoke fluently because, as we have seen, she had spent many years in Greece as a child and young woman. She had, moreover, learnt it as an academic subject and could even read the New Testament in Old Greek and translate it into English, not to mention her knowledge of the Greek classical writers.

Most of her letters, as well as her *Autobiography* and the biography of her sister, were written in French, since she had spent much of her later life in France and in French congregations and wrote for French-speaking people. As for Latin, she was a good judge of its correctness and of its translation into other languages, a fact to which Father Athanasius testifies. He had made an English translation of the document of affiliation of the Apostolic Carmel to the Carmelite Order in Rome, a copy of which he had sent to Mother Veronica. The document was in Latin. In this connection, he writes to Mother des Anges :

*Her Reverence, Mother Veronica, found it wordy, verbose... There was at the time in Pau, a good Tertiary Father of our Order, a distinguished priest, curate of Boston, who had come to Europe for his health. This Father, named Metcalf, a friend of the brother of the Archbishop of Westminster, wished to make a translation of it from Latin into English. Mother Veronica found it quite correct and more literal than mine. I do not know where she learnt Latin to judge of it. But I have no difficulty in accepting that she is perfectly correct.**

* Letters, 10 Feb., 1893.

Her letters to the Indian sisters, as also to Mother Elias, were written in English, as was *Carmel in India*.

Her style as a writer is simple, straightforward and conversational, the smoothness of the language making it flow easily. Much of her biographical and historical writing is a simple chronicling of events with a minimum of interpretation. But in her *Autobiography* and her *Letters*, where she can allow her personality full play, we see the writer in her at her best. The *Autobiography* bristles with a multitude and variety of persons, events, experiences, anecdotes, ranging from the humdrum daily occurrences of middle-class life, through historical battles and family tragedies, to psychological and spiritual phenomena. Our interest is aroused from the first page and, carried forward, as we are, by the quick-moving pace of events and on the delightful lilt of the cadences (which lose little in translation), we are loathe to lay the book down before the end. The *Letters* are similar in style to the *Autobiography*, familiar and chatty, undergoing speedy variations of mood, as the writer flits easily from one subject to another – expressing strong opinions and feelings, giving information or advice, describing persons, places or situations or, occasionally, just gossiping. Mother Veronica's total personality comes through more clearly in her numerous letters than in any other writings, her own or other people's. The series of letters about her life, written to the Trivandrum sisters in sequel form, are in a category by themselves and may be termed an epistolary autobiography. Special features of these letters are the closeness and warmth of the family atmosphere, the pen-portraits of members of the family, the lively travel sketches, and her own (Sophie's) traits of character, that come out clearly, as much through the events she

describes, as through the method of their narration. Mother Veronica's singular flair for picturesque and graphic description, especially Nature description, and her gift for apt metaphor and simile are other merits of these and all her writings – as may be noted from the numerous passages quoted in these pages.

In the course of her life, Mother Veronica had been a woman who could put her hand to any job – teaching, nursing, administration, business, writing, art. Abbé Privilegio had accurately sized up the talented young woman in those early days, when he had assured the superiors of the Sisters of St. Joseph that she would be a great asset to the congregation. In addition to her ordinary tasks, she would, all her life, be the one to be called upon to tackle an unusual or unexpected situation. Thus, at home, she had undertaken the specialised teaching of her deaf-mute sister, Emily; at various times she had nursed people; and, when a plan of the Bethlehem Carmel had to be drawn for the guidance of the contractor, it was she who had to do it.

Mother Veronica was, besides, a woman with a wide experience of life. For one thing, she had travelled widely, both with her family and as a religious, having crossed the Mediterranean, as we know, twenty-five times and visited India and Burma and many countries of Europe. Her family had depended on her in times of crisis and, in the religious life, she had held posts of importance, where she had had to make responsible decisions. In fact, so competent was she, that, as a Sister of St. Joseph, she would even be asked to meet Roman dignitaries, when matters regarding her congregation were being settled. As she herself owns,

*I speak, I think, with a little 'Connaissance de Rome' about Rome, for I have lived there some time and the Reverend Mother General often used to make me speak to personages who came to see her, which taught me many things about the way matters were conducted at Rome... I often see French Jesuits and others who are acquainted with Roman ways, very ignorant of many things which at Rome are quite simple.**

We know too that, had she not left for Carmel, she would have been appointed superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Having herself been an educationist, she could express herself very knowledgeably on the subject, as she does here to Mother Marie des Anges, just a month before her death :

*I hope that you do not have many difficulties with the new code. You know that to establish something new, there is always a little 'hitch', as we say in English; but all will turn out for the best. Your schools will continue to be prosperous. It will, I suppose, be an advantage to have your schools like those of Europe.***

Incidentally, this was as much a prophecy as a pat on the back. So well did the sisters acquit themselves in the work of education over the years, that they earned, by their very excellence, a number of grants – for school buildings as well as for the upgrading of students and teachers. As early as 1881, Mother des Anges writes to Bishop Pagani :

* *Ibid.*, 12 Mar., 1902.
** *Ibid.*, 14 Oct., 1906.

*this morning R.F.Stein (Reverend Father Stein) showed us our school report, which is considered by the Director of Public Instruction to be very satisfactory and he expresses his readiness to allow us a building grant for enlarging our school.**

To go back to Mother Veronica, interlaced with her many talents and worldly experience and wisdom, were the two other strands of her personality – her temperament, as it affected those she came in contact with, and her deep and flourishing spiritual life. Courageous, undaunted, virile, she combined in herself a tender, generous, motherly heart, full of concern for those in need or in pain. "Hers was a great soul, a high and powerful intellect, which found pleasure in the most lofty regions of the spiritual life, yet possessed withal, a simplicity and modesty truly touching."**

In the last years at Pau, there were many pleasant touches of Home for Mother Veronica. One day, Catharine came to see her and brought along a Protestant pastor to discuss religious questions with her Carmelite sister. Daniel Leeves, Mother Veronica's cousin, who was an Anglican pastor, wrote to her sometimes, and the nuns used to be agreeably surprised when he asked for their prayers for the success of a mission he was preaching to his people. Memories of her family and of England always made Mother Veronica very happy. She was very fond of a Miss Sutcliffe, an English lady of the family of Thomas More, who had been a great help to the Carmel of Pau. Mother Veronica loved reading *The Tablet*, which she received regularly, for it

* *Ibid.*, 18 Feb., 1888.

** *Religious Bulletin of the Diocese of Bayonne*, 1st Year, No. 32, Sunday, 9 Dec., 1906.

told her about the progress Catholicism was making in her country. She also read *The Illustrated Catholic Missions*, which was sent to her without fail for years. Incidentally, the French *Bulletin de L'Oeuvre Epistoire de Montligeon* continued to come to the Carmel of Pau in her name for more than forty years after her death, although the subscription had never been renewed,

Besides these simple joys, God gave Mother Veronica in these last years some of her deepest consolations, as if to prove that she was His spoilt child. It had been her great desire to see one of her daughters from India again, and this was granted. Mother Elias, just returning from the Missions and on her way to Belgium, stopped at Pau. As a special privilege, she was permitted to enter the cloister and meet Mother Veronica in the infirmary, since the latter was unable to go downstairs to the parlour. Mother Elias gave the foundress an account of all the good work that was being done, both in Trivandrum and in Mangalore, needless to say, filling the old nun's heart with a deep sense of fulfillment. Not content with letting her thus see the success of her work begun at Bayonne, God crowned His favours by inspiring the Carmelite Superior General to begin the process of introducing the cause for beatification of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. This brought Mother Veronica a double joy – that of knowing that the sanctity of her special spiritual child had been acknowledged officially by the Order, and that of seeing Father Lazare, who had suffered in championing her cause, finally exonerated – a happiness further enhanced in that she and Father Lazare could share it in common.

One of her last and greatest consolations was when a visiting Carmelite priest preached an exhortation to her and brought her Holy Communion. Father Hippolytus was old and blind, and the chaplain had to lead him to the infirmary. We naturally wonder why this should have been such an unusual and unique event for Mother Veronica. The reason lies in contemporary history. After the Revolution, there was a great dearth of Carmelite priests to direct the convents of Cloistered Carmelites. Hence, like the churches everywhere in France, the convents too, were ministered to by secular clergy. The Cloistered Carmelites were not under the Carmelite Father General, but under the bishops of the dioceses, secular priests acting as their superiors. In India, Mother Veronica had met Father Marie Ephrem and, since then, had become so attached to the Carmelite Order, that it had been the most natural thing for her to place her Tertiaries under the Carmelite Father General – notwithstanding that the convents of the Second Order had looked askance at her. Even had she been aware of the situation, which she was not, at the time, she would probably have acted no differently. This esteem for the Carmelite Fathers was one more factor explaining her attachment to Father Lazare and to his spiritual direction.

Another small, but significant pleasure, in Mother Veronica's last year was the arrival of an English postulant from Mauritius, who had visited Scotland and England. Mother Veronica had a great love for her country and a burning zeal for the spread of the Catholic Church there, which, for all their love and concern, her French sisters could hardly enter into deeply. Now, she could talk to her heart's content about England and its conversion to this little countrywoman of hers.

The last years of Mother Veronica's sojourn on earth may truly be considered as a proximate preparation for heaven. That she was, as always, generous with God, her sisters bear witness: "Sister Marie Therese (Mother Veronica)...continues to edify the Carmel of Pau, despite her 80 years, by her virtues and her patience in bearing the numerous infirmities of her age."* Also, the threads of her life's tapestry had all been tied up, one by one – her Carmelite vocation, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, her Bethlehem experience and, above all, her beloved offspring, Carmel in India. "God be praised a thousand times," she exclaims.

*My tears overflow with thankfulness and consolation. Our Reverend Mother says I look happy and this is true. I feel it. Our Lord has permitted such a grain of dust to do and suffer something for Him. Is this not something to be thankful for?****

Indeed, the sisters of her community never ceased marvelling at the exquisite attentions thus continually paid to her on the part of God in these her last years. Was this, perhaps, the third stage of the spiritual life, according to St. Teresa, the seventh mansion of the soul, which Mother Veronica had mentioned earlier, "where the soul enjoys perfect peace and continual union with God"?

In 1951, three Apostolic Carmelites, Sisters Doreen, Fidelia and Sophia, visited the Carmel of Pau and were fortunate enough to meet in the community several sisters who had known Mother Veronica well, al-

* *Vie Merveilleuse de Soeur Marie de Jésus Crucifié, Preface.*
** *Letters, 7 Jan., 1902.*

though she had been dead over forty years. Again it seemed that God was specifically at work with His delicate touches, for Sister Marie of the Nativity was none other than the English postulant to whom Mother Veronica had loved to talk about England. Sister Madeleine of the Eucharist had been a novice when Mother Veronica died, while Mother Louise of Jesus, the prioress, and Sister Marie of the Trinity had been among those who were young and new to Mother Veronica when she returned from Bethlehem. As may be imagined, there was great joy and lively exchange on both sides, for the Carmelites of Pau considered "the birth and fecundity of (the Apostolic Carmel) as one of the most beautiful fruits of (their) foundation."* The material for the archives of the Apostolic Carmel provided by this historic visit and by the correspondence that followed, is both substantial and extremely precious. It is only from the reminiscences of these sisters of the Carmel of Pau that we know how Mother Veronica affected those who lived closely with her, as also the personal details connected with her declining years and her last hours and moments. Some of the memories have been jotted down by the Apostolic Carmelites, as their hostesses spoke, and others are in the form of letters. That the cloistered sisters gladly shared their treasure is evident. "...it is a great pleasure for me," says Sister Madeleine, "to be able to provide you with this information, for I remember her so vividly."**

Mother Louise of Jesus here paints for us a word portrait of Mother Veronica, as she appeared to those who knew her :

* Carmel of Pau, *Souvenirs and Recollections*.
 ** *Ibid.*

*The impression of Sister Marie Thérèse (Mother Veronica) is that of a select soul, endowed with moral and intellectual qualities of the highest order, profound piety, rare delicacy of heart. Severe with herself, she had, from the time of the foundation of the Little Carmel at Bayonne, observed abstinence rigorously, despite her already enfeebled health. A Mother to her daughters, she inculcated in her little community that mutual charity, that family spirit, made up of simplicity and humility, which constitutes the happiness of religious life. Very handy at all kinds of work, she was a great help to the convent of Pau, particularly in the Sacristy.**

And Sister Marie of the Trinity adds :

*What appeared to be her principal quality was her benevolent disposition, which made her religious life so sweet, and which she practised always...As none of us is without faults, she was brusque when contradicted, and her English character, so different from ours, was quite remarkable. She was tender-hearted and was touched by the least attention given her. As she was not young when she joined our cloister, some of our practices, such as exact observances, a staid walk and other irksome details, escaped her.***

Having had a good English education, she did not like to hear others mispronounce English words. Thus, she often teased a lay sister who could not pronounce Miss Sutcliffe's name correctly.

Mother Veronica loved to talk about God and she

* *Ibid.*
 ** *Ibid.*

found a willing enough listener in her devoted infirmarian, Sister Marie of Jesus. But sometimes the young sister, being also in charge of the refectory, had to interrupt the conversation and hurry away, at which Mother Veronica would smilingly complain: "The Holy Virgin was never in a hurry." She always found joy in tending the vault in which was enclosed the heart of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and this she continued to do, with the help of her infirmarian, even when she was very old and feeble. For nineteen years she carried out this pleasant task.

Mother Veronica's cell was near the oratory, a few yards from the Blessed Sacrament, a privilege, indeed, for one who was so deeply devoted to Jesus in the Eucharist. She loved to be present at Mass and to receive Communion, and God permitted her this joy till her very last day on earth. One day, as Sister Marie of the Nativity, the English postulant, was passing her room, she called out to her and asked for the bottle of holy water. Drinking a few drops, she returned the bottle, leaving the postulant in admiration at her faith. "Just like our Mother St. Teresa," she comments, "she had devotion to holy water."* She also had a great love and veneration for the Blessed Virgin. Everyday, she would arrange flowers in the hermitage dedicated to Mary. And, at recreation, she loved to speak, like most Protestant converts, about the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady. Her gratitude to God for the grace of her conversion was immense. During her last days, she would keep asking the sisters to help her to thank God for this great favour.

* *Ibid.*

According to Sister Madeleine, Mother Veronica lived a very self-effacing life in the community, adhering to all the obligations of the Carmelite way of life, and at times getting lost in contemplation brought on by her remembrances of the past. She often used to say to the young sisters, "I cannot say that I have faith, for, in order to have faith, one must believe without *seeing*, and in my life I have come in such close contact with things supernatural, that for me it is *seeing* rather than *believing*". Being an energetic soul, eager for sacrifice, she only lived with the desire of always doing something more to prove her gratitude to the Lord who had withdrawn her from heresy. She was "pre-eminently a vibrant soul, who constantly pulsed with thanksgiving".*

To speak of the Little Carmel, to hear news of her dear children and the good work they were doing in India, made her very happy. The "best part of her heart" always remained with her children in the Missions, and at recreation she loved to relate what concerned them. When she heard that a second house had been opened in Mangalore, she was overjoyed, and prayed incessantly for the new postulants who had joined the community. "She prayed to God for all of you," Sister Madeleine asserts, and adds :

*It was her charity, her goodness, her kindness that inspired her to help you save the many little souls that would come to you. And with us, it was the humility, indifference, the obedience and fraternal love with which she accepted all the hardships of the religious life.***

* *Ibid.*
** *Ibid.*

A few days before her death, she said to Sister Marie of the Trinity : "If I had a few more years left, I would ask Rome for an indult and end my days with my dear daughters in India." And the Cloistered Carmelite's comment is : "This is truly a testament of her affection for you."** To which Sister Madeleine adds :

...it can truly be said that Mother Veronica is a beautiful figure, a figure of one who has suffered much to arrive at the Catholic Faith, suffered much to join the religious life and suffered still more in the foundation of the Third Order...

*She loved very intensely the 'Work' God had confided to her. He alone could measure the sacrifice she had made in relinquishing through obedience all practical pre-occupation with this 'Work', but in the depths of her heart and in her prayers she never abandoned it, and it is certainly she who has drawn down from Heaven the graces that have made the Apostolic Carmel flourish so well. She has sown in tears and reaped in joy, being always the Mother of her numerous children.***

In Mother Veronica's last letters we find two personal subjects featuring prominently – her falling health and her longing for heaven. "Since almost the first day of Lent," she says

I have been suffering from lumbago and sciatica with a bad cold, and I have spent the 40 days almost all the time on our straw mattress, for I could hardly walk, and even to sit, I did it with difficulty and often nearly doubled into two.

* Ibid.
** Ibid.

But, far from staying on the physical plane, it serves only to make her think of heaven. "God wishes," she continues, "that our lamps be trimmed and that we be ready when we hear the call : 'Behold the Bridegroom has come. Go before Him'."**

Writing to Mother des Anges, she is concerned that she (Mother des Anges) always has a little low fever – information she has received from a sister of the community. "...poor, dear child," she exclaims, "it is that you may look on high towards the Fatherland. That is what I always do, for this poor world is so sad from all sides, and besides all things pass away...You tell me," she continues, a little further on,

that your holy bishop, Monsignor Cavadini, will come to Rome this year...He will see the new Pope Pius X, who is a saint and whom he knows already.

*As for myself, I shall be happy to speak to him, but at the confessional of the sacristy, for I can no longer descend to the parlour – my legs carry me with difficulty. Now that it is cold, my little infirmarian makes me a small fire in the infirmary and I find myself there in a corner like a poor old woman. I eat very little and it is better for me.***

At this time, Mother Veronica was eighty years old. She still had three more years to live. Sister Madeleine, of the Carmel of Pau, tells us that she spent the last years of her life almost entirely incapacitated, in her cell, confided to the care of her devoted infirmarian.*** But we note in the letters to Father Lazare, labelled by

* Letters, 17 April, 1904.
** Ibid., 8 Jan., 1904.
*** Carmel of Pau, op. cit.

him, "The last letters of Mother Marie Thérèse Verónica", that as her health goes progressively downhill, her longing for her eternal home grows proportionately deeper and more ardent. "I cannot write any more today," she says, "I feel extremely feeble. The doctor came and gave me some caffeine – to strengthen me, he said."* In a later letter, we see that this physical condition has considerably deteriorated: "I would very much like to forget my poor 'corpaccio', for latterly it has become very heavy for me. I can hardly drag it". But she only sighs, "How many times have I not said '*heu mihi quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! – quomodo veniam et apparebo ante faciem Domini!*'** Only, I must see you before I go."***

A month before her death, she seems to be bidding farewell to Mother des Anges and her sisters:

I have become so hard of hearing that I could not hear the preacher (a Redemptorist had preached the retreat), which is a great privation for me. At my age it is not astonishing.

As for my health, it is not bad, but I am very feeble. I await the moment of deliverance. It will not be long before I go to see Jesus in heaven.

*My love to all the dear sisters...to all those who pray for me, their old mother. I shall meet them in heaven without anyone missing.*****

"As for my health, it is not bad, but I am very feeble."

* Letters, May 4th, 1906 (probably).

** 'How long must I tarry! When can I enter and see the face of God!'

*** Letters, n.d. (probably just before Nov., 1906).

**** *Ibid.*, 14 Oct., 1906.

Thus does Mother Veronica herself, a month before her death, corroborate what the sisters of her community tell us – that, in the closing years of her life, she was ailing rather than ill. When she was well enough, she would be brought for recreation, where she would join in the talk very pleasantly. But she had the consolation, as we have seen, of being present at Holy Mass every day till the end.

From 1905 onwards, weakened by old age, she was no longer able to join the community exercises. She suffered from lumbago and, being very bent, could not do any work. Sister Marie of Jesus, who was given charge of her as infirmarian, attended on her very lovingly. She accompanied her to the chapel for Mass every morning and led her back afterwards. Mother Veronica's place in the choir was next to the prioress.

In the autumn of 1906, it became apparent to all that she had become much weaker. So they suggested to her that she should receive Extreme Unction. She joyfully welcomed the prospect and set about preparing very fervently for the sacrament, by reading carefully beforehand all the prayers and liturgical rites. She did not wish to receive the last blessings of Holy Mother Church, as she fondly said, in an unconscious state. She received the sacrament one October afternoon "standing all the time." And, what was still more remarkable, after the ceremony, when the bell rang for community prayer, she went to the chapel leaning on her infirmarian, "to be present for the salutation of the Blessed Sacrament and to pour into the heart of her Divine Spouse, all the joyful ardour of her soul."*

* Carmel of Pau, *op. cit.*

Filled with her customary enthusiasm, which age had not diminished, she referred to her death as to an approaching feast, and after having received Extreme Unction, she repeated to each sister, "Do you know, I have received the graces of the Last Sacraments?" Thus do the sisters of Pau describe Mother Veronica's dispositions just before her death, and their Apostolic Carmel visitors add, by way of comment:

*she expressed her gratitude to God in accents which only those who heard her could repeat to us. They have tender memories of this as well as of the charming smile with which she said that she felt plunged in a sea of thanksgiving for all the benefits received from God - the grace of conversion and more than sixty years of religious life.**

In November, Mother Veronica fell ill with congestion of the lungs. She could take no nourishment, except milk and clear soup. But, a few days before her death, the doctor declared that she was cured of it. There was a tiny wound on her hand, but that was insignificant. However, from the eve of her death, she could not speak, due to suffocation caused by her tongue having turned over and become heavy, so that she was forced to keep her mouth open. But she had no illness as such and, true to the prophecy of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, she was to die only of old age.

Holy Communion had been taken to her every day, as mentioned above, till the eve of her death. When the last Communion was brought, she seemed ex-

* *Ibid.* Actually her religious life began in 1851 and ended in 1906.

tremely weak and drowsy, and the sisters feared that she was not sufficiently conscious to receive communion. When the priest arrived at the infirmary, Sister Marie of Jesus said to her, "My dear Sister Marie Thérèse, Jesus has come," and again, when the priest was near her bed, "Jesus is here, do you want to receive Him?" She replied very clearly, "Yes." All were reassured and Holy Communion was administered to her.

On 16 November, 1906, when the community were at Matins, Mother Veronica breathed her last, surrounded by the prioress, the infirmarian and two or three lay sisters. It was 9.45 p.m. Exactly when the *Te Deum* was intoned in the choir at the Commemoration of the Saints of Carmel, the clock struck and Mother Veronica fell asleep in the Lord. She was eighty-three.

Mother Veronica's life had been a paean of thanksgiving, alike in joy and in pain, and now, as was fitting, God paid her his last loving attention by having her led to her espousals with him to the jubilant tones of that hymn of praise, *par excellence*, the *Te Deum* - while the invitation was yet resounding in her ears :

*Arise, make haste, the time has come! The ripened
stalk
From Life's field with the weight of golden grain is
bent,
But see! The marriage splendour burst upon thy
sight,
Now closing fast on transient earth. Behold, He
comes,
Jesus, thy Spouse, for whom alone thy life was
spent;*

*To whom life's cup of suffering to its dregs you
quaffed;
To whom all lesser loves, and e'en thy very own,
Thy best-loved children, thou didst gladly yield –
And now He brings them back to thee, thine own
forevermore.**

These lines, translated from the French, are from a long poem by Sister Aimée of Jesus, which she sent to Mother Elias soon after Mother Veronica's death. "I send you these lines", she writes,

*which sprang from my heart while I was praying beside her during her painful agony. The verses are bad, the rules of poetry disregarded. But still, I think these thoughts will find an echo in your heart...It is I who read your last letter to her; but when it came to your request to visit her, she replied by that well-known gesture of the head, which was a negative.***

Mother Veronica's body was not exposed in the chapel choir, but in the infirmary, as the chapel had been closed down on account of the persecution of religious orders by the Government. She lies buried in the common tomb of the Carmelites in the old cemetery of the town. With a stroke of delightfully humorous irony, God arranged that this tomb should be in the middle of a plot acquired by the Jesuits of Pau - so that, for all eternity, Mother Veronica lies surrounded, not by Carmelites, but by Jesuits !

After Mother Veronica's death, relates Sister Madeleine, something happened which was very

* *Ibid.*
** *Ibid.*

strange but quite certain, for which, however, the sisters never tried to find an explanation:

...that same evening (of Mother Veronica's death), at the same hour, my sister who did not know Mother Veronica, nor that she was ill, saw her. Here are the details of the incident. My mother and sister had spent the evening together. It was late. My mother, who could not keep awake, suggested that it was time to retire for the night. My sister replied, 'I have a little work to do. I will come in a few minutes'. She took a candle and went out of the room. As she delayed to return, my mother said to her, 'What are you doing? Come on!' 'I'm coming,' she replied, and very calmly related, 'I have just seen a Carmelite. Something seems to have happened at Pau. Above the candle flame, a halo of light was formed and, as if in a medallion, I saw a Carmelite who looked at me smiling.'

*When she related the incident to us, we asked her to describe the religious whom she had seen. It coincided perfectly with the physiognomy, the attitude, the manner of holding the head of Mother Veronica.**

What are we to make of such a narration? On the one hand, it may justifiably be attributed to the imagination of the lady who claimed to have seen the vision, or to that of those who recognised Mother Veronica in the description they were given. But even if, on the other hand, it were, in fact, something more real, a truly mystical experience, it would not surprise us, accus-

* *Ibid.*

tomed as we are to the many and varied mystical phenomena found scattered among these pages of Mother Veronica's *Life*.

Mother Veronica was dead. She had fulfilled her destiny. A strange destiny indeed – in more ways than one – a life full of paradoxes, of the unexpected, a continual turning of corners. With a zealous Protestant pastor for a father and a bigoted Protestant mother, she becomes a Catholic and a nun. Once having taken the veil, we would expect her to settle down and be heard of no more. That is what usually happened to a nun in the nineteenth century. To all intents and purposes, she was lost to the world. Not so Mother Veronica. Although she migrates from an active congregation to the Cloistered Carmel, she is not left in peace. In fact, paradoxically, the more contemplative she becomes, the more active she is forced to be. After roaming the towns of France, she begins her congregation at Bayonne. The straight road from here would take her to India to be with her daughters till the end of her life. But for Mother Veronica there is no straight road. There is only the turning of corners – a continual detachment. Strange to say, the foundress will never live in her congregation. She will indeed guide it and even fight its battles for a short while, but from afar, before being forced to let go completely. She finds herself back in the Carmel of Pau, but very soon she is again on the move, with Bethlehem, dark and painful, round the corner. Returning from the Holy Land, she is now for the third time in her beloved Carmel of Pau. Mercifully, it is really Home at last. No more corners to turn. The remainder of the road will lead her straight into the arms of God. And while she awaits the Bridegroom she will taste only sweetness. As much as she had suffered before, she will now be

overwhelmed with consolations. A strange destiny indeed!

And what is Mary, the little unlettered Arab girl, doing in the life of this scholarly English nun? What indeed! Yet, strange as it may seem, their lives will be closely intertwined.

It is as if God, the Master Craftsman, before clothing his characters with flesh and blood, had conceived a play with a highly contrived plot and written the script, complete to the last detail; as if, true to the rules of dramatic art, he had introduced his heroine, developed her character through initial interaction with the supporting cast, taken her through a series of crises to the climax, and finally brought her to a happy and peaceful *dénouement*. Truth as strange as fiction! – for seldom does a real human life fall so neatly and perceptibly into place in art.

God had indeed planned for Mother Veronica a strange destiny. And she had played her part. Through obedience and humility, she had been completely malleable in his hands and thus permitted him to work out this destiny – for her own benefit as well as for that of her daughters, of the Church and of the world.

LIST OF IMPORTANT DATES

- 1823 Birth of Sophie Leeves at Constantinople (1 Oct.).
- 1827 Birth of Bishop Marie Ephrem (Lucien Garrlon) (29 Nov.).
- 1828 Birth of Father Lazare (Jean Bayle)
- 1835 Birth of Bishop Nicolas Pagani (9 Aug.)
- 1840 Sophie receives an extraordinary grace. She hears the words, 'Peace I leave you... my peace I give you' (Easter Tuesday).
- 1845 Death of Henry Daniel Leeves at Beyrouth (Beirut) (8 May).
- 1846 Birth of Mary, the Arab (Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified) (5 Jan.).
- 1847 Death of Emily Leeves, Mother Veronica's sister (7 Dec.).
- 1850 Sophie and Mary Ann receive Baptism and Holy Communion at the Church of the Gésu, Malta (2 Feb.).
- 1851 Sophie is received as a postulant in the Congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Syros, Greece (19 Mar.).
Sophie, aged 27, receives the habit and the name, Sister Mary Veronica (14 Sept.).
- 1854 Death of Henry, Mother Veronica's brother (28 Aug.).
- 1859 Father Marie Ephrem leaves Europe for Calicut to work as a Missionary (18 Sept.).

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- Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition arrive from France to take charge of the girls' school at Mangalore - in "The Bungalow", now St. Ann's Convent (13 Mar.).
- Sister Veronica is sent as superior to Piraeus (probably Sept.).
- 1860 Sister Veronica is sent to Tremorel, a village in Brittany, France, to be in charge of a school. She also takes care of the poor and sick. She remains here only one year (30 Dec.).
- 1862 Sister Veronica and Sister Mary Joseph arrive in Mangalore (7 Mar.).
Sister Veronica receives "the ring" celebrating her mystical espousals with Jesus (11 April).
St. Joseph's Convent is opened at Calicut, with Mother Veronica as superior (27 April).
- 1863 Monsignor Howard visits Calicut and meets Mother Veronica, who has been hearing an interior voice, saying: 'I want you in Carmel'. She and Father Marie Ephrem envisage the founding of a Third Order of Carmel for the Missions (16 Mar.).
- 1864 Mother Veronica is transferred to Rangoon, Burma (June).
- 1866 Collapse of the school building of St. Joseph of the Apparition at Mangalore. The school is closed for 3 years (21 June).
- 1867 The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition leave Mangalore to open a house at Cannanore - St. Joseph's Convent (Feb.).
Bishop Michael Antony starts a foundation of Carmelite Tertiaries at Jeppu.
Mother Veronica is appointed novice mistress of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition at Marseilles. She meets the postulant, Mary the Arab, for the first time (April).

LIST OF IMPORTANT DATES

- Mother Veronica and Mary the Arab leave Marseilles for the Carmel of Pau, arriving at Pau the next day (14 June).
- Mother Veronica receives the Carmelite habit. Mary receives the postulant's dress and the name Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified (7 July).
- In a letter, Father Marie Ephrem asks Mother Veronica to draw up Constitutions for the Third Order she is to found (13 Aug.).
- Mother Veronica makes her Profession at the Carmel of Pau (15 Sept.).
- Mother Veronica sets out for Savoy in search of a place to make the foundation (15 Dec.).
- 1868 *Foundatton of the Apostolic Carmel at Bayonne, France (16 July).*
- The first Apostolic Carmel novice, Sister Mary Agnes of Jesus, receives the habit (15 Sept.).
- Father Marie Ephrem is consecrated bishop (8 Nov.).
- The name 'Apostolic Carmel' is used for the first time in a letter by Bishop Marie Ephrem, though the term was Mother Veronica's (12 Dec.). cf. *Letters, M.Ep. 22 April, 1872.*
- 1869 Marie Duchon (Sister Marie des Anges) and Teresa Devine (Sister Elias) receive the Apostolic Carmel habit (7 June).
- Bishop Marie Ephrem visits Bayonne and receives the vows of Sister Agnes of Jesus (22 Oct.).
- 1870 *First Constitutions completed by Mother Veronica, Regulations for the Nuns of the Third Order of St. Teresa.*
- Death of Father Dominic of St. Joseph, O.C.D. (12 July).
- The first 3 Apostolic Carmelites, Sisters Marie des Anges, Elias and Mary Joseph, leave for India with

A STRANGE DESTINY

- 6 Cloistered Carmelites, including Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified (21 Aug.).
- Sister Elias, one of the 6 Cloistered Carmelites, the Prioress designate of the Mangalore Carmel, dies at Calicut (6 Nov.).
- The establishment of the Apostolic Carmel at St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore (19 Nov.).*
- Bishop Michael Antony's sisters join the Apostolic Carmelites.
- The 3 surviving Cloistered Carmelites form one community with the Apostolic Carmelites.
- 1871 Mother Magdalen Lubis receives the Carmelite habit and St. Joseph's Convent, Cannanore, gets incorporated into the Apostolic Carmel (Aug.).
- Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified makes her Profession at St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore (21 Nov.).
- Sister Agnes submits her resignation. Sister Marie des Anges is nominated superior of St. Ann's Convent, Mangalore. (29 Dec).
- 1872 Sister Agnes leaves Mangalore for Calicut, Father Lazare is transferred to Mahé (28 Feb.).
- Sister Agnes returns to Bayonne (29 May).
- About this time Mother Veronica meets Madame Gil Moreno da Mora.
- The 3 Carmelite Tertiaries of Bishop Michael Antony, who were at Tellicherry, close down their house and join the Apostolic Carmel, Mangalore (19 Oct.).
- Mother Perillon receives the Carmelite habit and St. Joseph's Convent, Calicut, is incorporated into the Apostolic Carmel (2 Sept.).
- Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified returns to Pau with Sister Cecilia (5 Nov.).
- 1873 Bishop Marie Ephrem dies in Mangalore (10 April).

LIST OF IMPORTANT DATES

- The Apostolic Carmel at Bayonne is closed and Mother Veronica re-enters the Carmel of Pau as a novice (11 Oct.).
- 1874 Mother Veronica's Solemn Profession. She takes the name Sister Marie Thérèse of Jesus (21 Nov.).
Death of Mrs. Marina Leèves, Mother Veronica's mother, at Hastings, England (12 Dec.).
- 1875 An Apostolic Carmel foundation opened at Quilon (Mar.).
Ten religious of Pau, including Mother Veronica and Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, start out for the new foundation at Bethlehem (20 Aug.).
- 1876 Father Victor of St. Antony gives the Apostolic Carmel the *Rule of St. Augustine adapted to Carmel* (Oct.).
St. Ann's is to be the motherhouse and novitiate. Mother Marie des Anges is appointed superior over all the four houses of the mission.
- 1877 Sister Mary of St. Joseph dies at Cannanore, first death in the Apostolic Carmel (9 Mar.).
- 1878 Mother Marie des Anges is formally appointed Superior General of the Congregation, by Father Victor of St. Antony (14 Jan.).
First printed edition of *The Constitutions of the Third Order Regular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel* (19 Mar.).
Death of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified at the Carmel of Bethlehem (16 Aug.).
Mangalore and Malabar separated from Verapoly and handed over to the care of the Jesuits (29 Sept.).
Monsignor Paganì S.J., the new Vicar Apostolic and Superior of the Mission, arrives with 8 other Jesuits to take over the Mission (31 Dec.).

A STRANGE DESTINY

- 1879 Monsignor Paganì S.J., confirms the appointment of Mother Marie des Anges as Superior General for a term of 6 years (14 Jan.).
The convent of Quilon severs connection with the Apostolic Carmel (24 April).
Sister Magdalen Lubis leaves Cannanore for Alleppy (May).
Mother Veronica writes to Mother Marie des Anges after a break of 8 years (15 June).
Sister Elias goes to Quilon (Nov.).
St. Joseph's Convent, Cannanore, re-named "St. Teresa's" (Nov.).
- 1880 Sister Elias founds the Holy Angels' Convent at Trivandrum (10 Nov.).
- 1882 The Cloistered Carmelites leave St. Ann's for their newly built monastery at Kankanady, Mangalore (7 Mar.).
- 1887 Mother Veronica leaves the Holy Land for Pau (29 April).
Death of Mary Ann (Sister Ignatius), Mother Veronica's sister, Foundress of the Ursuline sisters of Tinos (19 Aug.).
Mother Veronica begins her *Autobiography* (6 Oct.).
- 1888 Mother Veronica resumes correspondence with the sisters of the Apostolic Carmel in Mangalore. She sends them the *Origin of the Foundation of the Apostolic Carmel* and letters of Father Dominic O.C.D. and Father Athanasius O.C.D.
- 1889 Mother Veronica completes her *Autobiography* (28 Mar.).
- 1890 Bishop Paganì visits Mother Veronica at the Carmel of Pau (Oct.).
- 1892 Mother Marie des Anges goes to France. She meets Mother Veronica at Pau (April).

LIST OF IMPORTANT DATES

- The Apostolic Carmel is granted affiliation and participation in all the privileges of the First Order of Carmel (5 Sept.).
- 1895 Death of Bishop Paganl (30 April).
Publication of *Carmel in India* (14 Sept.).
- 1900 A write-up on the Apostolic Carmel appears in the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, New York. It is presumed that it was written by Sister Aloysia, A.C. (May).
- 1905 Death of Mother Magdalen Lubis at Ernakulam (30 June).
- 1906 Death of Mother Veronica at the Carmel of Pau. Her last letter to Mother Marie des Anges is dated 14 Oct., 1906 (16 Nov.).
- 1907 Death of Father Lazare O.C.D. (4 Jan).

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A Strange Destin

It is as if God, the Master Craftsman, before clothing his characters with flesh and blood, had conceived a play with a highly contrived plot and written the script, complete to the last detail; as if, true to the rules of dramatic art, he had introduced his heroine, developed her character through initial interaction with the supporting cast, taken her through a series of crises to the climax, and finally brought her to a happy and peaceful *dénouement*. Truth as strange as fiction! - for seldom does a real human life fall so neatly and perceptibly into place in art.