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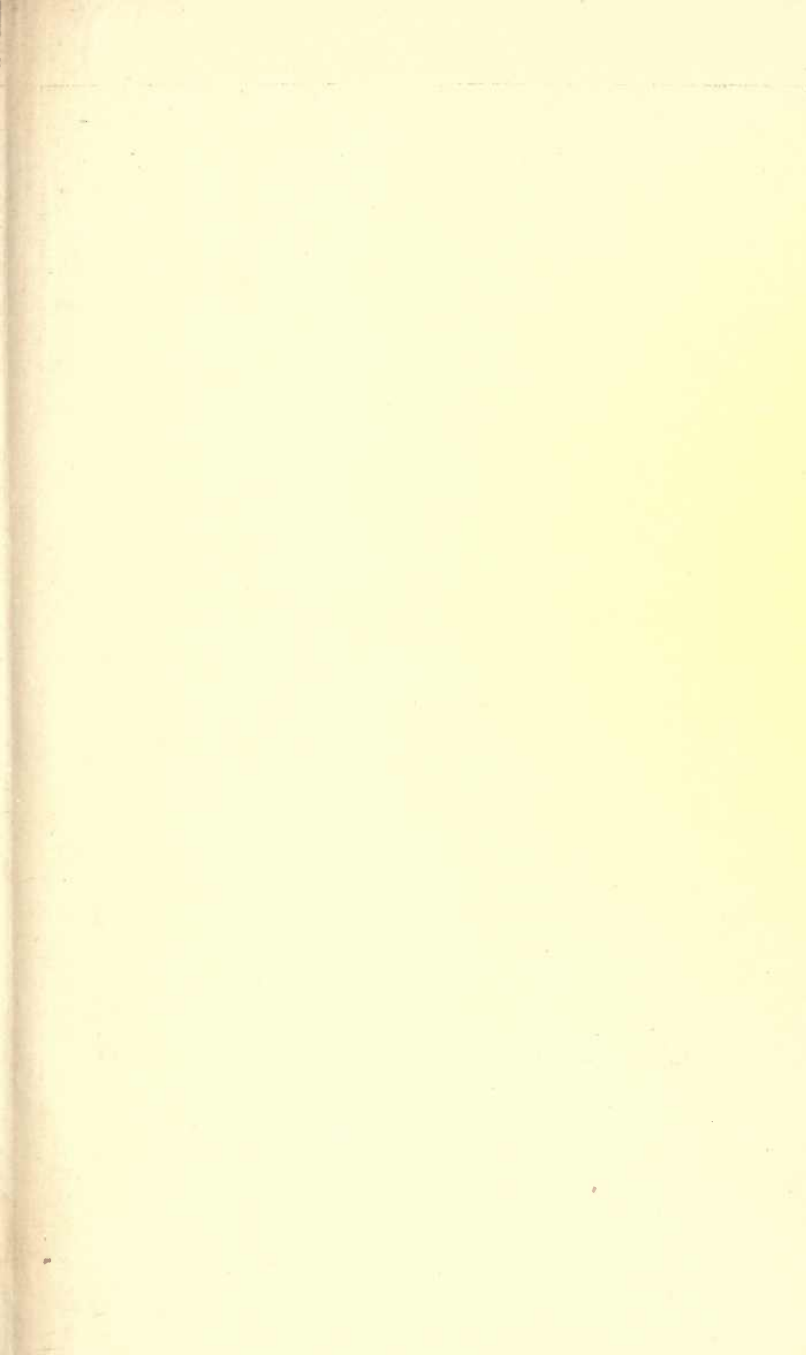
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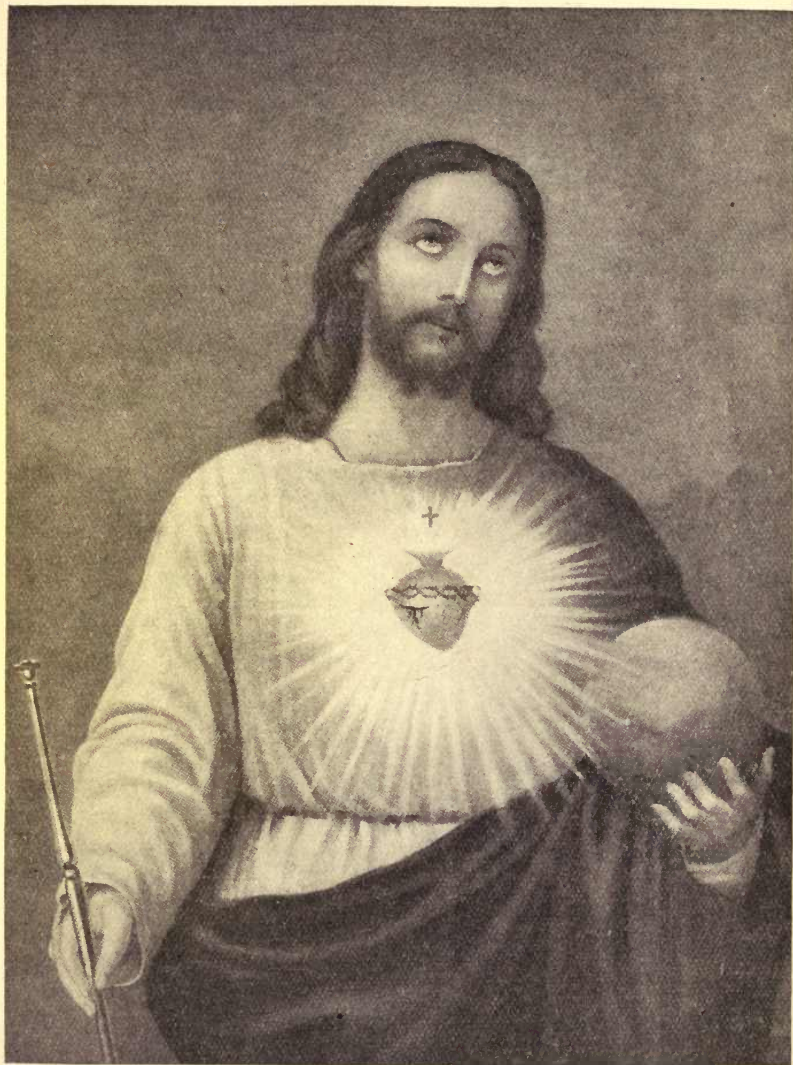
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LIFE OF
BLESSED MARGARET
MARY ALACOQUE

RELIGIOUS OF THE VISITATION
AT PARAY-LE-MONIAL
1647-1690

BY
SISTER MARY PHILIP
OF THE BAR CONVENT, YORK

PREFACE BY
THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF LEEDS



W. E. BLAKE & SON, LIMITED
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1919

TO THE
MOST SACRED HEART OF OUR
DIVINE LORD,
KING AND CENTRE OF ALL
HEARTS.

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“ONE cannot compare Saints, or declare that this one is holier than that—this would be ridiculous; but one can compare missions. Now Blessed Margaret Mary had an unique mission among the Saints—a mission which was to reach the whole world, the entire Hierarchy of the Church, all homes and all hearts to the end of time.

“Through her, God had made known His Heart to us. All the marvels of love which He still has in store for the world will only flow from this first gift, will only radiate with more or less light and heat from the fire of love that was opened to us at Paray, God not being able to give us more than His Heart. He may make It better known, by manifesting Its love and mercy in a more striking way; but—I repeat—this new effusion of love will only be a ray of the complete gift which He made known to us by Blessed Margaret Mary.”—*The Reverend Father Matthew Crawley-Boevy to the Religious of the Visitation at Lyons, 1917.*

PREFACE

MORE than two centuries and a quarter have passed since Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque gave her soul to God in the Convent of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial, where she had lived in the closest union with Jesus Christ, and had been privileged to receive from His lips the message of divine love, which she was to make known to the world, and the meaning of the devotion, by means of which the message was to be presented, and with which her name will be for ever associated.

It would seem as though the message has at last been fully understood and accepted, and that the desires of our Divine Lord as revealed to His servant are being fully realised; for the latest development of devotion to the Sacred Heart, namely, the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home by the consecration of the family, completes the work which she began, in response to the Command of Our Lord—a command she was the first to comply with on July 20th, 1685. It would seem, too, as if Our Lord wished to give a sign of His pleasure at the fulfilment of His wishes, for in the near future His Vicar on earth will number Blessed Margaret Mary among the Saints. The Decree of Canonisation is ready, and at the first opportune moment will be solemnly promulgated.

Under these circumstances, the time has been well chosen for the publication of her life, and doubtless it will be eagerly read by all admirers

PREFACE

of this great Servant of God, as well as by all who have made the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus one of their chief devotions. They will find in the following pages a wonderful revelation of one of God's ways of leading souls to knowledge and love; they will learn what are the dispositions that prepare for and merit the grace of Union with God; and they will realise more and more perfectly the extent of God's love for them, and by what means they can return love for love. It adds greatly to the interest that Blessed Margaret Mary is made to tell much of the story of her life in her own words, and we owe a debt of gratitude to the Superiors who commanded her to put down in writing an account of the many spiritual favours she received, and the nature of the communications that passed between our Divine Lord and herself. This she did with a humility and an obedience that are altogether convincing. We feel that she has hidden nothing from us from the day on which the work of divine preparation for her great apostolate was begun, and on through her years of trials and disappointments to the day of success, when she could pass from earth to heaven, knowing that her life's work was accomplished and her mission fulfilled.

It is with a desire to further the work of Blessed Margaret Mary, and increase devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that this Life has been written—a desire which from our heart we hope and pray may be fulfilled.

✠ JOSEPH ROBERT BISHOP OF LEEDS.

BISHOP'S HOUSE, LEEDS,
October 17th, 1918.

NOTE

THIS Life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, though in no sense exhaustive, will, it is hoped, be found complete.

Facts have been taken from her Autobiography and from the Life written by her contemporaries. Her own words have been quoted whenever this was possible. A few of the most characteristic of the hundred and forty letters which have been preserved are here given.

As for her other writings, Advice to Novices, Notes of Instructions, Practices for Various Feasts and Seasons, etc., the difficulty has been to select from such abundance. The chapter devoted to these Extracts may perhaps send readers to the large French Life, in two volumes, published by the Convent of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial, where the entire collection will be found.

It has been the writer's aim to bring out strongly the special desire Our Lord deigned to manifest to His servant—the extension of His Kingdom upon earth—a work for which she was to labour by making known to men His desire to be enthroned as King in their hearts. “I will reign,” He said to her, “in spite of all who oppose Me.” Stress has been laid on the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Noviceship at Paray, which was the first of the many Enthronements of that same Divine Heart all over the world to-day.

ST MARY'S CONVENT,
YORK, *July 22nd*, 1918.

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LIFE OF BLESSED MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY LIFE

(1647-1663)

THERE are countless English hearts to-day which turn yearningly to France—"La belle France" as she is so often called. It may be that a father, brother, husband, lover or friend has been there in deadly peril. Our thoughts and hearts have followed our loved one, and we like to picture to ourselves the scenes amongst which he lived and the people who surrounded him. We listen eagerly to all that we can hear about our beautiful sister-country, for the Great War has knit the French nation to our own in a way more solid and enduring than anything else could have done.

Yet as Catholics we can never forget that France has another claim upon our interest. For centuries she has been known as "La fille aînée de l'Eglise"—"The eldest daughter of the Church"—and no Revolution, no persecution even, of that same Church at her hands has ever been able to rob her of the title. God seems to love the French nation with a special tenderness! How often has He revealed Himself to one or other of the daughters of France! Think of Blessed Joan,

the Maid, who was raised up by Him to be the Deliverer of her country. Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, Catherine Labouré, and countless other French names come at once to our minds. In our own days every one is speaking of Sœur Thérèse de Lisieux, the young French Carmelite, who is working such wonders amongst us. Then we read of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Carmelite of Dijon, and of Sister Gertrude-Marie or Angers, to both of whom Our Lord seems to have revealed Himself with special love.

So it is now, so it has always been. Beautiful France is renowned not only for the loveliness that attracts the eye but still more for that beauty and nobility of soul which characterises so many of her children.

In June 1917, as the third year of the Great War was drawing to a close, it was agreed that all the Allied Nations should join in a public Consecration to the Sacred Heart. One of the desires of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV., seems to be to propagate more and more this devotion to the Divine Heart, and, as one of the means of doing so, he is hastening the day when, as Supreme Pontiff on earth, he can put his seal to the Cause of Blessed Margaret Mary, by proclaiming her canonization. One wonders, perhaps, why the Cause has been so long on hand. May it not be that God has reserved this final triumph for the humble Saint of Paray-le-Monial as a pledge of the peace which is dawning for France. Surely we may hope that now the days of the persecution of the Church are over for ever, for is she not rising cleansed and renewed by the baptism of blood through which she has lately passed. In an Allocution of 6th February 1918, our Holy Father says: "It seems to Us that it would not be erroneous to

suppose that the full glorification of Margaret Mary was reserved by God for an age in which the mission entrusted to her to propagate the worship of the Sacred Heart appears more extended, better received in the world and more fruitful in its results."

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, it need hardly be said, is as old as the Church itself—nay, older—for we can date it back to that first Christmas Night when Our Lady held her Divine Child close in a long embrace and felt the Sacred Heart of her God beat against her own. Saint John leant his head upon that same Divine Heart at the Last Supper, and ever since countless men and women have poured out their love in devotion and praise to the Heart of their Master. Some names stand out prominently before us: St Bernard, St Gertrude, St Mechtilde, the Carthusian monk, Dom Lanspergius—all of whom have left us in burning words the proof of their love. It is related in the revelations of St Gertrude that she once asked St John the Evangelist why the devotion to the Sacred Heart was not publicly acknowledged in the Church at that time, and the reply was that God had reserved the manifestation of the devotion to the latter days of the Church, when the love of the people would have grown cold. It was not, therefore, until the second half of the seventeenth century that Our Lord revealed the treasures of His Heart to a humble daughter of the Visitation Convent at Paray-le-Monial.

Margaret Alacoque, for she took the name Mary only in Confirmation, and retained both when she entered religion, was the fifth child of Claude Alacoque and of Philiberte, *née* Lamyn, his wife. She was born on 22nd July 1647, the feast of St Mary Magdalen. Her biographers have differed

slightly over the place of her birth, but it seems that her father and mother were residing at the time at Terreau, a small village in the territory of Verosvres, in the Province of Burgundy.

The château of the place had its chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, and where little Margaret Alacoque first learnt to love her Eucharistic Lord.

Her father was a pious and honourable man. He held the position of legal adviser to the gentry of the neighbouring countryside and gained the esteem and confidence of all who knew him.

God very soon drew Margaret's heart to Himself. This He did, as He has so often done, by the means of the thoroughly Catholic education she received from her parents. She very early showed an extraordinary horror of sin; so much so that the least stain on her soul became a real torment to her, and it was sufficient to stop her instantly from committing any childish fault and prevent her from following her own will, to tell her that such or such a thing was not pleasing to God.

'The little girl had not reached the age of four when she felt herself continually urged to say these words, of which she understood neither the sense nor the merit:—"My God, I consecrate my purity to Thee, and I make a vow of perpetual chastity." One day while hearing Mass, kneeling on the bare ground as she was wont to do, she felt herself drawn to repeat her vow more expressly. "I understood neither what I had done, nor what the words 'chastity' and 'vow' meant," she said, but God, Who had inspired her with the words, poured such sweetness, strength and consolation into her soul at the time that the memory of it lasted all her life.

When Margaret was about four years old, her

godmother, Madame de Fautrières-Corcheval, who lived at the château at Corcheval, near Baubery, wished to have her godchild to live with her in order to watch over her virtue and teach her to pray. Margaret's parents were willing to entrust their child to so pious a guardian, and to her great delight Margaret went to live under the same roof with Our Blessed Lord, for there was a chapel at the château, and she could thus spend her time before the Blessed Sacrament without giving anxiety to those who had charge of her. There the little girl used to kneel, with joined hands and downcast eyes, thinking over the truths of religion which had been taught her and feeling her heart burn with love for Jesus Christ Whom she knew to be truly present.

Our Lady showed special affection for this young child who already had such love for her Son. Margaret turned to the Blessed Virgin in all her childish troubles. She tells us that three times in her early years Our Lady rescued her from great danger; what those dangers were we do not know, but we are told that she delighted in dwelling on the mysteries of her Mother's life, and in thinking over and trying to imitate her virtues. She made a vow to fast every Saturday in Our Lady's honour, and later the rosary became a daily devotion which she recited on her knees, sometimes kissing the ground at each Hail Mary.

During her stay at Corcheval, Margaret was entrusted to the care of two women, who were appointed to teach her the catechism and her prayers. One of these women was extremely kind to her, the other much more severe and exacting, yet Margaret turned instinctively from the former and attached herself to the latter; later it appeared that she was guided in this by her great purity of

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heart, for the woman who was kind did not lead a good life, while she who was so severe was a faithful Catholic.

Margaret spent four happy years with her god-mother, but Madame de Corcheval died in 1655, and the little girl, then eight years old, was sent to her parents who were at that time living at Lauthecourt. Very shortly afterwards Monsieur Alacoque died, leaving his family in straitened circumstances. His sorrow-stricken widow was too much occupied with money affairs to be able to devote herself as much as she wished to the education of her children, so she placed her daughter at Charolles with the Urbanist nuns, who were not long in discovering what a treasure had been entrusted to their care. Margaret was soon allowed to make her First Communion at the then early age of nine years. From that day she was so filled with love of her Lord that all her thoughts were for Him. In speaking of that time she says :—
“After my First Communion Our Lord shed so much bitterness over all my little pleasures that I enjoyed none of them, although I eagerly sought them. As soon as I tried to amuse myself with my companions, I felt something which drew me away from them and which gave me no peace until I had followed the attraction ; then I felt urged to pray, but always either prostrate or kneeling on the bare ground, provided I was not seen, for it was a real torment to me to be discovered.”

It was in this convent that Margaret first felt the desire for religious life. She wished to do all that the nuns did, looking upon them as saints. She thought that if she joined them she would become as holy as they ; yet the life they led did not altogether appeal to her ; it was not sufficiently solitary and austere ; however, not knowing of

any other form of religious life, she supposed she would remain with them.

It is almost a relief for us to be told that in spite of her great fervour Margaret was certainly not without natural faults of character. She was of a cheerful, gay disposition, but too fond of pleasure. Sometimes, in spite of her love for prayer and solitude, she allowed herself some innocent amusement with her companions. But God wished to detach her from this love of pleasure, which, unchecked, might have led her astray ; He sent her a very serious illness which for four years held her on a bed of pain ; thus He made her bear some portion of the sorrows of His Passion. Her illness was a kind of rheumatism, complicated by paralysis ; she could neither walk, sleep, nor eat, and she became so emaciated that her bones pierced the skin. After two years, her mother, hoping that a change of air would prove beneficial to her, removed her from the convent.

At Lauthecourt, Madame Alacoque lavished all the care possible upon her daughter, but for two years longer there was no improvement ; the doctor could do nothing and Margaret continued to suffer. But God had His own designs upon her soul. He inspired her with the thought of dedicating herself by vow to Our Lady, and of promising that if she were cured, she would one day consecrate herself absolutely to her service. In a few days she was entirely restored to health, and from that time Our Lady watched over her with a new and special care. In the Life which Margaret wrote later on, in obedience to her confessor, she says :—
“ From this time the Blessed Virgin made herself mistress of my heart, and looking upon me as her own, she governed me as being dedicated to her. She taught me to do the Will of God ; she re-

proved me for my faults ; and one day when I had happened to say the rosary in a sitting posture she presented herself before me, and gave me this reprimand which has never been effaced from my memory, though I was at that time very young : ‘ My child, I am astonished that you serve me so negligently.’” From this time forward Margaret’s love for Our Lady continually increased, and this good Mother often consoled her child with a sense of her presence which did not leave her even when the hour for prayer was passed.

Prayer was, indeed, the great joy and consolation of her life at this time, and Our Lord often let her feel the sweetness of His love. She regularly gave two hours a day to mental prayer, rising before daybreak and remaining up at night to secure the time without inconveniencing in any way those with whom she lived. She did not dare to communicate very often, but felt a holy envy of those who did so, and to make up for this deprivation as far as she could, she tells us that she used to kneel as close to the altar as possible in order to “consume myself by love in His presence, as the wax which I saw burning upon the altar.”

To prayer Margaret joined much penance and mortification. She usually slept upon the bare ground, watching far into the night and scourging herself with a discipline which she had made for herself of chains. Whatever care she took to conceal all these austerities the servant soon discovered them, and her mother, fearing for her health, made her sleep in her own room. This was a greater mortification to Margaret than any austerity, but she sacrificed her own will at once and obeyed her mother. And God soon rewarded her, as He is wont to reward those whom He specially loves, by sending her new sufferings.

CHAPTER II

LIFE IN THE WORLD

(1663-668)

MARGARET was sixteen years of age when she again fell ill. This time she suffered from a violent pain in her side and from ulcers on her legs, which became so bad that it was impossible for her to conceal her sufferings; she made them an excuse for asking to be again allowed to sleep alone, her mother consented, and Margaret at once began her watchings and other penances. It was no wonder her ailments increased. Her mother, really anxious, begged her to take care of herself, but Margaret gently reassured her: "God has Himself sent me this little suffering, Mother," she said, "and He will remove it in His own good time. Besides," she added humbly, "He saw that I should not make good use of my trial, so He has not allowed the pain to be as great as you would suppose from appearances. If I really suffered much I should be weak enough to show it."

It was not likely that such words would reassure a mother's love, and Madame Alacoque had recourse to several doctors, who prescribed remedies which had no good results whatever, though Margaret submitted to all with the greatest docility. "Do you not see," she said to her mother, "the utter uselessness of these human remedies? I have done all you wished, but you remember what I told you, God will cure me Himself, and that,

before another month is over, because I have not profited by it. To console you, I will join my prayers to yours and we will obtain a cure which will serve principally to make you happy." So the mother and daughter made a novena together. Before the nine days were completed the ulcers entirely disappeared, leaving no trace, and the pain in her side was cured. Madame Alacoque was full of joy and gratitude, and together she and Margaret thanked our Lord for His favours. But knowing her daughter, the poor mother begged her not to injure her new-found health by austerities, so that she might be spared to help and support her in her old age. "In God's name," she begged, "I ask you to grant me this satisfaction." "Do not be uneasy, Mother," replied Margaret, "God will give me sufficient strength to serve you." And from this time until she entered religion, some eight years later, her health was perfect, though she did not in any way relax her austerities.

We come now to the one period in our Saint's life which was not as fervent as we should have been led to expect from her childhood's years. Not that Margaret ever went astray from God—to be brought back to Him in penitence and tears as so many of His Saints have been—there was nothing of this, but still the love of the world and of pleasure crept insensibly into her heart, and God who loved her so tenderly was kept waiting, as He often is, when He knocks patiently and persistently at the door of our hearts.

Little by little Margaret relaxed her pious practices; small infidelities led to greater ones; she did not shun as formerly the society of worldly persons, nor did she dislike the pleasures they offered her. Vanity crept into her heart and she was sensible to flattery. The affection be-

stowed on her by her mother and brothers only served to increase her self-love, and the liberty they allowed her was used to gratify her natural love of pleasure. Years later, when speaking of this period, she said : "I did not think then, my God, of that which Thou hast so well taught me since, that Thy Sacred Heart had brought me forth on Calvary in the midst of suffering and sorrows, and that therefore the life Thou hadst thus given me could not be sustained but by the cross, for which I was later to have such an ardent love."

It is true that in the eyes of her family Margaret appeared holy and devout, but God Who reads the heart found there vanity and dissipation, infidelity to His grace, and love of the world. One Carnival she went to a masked ball, a thing she never ceased to regret and to weep over to the end of her life. She herself attributes her imperfections to the fact that she seldom went to the Sacraments, for want of a confessor to whom she could have recourse to help her in the practice of virtue.

Meantime God continued to knock at the door of her heart and, in order to make her enter into herself, He sent her fresh trials. He deprived her of the liberty which had been the cause of her loss of fervour and permitted that she should become like a slave in her own house.

Madame Alacoque, at this time in a delicate state of health, was not able to attend to the management of her house and property. Some have thought that she entrusted her affairs merely to servants, but it is not likely that she and her daughter would have submitted to endure from such people the harsh treatment they received, when they could have stopped it by dismissing those in fault. The extreme reserve with which the Saint alluded to this time in the Memoir she

afterwards wrote, does not allow us to know for certain who the persons were who caused her so much suffering, but it is probable that they were related to her. The old family papers prove that the household at Lauthecourt at this period consisted of Madame Alacoque and Madame Lamyn, Margaret's grandmothers, of Mademoiselle Catherine Alacoque, her aunt, of her mother, her young brother Jacques, and herself. There were probably several married couples among the house-servants and farm hands, and these, subject only to elderly women, would easily be able to get the upper hand and, taking advantage of a certain ill-feeling shown towards Margaret and her mother by their relatives, push their ill-conduct beyond bounds, thus becoming a great source of suffering to the naturally sensitive soul of the young girl. She describes the position thus: "We no longer had any power in our own house and we dared do nothing without permission. It was a continual war. Everything was kept under lock and key, so that I could not even get ready to go to Mass without asking for my cloak and hood."

Margaret, however, saw in all this nothing but God's kindness in leading her back to Himself. She humbled herself under His chastising hand. "I began to feel my captivity, but I yielded to it entirely, and so humbled myself that I would do nothing, not even go out, without the consent of three persons. From that time all my consolation was to be before the Blessed Sacrament, but I was some distance from the church, and if one of the three persons gave consent for me to go, I was sure to meet with opposition from one of the others. Often when I wept they accused me of wanting to go to meet somebody, and said it was their duty to stop my hypocrisy in pretending that I desired to

go to Mass or to visit the Blessed Sacrament. I felt such a horror of anything of the sort that I would rather have consented to have my body torn in pieces, so I took refuge in some corner of the garden or stables, where throwing myself on my knees I poured forth my heart before God, imploring the intercession of Our Lady, in whom I placed entire confidence. Sometimes I remained the whole day without eating or drinking; indeed, this often happened. Occasionally the poor people of the village, touched with compassion, would bring me some milk or fruit in the evening. I returned to the house with fear and trembling as though I had been a criminal. I would rather have begged my bread than live in this way, for often I dared not take a piece of bread from the table. As soon as I re-entered the house the attack commenced worse than before. I was reproached with neglecting my household duties, and without giving me time to say a single word, they set me to work with the servants, after which I passed the night, as I had passed most of the day, in weeping at the foot of my crucifix." There Our Lord taught Margaret that He wished to be the absolute Master of her heart and to give her a share in His suffering life. "He showed Himself to my soul as my Master, in order to teach me how to act as He did in the midst of all He suffered for the love of me. From that time my soul was so penetrated with His presence that I always seemed to see Him either as crucified, crowned with thorns, or carrying His Cross, and this gave me so much compassion for His sufferings that all my trials became light, and I longed to suffer for Him and thus become more like to Him."

Never once did Margaret resent the ill-treatment she received; on the contrary, she was sorry when

those who ill-used her did not always carry out their threats, and she tried in every way to do them good and speak well of them. But she knew that in this, as in everything, she was indebted to her Lord. "He took such possession of my will," she writes, "that He would not permit me to form any complaint, murmur, or feeling of resentment against these persons, nor even would He allow me to be pitied, or meet with any sympathy in my sufferings. He showed me how meekly He had borne with His enemies, so that I was to excuse mine and lay all the blame on myself; adding truly that my sins deserved a much greater punishment."

During all this time of trial Margaret continually asked God to send her some one to guide her. Our Lord did not at once comply with her request, but consoled her instead by saying, "Am I not sufficient for thee? What dost thou fear? Can a child so loved perish in the arms of her Almighty Father?"

Just about this time Madame Alacoque fell ill and suffered severely from the petty persecution of her relatives. This was the greatest of trials for her daughter, who loved her mother with a deep and tender love. "The most cruel of my crosses," she said, "was not being able to alleviate my mother's sufferings. They were far harder to endure than my own. As everything was locked up, I was often obliged to go out to beg for eggs and such little things as I required for my sick mother, and, being naturally timid and sensitive, I suffered terribly from being reduced to this." Soon the worry and weakness told so much on Madame Alacoque that she was attacked by severe erysipelas in the face; her head was terribly swollen and inflammation and fever prostrated her. Her

life was evidently in danger, and yet Margaret was left entirely alone to do all the nursing, nor could she get any better advice than that of a village doctor, who declared the patient could not possibly recover except by a miracle. Margaret's faith obtained that miracle. On the Feast of the Circumcision, as she knelt at Mass, she begged Our Lord to be Himself Physician and Remedy to her mother. Before she had finished her prayer the abscess on the invalid's face broke and the wound was healed in a few days, leaving her entirely cured.

In 1665 a new sort of trial came. Margaret was now eighteen, and her relations and friends thought it time that she should settle in life. She had several desirable offers of marriage, for although she had only a small dowry, she was gifted with gentleness and piety, with a sweet temper and prudence in domestic affairs. Visitors, therefore, began to frequent the house and the whole aspect of things was changed, for Margaret was expected to help with their entertainment and to take part in all the usual amusements. This being quite in accordance with the pleasure-loving nature of the young girl was a real and dangerous temptation; but to this was added a greater still to her affectionate heart. Madame Alacoque, not sufficiently strong-minded to stand up for herself against those who ill-treated her, counted on being able to escape from persecution if her daughter married, by making her home with her. She did her best to persuade her daughter to yield, saying: "You see my suffering; I have no other hope of ever escaping from the circumstances in which I am placed. Will you refuse me this consolation? If you leave me I shall die of grief, and you will be the cause of it." Such language made a great

impression upon Margaret, who had very strong affections, and the devil added another temptation still more insidious. He made use of her piety and the humble estimation in which she held herself in order to entrap her by telling her that the religious state was so holy and perfect that it would be presumption in her to engage in it. He represented to her that this life demanded a virtue so exalted that she could never attain to it, and that in the cloister she would no longer have liberty to practise those austerities and works of charity to which she was accustomed. Then the tempter went a step further. The vow of chastity by which Margaret, when a child, had consecrated her virginity to God, now appeared to her as no true vow. Was she not too young to have really bound herself by such a promise? Surely at most all that could be required of her would be to ask a dispensation which could easily be obtained on the plea that she was necessary to her mother. Thus the tempter argued and Margaret, instead of being absolutely faithful to grace, dallied somewhat with the suggestions. She gave less time to prayer and more thought to her dress and personal appearance. The world pleased her, and she tried to please the world. She visited more and took more pleasure in the society of others. Not that in all this Margaret fell into any grave sin. Indeed we learn from those who knew her at the time that her exterior was always edifying; but interiorly she was not as faithful as she should have been to the Lord Who had loved her so tenderly and so manifestly. She struggled against grace. God wanted entire detachment from her, and He shed a certain bitterness and trouble on all her intercourse with the world. Then Margaret tried to give Him other things. She overwhelmed her

body with mortifications and penances. She encircled her waist with a knotted cord fastened so tightly that she could scarcely breathe without pain ; she wore small iron chains round her arms and disciplined herself to blood, besides inventing many other penances for herself ; but at the same time she gave herself up during the day to the pleasures of the world which she found so attractive. This was not what God wanted of His servant. He reproached her interiorly for her ingratitude, and severely reprimanded her for her cowardice. He showed her the sweetness of His love. He made her understand that it was not bodily corporal penance He desired, but rather the immolation of her heart with its affections. Margaret would weep and pray and discipline herself, but the very next day she would return to her amusements.

At length one evening as she was taking off her dress after some entertainment at which she had worn it with a certain vanity, Our Lord appeared to her in the state in which He was after His Scourging. His Sacred Body was bruised, torn and bleeding. He told her that it was her vanity which had reduced Him to this state, and that by her irresolution she was losing time, of which she would have to give a strict account at her death, and then He reproached her for her infidelity. Margaret was so impressed that she never afterwards lost the remembrance of that vision ; yet still she was not wholly conquered. Nothing could exceed the inward struggle of her soul at this time. Afterwards, when speaking of her unfaithfulness, she expressed astonishment that hell had not opened under her feet to bury her alive in punishment.

Her interior trouble was so great that though

she bore it in silence she began to pine away visibly. Her mother was alarmed, but Margaret did not say one word as to the cause of her grief. She had not even the relief of help from a confessor, for there was no priest near to whom she dared or could speak. She read the *Lives of the Saints*, but was disheartened at their generosity and self-sacrifice, and despaired of ever being able to imitate them. Sometimes, as many another has done before and since, she said to herself: "I will look for a life very easy to be imitated that I may conform myself to it." She looked, but she did not find. She wished to be holy, but did not wish to make the efforts the Saints had made; the Saints, she found, became holy only in doing violence to themselves and in sacrificing without reserve all that was most dear to them. At last the victory was won. During Holy Communion God worked a change in her heart and filled her with His own gift of peace. He made her see clearly that He deserved her love more than all earthly rivals, and reproached her for thinking of contracting an alliance with any one after having promised herself to Him for so many years. "Know," He said, "that if thou insultest Me by such a preference I will abandon thee for ever, but if thou remainest faithful to Me I will never quit thee, and I will Myself be thy Strength and thy Victory to triumph over thine enemies. I excuse thine ignorance because thou dost not yet know Me, but if thou wilt follow Me I will teach thee to know Me and I will manifest Myself to thee." These words brought calm to Margaret's soul, and she made a generous resolution of absolutely renouncing all to follow her religious vocation. "It seemed to me," she said, "as if heavy chains had been removed from me, or as if I had been restored to the light of day

after a long and dark night." All that she had most dreaded in religious life now appeared light to her in comparison with the danger she had escaped. Her distrust gave way to a loving confidence, and she gave herself unreservedly to Our Lord.

God gave Margaret many consolations in return for her submission. One day He showed her the beauty of poverty, chastity and obedience, and how the vows taken in religion conduce to true holiness. Another time He told her that He had borne with her so patiently because He intended to make her a "commingling of His mercy and His love." Again she says: "The Divine Spouse of my soul, as though He feared that I might yet escape Him, on account of my weakness, asked me to consent to His taking possession of and making Himself Master of my liberty. I gave my consent with all my heart. I renewed my vow of chastity, beginning now to understand its real nature, and I told Him that even though it should cost me a thousand lives I would never be anything but a religious."

Margaret made no secret of her intentions. She let her family and friends clearly understand that her final resolution had been taken. Even her mother dared no longer oppose her, though she still wept over it in secret. Those who frequented the house as suitors for her hand were immediately dismissed. Her brother, Chrysostom, still held out hopes of her marriage, however, and offered her a part of his fortune to increase her dowry; but to this and to all such appeals Margaret's heart, as she expressed it, had "become insensible as a rock."

CHAPTER III

VOCATION (1668-1671)

MARGARET now began to prepare herself as far as she could for the religious life she had made up her mind to embrace. She resolved especially to practise the virtues of charity and obedience.

The poor were her favourites. She distributed amongst them all the money left at her disposal, thus beginning to practise the virtue of poverty. She gathered round her the poorest children of the neighbourhood, and taught them to know God, and to say their prayers. Her brother asked her if she intended to turn "schoolmistress," while the other members of the household complained loudly at the "pack of children," and accused Margaret of taking what did not belong to her for them; an entirely false accusation, for she never gave away anything but what she had received from her mother.

As to the virtue of obedience, Margaret tells us why she strove so valiantly to practise it exactly, even towards those who had no real authority over her. "My Divine Master impressed in my soul so great a fear of doing my own will, and of following it in anything, that I thought whatever I did would only be agreeable to Him through obedience. This made me yearn to do all my actions through obedience and love, yet I knew not how to practise either."

Seeing Margaret had entirely made up her mind to enter religion, and that all further protests were useless, the family gradually became reconciled to what they could not prevent. But there was still question as to which particular Order she should join ; and in this again she found many difficulties and a good deal of opposition.

An uncle, who was her guardian, invited her to stay with him at Mâcon. She went, and while there met one of his daughters, a nun in the Ursuline Convent in that town. With more affection than discretion her cousin, seeing that Margaret wished to enter religion, did all in her power to persuade her to become an Ursuline. Every argument was urged, and she even begged her father to use his influence with his ward, and obtained from the Community the promise to receive her with less dowry than was customary. Margaret felt it difficult to resist such kindly-meant offers, but she had no interior attraction to the convent at Mâcon. She seemed to hear Our Lord saying to her : " It is not here I would have thee stay." So all the reply she gave to her cousin was : " If I entered your house it would be for the love of you ; I wish to go where I have neither relations nor acquaintances, that I may be a religious from no other motive than the love of God."

Still, Margaret did not know where God would have her go. Chrysostom was annoyed with her for attempting, as he thought, to enter with the Ursulines without his permission, but she had no thoughts of doing that, and at last a secret voice told her that it was the " Sisters of Holy Mary " of the Order of the Visitation that God had chosen for her. Margaret knew nothing of the Order except its name. " I was attracted by the sweet

name of 'Holy Mary,'” she tells us; and Saint Francis of Sales seems to have shown his future daughter the place she was to occupy in his religious family. “One day, as I was looking at a picture of the great Saint Francis of Sales, it seemed to me that he cast so tender and paternal a look upon me, addressing me at the same time as his daughter, that from that time forward I always looked upon him as my father.”

But Margaret did not dare tell any one of these thoughts, and her cousin and the Ursuline Community were so insistent in trying to force her to stay with them, that she could hardly have escaped if Our Lord Himself had not arranged matters for her. “They were on the point of opening the enclosure to me when I received news that my brother was very ill, and my mother almost at death’s door. This obliged me to leave at once in order to go to them, nor could any one prevent me, although I was ill myself, but indeed my ailment came rather from sorrow at being obliged, as I thought, to enter a convent to which I was not called by God, than from any other cause.”

So Margaret went home and found herself subjected to much the same kind of persecution as before, for they told her that it was evident her mother could not live without her, and that if she left her, she would be answerable for her death. This view was taken even by priests, and caused Margaret intense pain; “and the devil,” she says, “took advantage of my distress to make me believe that to leave my mother under such circumstances would cause me to lose my soul.”

Our Lord, on the other hand, urged her powerfully to carry out her resolution. He gave her a strong desire to conform herself to Him in His suffering life. On one occasion when kneeling

before her crucifix she expressed this desire, saying; "How happy should I be, my dear Lord, if Thou wouldst imprint in me the likeness of Thy sufferings." "That is what I mean to do," replied Our Lord, "provided thou dost not resist Me, and that on thy part thou dost what thou canst." Later on we shall see how fully this promise was kept. Margaret redoubled her penances in order to show her love for her Divine Spouse. "I took the discipline every day in Lent in honour of the Scourging. On the three last days of the Carnival I would gladly have cut myself in pieces to repair the outrages which sinners offered to the Divine Majesty. I fasted on these days, as far as I could, on bread and water, giving to the poor all that was provided for my own nourishment."

Far more painful to Margaret than any self-inflicted penance was the opposition she met with at home whenever she wished to receive Holy Communion. But this difficulty only inflamed her desire to enter a convent. On the eve of Communion she was so absorbed at the thought of the morrow's happiness that she could scarcely speak, and she tells us that after Communion she concealed herself as much as possible that she might learn in silence to love her Sovereign Lord. "He pressed me to return Him love for love, but I thought that whatever I could do, I should never be able to love Him if He did not teach me how to pray."

Margaret had reached the age of twenty-two years before she was confirmed, in 1669, by Monseigneur Jean de Meaupou, Bishop of Chalons-sur-Saône, who was making his visitation at Verosvres. She took the name of Mary in addition to her baptismal name, with the intention of binding herself more particularly to honour

Our Lady. The Holy Spirit coming to her with the fulness of His gifts just at this critical time increased her fervour and gave her new strength to suffer courageously.

Our Blessed Lord taught Margaret many lessons, and amongst others the excellence of obedience. She saw clearly that the best sacrifice we can give to God is that of our own will. Seeing this she became uneasy at the delight she found in prayer and penance. She feared that her austerities were less pleasing to God because she followed her own will in them, and she believed that she needed a guide to whom she could submit herself, and who would teach her how to pray. "Lord Jesus," she pleaded tenderly, "give me some one to guide me to Thee." This time Our Lord granted her prayer and sent her temporary help.

In 1670 a Jubilee was granted by Pope Clement X. on his accession to the Pontificate. A holy Franciscan came to Verosvres, and to him Margaret made known the state of her soul. She spent nearly a fortnight preparing her general confession. "It seemed to me," she wrote, "that I could never give enough time to it on account of my numberless sins. I was filled with such great sorrow for them that I not only shed abundance of tears, but I would gladly have published them before the whole world." In her simplicity, and thinking that in her blindness she could not form an adequate idea of her sins, she determined to accuse herself of nearly all those things she found mentioned in the detailed examination of conscience which she found in her prayer-book. "Perhaps I am guilty of them without knowing it," she thought humbly, "and even if I have not committed them, it is just that

I should have the shame of accusing myself of them to satisfy the justice of God for so many other sins which have escaped my notice." Such an accusation was not, of course, allowed by the confessor, who told her that the accusations of the penitent ought to be simple and sincere without exaggerating or diminishing anything. This was a new subject of humiliation for Margaret, who grieved deeply for her fault, thinking that she had displeased God, but Our Lord comforted her by assuring her that He forgave everything that was done without malice. This confession left Margaret's soul in peace. She told the confessor something of her manner of life, but not all, for "I thought," she says, "that it would be vanity to do so." In return he gave her much valuable advice; but he did more than this. Margaret told him of her desire to enter religion, and how her brother thwarted her. The Father hereupon spoke to Chrysostom so strongly that he approached his sister on the subject, and hearing that she would rather die than change her mind, he promised to allow her to carry out her desire. He went, therefore, to make arrangements about her dowry with the Ursuline Community, who still urged Margaret to enter at Mâcon, as indeed did the entire family. But Margaret was not alarmed; she had placed her cause in Our Lady's hands and had been consoled by her lovingly: "Fear nothing, thou shalt indeed be my daughter and I will always be thy good Mother." So Margaret spoke resolutely to Chrysostom: "I want to go to the nuns of Holy Mary, to a convent at some distance from here, where I have no acquaintances. I will be a religious for the love of God alone. I wish to quit the world entirely, and hide myself in some corner where

I may forget it and be forgotten by it for ever."

Up to this time she had never heard of Paray-le-Monial. Hearing it mentioned one day as being a place where there was a Convent of the Visitation, she immediately felt drawn towards it. "As soon as they named Paray to me," she says, "my heart bounded with joy and I gave my consent at once."

Accompanied by her brother, Margaret went to Paray to present herself to the Superior of the Monastery, who at that time was Mother Margaret Jerome Hersant. No sooner had they entered than Margaret interiorly heard the Divine Voice saying: "It is here that I would have you to be." Her heart was flooded with joy, and she told Chrysostom that he absolutely must come to a final agreement with the Superior, for she was determined never to go anywhere else.

Some of the nuns were surprised at seeing her so joyful, and thought she was acting with levity and dissipation, but the Superior, a prudent and virtuous woman, judged otherwise, and soon discovered that God had prepared a treasure for their house at Paray in the person of the postulant who begged for a place amongst them. Mother Hersant was as anxious to receive Margaret on trial as Margaret was to be admitted. When writing years afterwards of this time, she says: "I seemed to receive new life, so great was the happiness and peace which I felt." And she concludes thus: "As I write this, Our Lord often makes me this loving reproach: 'See, My daughter, if thou canst find a father filled with love for an only son, who has ever taken such care of him and given him such marks of affection as I have given to thee and am ready still to give thee. My love has never ceased to tend thy soul

and fashion it according to My Heart, waiting for thee with patience and gentleness without being repelled by all thy resistance. Remember then, that wert thou ever to forget the gratitude thou owest Me and fail to refer the glory of everything to Me, this inexhaustible source of all good would be cut off from thee.' ”

Margaret was obliged to return home to arrange her temporal affairs, but this was soon done, and she did not tarry long over her leave-takings. “At length,” she says, “the long-desired day came on which I could bid farewell to the world, and never had I felt such joy and strength. I felt almost insensible to friendship and also to the grief which my friends, and especially my mother, showed at my departure. I did not shed a tear when I left them. I felt as if I were a slave delivered from chains and prison, and about to enter the house of her Spouse to take possession of it, and to enjoy in full His presence, His riches and His love.”

But Satan made one last effort to delay the sacrifice he had so long tried to prevent. The struggle was sharp and severe, similar to that which Saint Teresa describes as having taken place in her own soul when she was entering the Carmelite Convent. Margaret mentions the trial in a few words. “I acknowledge that when the day came for my entering the Monastery, which was on a Saturday, I was assailed by such violent trouble that it seemed to me that my soul was on the point of being separated from my body. However, no sooner had I entered than my trouble ceased, and it was shown me how Our Lord had taken off from me the sackcloth of my captivity, and clothed me with the robe of gladness. I was transported with joy and exclaimed: “It is here that my God would have me be.”

CHAPTER IV

NOVICESHIP

(1671-1672)

MARGARET MARY entered the convent on 25th May 1671. The Community at Paray had been founded forty-five years previously, and numbered in all at this time thirty-nine members: thirty-three Choir Sisters, three Lay Sisters, and three Novices. The postulant was placed under Mother Anne Frances Thouvant, the Mistress of Novices, who was an exemplary religious and eminently fitted to guide souls to God. Saint Jane Frances de Chantal had been attracted by her virtues, and after forty-four years of religious profession Mother Thouvant had the privilege of being entrusted with the care of our Saint in her Noviceship.

From the outset Margaret Mary was wholly intent on giving herself up unreservedly to Our Lord. "I at once felt engraved on my soul," she says, "that this house of God was a holy place, and that all who dwelt in it were called to be saints; that the very name of 'Holy Mary' signified that I must become one at any price, and that to secure this I ought to abandon myself wholly to God and sacrifice myself completely to Him. This thought sweetened all that in the beginning I found hard."

Our Blessed Lord continued to favour His spouse with the same graces and supernatural

communications which He had before bestowed upon her, but with this difference: formerly He taught her directly what she was to do to please Him, for then she had no exterior help, but now, all the instructions she received from Him tended only to keep her in dependence and obedience, and to teach her to have no other rule of conduct than the will and orders of her Superiors. About this time Margaret was awakened on several mornings in succession by hearing different verses of the Psalms distinctly pronounced: "Thou hast loved justice and hated iniquity: therefore hath God anointed thee;" or, "Hearken, O daughter, and see and incline thine ear," etc.; or again, "Thou hast reformed thy path and thy way, O Jerusalem, house of Israel, the Lord shall guide thee in all thy ways and shall never abandon thee." She did not understand the words, but repeated them simply to her Mistress who, recognising the voice of God, explained to her their meaning and the fruit she was to derive from them.

We have seen what great love Margaret had for the virtue of obedience. She looked upon all that her Superior and Novice Mistress said as the Voice of God, and feared nothing so long as she could obey. One day she went humbly to Mother Thouvant to ask to be taught how to pray. The good religious, fearful, perhaps, of marring a work she had reason to think had been begun by the Divine Master Himself, replied: "Go and place yourself before Our Lord as a blank canvas before a painter." Margaret did not understand her. "I could have wished," she says naively, "that she had explained her injunction to me more fully, for I did not understand it, and I did not dare tell her so!" There was no need to tell her. Our Lord whispered all that was necessary, "Come,

and I will teach thee." The result she records herself. "No sooner did I kneel down to pray than my Sovereign Master showed me that my soul was the canvas on which He would paint all the features of His life which had been passed in love, privation, silence and sacrifice to the end; that He would impress the same on my soul after He had purified me from the stains which remained in me, whether from affection to earthly things or from love of myself and creatures towards which I was naturally much inclined. At the same time He stripped me of all, and having emptied my heart and left my soul as it were naked, He enkindled in it so ardent a desire of loving Him and of suffering for Him that He gave me no rest, pursuing me so closely that I had no time to think of anything but of how I might prove my love by crucifying myself; and His goodness to me has been so great that He has never failed to furnish me with the means of doing this."

Margaret laid open her heart with entire simplicity to her Superiors, and this, together with her fidelity in obeying them, was the most solid proof that she was not deluded by the devil or her own imagination in her spiritual life. On one occasion however, her desire for suffering led her to make up her mind to continue a penance for a longer time than that for which she had permission. St Francis of Sales reproved her severely for this fault. "What, my daughter," he said, "do you think to please God by passing the limits of obedience? Remember that obedience, and not austerities, is the foundation and support of the Congregation." These words remained deeply engraved in the heart of the postulant.

After three months' trial Margaret was admitted to receive the holy habit of religion on 25th August

1671. Her Clothing Day was one of intense joy to her, and she wrote of it later: "Our Lord manifested to me that this was the day of our spiritual betrothal; that this engagement gave Him new dominion over me and imposed upon me a double reason for loving Him with a love of preference. He gave me to understand that He would allow me to taste for a certain time all that was most delightful in the sweetness of His love. From then on His Divine caresses were so great that they often carried me, as it were, out of myself and almost made me incapable of exterior work, and this filled me with such confusion that I hardly dared to appear in public."

The fact was that Sister Margaret Mary's supernatural favours began to appear exteriorly, and were remarked by others. This brought upon her many a severe rebuke, for she was told that such things were quite contrary to the spirit of the Order, and that if she did not renounce these ways she could not be received for Profession. This plunged her into great desolation. She did all she could to withdraw from this way, but in vain; all her efforts were useless. Our Lord told her at this time that she must make a solitude in her heart, and that He would come and keep her company and teach her to love Him. This she endeavoured to do, giving up to prayer all the free time she had. Sometimes she was so penetrated with the presence of God that she was incapable of anything but loving and desiring to suffer for Him. At other times she found herself deprived of all consolation, and at this she complained lovingly to Our Lord, who told her that her uneasiness arose from the fact that she sought herself in the consolations she enjoyed, and that He still saw in her too much curiosity,

which fault would lead her astray if she did not correct it. Then Christ gently reproached her: "If I would have thee in My presence deaf, blind, and dumb, oughtest thou not to be content?"

The Mistress of Novices desired Sister Margaret Mary to follow the usual method of prayer taught in the noviciate. The novice did her best, but in spite of every effort she always returned to that taught her by her Divine Master. At this Mother Thouvant was alarmed, thinking that such ways were contrary to the spirit of the Order. She consulted the Superior, and together they decided to test Sister Margaret Mary by placing her as assistant to another Sister in one of the busiest offices of the house. This Sister had orders to make the novice work incessantly, especially during the hours of prayer. Sister Margaret Mary obeyed in all simplicity. "After this," she writes, "on my going to ask my Mistress for permission to resume my prayer she dismissed me harshly, telling me that I made my prayer in doing the work of the Noviceship. This I discharged without its being able to distract me from the sweet joy and consolation which my soul enjoyed and which increased every day. I was ordered, after hearing the points of the morning meditation, to go and sweep the portion of the house assigned to my care, until Prime; after which they told me to give an account of my prayer, or rather of that which my Sovereign Master made in me. In all this, as I had no other desire but to obey, I felt an extreme pleasure whatever I suffered." She used to express her joy in rhymes which, if not of great merit, at least have a charm of their own:

" Plus l'on contredit mon amour
Plus cet unique bien m'enflamme.
Que l'on m'afflige nuit et jour,

On ne peut l'ôter à mon âme.
Oui, plus je souffre de douleur,
Plus mon Dieu s'unit à mon cœur."

It was not only with regard to her prayer that Sister Margaret Mary had to suffer. She had trials in many other ways. The spirit of prayer is closely allied to the desire and practice of mortification. Our Lord continually urged her to ask for those humiliations, which, owing to her natural disposition, she felt most keenly. "Though I was refused those which I asked for," she says, "I received others which I did not expect, and which were so opposed to my own inclination that I was forced to say to my good Master, 'Do Thou, O Lord, come to my assistance, for Thou art the cause of my trouble.' He did so, and said to me, 'Acknowledge then that thou canst do nothing without me. My assistance shall never be wanting to thee provided that thou dost always keep thy own weakness and nothingness buried in My strength.'"

Sister Margaret Mary had, in common with all her family, a very strong repugnance to every kind of cheese, so much so that her brother, before signing the contract for her dowry, had laid down as a condition that she should never be obliged to eat it. This was promised, as the thing was in itself a matter of indifference. One day, either by accident or by design in order to try her virtue, some cheese was placed before her as before the others. The Novice Mistress desired her to eat it. Perhaps Our Lord wished to test the strength of her love for Him, for He allowed her to feel the full force of her natural antipathy. How strong this dislike was, we may judge from her words: "On the one hand, it seemed to me that the sacrifice of my life would have been a thousand

times easier than to do this, and had I not cherished my vocation more dearly than my life, I would rather have abandoned it than make up my mind to do what was required of me. On the other hand I felt that my Sovereign Lord wished for this sacrifice from me, for on it depended so many others. The struggle went on for three days. Sister Margaret Mary tried to do as she had been told, but again and again her courage failed, and in the greatest distress she said: "Would that I might rather lose my life than fail in obedience." At this Mother Thouvant sent her away, telling her that she was not worthy to practise such an act of virtue, and forbidding her now to do what she had been ordered. This was enough for Margaret, who exclaimed: "I must either conquer or die." She turned in her trouble to her Divine Spouse, and kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament she poured forth her heart to Him, begging Him to help her. "My God," she cried, "hast Thou forsaken me? Must there be any reserve in my sacrifice? Shall I not be consumed as an entire holocaust?" Thus she knelt and prayed for three or four hours. But Our Lord wished to test the fidelity of her love, and as He afterwards told her He took pleasure in seeing divine love combat in His unworthy slave against the repugnance of nature. Love triumphed. Sister Margaret Mary went to her Mistress, saying to herself: "There must be no reserve in love," and again obtained permission to perform her act of obedience. This time she accomplished it, but not without great sickness and pain, which recurred every time she took cheese. She persevered in taking it, however, for eight years, after which time her Superiors had compassion on her and forbade her to take it.

This sacrifice was followed by such overflowing spiritual sweetness and grace that she was often obliged to exclaim: "Stop, O my God, these torrents which overwhelm me, or give me greater strength to support them." Further on she writes: "I omit to mention here all the profusion of divine love with which I was visited, for it was so great that I could not express it."

We have seen how naturally affectionate Sister Margaret Mary was: this led to another struggle. Some months of her Noviceship were now passed, and still she had not been able to overcome a particular attachment to one of the Sisters. This was a great obstacle to the graces Our Lord wished to bestow on her. He reprov'd her for it several times, but she did not entirely correct her fault. One evening at prayer He reproach'd her, saying that He did not wish for a divided heart, and that if she did not withdraw from creatures, He would withdraw from her. She felt this reproach so keenly that she resolved to sever the attachment completely, and begged Our Lord to give her the power of loving Him alone. Our Divine Master showed her her weakness and taught her that she was to derive all her strength from His Sacred Heart, and, thus instructed, she was better able to lead others to go to that Divine Heart as the source of life and holiness.

On another occasion, when she felt great difficulty in submitting herself, Jesus showed her His Sacred Body covered with wounds, and reproach'd her with her ingratitude and cowardice. "What wouldst Thou have me do, O my God?" she said, "my will is stronger than myself!" Our Lord told her to enclose it in the wound of His sacred side, and that then she would no longer feel the difficulty. "Place it therein Thyself, O my

Saviour," she replied, "and bind it there so securely that it may never more escape from thence."

Towards the close of her Noviceship Our Lord began to prepare Sister Margaret Mary for the work for which He had destined her, that of making reparation for others. One day whilst making her thanksgiving after Holy Communion with the desire of doing something for God, Our Lord asked her interiorly if she would not be content to suffer all the pains which sinners deserved in order that He might be glorified in all those souls. "Upon this I offered Him," she says, "my soul and my whole being in sacrifice to do His Divine Will. Even if the pain were to last until the Day of Judgment I should be content, provided that He was glorified."

Shortly afterwards, when she was begging God one evening to tell her what means she had of satisfying her desire to love Him, He gave her to understand that she could give no better testimony of her love than by loving her neighbour for His sake. He taught her how to work for the salvation of sinners and for that of her Sisters, although she herself was the most miserable of all, and showed her how to forget her own interests for theirs as far as possible. As she did not understand Our Lord's meaning, He explained to her that what He desired was the re-establishment of charity in all hearts, for by failing in this virtue, people separated themselves from Him Who is Love. He made her see that not only persons living in the world, but religious also did not fear to wound charity, that divine virtue which springs directly from the Heart of God Himself. He added: "It is these members already half-corrupted and ready to be cut off which cause Me such pain. They would even now have received their punishment

had it not been for their devotion to My holy Mother, who appeases My offended justice, which can only be satisfied by the sacrifice of a victim." Sister Margaret Mary was deeply touched by these words. "I would gladly," she says, "have accepted every kind of torment, even the pains of Purgatory to the Last Day, in order to satisfy His goodness." "Make known to me, my God," she prayed, "make known to me, what it is that has offended Thy justice." Then Our Lord told her it was sins which were hidden from the eyes of creatures, but which could not be hidden from Him. He gave her to understand afterwards that He was pleased with the efforts Superiors took to re-establish charity in their Communities, and that this should not go unrewarded, but that if there were no amendment He would withdraw His mercy and leave His justice to act, because charity is the character and true spirit of the daughters of Saint Francis of Sales. It then seemed to her that her Holy Founder encouraged her to undertake this work of charity, by himself telling Our Lord that he would wish to do penance till the Day of Judgment for his daughters.

The time of Sister Margaret Mary's Noviceship was now drawing to a close. Deeper and deeper grew her spirit of prayer, mortification, and humility. She became absorbed in the presence of God without any sentiment or affection but that of loving Him and desiring to suffer for His sake. The aspirations she used show us a little of the dispositions of her soul. "It is enough for me, my Beloved, to be as Thou desirest." And again: "Oh, how beautiful is the Beloved of my soul! Why cannot I love Him?"

All her delight was in this union with God. "There was no time," she says, "more agreeable

to me than the night, because it was the time best suited for me to converse with my Beloved. I therefore begged my Angel to awaken me sometimes. On these occasions I felt my heart wholly filled with God, Whose converse was so sweet to me that I often passed three hours without any other sentiments than those of love, and without its being in my power to fall asleep again. I could not rest on my left side, being unable to breathe in that position. Once when I wished to turn to relieve the pain in my shoulder, Our Lord told me that whilst carrying His Cross He did not change it from side to side to obtain relief. By this I understood that He wished me to give up all seeking of comfort."

As the date for Sister Margaret Mary's Profession drew near, her Superiors redoubled her trials in order to put her to the proof. They tested her principally to see if her obedience was absolute and her humility real and constant. They told her again and plainly that they did not consider her fitted for their Order on account of the extraordinary ways in which she was led. This was very painful to her, and, as usual, she carried her trouble to Our Divine Lord, saying to Him tenderly: "My Lord, wilt Thou then be Thyself the cause of my being sent away?" He replied: "Tell thy Superior that she has nothing to fear in receiving thee; that I will answer for thee and be thy guarantee." The novice went quite simply to Mother de Saumaise, who had succeeded Mother Hersant as Superior of the Community, and told her of Our Lord's words. "Well then," was the answer, "ask Our Lord as a proof of His Will to make you useful to the Community by the exact observance of the Rule." Sister Margaret Mary repeated this to Our Lord, Who answered: "My child, I grant it to thee. I will make thee more useful to the Order than they

think, but in a way known only to Me. From henceforth I will adapt My graces to the spirit of the Rule, the will of thy Superiors and thy own weakness. Look with suspicion upon anything which draws thee from the exact observance of the Rule ; it is My Will that thou shouldst prefer it before everything else. Moreover, I am content that thou follow the will of thy Superiors rather than Mine when they forbid thee to do what I have ordered thee. Let them do what they like ; I shall know how to make My designs succeed even by the very means which seem opposed to them. I reserve to Myself the guidance of thy interior life, and especially of thy heart, in which I have established the reign of My pure love, and I will never resign it to another."

✓ The Superior and the Mistress of Novices were now satisfied, because the effects of this communication on Sister Margaret Mary left them in no doubt as to its truth. "Henceforth I devoted myself wholly to the practice of obedience, with great interior peace, whatever it cost me to obey." Her obedience, humility, and mortification won for her the esteem of all, and she was received for Profession by the unanimous vote of the Community. Esteem, however, was not at all to Sister Margaret Mary's taste. She knew herself too well for that. "The esteem which they manifested towards me," she writes, "and the regard in which I was held, were an insupportable martyrdom to me. I looked upon them as a just punishment for my sins, which appeared to me so great that every imaginable torment would have seemed light to me for the expiation of them and to make satisfaction to the divine justice."

As this chosen soul was continually united to God in prayer, those about her spared no occasion of humbling her, in order to test her thoroughly. In

the enclosure adjoining the convent kitchen garden they kept an ass and her foal, and the novices were told to see that the animals did not stray into the garden. Sister Margaret Mary considered this command as addressed to herself personally, and never failed to be at her post except when engaged in the choir. This occupation gave her plenty of exercise, for the animals were constantly straying away if she relaxed her attention for ever so short a time. The day for Sister Margaret Mary to begin her Profession retreat arrived, and still she thought, as she received no instructions to the contrary, that she ought not to relinquish her charge. Her Superiors, in admiration at her constant union with God, and wishing to see how far her obedience would go, said nothing. "I felt so happy," she says, "in this employment that I should not have cared if it had lasted all my life." There is an oral tradition in the convent at Paray that one day when she was going to break in upon her converse with Our Lord in order to look after the animals, He said to her: "Leave them alone, they will do no harm," and though they were seen by the Community loose among the vegetables, upon examination of the ground it was impossible to find any trace of their footsteps.

On the second day of her retreat, Sister Margaret Mary was released from her occupation and told by her Superiors to give an account in writing of the graces she had received while thus employed. This is what she wrote: "My Divine Master kept me company so faithfully, that though running about continually I never lost His presence. I received greater lights at this time than I had ever had before, particularly regarding His Sacred Passion and Death." (The cluster of filbert trees, the scene of Our Lord's apparition on this occasion

to Blessed Margaret Mary, is still shown to pilgrims in the convent garden at Paray-le-Monial). "It would take me too long to write all. I will only say that this has given me so great a love for the Cross that I cannot live a moment without suffering, suffering in silence, without consolation or relief and without compassion from anybody. Happy should I be if I could die with the God of my soul, crushed beneath the cross of insult, humiliation, sorrow, and contempt."

On All Souls' Day 1672, four days before her Profession, Sister Margaret Mary, who was occupied in thinking over all her infidelities to grace, offered herself to God as a holocaust of sorrow and expiation. Our Lord accepted her sacrifice and said to her: "Remember it is a crucified God thou wishest to espouse; for this reason thou must conform thyself to Him in bidding adieu to all the pleasures of life; from henceforth there will be none for thee which will not be overshadowed by my Cross." He then placed before her eyes His Holy Humanity attached to the Cross for the salvation of men, and He desired her to attach herself from that time to the Cross which He had prepared for her. "It will be so painful," He added, "that if thou wert not supported by My all-powerful arm, it would be impossible for thee not to give way."

The Servant of God passed the whole of her retreat in closest union with Our Divine Lord. Her prayer was continual. When she rose from her knees in the chapel after the usual time for prayer was over, she used to say: "My God, instead of thanksgiving for all the benefits Thou hast conferred upon me, instead of prayers, instead of offerings, instead of adoration and resolutions, I offer Thee Thy well-beloved Son, I offer Him to Thee as my Love and my All. Receive Him,

Eternal Father, to supply all my deficiencies and whatever Thou desirest of me, since I have nothing to offer Thee which is not unworthy of Thee, excepting Jesus my Saviour, of whom Thou givest me the possession and enjoyment."

Our Blessed Lord Himself dictated to her the resolution He wished her to make at this time. This is the account she gives of this favour. "After having received my Beloved in Holy Communion, He said to me, 'Behold the Wound in My Side wherein thou art to dwell now and for ever; it is there thou wilt be able to preserve the robe of innocence with which I have clothed thy soul, so that thou mayest live henceforth the life of the Man-God. Live as no longer living, in order that I may live perfectly in thee. Think of thy body and all that may happen to it no more than if it no longer existed. Act as if thou didst no longer act but I alone in thee. For this, all thy powers and thy senses must be buried in Me, that thou mayest be deaf, blind and dumb to all the things of earth. Thou must will as though thou hadst no longer any will of thine own, without desire, private judgment, affection or any wish save that of My good pleasure which must be all thy delight. Seek nothing out of Me if thou dost not wish to insult My power and to offend Me, since I wish to be everything to thee. Be ever ready to receive Me; I shall always be ready to give Myself to thee, because thou wilt often be delivered up to the fury of thine enemies; but fear nothing, I will surround thee with My power and be Myself the reward of thy victories. Be careful never to think of thyself but in Me. Let thy motto be "To love and to suffer blindly." One only heart, one only love, God alone.'"

When Sister Margaret Mary had written this,

she added in her own blood: "I, a poor miserable nothing, protest to my God that I will offer and sacrifice myself to all that He asks of me, offering my heart wholly to the accomplishment of His Will without any other desire than that of His greater glory and His pure love, to which I consecrate and give my whole being and every moment of my life. I belong for ever to my Beloved, as His slave, His handmaid, His creature, since He is everything to me and I am His unworthy spouse, Sister Margaret Mary, from henceforth dead to the world. All from God and nothing from myself. All in God and nothing in myself. All for God and nothing for myself."

Thus, prepared by the Divine Master of all hearts, Sister Margaret Mary made her Profession.

CHAPTER V

PROFESSION AND FIRST YEARS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE (1672-1673)

SISTER MARGARET MARY made her Vows on the 6th of November 1672. "On this day," she says, "my Divine Lord received me as His spouse in a manner I am unable to express. I will only say that He treated me as a spouse of Thabor. Yet I felt this harder than death, seeing in myself no resemblance to my Spouse, Whom I beheld all disfigured and torn on Calvary. But He said to me, 'Leave Me to do everything in its own time. At present I would have thee given up to My love, blindly and without resistance, allowing Me to do My Will at thy expense. But thou wilt lose nothing thereby.'" Then Our Lord promised never to leave her. "Be ever ready to receive Me, for I will dwell with thee and converse and entertain Myself with thee."

Still, the very day of the Profession did not pass without the shadow of the Cross, for she writes: "Ever since I have had the happiness of being the spouse of a Crucified God, I never remember to have been without the livery of the Cross which I so love, beginning with the day of my Profession, on which I received a cross which I felt deeply according to nature, but I declare that I can never sufficiently admire the goodness of God."

From this time Our Lord allowed Sister Margaret Mary to enjoy His divine presence continu-

ally in a manner she had never before experienced. She saw Him with the eyes of her soul; she felt Him as it were near her. "I knew Him much better than if I had seen and felt Him with my corporal senses, for they would have been distracted and would have diverted me from that presence, but the exterior senses did not distract me from this interior sight which occupied my soul." This Divine Presence produced in her an ever-growing reverence for the all-holy God, and a profound feeling of interior annihilation. She would have wished to be continually on her knees or prostrate on her face before her Divine Spouse, and when alone she was always, as far as possible, in one or other of these positions. The sense of God's holiness made her apply herself incessantly to the discovery and correction of all her weaknesses, faults and infidelities. She wished sincerely to be despised and humbled, and was delighted when any one spoke against her. Our Lord took pleasure in seeing her thus. She says: "He no longer allowed me to find any pleasure among creatures, except in occasions of humiliation, contradiction and abjection. He wished this to be my most delightful food, and He has never allowed me to be without it. He supplied me with it Himself when I failed to receive it from creatures; and when He did so, it was in a way I felt much more keenly." In another place she writes: "Since Our Lord has conferred upon me the grace of constantly enjoying His Presence, I have been indifferent to every arrangement which might be made concerning me. I felt persuaded that since God had given Himself to me through the effect of His goodness, and that without any merit on my part, nothing could take Him from me. It was this thought that made me happy wherever I was."

Here, then, we have the secret of Sister Margaret Mary's strength and the source of all her joy in suffering.

Mother M. Frances de Saumaise, of the Visitation of Dijon, had been elected Superior of Paray in the August of 1672. During the whole of Sister Margaret Mary's religious life she was governed by Superiors taken from different houses of the Order—five in all—and each one tested in a different manner the extraordinary ways in which she was led by God. In the end they were all unanimous in the high testimony they rendered to her heroic virtue. Sister Margaret Mary gave her confidence at once to Mother de Saumaise, who responded by bestowing on her a truly maternal affection, but one which did not hesitate to prove and try her in every possible way. Convinced of the deep love for Our Lord which the young religious had, Mother de Saumaise gave her ample opportunity of satisfying this love by giving her occasions of suffering, in imitation of and in union with Him. The Community of Paray bear witness to the fidelity with which Sister Margaret Mary corresponded to the graces she received. They tell us that she was especially distinguished by her obedience, silence, severity towards herself, simplicity and religious poverty, which led her, in spite of her delicate health, to conform to the rule in all things without complaining of anything whatever.

Now that she was professed, Sister Margaret Mary was employed, according to custom, in the different offices of the house. During the eighteen years of her religious life she passed through most of the employments which are usual in convents. We shall see how she was at one time Assistant to the Infirmarian, at another Dispenser; twice for a considerable period she had charge of the children

of the school, and later on the important offices of Mistress of Novices and Assistant to the Superior were entrusted to her. In all and each of these employments she acquitted herself with the utmost fervour; but in all of them she found ample opportunity for mortification and humiliation. Indeed, Our Lord seems to have allowed her to feel a very strong natural repugnance for the employments assigned to her, a repugnance which increased rather than diminished as time went on.

First, then, Sister Margaret Mary was employed as Assistant to the Infirmarian—and it happened that the Infirmarian, though a thoroughly good religious, was the very opposite to her in character and temperament. Sister Catherine Augustine Marest was an exceptionally strong woman physically, overflowing with energy both of body and mind, and, as so often happens in similar cases, apt to forget that all are not cast in the same mould. Sister Margaret Mary, on the other hand, was, as we know, of a gentle, retiring disposition, often absorbed in the presence of God, and so the two characters told one against the other and gave plenty of opportunity for merit on both sides. The young Assistant Infirmarian was often reproached for her awkwardness, for she not infrequently fell when going up or down stairs, letting the things she carried drop and break. Later on it was recognised that many of these accidents were due to the devil. One day when she was carrying a shovel full of live coals she fell from the top to the bottom of the staircase; not a single piece of coal was dropped, and she got up unhurt.

On another occasion a fall resulted in leaving her subject to violent neuralgia in the head, the pain of which was sometimes so bad that she nearly fainted; on these occasions she would ask leave to

go to the garden for a few minutes to get some fresh air, and would then return to her place amongst her Sisters as calmly as if she had never suffered any pain. This was the only relief she allowed herself. It was while she was employed in the infirmaries that the following incident occurred of which she writes: "Finding myself engaged in an employment which often deprived me of leisure to meditate with the Community, a feeling of discontent arose in my mind one Easter Sunday. I was immediately reprov'd by my Divine Master, Who said: 'Know that the prayer of submission and of sacrifice is more agreeable to Me than contemplation and every other kind of meditation, however holy it may appear.' This impressed on my soul so deep a feeling of peace that from that time I have never been troubled in the least by anything my Superiors exacted from me."

At another period Sister Margaret Mary was employed as Dispenser. She set apart for herself portions of food which she would not have thought of offering to any one else. When she had the opportunity she always took the worst of everything. "It is not to be truly poor," she said, "to make a vow of poverty, and yet to want for nothing." It was surprising to see the amount of work she got through, for besides accomplishing all her own duties, she was always ready to help others, and might often be seen helping the Lay Sisters to wash the clothes, to carry wood or wash the dishes, and this she continued even when she became Assistant.

Sister Margaret Mary was twice given charge of the children who were being educated at the convent. She held the office of Mistress of the School, first in 1672, for a period of about two

years, and was reappointed in the autumn of 1679. It was an employment to which she had an extreme repugnance, having no natural aptitude for dealing with children, but she succeeded so well in hiding this, that the children loved her exceedingly. Several of them, who afterwards became religious either at the Visitation at Paray or at the Ursuline Convent in the same town, have borne witness to her unfailing goodness to them and of her heroic virtue on many occasions. Her one idea was to gain the children's hearts to the love of the Sacred Heart. She did her utmost to instil solid principles into their minds, together with a great horror of sin and a deep love of virtue. She often told them that they ought rather to suffer anything than commit a single sin. The children soon found out the worth of their holy Mistress who easily pardoned all faults except those of falsehood and particular attachments, both of which she punished severely.

At other periods of her religious life Sister Margaret Mary was employed in the refectory, the sacristy and other offices, in all of which the only fault those who worked with her could blame her for was that she invariably took all that was most troublesome and mortifying for herself. Indeed her love of mortification was so great that it sometimes happened that she did not wait until she had obtained her Superiors' permission before practising some penance. Her Divine Master reproved her severely for this. "Thou deceivest thyself," He said to her, "in thinking to please Me by practising this kind of mortification chosen by self-will, which would rather have the will of Superiors bend before it than bend itself. Know, that I reject all such fruits which self-love has turned to rottenness, for I abhor self-will in a religious. It is

more pleasing to Me that such a soul should remain at ease and rest through obedience than load itself with austerities and fasts through self-will." Once she had been told to take a discipline for the space of an "Ave Maris Stella." The prayer being finished, Sister Margaret Mary was about to continue the penance when Our Lord said: "That was for Me, but what you are now about to do will be for the devil," "which words," she adds naively, "soon made me stop my penance." Another time, when she was doing a like penance for the souls in Purgatory with the same disregard for exact obedience, the holy souls seemed to surround her, complaining that she injured them and increased their sufferings. These lessons made such an impression on her that she resolved never again to swerve from the most exact obedience. The remainder of her life shows how faithfully she kept this promise.

Another virtue to which Sister Margaret Mary was strongly attached was silence. It was more difficult for her to turn away from her continual union with God to talk to her Sisters than it is for a dissipated person to control her tongue. All were edified by her exact observance of silence at all times and in all places prescribed by the Rule. One never saw her commit the slightest fault in this respect. Even during the hours of recreation, though she was never taciturn or melancholy, one could not help remarking her attraction for silence, for she spoke little unless, indeed, the conversation turned on spiritual things. She never tolerated the least word against charity. If something of the sort was said in her presence, she did all she could to bring forward the good qualities of others, especially of those who were in any way opposed to her. But with regard to this virtue, as all to

others, she had no great opinion of herself: "From the great talker that I once was," she says, "I am now become so ignorant that I know nothing, and cannot tell what to say, and I am no longer able to learn anything. Yet," she added, "I desire to learn nothing but Jesus Christ Crucified."

Mother de Saumaise gives us a true picture of what Sister Margaret Mary was in these first years after her Profession, when she says: "During the six years that I knew Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, I can affirm that I never once remarked that she failed even for an instant in the resolution she had taken on her Profession day, to put no obstacle to the reign of God in her heart in all, above all and before all; and she allowed herself no merely natural pleasure either for her body or her mind. This fidelity drew down upon her abundant graces and favours, which led her to a great desire for all kinds of suffering and humiliation. I may say without exaggeration that pleasure and honour could not be sought more eagerly by the most ambitious than suffering was by her. Crosses were a real joy to her, but she felt them very keenly."

Sister Margaret Mary's own words about suffering at this time were: "I do not understand how a spouse of Jesus Christ Crucified can fly from the Cross, and not rather love it; for in flying from it, she flies, at the same time, from Him Who bore it for love of us and regarded it as the object of His delight. We can love Him only so far as we love the Cross."

It is certain, however, that the first year of her Profession was a year of consolation rather than of suffering. But the graces she received were not only for herself. Her mission towards others was to be accomplished by suffering. Our Lord

prepared her for this by allowing her to see in Himself a twofold sanctity : of love and of justice. Both were rigorous in their character and both were to exercise continual influence upon her. The first would make her suffer a kind of purgatory most painful to bear, in order to relieve the Holy Souls who would be allowed to address themselves to her in their need. The second, that of justice, so terrible to sinners, she was to feel the weight of, in expiation for sin. " Particularly," said Our Lord, " for the sins of those consecrated to Me. I will make thee feel hereafter what thou most suffer for My love in this matter." All this Sister Margaret Mary made known to her Superior with the utmost simplicity. Mother de Saumaise told her to think no more about the favours. This was a new source of suffering, for Sister Margaret Mary loved obedience and had been told by Our Lord to prefer it before everything, even before that which He Himself had taught her, but the communications she received attracted her soul so powerfully to God that it seemed to her impossible to resist them. " O my only Love," she prayed, " why wilt Thou not leave me to the common life of the Daughters of Mary? Hast Thou brought me here that I may be lost? Give Thy precious graces to those chosen souls who will correspond with them and glorify Thee better than I, for I can only resist Thee and am compelled to do so by obedience. I want nothing but Thy Cross and Thy love, that will suffice to make me a good religious, which is all I desire." And Our Lord lovingly replied : " Fight, My daughter, I am content. We will see who will gain the victory, the Creator or the creature, strength or weakness ; but he who conquers, shall conquer for ever. I am not displeased with these struggles and the opposition

that thou offerest through obedience. I love obedience. I offered up My life for it; but I will teach thee that I am the absolute Master of My gifts and of My creatures, and that nothing shall prevent Me from accomplishing My designs. It is for this reason that I wish thee not only to do what thy Superiors shall direct, but also to do nothing that I shall order thee without their consent. Without obedience no one can please Me."

One day, after Holy Communion, when engaged in loving colloquy with Our Lord, He asked her to sacrifice again to Him her entire liberty and her whole being. This Sister Margaret Mary did with all her heart, begging Our Lord that nothing might appear in her but what would humiliate her before creatures, for she said, "I feel my weakness, I fear to betray Thee and that Thy gifts should not be safe with me." Then she asked once more why He left her without suffering. For answer Our Lord showed her a cross covered with flowers, but under the flowers were thorns, nails and sharp points of every kind. "Behold," said He, "the couch of My chaste spouses. It is upon this that the fire of My love shall consume thy sacrifice. By degrees these flowers will fade and only the thorns, which are now hidden on account of thy weakness, will remain, and thou wilt feel their sharpness so keenly that thou wilt need all the strength of My love to enable thee to bear the pain." These words filled her with joy. "I thought," she said, "that I should never have enough suffering, humiliation and contempt. It seemed to me that I could never find a greater suffering than that which I felt in not suffering. I wished to have the cross and the cross alone." The sanctity of love which had been shown to her had

enkindled three desires in her heart : to suffer, to receive Holy Communion, and to die so as to be united to God.

To say all that could be said of Sister Margaret Mary's love of Our Divine Lord in the Holy Eucharist would fill a volume of itself. "I had such a great desire of Holy Communion," she says, "that had I to walk barefoot over flames, it seems to me that the pain would cost me nothing in comparison with the pain of being deprived of this happiness. Nothing is capable of giving me so much sensible joy as the reception of the Bread of Life. After I have communicated I remain annihilated as it were before my God, and pass several minutes in deep interior silence and profound respect, so that I may hear the Voice of Him Who alone gives joy to my heart." She spent every minute she could in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Our Lord urged her so strongly to go in search of Him, that if she resisted she felt inexplicable suffering. The proof that this was no effect of her imagination lies in the fact that if she was inclined to remain before the Tabernacle when obedience called her elsewhere, she felt the same pain. Rising from her knees she would say : "My Jesus, as I cannot remain longer in Thy Presence, do Thou come with me to sanctify all that I do, since it is all for Thee." Her Superiors told her that she should try and moderate the constant application of her mind to the thought of God for fear of injuring her health ; that she ought not to be more outwardly devout than her Sisters, and that she should not be so constantly before the Blessed Sacrament on feast-days, when she remained nearly the whole day in prayer. Sister Margaret Mary, ever obedient, resolved to remain in her cell on feast-days, but she found it an im-

possibility. She resisted the attraction she felt towards the Blessed Sacrament for some time, but was at length obliged to leave her cell to go to Him Who called her. On her way to the chapel she heard Our Lord say to her in a displeased tone: "Know that if thou withdrawest from My Presence, I will make thee feel it, as well as those who are the cause of it. I will hide My Presence from them, and when they seek Me, they shall not find Me."

A short time after Sister Margaret Mary's Profession, and a few days before the Feast of St Francis de Sales, she was favoured with a visit from her holy Founder. This is the account she gives of it: "He showed me during my prayer that the virtues he had always most desired for his daughters were those by which he himself had become most closely united to God, namely, charity towards God and our neighbour, and a profound humility. He said: 'They have fallen both from one and the other: from charity by looking to creatures in their actions and by seeking only their approbation, not considering that this way of acting renders them displeasing in God's sight. And,' he added, 'particular friendships destroy both charity and silence.'" As to humility, he taught her that it was lost for want of keeping a strict guard over one's own defects, from which sprang the facility with which judgment is passed on the small faults of others, even their intentions being criticised on the slightest grounds. St Francis showed her that these things gave him great pain, and that they were caused by the too great mildness of Superiors arising from too much complacency towards creatures, which could only be remedied by severity, tempered with kindness, and by continual watchfulness. Then he left her with

these words : “ I will come on my feast and make choice of my daughters who possess my true spirit. I will write them in my heart and offer them constantly to the Divine Majesty as an odour of sweetness to supply for the imperfect.”

By such favours and consolations did Our Lord prepare His chosen spouse for the great sufferings to which He destined her.

CHAPTER VI

VARIOUS FAVOURS RECEIVED

(1673).

MOTHER DE SAUMAISE, seeing that Our Lord continued to favour Sister Margaret Mary with such great graces, told her to write an account of them. To this she felt a great repugnance, but Our Lord said to her: "Why dost thou refuse to obey My voice and put in writing that which comes, not from thyself, but from Me? Thou hast no part in it beyond a simple clinging to My Will. Consider what thou art, and what thou dost deserve, and thou wilt understand whence comes the good thou dost possess. Why dost thou fear? I have given thee a place of refuge where all becomes easy." At these words Margaret was consoled and wrote the account desired of her.

"One day, on the eve of Communion, I asked Jesus to unite my heart to His, saying, 'I know, my God, that this divine union can only be by Thy love.' Upon this He showed me His Divine Heart, brighter than the sun, and I saw also an ugly shapeless atom which seemed to be trying in vain to approach It. 'Lose thyself in My greatness, and see that thou never come forth thence,' said Our Lord, 'for if thou leavest it, thou shalt never again enter it.'"

On 1st July 1673, the eve of the Feast of the Visitation, Our Lord gave Sister Margaret Mary a new lesson in self-abandonment and dependence

upon His Holy Will. This is the account she gives of it: "I had been unable to sing the Office for a long time, having lost my voice. This was no small trouble to me, both because I felt such joy in singing the praises of God, and also because I thought it was a just punishment for my negligence, which humiliated me greatly. On the eve of the Visitation, at Matins, having several times tried in vain to sing the Invitatory, and not even being able to follow the Psalms with the choir, at the first verse of the Te Deum I felt myself penetrated with a power before which all the powers of my own soul bowed themselves, as it were, in a spirit of homage and adoration. As I held my arms crossed in my sleeves a heavenly light rested on them in the form of a little child, or rather of a brilliant sun. 'My Lord and my God,' I said, 'what excess of love is this by which Thou thus lowerest Thine infinite greatness?' 'I am come, My daughter, to ask thee why thou tellest Me so often not to approach thee?' 'Thou knowest. O my Lord,' I replied, 'that it is because I am not worthy to approach Thee, much less to touch Thee.' 'Learn then,' He answered, 'that the more thou retirest into thine own nothingness, the more does My greatness lower itself to find thee.' Fearing, however, that it might be an angel of Satan, I made Him the following request: 'O my God, if it be Thou, enable me to sing Thy praises.' I immediately felt my voice freed and stronger than ever. I joined in the Te Deum and the rest of Matins with the choir without all the caresses which I received from His Goodness being able to make me less attentive to the Office. But I felt myself interiorly united to Him, and employed in honouring Him. At the end He said to me: 'I wished

to try the motive thou hadst in singing My praises. Hadst thou been for a moment less attentive, I should have left thee.” “Having had the use of my voice,” she continues, “for a considerable time, I lost it again. On begging Our Lord to give it me back, He replied that it was not mine, that He had lent it to me in order to oblige me to believe, and that I ought to be as content to lose it as to possess it. Since then, I have remained in indifference about it, nothing being more profitable to a soul than a perfect self-abandonment in all things.”

Another time it seemed to Sister Margaret Mary that she was on the brink of a precipice. She did not understand this, and was troubled by it, so she asked Our Lord to make clear to her what it was that thus disquieted her. As soon as she was engaged in prayer Our Lord presented Himself to her all covered with wounds, and told her to look upon the opening in His Sacred Side, which was an abyss opened by an arrow of unfathomable length—His love—and that if she wished to fly from the abyss which threatened her, and which she could not understand, she must plunge herself into this abyss of His side by which she would escape all others. This, He told her, was the dwelling-place of those who love Him. They find there two lives, one for the soul, the other for the heart. The soul finds there the source of living waters to purify it and give it the life of grace of which it had been deprived by sin; the heart finds a furnace of love in which all other love is consumed. But since the opening is very narrow, it is necessary to be very humble and detached in order to be able to enter therein.

Sister Margaret Mary was destined to suffer.

This was indeed her great desire, the yearning of a loving soul to be likened to Him Whom she loved. And Our Lord prepared His servant with tender care for the mission of reparation He had assigned to her. He showed her Himself suffering in several phases of His Passion. Once when she was meditating on the Agony in the Garden, He revealed to her that He suffered interiorly more in Gethsemane than in all the rest of His Sacred Passion. "No creature can comprehend," He said, "the greatness of the torments which I suffered at that time." Then He spoke to her of what she herself would have to suffer in order to appease the justice of God against sinners. "Thou must raise thy heart and thy hands to Heaven by prayer and good works, presenting Me continually to My Father as a Victim of love sacrificed and offered for the sins of the whole world, placing Me as a rampart and sure fortress between His justice and sinners."

Shortly afterwards Our Lord disclosed to her His Heart torn and pierced with wounds. "See the wounds," He said, "which I receive from My chosen people. Others content themselves with striking My Body; these attack My Heart, which has never ceased to love them. But My love will give place at length to My just anger, to chastise these proud souls so attached to the earth, who despise Me for creatures, and fly humility to seek esteem for themselves. And, as their hearts are void of charity, they have nothing left but the name of religious." Sister Margaret Mary was touched to the heart, and quickly offered to God the merits of the Life, Passion and Death of Jesus in satisfaction for the injuries He had received. "I offered myself to His divine Goodness to suffer all the pains which He should be pleased to send me,

so as even to be annihilated rather than to see those souls perish which had cost Him so dear."

Another day Our Lord presented Himself before her covered with wounds, His Body bleeding and His Heart torn with grief. He seemed utterly spent with fatigue. She prostrated herself at His Feet without daring to say anything to Him. "See," He said, "the state to which My chosen people have reduced Me—those whom I had designed to appease My justice. They persecute Me in secret. If they do not amend, I will chastise them severely. I will withdraw the just and sacrifice the rest to My just wrath which shall be kindled against them." But Sister Margaret Mary knew how to comfort her Lord. "I presented to Him His own suffering love, one single look at which was capable of appeasing His wrath."

Our Lord complained especially of the injuries He received in Holy Communion, and to make reparation for this, Sister Margaret Mary suffered at this time intense dread in approaching the Holy Table. "One day," she says, "feeling myself seized with a great fear of dishonouring my Saviour by approaching to Holy Communion, but not having been able to obtain permission of my Superior to stay away, I approached with so extraordinary a sorrow that my whole body shuddered with grief at the thought of the sorrow my Saviour would feel on account of some who were to receive Him. After Holy Communion He presented Himself to me as the Ecce Homo, all torn and disfigured. 'I have not found any one,' He said, 'who would give Me a place of repose in this my suffering and sorrowful condition.' This sight so impressed me with grief that I would rather have died a thousand times than see my Saviour reduced to such a condition. 'If thou didst know,' He continued,

‘who they are who have reduced Me to such a condition, thy grief would be much greater. Five souls consecrated to Me have treated Me thus. I have been dragged by strong cords through a narrow space beset with sharp points, nails and thorns, and they have brought Me to this state.’” Sister Margaret Mary desired greatly to understand the meaning of these words, and Our Lord explained to her that the cords were the promises He had made to give Himself to us; their strength was His love; the narrow space represented hearts that were ill-disposed to receive Him; and the sharp points were the spirit of pride. She then offered her own heart to Him as a place of repose, and He in turn offered her His wounds in order that she might kiss them and so relieve His pain.

On yet another occasion Our Lord showed Himself to His servant crowned as it were with a crown made of nineteen sharp thorns which pierced His Divine Head. She could not speak for weeping. He then told her that He had come to seek her so that she might pluck the thorns which had been thus deeply buried in His Head by a faithless spouse. “She pierces My brain with thorns as often as in her pride she prefers herself to Me.” Not knowing what to do to draw them out, Sister Margaret Mary had recourse to her Superior, who told her to ask Our Lord about it. She did so, and He told her to make nineteen acts of humility in honour of His humiliations. “But,” said the humble Saint, “as I was so proud myself, I begged my Superior to offer to Our Lord the practices of humility of the Community. This was very pleasing to Him, and five days later He showed me three of the wounds, the pain of which was much relieved. The others remained for a much longer time.”

One Friday, towards the end of the year 1673, she received a most special proof of Our Lord's love. "After I had received my Saviour," she writes, "He placed my mouth to the Wound of His Sacred Side, and held me close to Him for the space of three or four hours, with delights that I can never express. I heard these words frequently repeated: 'Thou seest now that nothing is lost by trusting in My power, and that all is to be found in the enjoyment of Myself.' 'O my Love,' I replied, 'I will gladly quit all these delights to love Thee for love of Thyself alone,' and I repeated these words as often as He caressed me.'

Then Our Lord asked her to recite prostrate upon the ground five Paters and Aves and five acts of adoration and reparation which He taught her, every Thursday night, in honour of the anguish of the night of His Passion. Sister Margaret Mary promised to do so if her Superior would allow it, and Our Lord then replied: "Almighty as I am, I ask nothing of thee but in dependence upon thy Superior." He then told her how impossible it is for a religious to please Him if she be wanting in obedience and opposed to her Superior.

As the servant of God was preparing, during her retreat in 1673, to make her annual confession, and felt a great anxiety to discover her sins, Our Lord said to her: "Why dost thou torment thyself? Do what is in thy power, and I will supply for what is wanting. I require nothing so much in the Sacrament as a contrite and humble heart, which, with a sincere will never more to offend Me, accuses itself without disguise. Then I pardon at once and there follows a perfect amendment." She then made her confession,

after which it seemed to her that Our Lord clothed her with a white robe of innocence.

After Holy Communion Our Lord said lovingly to her: "I have come, My well-beloved, I, thy Spouse, thy God and thy Love, to clothe thy soul in a robe of innocence, in order that thou mayest live only by My Life." Then He opened His Heart to her that she might constantly dwell therein. The effect of this favour Sister Margaret Mary gives us in her own words: "My Beloved has consumed in me every desire but that of receiving His divine love, and has left me without fear of anything but of sin. . . . All things find their rest only in their centre; my heart is wholly buried in its centre, which is the most humble Heart of Jesus. It finds therein a burning thirst for humiliations, contempt and oblivion on the part of all creatures. For I can never be so happy as when I am conformed to my Crucified Spouse."

We have already seen that Our Blessed Lord had deigned to give Sister Margaret Mary many lessons on prayer. That they had taken deep root in her heart is proved by the account she gives at this time of her intercourse with her Beloved. "I generally go to prayer without any other preparation than that which God makes within me. I often present myself before Him as a sick person before an all-powerful Physician. Apart from Him I can find no rest or comfort. I place myself before Him as a living victim, whose only desire is to be offered and sacrificed to Him that it may be consumed as a holocaust in the pure flames of His love. My good Master allows me to feel sensibly His divine Presence, and discovers its beauties to my soul. His love so binds all my powers that I am unable to say anything to Him to testify my love. Then I say

to Him simply: 'Thou mockest at the endeavours of my heart to show Thee its love,' and He replies, 'Thou hast no longer the use of it, but all its movements are known to Me.' With this I remain content. At the end of my prayer I make no resolution, petition or offering except that of my Jesus to His Eternal Father. 'My God I offer Thee Thy well-beloved Son for my thanksgiving for all the blessings Thou dost confer upon me, for my petition, my offering, my adoration and all my resolutions. In fine, I offer Him to Thee for my love and my all. Receive Him, Eternal Father, for all that Thou desirest of me. I have nothing to offer Thee which is worthy of Thee except Him, the possession of Whom Thou gavest me with so much love.' Often nature and self-love assail me violently, telling me that I am losing my time, and that I am in the way of perdition. This troubles me so much that I know no one to whom I can have recourse except to God. I find Him ever ready to assist me. 'A child can never perish,' He says to me, 'in the arms of an Almighty Father.' Then I abandon myself entirely to His divine Will, so that He may act in me according to His good pleasure, without having regard to my own satisfaction."

CHAPTER VII

PREPARATION FOR OUR LORD'S REVELATIONS

(1674)

THE year 1674 was chosen by Our Blessed Lord to be the year in which five out of six great revelations of His love were made known to the Apostle of His Heart.

During the first part of the year Sister Margaret Mary was prepared for these favours by her Divine Master. He told her that He had chosen her heart as a sanctuary in which His divine love might burn continually, so that she might communicate it to others. "Thy heart is as a consecrated altar to which nothing defiled should ever approach. I have chosen it in order to offer to My Eternal Father a burning sacrifice to appease His justice, and to give Him infinite glory by the offering thou shalt make Him of Myself, uniting with it that of thy whole being." "I acknowledge," she says, "that after that time I felt so strong and burning a fire in my heart that I should have liked to communicate it to all creatures, so that my God might be loved."

It is customary in the Order of the Visitation for the Community to meet after Vespers for spiritual conversation, in which all join. One day, as Sister Margaret Mary was in her cell occupied with reading a spiritual book, so as to be able to contribute her share to the conference, Our Lord appeared to her and said: "I wish to make thee read in the Book

of Life, which contains the science of love." Then showing her His Sacred Heart pierced for our salvation, she heard these words: "My love reigns in suffering; it triumphs in humility; it rejoices in unity." This lesson made such an impression upon her that she never lost the remembrance of it.

One morning, when preparing for Holy Communion, she heard Our Lord say to her: "See, My daughter, the bad treatment I have received from this person who has just received Me. She has renewed all the sufferings of My Passion." Sister Margaret Mary, overcome with grief, cast herself at His feet and offered herself with tears to make atonement to Him for the injuries He had received. "My Lord and my God," she prayed, "if my life be of any use to repair these injuries, though those which Thou receivest from me are a thousand times greater, I am Thy slave—do with me whatever Thou wilt." And Jesus answered her: "I desire, when I let thee know the ill-treatment I receive from this soul, that after receiving Me thou shouldst prostrate thyself at My Feet to make amends to My Heart. Offer to My Father the Sacrifice of the Cross and in union with it thy whole being, and thus repair the indignities I receive from this heart." "I was quite surprised," continues Sister Margaret Mary, "to hear such words about a person who had just washed her soul in the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, but the same voice said to me again: 'It is not that she is in sin, but the will to sin still lingers in her heart. This I look upon with a greater horror than the act of sin itself, for it is to apply My Blood with contempt to a corrupt heart, inasmuch as an evil will is the root of all corruption.' I suffered greatly on account of these words, and continually implored for mercy. One day, in Easter week, I was consoled

by hearing Our Lord say : ' I have heard thy sighs and have shown mercy towards this soul. ' ”

From time to time, when more than usually oppressed with interior sufferings, Our Lord would refresh His servant with the sweetness of His love. Thus He one day showed her His Sacred Heart as a delightful garden full of lovely flowers most various and beautiful. Into this He invited her to enter, so as to revive her strength of soul. After she had looked at the flowers, without daring to touch them, Our Lord gave her permission to gather them at will ; then casting herself at His Sacred Feet she said : “ O my Divine Saviour, I wish for nothing but Thyself, Who art a bundle of myrrh to me, which I would fain carry continually in the arms of my affection. ” And He replied, “ Thou hast chosen well ; it is myrrh alone that can retain its beauty and fragrance. This life is its season ; it is not known in eternity. There it has another name. ”

Over and over again Our Lord turned to His servant to ask her to make reparation for sinners, and particularly to comfort Him for the coldness He received from lukewarm religious. Thus He taught her to come every Friday to adore Him thirty-three times upon the Cross, the throne of His mercy. She was to prostrate herself humbly at His feet and unite herself to Our Lady at the foot of the Cross, and then beg of the Eternal Father, through the sufferings of His Divine Son, the conversion of hardened hearts.

On another occasion He taught her the dispositions in which she should hear Mass, receive Holy Communion, and pray. At Mass she was to unite herself to Our Lady on Calvary. When she received Holy Communion it was again to the Blessed Virgin that she was to turn, uniting herself

to Mary at the time of the Incarnation, and trying to enter into her dispositions, and so to offer them with her own to Our Lord, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." In prayer she was to unite herself to our Lady at the time of her Presentation in the Temple.

Another special favour was granted to her at this time. The Community were all together preparing flax in one of the convent courtyards. Sister Margaret Mary withdrew a little from the rest to a corner near the chapel, so as to be near the Blessed Sacrament. The Sisters taxed her with this, and she replied that she would not do it any more. But she had no sooner joined the others than she felt herself irresistibly drawn to return to her solitude. Being troubled at this she spoke to her Superior, who told her to follow her attraction. This she did, and continued her work on her knees in great interior and exterior recollection. All at once the adorable Heart of our Lord was presented to her more brilliant than the sun, and surrounded by Seraphim, who sang in chorus—

"Love triumphs, love rejoices,
The love of God in itself is delight."

Then these blessed spirits invited Sister Margaret Mary to join in their song of praise, but she did not dare do so. They told her that they had come to associate themselves with her, so as to render to Our Lord a continual homage of love, adoration, and praise; that they would take her place before the Blessed Sacrament, so that she could offer continual acts of love through them. At the same time it seemed to her as though the angels wrote this compact in the Sacred Heart in ineffaceable letters of gold.

This vision lasted about two hours, and Sister Margaret Mary felt the effects of it for the rest of her life, both in the help she received and the sweetness she experienced.

It was, however, not only by favours such as these that Our Lord prepared His servant for the work to which He had destined her. He required of her the utmost purity of heart. On many occasions He reproved her severely for the smallest faults. One day, when she had been guilty of some slight insincerity through self-love, Our Lord said to her: "Learn that I am holy and teach holiness. I am pure and cannot suffer the slightest stain. Therefore thou must act with simplicity and with a right and pure intention in My Presence. The least deceit is displeasing to Me. I will make thee understand that if My love has made Me thy Master so that I may teach thee and model thee according to My Will, I cannot support lukewarm and careless souls. If I am gentle in bearing with thy weakness, I shall be none the less severe in correcting thy infidelities." The truth of these words Sister Margaret Mary experienced all her life. Our Lord never let pass the smallest fault which was in the slightest degree voluntary or due to negligence without reproving and punishing her for it, but this He did always with mercy and tenderness. No penance, however, could have been as rigorous and terrible to her as to know that Our Lord was ever so little displeased with her. All other mortifications, correction and trials were as nothing to her in comparison, and this made her very prompt in asking pardon and penance for her faults from her Superior, because Our Lord was always satisfied with the penance imposed by obedience.

In writing of this subject she says: "My Divine

Master has never ceased reproving me for my faults and showing me their deformity. But there is nothing that displeases Him so much, and for which He reproves me with so much severity, as for a want of attention and respect in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, especially at the time of Office or prayer. Alas! of how many precious graces have I deprived myself by a distraction, by putting myself into a more comfortable but less respectful position at prayer or by a curious glance. Nevertheless," she goes on to say, "I can assure you that my Divine Saviour has often told me that there is nothing so hurtful to people in religion as a want of obedience, however slight, either to Superiors or the Rule. The least answering back or exhibition of repugnance to Superiors is insupportable to Him in the soul of a religious."

We have already seen, when speaking of Sister Margaret Mary's obedience, how well she took these lessons to heart, and how she profited by the occasions on which she herself had been reproved by Our Lord for slight faults against this virtue.

Several years later than the time with which we are now occupied, during a retreat she made in 1678, Our Lord said to her: "Thou canst not please Me better than by adhering strictly to thy Rules, and faithfully observing them, the slightest departure from them being a great defect in My eyes; and the religious who imagines that she can find Me in any other way than that of the exact observance of the Rule, deceives herself and removes herself from Me." And again: "Preserve in purity the temple of the Lord, for wherever thou art He will assist thee by a special presence of protection and love."

On yet another occasion Our Lord made her

this promise: "Thou shalt never lack help until My Heart lacks power."

Thus it was that Sister Margaret Mary was led from grace to grace by her Divine Master; each day adding something to the preparation He had been working in her to make her a fit instrument to receive and pass on to others the marvellous revelations of the love of His Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER VIII

REVELATIONS OF THE SACRED HEART

(1674-1675)

WE have seen how Margaret Mary had from her childhood been on terms of most intimate friendship with Our Lord and His Blessed Mother. She had been guided by them step by step in her spiritual life, but the year 1674 was to reveal the secrets of Our Lord's Heart to His servant in a new and very special way. Again and again Sister Margaret Mary tells us that He assured her that the revelations were not for herself alone, but for the souls of millions who would be drawn to God by the sweet attraction of the love of His Sacred Heart made known to them through one who was, as she well knew, nothing more than an instrument in His divine hands.

Up to this time Our Lord's communications with His chosen spouse had mainly referred to herself. He had opened to her the Wound of His Sacred Side as a place of refuge and a fountain of strength in all her difficulties. She had seen the Sacred Heart represented as an ocean of light in which her own heart, as a tiny atom, was absorbed and lost. Another time it was as an abyss of love into which she was to plunge herself in order to avoid all dangers ; and again as a Book of Life containing every lesson necessary for her soul. When wearied and spent with interior conflict, Our Lord had called her to rest in the Garden of His Heart,

where she was to revive her soul's strength. All these favours were marvellous graces, most tender proofs of the love of Christ for His spouse. But Our Lord's Heart yearns not alone for the heart of Margaret Mary, but for the love of all mankind. He of Whom each one of us can say "He loved me and delivered Himself for me," thirsts with unspeakable thirst for the love of every heart that He has made—and so He manifested His own adorable Heart to His chosen servant, that through her all might come to a clearer knowledge of the height and depth and breadth of that love of His which surpasseth all understanding.

The first of these great revelations took place in the spring of 1674. One day, having a little more leisure than usual, Sister Margaret Mary was passing her free time, as she nearly always did, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. She was more than usually recollected, and so absorbed in the presence of God that she entirely forgot herself and the place where she was, and, abandoning herself to the Holy Spirit, she yielded her heart to the power of His love. Then Jesus Christ showed Himself to her, and allowed her to rest her head upon His Sacred Breast. At the same moment He showed her, for the first time, the inexplicable secrets of His Divine Heart and the treasures of love It holds for man. This was done in a manner so real and sensible that, in spite of the fear she always had of being deceived, she could not doubt of the reality of the favour. Our Lord's words she gives as follows: "My Divine Heart is so full of love for men, and for thee in particular, that being unable to contain within Itself the flames of Its ardent charity, It must needs spread them abroad by thy means. My Heart desires to manifest Itself to men, that they may be enriched with Its

treasures which I discover to thee, and which contain graces of sanctification and salvation necessary to withdraw their souls from perdition. I have chosen thee, in spite of thy unworthiness and ignorance for the accomplishment of this great design, so that all may be done by Me."

After these words Our Lord asked Sister Margaret Mary for her heart. She implored Him to take it. It seemed to her that then Our Lord did in reality take it and place it within His own, which she saw through the Wound in His Side as a burning furnace in which her own heart seemed but a tiny atom. Our Lord then withdrew this atom in the form of a flame, and replacing it in her side, He said to her: "See, My beloved, I give thee a precious token of My love. I have enclosed in thy side a little spark of that love, to serve thee as a heart and to consume thee to the last moment of thy life. Its ardour will never be extinguished and thou shalt never be able to find any relief from it except a very slight one by bleeding; and this remedy will be so marked with My Cross, that it will bring thee more humiliation and suffering than relief. I wish thee therefore to ask for it with simplicity, both in order to comply with the Rule and also to give thee the consolation of shedding thy blood on the cross of humiliation. As a proof that the great favour I have bestowed on thee is no imagination, but the foundation of all those I intend to confer upon thee, thou wilt always feel the pain in thy side, although I have closed up the wound." Then Our Lord added tenderly: "Up to this time thou hast called thyself My slave, from henceforth I will give thee the title of the beloved disciple of My Heart."

After this ecstasy, which lasted a long time, Sister Margaret Mary remained for several days

all on fire with divine love and, as it were, out of herself, so that it was only with great difficulty that she could speak or attend to her usual employments. This state, the cause of which was entirely unknown to her Sisters, drew down upon her the criticism of some of the less charitable among the nuns. Even at night she could obtain no rest, for the pain in her side was so acute.

Our Lord told His servant to keep nothing concealed from her Superiors, so she was obliged to give an account of her vision. She did so without delay, though she says: "The confusion I felt on account of my unworthiness was so great that I would have a thousand times preferred to tell my sins to the whole world and read my general confession aloud in the refectory. Had this been permitted it would have been a great consolation to me, so that all might know the depth of corruption within me and never attribute the graces I received to myself." Our Lord, however, had promised her humiliation and she received it in full measure. Mother de Saumaise, whatever she really thought, took no notice of her, while the Community openly treated her as a visionary, and believed neither in her ecstasies nor her pain. Sister Margaret Mary was silent, not a word of complaint escaped her, but she grew so weak that it was noticed by every one: fears were even entertained for her life, and they began to think of applying remedies. In all simplicity Sister Margaret Mary declared that nothing would relieve her but bleeding. This request was only laughed at, the doctor telling her that such a remedy would be not only useless, but injurious. She was sent to the infirmary and other remedies prescribed by the doctor were applied. But it was in vain; they resulted in nothing but causing the patient continual sickness, so that she

became weaker and weaker. Her sweet serenity never failed under this treatment, nor did she again mention the word "bleeding," although she knew it to be the only remedy. Soon she was reduced to extremity, she could hardly speak or even breathe. In this state the doctor declared more than ever that it would be folly to bleed her, but Mother de Saumaise was alarmed and ordered it to be done. After great hesitation Doctor Billet complied, thinking that as there was no hope for the patient's recovery in any case, he might risk it. Mother de Saumaise told Sister Margaret, who replied with a smile: "I know this is the only thing which can relieve me, but I do not desire it if your charity does not desire it for me; my Jesus makes you wish for me whatever He pleases. I am quite content to suffer as much as He wills." The doctor then bled her slightly. Instantly the sickness ceased, her speech and respiration became free, and the arm was hardly bandaged before the invalid immediately found herself strong enough to leave the infirmary and follow the exercises of the Community, which she would have done, had she been allowed.

This marked cure convinced Mother de Saumaise of the truth of Sister Margaret Mary's account of her vision, and when the pain became great, she allowed her from time to time to be bled. The Community, on the other hand, who did not know the details of the cure, continued to treat her as a *malade imaginaire*—a person suffering from nerves, as we should now say—so that, as Our Lord had warned her, the slight relief from bleeding was always accompanied by many humiliations. This was evidently Our Lord's express wish, for on one occasion Mother de Saumaise, who now admired and respected her great patience, told her

she might be secretly bled in her cell instead of going to the infirmary. This was done, but on that same morning she fainted at Mass, so that the Sisters guessed what had been done, and continued their unkind remarks, all of which were borne with a sweet patience.

She suffered especially on the first Friday of each month. On this day the pain and the favours she had originally received were renewed. She saw the Sacred Heart as a sun, shining brilliantly, its rays falling vertically on her heart and inflaming it to such a degree that she thought it would be reduced to ashes. "It was particularly at these times," she says, "that my Divine Master taught me His Will and showed me the secrets of His Heart."

Sister Margaret Mary's trials prepared her for the second of Our Lord's great revelations, an account of which she herself gives:—

"One day, when I was before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar, after having felt entirely drawn into myself by the recollection of all my powers and senses, Jesus Christ, my Divine Master, appeared to me, resplendent with glory, with His five Wounds brilliant as five suns. Flames issued on all sides from His Sacred Humanity, but especially from His adorable Breast, which resembled a furnace. In this He showed me His most adorable Heart, the living Source of these flames. Then He disclosed to me the ineffable wonders of His love, and to what an excess He had carried it in His love for men, from whom He received only ingratitude. 'This,' He said to me, 'I feel more deeply than all that I suffered in My Passion. If they would return Me love for love, I should think but little of all that I have suffered for them, and should wish, if it were possible, to suffer still more. But

instead of love I meet with coldness and repulses on every side in return for all My eagerness to do them good. Do thou, at least, console Me, by supplying for their ingratitude as far as thou art able.' I then laid before Him my inability and my weakness. 'This,' He replied, 'will supply for all thy deficiencies,' and opening His Divine Heart there issued forth from It a flame so burning that I thought it would have consumed me. I was penetrated through and through with it, so that I was obliged to ask Him to have pity on my weakness. 'I will be thy strength,' He said, 'fear nothing, but be attentive to My Voice and to what I require of thee, to fit thee for the accomplishment of My designs.'"

Our Lord then prescribed the manner in which Sister Margaret Mary was to love and honour His Heart.

"In the first place, thou shalt receive Me in Holy Communion as often as obedience shall permit thee, notwithstanding all the mortifications and humiliations it may cause thee, for these thou must receive as pledges of My love."

"Secondly, thou shalt communicate on the First Friday of each month."

"Every Thursday I will make thee participate in the mortal sadness which it was My Will to feel in the Garden of Olives, and this sadness will reduce thee to an agony harder to bear than death. To bear Me company in the humble prayer which I offered to My Father in My anguish thou shalt rise between eleven o'clock and midnight, and remain prostrate with Me for an hour, thy face to the ground, so as to appease the divine anger of My Father by begging pardon for sinners, as well as to share, and in some way soften, the bitterness

I felt in being at that time abandoned by My Apostles, an abandonment which obliged Me to reproach them with not having been able to watch one hour with Me. During this hour thou shalt do as I will teach thee. Now listen, My daughter, believe not lightly nor trust every spirit, for Satan is raging to deceive thee. Do nothing therefore without the approbation of those who guide thee, he will then be unable to deceive thee, for he has no power over the obedient."

The ecstasy lasted so long that the Sisters, astonished to see Sister Margaret Mary remain so far beyond the usual time before the Blessed Sacrament, went to tell her to come away. They found she could neither speak nor support herself without difficulty. However, they took her to the Superior. Mother de Saumaise, seeing the poor Sister seemingly beside herself and trembling all over, understood that something extraordinary had happened, but pretending to make no account of it at all, she treated her with great severity, humbling and mortifying her in every way she could. These corrections Sister Margaret Mary received on her knees. Afterwards Mother de Saumaise ordered her to give an account of all that had passed. This she at once did. The result may be summed up in her own words. "After I had told her with extreme repugnance what had taken place, she humbled me still more and refused to allow me for the present anything I believed Our Lord asked of me, treating with contempt all I told her." This, she concludes, "consoled me greatly, and I withdrew in great peace."

All the graces that Sister Margaret Mary had received resulted in a union with God so intimate that it was only with great difficulty that she could apply herself to exterior work. She never said a

word about herself, but every one could see by her air of intense recollection that God was manifestly working in her soul. She fell into a burning fever, but did not complain until her failing strength betrayed her. Then she was sent to the infirmary. Doctor Billet soon discovered the cause of her weakness and declared that she had brought it on herself by concealing her pain. But, in spite of everything, Sister Margaret Mary was filled with spiritual joy. "Never," she writes, "did I feel such consolation. My whole body endured extreme pain, and this relieved a little the burning desire I had for suffering. This devouring fire could only be fed by the fuel of the Cross, that is to say, by every kind of suffering—contempt, humiliation and pain."

At last she was so ill that fears were again entertained for her life, but Our Lord had reserved many other crosses for her. This He soon made known to her in another vision.

The three Persons of the Blessed Trinity appeared to her under the form of three young men clothed in white garments and resplendent with light. "I cannot explain what took place," she writes, "except that the Eternal Father presented me with a cross beset with thorns and surrounded with all the instruments of the Passion, saying: 'See, My daughter, I make thee the same present as I made to My Beloved Son.' 'And I,' said Jesus Christ, 'wish to attach thee to it as I Myself was attached, and I will keep thee faithful company.' The Third adorable Person, Who is Love, would, He told me, Himself consume and purify me thereon."

The effect of this vision was to leave Sister Margaret Mary's soul in deep joy and peace. The impression which it produced upon her was never

effaced from her mind, though she says, "I did not understand at the time, as I did afterwards, the great suffering signified by what I had seen."

Mother de Saumaise now told Sister Margaret Mary to ask Our Lord to restore her to health. She obeyed with simplicity, though her love of suffering made her dread being heard. Then her Superior told her that her cure would be looked upon as a proof that what passed within her came from God, and that she would then be allowed to do what Our Lord had commanded, both as regarded her Communion on the First Fridays and the Holy Hour on Thursdays. All this Sister Margaret Mary laid before Our Lord, and God, who wished to give an undoubted proof of the holiness of His servant, and the truth of the graces with which He had favoured her, immediately cured her, bestowing the favour on her through the hands of Our Lady.

"The Blessed Virgin, my kind Mother," she writes, "favoured me with her presence. She caressed me tenderly, and after conversing a long time with me, she said: 'Let the health which I bestow on thee at the Will of my Son encourage thee, my daughter. Thou hast yet a long and painful way to go. Thou wilt always be upon the cross, pierced with nails and thorns and torn with scourges. But fear nothing; I promise thee my protection and I will never forsake thee.'" Sister Margaret Mary experienced Our Lady's fidelity to this promise over and over again on occasions of need.

Such a visible miracle as this convinced Mother de Saumaise of the truth of the favours God bestowed on His servant, but this conviction carried with it a new difficulty for the Superior

and new suffering for Sister Margaret Mary. Mother de Saumaise, deeming herself incapable of guiding one so highly favoured by God, thought it her duty to oblige the young religious to break the silence she had kept till now about the affairs of her soul. She had confided in no one but Mother de Saumaise, both from humility and also in obedience, for, treating the whole matter as an illusion, the Superior had forbidden her to speak upon the subject.

Now, however, she was told to consult some experienced directors about her state of soul, and to relate to them the wonderful favours she had received. Her conferences with these directors, to whom she spoke separately and at different times, were the cause of fresh humiliation to her. They condemned her attraction for prayer, treated her as a visionary, and would not allow her to follow the inspirations with which she was favoured.

All this was a terrible trial to the poor Sister, but she did her utmost to obey whatever she felt. "I made every effort," she writes, "to resist these attractions, believing assuredly that I was deceived; but finding it was useless to oppose them, I thought myself abandoned by God, since on the one hand, I was told it was not the Spirit of God, and on the other, it was impossible for me to resist the Spirit which attracted me." In this, as in every trouble, she turned to Our Lord, to find her strength and consolation in Him. Her Divine Master gently reassured her, promising that He would soon send one of His faithful servants to Paray, to whom she was to disclose, as He should direct, all the secrets of His Sacred Heart confided to her.

In the meantime Our Lord continued to shower

His favours upon His spouse. On the Feast of All Saints 1674, she heard these words:—

“Rien de souillé dans l'innocence
Rien ne se perd dans la puissance ;
Rien ne se passe en ce beau séjour
Tout s'y consomme dans l'amour.”

This was explained to her in the following way. She was not to allow the slightest stain in her heart or soul, which were to be kept in great innocence, and she was to abandon herself completely to God, Who is all-powerful. The two last lines referred to Heaven, where nothing passes away, for all is eternal, and where all is perfect love. “Then,” she says, “I was allowed a glimpse of this bliss. O God! into what transports of joy did it not throw me!” But soon she was given to understand that she was not yet ready for Heaven.

“C'est en vain que ton cœur soupire,
Pour y entrer comme tu crois ;
Il ne faut pas qu'on y aspire
Que par le chemin de la Croix.”

An echo surely of the Apostle's words, that “through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.”

The year 1674 was now rapidly drawing to a close. The Feast of St John the Evangelist, December 27th, was the day chosen by Our Lord for disclosing to His chosen disciple one of the greatest revelations of His Heart. In after years Sister Margaret Mary wrote an account of this most signal favour to her director, Père Rolin, S.J. :—

“On the Feast of St John the Evangelist (1674), after having received from my Divine Saviour a favour similar to that bestowed upon the Beloved Disciple on the evening of the Last Supper, the

Divine Heart was represented to me as on a throne of fire and flames shedding rays of light on every side, brighter than the sun and transparent as crystal. The Wound which He had received on the Cross was clearly visible. A crown of thorns encircled the Divine Heart and It was surmounted by a cross. My Divine Saviour made me understand that these instruments of His Passion were symbols, that His immense love for men had been the source of all the sufferings and humiliations He had endured for us ; that from the first moment of His Incarnation all these torments and this ignominy had been present to Him, and that the Cross had been even from this first moment planted, as it were, in His Heart ; that He had immediately accepted, in order to prove His love for us, all the humiliations, poverty, and sufferings that His Sacred Humanity was to endure during His whole mortal life, and also all the outrages to which His love would expose Him to the end of time in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

“Then Our Lord made me understand that it was the great desire He has to be perfectly loved by men, that had made Him manifest His Heart to them, opening to them the treasures of love, mercy, grace, sanctification and salvation which It contains, so that all those who would wish to procure Him all the honour possible, might be copiously enriched with the divine treasures of which His Sacred Heart is the Source.”

“He assured me that He took special pleasure in being honoured under the representation of the Heart of flesh, and that He desired such representations to become public, so that the hard hearts of men might thereby be touched. He promised me that He would pour forth the gifts of His love abundantly on all those who should honour His

Heart and that wherever the image of His Heart should be exposed for special veneration it would draw down every sort of blessing. In fine, I understood that this devotion was a last effort of His love towards Christians of these latter times by proposing to them an object and a means so calculated to persuade them to love Him and to love Him solidly.

“After this,” continues Sister Margaret Mary, “my Divine Saviour spoke these words to me: ‘My daughter, this is the work for which I have chosen thee; it is for this that I have given thee such great graces, and have taken such special care of thee from thy cradle. I have Myself been thy Master and Director, so as to dispose thee for My great graces, amongst which thou shouldst especially signalise that by which I reveal to thee and give thee the greatest of all treasures, in showing thee and presenting thee with My Heart.’”

Fifteen years after this vision had taken place, and about two years before her death, Sister Margaret Mary wrote in January 1689 to Mother de Saumaise:—

“It seemed to me, dear Mother, that my heart would melt with confusion and gratitude when, on the day of the Feast of the dearly-beloved Disciple of our Beloved (27th December 1688) I called to mind that it was on this day (1674) that my Divine Spouse bestowed on me the incomprehensible favour, of which I am so unworthy, of allowing me to repose on His Breast with the beloved Disciple, and of giving me His Heart, His Cross and His love. His Heart to be my refuge and my haven of rest amid the tempests of this stormy sea; His Cross to be my throne of glory, in which I was not only to glory but to rejoice, since there is no good for me but Jesus, His Cross and His love;

His love to purify, consume, and transform me wholly into Himself."

This most wonderful revelation of Our Lord's love for us was the closing event of the year 1674.

In the June of the following year Christ once more revealed Himself to His servant in what was perhaps the most striking of all the manifestations of the desire of His Sacred Heart to be known and loved by men, but by that time Sister Margaret Mary had experienced the fulfilment of the promise made to her by her Divine Master when He told her that He would send her "His faithful servant," to whom she was to disclose the secrets of His Divine Heart, which had been confided to her.

CHAPTER IX

VENERABLE CLAUDE DE LA COLOMBIÈRE

(1675-1676)

ABOUT midway between Lyons and Vienne there lies a small town called Saint-Symphorien d'Ozon. Here, on 2nd February 1641, Claude de la Colombière was born. The family was an honourable one and essentially Catholic and pious. Claude learnt from his mother those lessons of virtue and piety which characterised his whole life. He was educated at the celebrated Jesuit College at Lyons, and was only eighteen and a half years of age when, on 22nd October 1659, he joined the Society of Jesus. He passed his Noviceship at Avignon, was sent back to Lyons to pursue his studies for the priesthood, was ordained in 1669, and won great success as a brilliant rhetorician and a rising orator.

But God had better things in store for Claude de la Colombière than the development of these gifts, great as they were. His mother had said to him, as she lay on her deathbed, "You will become a great Saint, my son," and these words seemed likely to be fulfilled, for when he was recalled from the University of Lyons to make his Tertianship, Claude gave himself up heart and soul to God and to the pursuit of perfection.

Although only thirty-three years of age, he was sent as Rector to Paray-le-Monial early in the January of 1675. Some people thought that it

was waste to send a young and gifted man to such a small place, but God had His own designs. The great work of Father de la Colombière's life—the direction of Blessed Margaret Mary—was made possible by this means. The new Rector entered at once upon his duties. Much helpful intercourse already existed between the Jesuit Fathers and the Convent of the Visitation at Paray, so the new Superior soon found himself in communication with Sister Margaret Mary. The first time that he called on the Community she heard interiorly but very distinctly, these words: "This is he whom I have sent to thee." A few days later, Father de la Colombière went to the convent as extraordinary confessor during the Lent Ember days. Sister Margaret Mary says of this occasion: "I soon recognised the truth of the words I had heard, for although we had never seen or spoken to each other, he kept me a very long time and talked to me as though he understood all the secrets of my heart. But I did not want to confide fully in him on that occasion. I wished to withdraw for fear of inconveniencing the Community. He then asked me if he should come and speak to me another time in the same place, but being naturally timid, I was afraid, and only answered that being under obedience I should do as I was told about it."

Shortly after this, Father de la Colombière came to give a conference to the Community; he was struck by the appearance of Sister Margaret Mary, and asked Reverend Mother de Saumaise who she was, describing the place she had occupied. On being told her name, he remarked that she was certainly a chosen soul. Mother de Saumaise had a very high opinion of Father de la Colombière, and so decided to tell Sister

Margaret Mary to open her heart entirely to him.

Recognising God's Will in this wish of her Superior, the humble Sister obeyed, but not without very great repugnance. She began her confession by accusing herself of this fault, as she considered it, and for all reply, Father de la Colombière said that he was very glad to give her an opportunity of making a sacrifice for God. Then her difficulty vanished, and without pain or trouble she laid bare her soul before him, concealing neither good nor ill. The result was that she received great consolation and encouragement. He assured her that she had nothing to fear in following the guidance of the Spirit which led her, as long as she never failed in obedience; that she ought to abandon herself wholly to God's Will to be sacrificed and immolated according to His good pleasure. "He expressed his admiration," she says, "at the goodness of God in not having been repelled by so much resistance on my part. He taught me to value the gifts of God, and to receive His communications and the familiar intercourse with which He favoured me with great respect and humility, telling me that I ought to be constantly giving thanks for such great goodness."

Then Sister Margaret Mary spoke of her difficulties with regard to vocal prayer, difficulties which arose from the close union of her soul with God. Father de la Colombière told her to be satisfied with those vocal prayers which were of obligation, but to say the rosary whenever she could. She added a word about the very intimate union of love she enjoyed with the Beloved of her soul, and was told that this should be to her a special subject for humiliation, and that for him

it was a great reason for admiring the mercy of God with regard to her soul.

It was not God's Will that Sister Margaret Mary should receive consolation apart from humiliation. She paid dearly for that which she received from her director. The Community blamed both the confessor and the penitent. Some said that Sister Margaret Mary wished to deceive Father de la Colombière as she had deceived so many others; while others declared the confessor to be no less a visionary than the penitent and blamed him for weakness in listening to and encouraging the tales of a weak-minded woman. Sister Margaret Mary heard these remarks. Those which concerned her, cost but little, but those which concerned her confessor she felt bitterly, and she suffered intensely on account of them. But she complained only to Our Lord, laying at His feet the pain and bitterness she felt. Our Lord did not fail her. He consoled her most tenderly, giving her unmistakable proofs of His love, particularly on one occasion, when He assured her that He had chosen Father de la Colombière to assist her in the work of promoting devotion to His Sacred Heart.

It happened that the holy Jesuit was saying Mass in the convent chapel. During the Holy Sacrifice he felt his heart burn with a new and inexplicable love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Sister Margaret Mary knew what was passing in the heart of her confessor. As she approached to receive Holy Communion, Our Lord showed her His Divine Heart under the symbol of a burning furnace. She saw also two other hearts on the point of uniting themselves to It and being absorbed in It. At the same time she heard these words: "It is thus that My love will unite these three hearts for ever." She clearly understood

that the two hearts were her own and that of Father de la Colombière.

In the account she afterwards gave of this vision, she says: "Our Lord gave me to understand that this union would be wholly for the glory of His Sacred Heart, the treasures of which He wished me to discover to His servant, so that he might make known their true value, and that for this end He wished that we should be as brother and sister, sharing equally in these spiritual goods. I then represented to Him my poverty and the great inequality there was between a man of such great virtue, and a wretched sinner like myself. Upon this, Jesus said to me: 'The infinite riches of My Heart will supply for everything and make all equal. Let him know this, and fear nothing.'"

The Saints are not to be outdone in humility. Father de la Colombière was equally confused when Sister Margaret Mary told him that God had chosen him as an instrument for the glorification of His Sacred Heart. The consciousness of his own unworthiness overwhelmed him, and Sister Margaret Mary declared that no sermon had ever affected her so deeply as the profound humility with which her director received the message she gave him from Our Lord.

One of the points upon which Sister Margaret Mary asked advice was with regard to some communications she had received from Our Lord about certain people, to whom she felt interiorly urged either to write or speak, in order to strengthen them in trial and temptation, or to induce them to make the sacrifices God required of them. Our Lord had told her that she was not to trouble herself about the way she wrote or spoke these things, because He would Himself attach to them the unction of His grace, so that they would produce

the effect He desired on those who received them well.

As a matter of fact these notes were not always well received by those to whom they were addressed. They brought many humiliations on the writer, who was requested not to meddle with things that did not concern her. These rebuffs troubled Sister Margaret Mary, not because she herself was snubbed, but because she really began to fear that there was a certain indiscretion in writing such notes.

Father de la Colombière thought otherwise. He told her to follow the interior suggestions she should receive in this matter, whatever trouble or humiliation it might cause her; to show her notes to her Superior, and then either to give them or not as she was told. "I kept to this advice," she says, "but it brought me much humiliation from creatures."

Father de la Colombière now told Sister Margaret Mary to write an account of all that passed in her soul. This order was a very bitter trial to her, nevertheless she obeyed. We have not profited, however, by this account, because, overcome by her humility, she had no sooner written it than she threw it into the fire. Again we have her own comment: "I suffered much in consequence. What was said to me on the subject gave me a scruple about it, and I was forbidden to repeat my conduct."

The Octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi (1675) was the time chosen by Our Lord for what was, perhaps, the most important, and is certainly the best known, of the revelations concerning the devotion to the Sacred Heart. In this vision Father de la Colombière was appointed by name to assist Sister Margaret Mary in the establishment of the devotion.

For four or five months previously, the saintly director had tried and tested his penitent. He was a man not at all given to believe anything without sufficient evidence, but being gifted with discernment he recognised that it was impossible that one so humble and obedient as Sister Margaret Mary should be the victim of delusion. When, therefore, she told him of Our Lord's great revelation, he had no doubt at all of its truth, and told her forthwith to write an account of it, that he might study it at leisure. After examining it with much prayer, Father de la Colombière solemnly declared to Sister Margaret Mary that he had no doubt as to its divine origin, or as to her obligation to obey implicitly. The account was as follows:—

“As I was before the Blessed Sacrament on a day during the Octave of Corpus Christi, I received from God most special graces of His love. I felt moved with the desire of making Him some return, and giving Him love for love, and He said to me: ‘Thou canst not make Me a more acceptable return of love than by doing what I have so often asked of thee.’ Then showing me His Divine Heart, He said: ‘Behold this Heart which has so loved men, that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself to prove to them Its love. In return, I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude, contempt, irreverence, sacrilege, and coldness in this Sacrament of My love. But what I feel still more is that there are hearts consecrated to Me who use Me thus. Therefore I ask of thee that the First Friday after the Octave of the Blessed Sacrament shall be kept as a special Feast in honour of My Heart, to make reparation for all the indignities offered to It, and as a Communion day in order to atone for the unworthy treatment It has received when exposed upon the

altars. I also promise that My Heart shall shed in abundance the influence of Its divine love on all those who shall thus honour It or cause It to be so honoured.”

Casting herself at Our Lord's feet, Sister Margaret Mary exclaimed: “But, my Lord, to whom dost Thou address Thyself? To a weak creature, a poor sinner, whose unworthiness will be an obstacle to the accomplishment of Thy designs? Thou hast so many generous souls to do Thy work.” And Our Lord replied: “Dost thou not know that I choose the weakest subjects to confound the strong, and that My power is most frequently shown in those who are humble and poor of spirit, so that they can attribute nothing to themselves?” “Then give me, Lord, the means to do as Thou wilt,” prayed Sister Margaret Mary, and again Our Lord answered her, “Go to My servant, Father Claude de la Colombière, and tell him from Me to do all in his power to establish this devotion and give this pleasure to My Heart. Let him not be discouraged by the difficulties he will meet, for there will be many, but let him remember that he is all-powerful who, distrusting himself, places his whole confidence in Me.”

Father de la Colombière lost no time in taking up the mission imposed upon him by Our Lord. He began with himself. On the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, which that year fell on 21st June, he consecrated himself entirely to the Heart of Jesus. From that time he taught the devotion to his penitents, urging them to receive Holy Communion in honour of the Divine Heart on the day chosen by Our Lord for Its special Feast.

Great was the help and consolation that Sister

Margaret Mary received from Father de la Colombière during his short stay at Paray. But neither the name and authority of the Father Rector nor his reputation for learning and piety were sufficient to stop the busy tongues of those who disbelieved in, or who strongly disapproved of, the saintly nun whose guidance he had undertaken. This, however, did not deter Father de la Colombière in the least. He taught Sister Margaret Mary how to correspond with Our Lord's designs in her regard, and reassured her in the fears she constantly felt of being deceived. On the other hand Sister Margaret Mary was able by the light she received in prayer to render her director valuable assistance. She spoke to him of his quitting France some time before his Superiors had had any thoughts of sending him to England. He received indeed, quite another order, which he was just preparing to act upon, when the final order came—"Paris, *en route* for London."

Sister Margaret Mary was human — she had human feelings as we have, and, moreover, she possessed a heart particularly sensitive to gratitude towards those who had in any way helped her. The blow, then, of losing her friend and confessor after eighteen short months was a great one, yet she bore it with most perfect conformity to the Will of God. When she was inclined to let her thoughts dwell even momentarily upon it, Our Lord reproached her: "What! Am I not sufficient for thee, I Who am thy First Beginning and thy Last End!" "This was enough," she says, "to lead me to abandon myself entirely to Him."

Before Father de la Colombière left for England, he gave the following note of advice to his holy penitent. "Remember that God asks of you everything and nothing. He asks everything, because

He would reign over you and within you as in that which belongs wholly to Him, so that He can dispose of everything, that nothing in you may resist Him, but that all may bend to Him and obey the least sign of His Will. He asks nothing of you, because He wishes Himself to do everything in you, without your interfering in anything, contenting yourself with being the subject on which and in which He acts, so that all glory may be His, and that He alone may be known, loved and praised for ever."

In her turn Sister Margaret Mary gave her director some notes which helped to guide him in the important and difficult work to which he was being sent. Father de la Colombière attributed the measure of success that was his in his English mission to the lights communicated to him from Paray. He wrote to her personally very rarely, but was in frequent correspondence with her Superior, sending and receiving messages from Sister Margaret Mary through her. In this way these two chosen souls remained united, bound together as they were by Our Lord's choice of them as His instruments for the development and propagation of devotion to His Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER X

THE MESSAGE TO ENGLAND

(1676-1679)

FOR centuries England had been known as Our Lady's Dowry and the Island of Saints. It lost its claim to both these titles, alas! in the sixteenth century, but Mary's prayers did not cease to protect the land in which she had been so honoured. May we not think that it was in answer to her petition that the devotion to the Sacred Heart was brought direct from Paray-le-Monial to our land in 1676, and that it is owing to her care that in our own day the good seed sown amidst such difficulties by Venerable Father de la Colombière, more than two hundred and forty years ago, is now breaking into blossom, which bears promise of a rich harvest for the Divine Heart at no very distant date? All for Jesus through Mary. So was it ever in England in the olden days of faith, so, please God, may it be again in the land we love so well.

The position of chaplain to the Duchess of York, which Father de la Colombière was called upon to fill, was a delicate and perilous one. The schism of Henry VIII. and the terrible persecutions of the reign of Elizabeth had not succeeded in stamping out the old faith entirely from the land. Indeed, Catholics had hoped that the return of Charles II. to the throne of his fathers would mean a revival of the ancient faith. The Queen of England, Catherine of Braganza, was a Catholic, and the

Duke of York, brother to the King and heir-presumptive to the crown, openly professed the Catholic faith, and made no secret of his intention of proclaiming liberty of conscience on his accession to the throne.

Thus it was that Protestant feeling in England ran high and was greatly incensed by the marriage of James, Duke of York, to Mary Beatrice of Modena, a Catholic and exceedingly pious princess. The King began to be alarmed at the turn public feeling was taking, and refused the Duchess the use of a public chapel, which had been guaranteed to her by the terms of her marriage contract. Her chaplain, a French Jesuit who attended her to England, was forced to return to France to place his life in safety.

Such then, was the position of affairs when Father de la Colombière was sent by his Superiors to take up his residence at the English Court to serve the private chapel of St James' Palace. Could there have been a greater contrast than this to the quiet life he had led at Paray, where Our Lord had given him so many proofs of His love?

He arrived in London on October 13th 1676. A notice by Père Nicolas de la Presse gives us a picture of his life in England. "A guest in St James' Palace, Father de la Colombière lived there in the quietest manner, a stranger to the excitements and tumults of the Court, knowing only those parts of the Palace through which he was obliged to pass to reach the apartments of the Duchess of York. His room overlooked the wide space in front of the building, yet never once did he gaze from the windows on what is one of the most beautiful views in London. He never visited the monuments or curiosities of the town, nor did he frequent any of the public walks, for he went

out only to visit the sick or those to whom he hoped to be of service. Devoting himself entirely to God and the good of his neighbour, he never conversed with any except on religious topics."

Father de la Colombière soon became accustomed to English life, though it must have been very distasteful to him in many ways. He was kept fully occupied, as we learn from a note he wrote to his brother in November 1676. "I am already as much accustomed to English life as if I had been born in London. I find a great many Catholics here, but am told that the number of the devout amongst them is small. I am not surprised at this, for had we as little spiritual help in France as they have here, I think our state would be worse than theirs. No English subject is allowed to enter the Ambassador's Chapel to hear Mass, and since my arrival men have been placed at the doors of all the chapels to arrest any Englishman who might be seen entering. There are many Frenchmen in London, but it is a year since they have received any instruction."

Father de la Colombière preached two Lenten courses as well as a sermon on every Sunday and festival in the Chapel Royal. He had a sincere admiration for the Duchess of York, who led a truly edifying life. "The Duchess of York," he writes, "is a Princess of the deepest piety. She communicates weekly, sometimes oftener, and spends an hour every day in mental prayer. Her dream is to found a Convent of your Order (the Visitation) in Flanders for English girls." And again: "I serve a Princess pious in every sense of the word, gentle, amiable, and an example of all that is good."

No historical record has been kept of the details of Father de la Colombière's apostolic life in England, but that he spent his days in arduous

labour may be concluded from two things. His health gave way under the strain, and though the English climate probably had something to do with this, it is evident that his work was the main cause of the disease which undermined his strength and brought him in a few years to the grave. The second indication of his labours we gather from the litany composed by Blessed Margaret Mary in his honour shortly after his death, where she calls him "Voice of an Apostle," "Buckler of the Catholic Faith," and "Destroyer of Heresy." She declared that he employed all his eloquence in making known the greatness of God, converting sinners to penance and drawing heretics to a true conversion.

One of the greatest helps he had in his difficult work lay in the little note Sister Margaret Mary had given him before he left Paray. It ran as follows:—

"1. Father de la Colombière's talent is to lead souls to God; therefore the devils will do all in their power against him. He will meet with trouble, even from persons consecrated to God, who will not approve of what he says in his sermons to convert them: but in these crosses the goodness of God will be his support, so long as he continues to trust in Him.

"2. He must have a compassionate gentleness for sinners, and only use severe measures when especially inspired by God to do so.

"3. Let him be particularly careful not to draw good from its source. This sentence is short, but it contains much which God will enable him to understand according to the diligence with which he applies himself to find its meaning."

Little by little these words were entirely verified. Even the third point, which sounds so obscure, became perfectly clear to him in a retreat he made

in February 1677. In a letter of May 3rd of that year, Father de la Colombière wrote to Mother de Saumaise: "I do not believe that without the advice contained in Sister Margaret's letter I could have borne the pains which I have suffered, and which have never attacked me with more violence than when pressed and overwhelmed with work."

Mother de Saumaise continued to send him Sister Margaret Mary's notes from time to time, but she used her own discretion as to when they were to be sent. On one occasion she kept one of the notes, but seeing from a letter Father de la Colombière wrote to her that he had need of the advice contained in it, she made a copy of the note, intending to send it to him, without mentioning the fact to any one. Just then Sister Margaret Mary came to her and told her that since she saw fit to send a copy of her note to Father de la Colombière, no change should be made in it. Mother de Saumaise was astounded, and on reading over the copy she had made of the note she found that she had, in fact, made a mistake in it that was rather an important change.

In November 1677, Father de la Colombière wrote again to Mother de Saumaise: "I cannot tell you what a consolation your letter was to me. Sister Alacoque's note has given me great strength, and reassures me on the subject of numberless doubts which present themselves to me every day. I am in great difficulty regarding that which she desires of me and do not know what answer to give her. Our Lord does not reveal Himself to me as He does to her, and I am far from being able to give her advice in anything. However, to satisfy her humility, I will write to her to-day."

What esteem Father de la Colombière had for Sister Margaret Mary's sanctity is shown from the

following extracts from various letters to Mother de Saumaise, written from London :—

“We do not meet here with Daughters of the Visitation, and much less with a Sister Alacoque ; but God is to be found wherever we seek Him, and He claims our love no less in London than in Paray. I thank Him with all my heart for the favour He confers on me in my being remembered by that holy religious. I do not doubt that her prayers bring great graces upon me.”

“What joy all that you say regarding Sister Alacoque gives me. How admirable and loving God is in His Saints !”

“I would gladly reply to holy Sister Alacoque’s letter, which has edified me extremely, but I feel quite incapable of saying anything to her, and I fear so much to interrupt her interior life that I cannot make up my mind to follow my inclination to write to her. I look upon her as most wise and enlightened, and I am persuaded that God communicates Himself to her in a most special way.”

One of the greatest of Father de la Colombière’s trials in England was to see the Blessed Sacrament but little known and loved, and so exposed to outrage. He redoubled his own love and fervour, remaining as long as he could at the foot of the altar. How happy he would have been to bring home to that Divine Shepherd the multitude of wandering sheep, and to have spoken to them of the wonders and love of the Sacred Heart.

To such as confided to him the direction of their souls, he spoke freely and urged them to have a great love for this devotion. The Duchess of York soon became inflamed with the love of the Divine Heart, and it was she who, in 1697, petitioned the Holy See for the institution of a Feast in Its honour.

Now that in this twentieth century Bishops and Priests alike are urging their people to consecrate themselves and their families to the Sacred Heart, and that the devotion of the Enthronement is becoming widely known in England, it cannot but be interesting to listen to the words of the Holy Jesuit of the seventeenth century, as he lifted up his voice in the Chapel Royal of St James' Palace, proclaiming to a handful of Catholics the love of the Divine Heart. That love does not change—it is to-day what it was then—Jesus Christ is “yesterday, to-day, and the same for ever,” the words therefore uttered in that royal pulpit should find their echo in our own hearts, and stir us up to greater and deeper love for the Heart that has loved us with an everlasting love.

“What wilt Thou do, O Lord, to overcome this obstinate insensibility? The Fathers of the Church tell us that Thou hast exhausted Thyself in this Mystery of Love, the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar; if the sacred contact of Thy Body cannot break the spell which binds us to sin, what success can we hope for from any other remedy? I can see in such our evil plight but one resource. Give us, O my God, a new heart, pure and tender, neither of marble nor of bronze, a heart in all things like to Thine. Give us, O Jesus, Thine own Heart. Come, O sweet Heart of Jesus to my breast, and there, if it be possible, light up a fire of love which shall burn with the ardent devotion I should pay to my Saviour and my God! Come, O Sacred Heart, and love Jesus in me even as Thou didst love me in Him. May I live only in Him, and for Him, so that at last I may live with Him for ever and ever!”

After preaching the Lenten sermons in 1678 Father de la Colombière's health broke down, and

it seemed doubtful whether he would be able to continue his work at the English Court. He expected therefore to return to France in September, but a letter from Sister Margaret Mary warned him to prepare his soul for fresh trials. Of this letter he writes : " What makes me now think I shall be here for some time is that fresh harvests present themselves to be gathered and that Sister Alacoque prepares me for a continuation of my work. I received your letter and the paper you sent me from her, the very day on which I had seen the doctor, and was feeling so weak and low that I seemed to have little strength for the work I foresee in the coming year, and I looked upon my illness as an interposition of Providence, Who seeing my incapacity for the task, was about to withdraw me from this country. For this I was prepared, but having read the note exhorting me not to lose courage on account of the difficulties before me, and to remember that he who trusts in God is all-powerful, I began to think otherwise, and to believe that I shall stay on here."

Warned by his spiritual daughter, Father de la Colombière awaited his trials in peace. In 1678 a storm of persecution broke out against the Catholics on account of the Titus Oates Plot. The Jesuits, as usual, were the first to suffer. Father de la Colombière, betrayed by one of his own countrymen, Luzancy, to whom he had been very kind, was arrested and thrown into prison on 26th November.

On the 28th of the same month the French Ambassador wrote to Versailles : " The Duchess of York's Jesuit Chaplain, Father de la Colombière, has been taken into custody, charged with attempting to convert a Protestant and with having told him that the English King was really a Catholic." The

imprisonment, however, although very rigorous, only lasted three weeks. A petition was addressed to the King—"That it will please His Majesty to command that the said Colombière may be for ever banished from this kingdom and from all the territories and dominions of the Crown." Sentence was passed to this effect. However the close confinement in prison had seriously affected the holy Jesuit's health and he was forced to beg for a reprieve. Ten days were granted to him and he was given his freedom on parole. This enabled him to take leave of several people, much to his own consolation as well as to theirs.

How willingly Father de la Colombière would have given his life in order to win the noble English nation back to the faith of its fathers and to present it as a conquest to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord may be gathered from the words he uttered as he stood on the deck of the vessel that was bearing him back to his native land. Watching the shores of England disappear in the mist, he said, whilst tears started to his eyes:—

"Thou knowest, O Lord, that at a word, at the slightest intimation from my Superiors, I am willing to return to that shore to work and to suffer. Does Thy justice require yet another victim, take my life. Verily, O Lord, shouldst Thou restore this people to the fold of Thy Church, Thou wouldst find amongst them many true and generous hearts there to glorify, as in past days, Thy adorable Name."

CHAPTER XI

THE VICTIM OF THE SACRED HEART

(1677-1678)

WHILST Father de la Colombière was working and suffering in England, Sister Margaret Mary continued her life of sacrifice and love in the cloister.

Our Lord did not allow her to forget that she had offered herself to Him as His victim. "One day," she writes, "my Beloved appeared to me bearing in His hand a picture of the happiest life imaginable for a religious : a life of peace, interior and exterior consolation, and of perfect health, joined to the esteem and applause of creatures and other things pleasant to Nature. In the other hand He bore a picture of a poor and abject life, crucified, despised, contradicted, and always suffering, both in body and soul. He presented these two portraits to me, and said : ' My daughter, choose that which pleases thee best. I will give thee the same graces whichever thou dost choose,' and I, casting myself in adoration at His feet, replied : ' O my Lord, I desire Thee only, and the choice Thou makest for me.' " Our Lord then pressed her to choose one or the other, and Sister Margaret Mary again replied : " Thou, O my God, art sufficient for me. Give me that which will glorify Thee most without reference to my interest or my consolation ; it is enough for me if Thou art pleased." Then Our Lord told her

that with Magdalen she had chosen the better part, which should never be taken away from her, and giving her the picture of the suffering life, He said: "This is what I have chosen for thee, both for the accomplishment of My designs and also to make thee conformable to Myself. The other is a life of enjoyment, but not of merit; that is reserved for eternity." Sister Margaret Mary accepted the picture of a life of suffering, and kissed the hand which gave it to her, although her whole nature shuddered at the thought of it.

About this time Our Lady prepared Sister Margaret Mary still more definitely for the work she was to do as a victim of reparation. On the Feast of the Assumption, 1677, she appeared to her and showed her a crown of flowers which she had entwined for herself, so that she might adorn herself with it, and so present herself to the Blessed Trinity. These flowers represented the religious of the Paray Community. Our Lady then gave her to understand that, wishing to quit the earth, she found these flowers so attached to it that only fifteen remained with her, and that of these, five were received as spouses of her Son.

Another time Our Lady showed her the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a living Fountain, from whence flowed five channels into five hearts which He had chosen. Below were five others which received much grace, but allowed most of it to escape.

Again on another occasion Sister Margaret Mary was shown five hearts which Jesus was about to reject. She was overcome with sorrow, and exclaimed: "O Lord, Thou mayest destroy and annihilate me, but I will not leave Thee until Thou hast granted me the conversion of these hearts."

It was, perhaps, in order to give His chosen

servant a greater compassion for others, and therefore a more ardent desire to help those for whom she was to make reparation, that God allowed her to be severely tried herself by temptation. One Thursday night, when she was making the Holy Hour, Our Lord told her that Satan had asked to tempt and try her by all sorts of contradictions, humiliations, and desolations, and that He had given permission for her to be subjected to all temptations except those of impurity. She was to be especially upon her guard against pride, despair, and gluttony, "of which," she says, "I had a greater horror than death." At the same time Our Lord promised that He would Himself protect her; she was to be particularly watchful over her exterior, as He would take care of her interior life.

The devil lost no time before tormenting her. She saw him more than once as a hideous negro, his eyes burning like coals. "Accursed that you are," he said, "if I can once hold you in my power, I will make you feel what I can do. I will injure you in every way."

We come now to an event in the month of November 1677, on account of which some biographers have taken a severe view of the probable state of the Community at Paray at this time. But we must remember that it is a very difficult thing to judge people who lived more than two hundred years ago, and we must bear in mind also that God in choosing that convent at Paray-le-Monial as the cradle whence the devotion to the Sacred Heart was to be made known to the world, must have had a special love for it, and must therefore have exacted a higher standard of holiness from the members of that privileged Community than from others.

Faults which to the world look light and trivial are not so in religious, for "to whom much has been given, from him also much shall be demanded."

The Sisters were certainly not perfect, but then again religious are human. Sister Margaret Mary must have been a puzzle to most of them, and the daughters of Saint Francis of Sales would naturally be particularly on their guard against any departure from the beaten track in the way of spirituality, especially as to any so-called new devotion, seeing that their Rule expressly desires them to be so. It is certain that many of the Sisters failed in charity towards one whom they deemed to be a mere visionary, and Our Lord, Whose Sacred Heart is "full of kindness and love," was displeased at these and other faults, and demanded reparation for them. The victim He chose was Sister Margaret Mary. "I wish to give thee My Heart," He said to her one day, "but first thou must make thyself a victim of immolation, to turn aside by thy intervention the chastisements which My Father is about to inflict on this Community." At this she shuddered, and not having the courage to make the sacrifice of herself, replied that she could not do it without the consent of her Superior. She shrank, however, from speaking to Mother de Saumaise, but was reproached so persistently by our Lord for this, that she at length told her everything. Mother de Saumaise advised her to make a complete sacrifice of herself, but she still continued to resist. At last on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady's Presentation, 20th November, when praying with the Community and struggling against her repugnance, the divine justice was shown to her under an aspect so terrible that she was quite overwhelmed. She heard the words formerly addressed to St

Paul: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." Then she was told that because she had so long resisted on account of the humiliation she would meet with in the sacrifice, it would now be doubly humiliating. Before, she had been asked to make the sacrifice in secret, now it was to be in public, and at a time and in a way which would seem to others quite unreasonable. This would cause her such humiliation that it would be a subject of confusion to her to the end of her life, both in her own eyes and in those of others.

When the hour for prayer was passed the Community left the chapel, but Sister Margaret Mary remained there in tears until the bell rang for supper. She kept repeating the words: "My God, have pity on me, according to the greatness of Thy mercy." She dragged herself to the refectory, and there felt strongly urged to make the sacrifice of herself aloud in presence of the assembled Community. Mother de Saumaise, however, being indisposed, was absent, and it was necessary to obtain her permission. Sister Margaret Mary left the refectory, intending to go at once to her Superior, but her strength failed her. "I felt," she writes, "like a wicked criminal dragged to a place of punishment." Her interior struggle was so violent that she was quite overcome and stopped half way, weeping and trembling from head to foot. One of the Sisters found her in this state about eight o'clock and led her to the Superior. Sister Margaret Mary cast herself at the feet of Mother de Saumaise in terrible confusion, for it seemed to her that every one knew of her struggles, her infidelity, and the anger of God. Mother de Saumaise saw at once that something more than ordinary had happened, and knowing what a power obedience had over her, she told her to give an account of

the whole. Sister Margaret Mary obeyed, and related simply how God had made known to her His displeasure against the Community, the sacrifice He demanded of her in reparation, and the resistance she had made to His will. Mother de Saumaise felt inspired by God to submit to the warning sent to her by His servant. She sent the Mother Assistant to tell the Community, then assembled for Matins, that they were to do a certain penance in reparation for faults which rendered them displeasing to Our Lord.

As may easily be imagined, this sudden order was received with dismay. The greater number at once submitted their judgment and obeyed in a truly religious spirit. Some, however, suspecting that Sister Margaret Mary had been the cause of it, went to the infirmary where she was, and vented their vexation against her. Monseigneur Languet, in his biography of the Saint, gives what would seem to be a very overdrawn picture of the scene which took place. This is probably accounted for by the fact that at the time of his visitations of the convent at Paray-le-Monial in 1712, and subsequent years, many of the sisters who had been contemporaries with Blessed Margaret Mary would still have been alive. These Sisters, as we learn from papers left us by the elder religious, were so overcome with grief at the way they had treated one whom they now held to be a Saint, that they accused themselves in no measured terms to Monseigneur Languet, and so led him to take a rather unfavourable view of the Community as a whole.

The Sisters who went to find Sister Margaret Mary in the infirmary certainly treated her unkindly. Some supposed that she was possessed by the devil: others accused her of hypocrisy, of failing

in charity, and pretended that she was wanting both in humility and prudence. At the same time we read that on the following morning they had already repented of their conduct, for while Sister Margaret Mary was assisting at Mass she heard the following words: "At length peace is restored and My holiness of justice is satisfied by the sacrifice thou hast made Me. I will join thy sacrifice to Mine and apply it in favour of charity as I have shown thee. Therefore thou must no longer claim anything for thyself in all that thou dost do or suffer either by way of merit, or in satisfaction, or in any other way, all must be sacrificed to Me in favour of charity. In imitation of Me, thou must act and suffer in silence, desiring only the glory of God and the establishment of the reign of the Sacred Heart in the hearts of men to whom I wish to manifest Myself by thy means."

It would seem that Our Lord often rewards whole-hearted sacrifice by calling the soul to closer union with Himself by means of new sufferings. So it was with Sister Margaret Mary. After the incident of the 21st of November, her soul remained plunged in interior desolation and trial. Everything became more repugnant to her than ever. She felt that she was an object of contradiction, a very sink—to use her own expression—of contempt and humiliation. She could neither eat nor sleep. Yet, in spite of it all, she would not allow herself to be dispensed from any part of her work, or from the strictest observance of the Rule. Mother de Saumaise, not being able for a time to go to the refectory, one of the Sisters thought it her duty to compel Sister Margaret Mary to eat. She obeyed, but could retain no food, and at last became so weak that she was told only to take what she could.

"From this time," she says, "eating became a torment to me. I went to the refectory as to a place of punishment for my sins."

The devil assaulted her violently. "I should have yielded a thousand times," she writes, "had I not felt an extraordinary power within me, supporting me and combating for me."

At last Mother de Saumaise told her to beg Our Lord to restore her to her former health. "Yes, My daughter," was Our Lord's reply to her request, "I will give thee fresh vigour, but only to make thee a victim to new sufferings."

The new trial was soon upon her. All her life, as we have seen, she had felt a great fear of being deceived and of deceiving others. Now she was told by those about her that the devil was the author of all that passed within her, and that he would destroy her if she did not take care. Again it was Our Lord Himself Who consoled her. "What hast thou to fear in the arms of the Almighty? Could He allow thee to perish, or abandon thee to thine enemies? I have been thy Father, thy Master, and thy Director from thy earliest years. I have given thee constant proofs of the tenderness of My Heart, which I have even given thee as thy dwelling-place now and for ever. Tell Me, what stronger proof thou dost desire of My love and I will give it to thee. Why dost thou combat against Me Who am alone thy true and only Friend?" These reproaches humbled her, and she resolved no longer to take part in the trials they insisted on making of the Spirit which guided her, but to content herself with accepting wholeheartedly and humbly whatever was required of her.

The Constitutions of the Order of the Visitation do not allow any Superior to be elected for more than three years at a time, and only twice consecu-

tively, so Mother de Saumaise, having completed six years of Superiority at Paray-le-Monial, went to Dijon, the Monastery of her Profession, and was succeeded at Paray by Mother Péronne Rosalie Greyfié, who arrived on 17th June 1678.

Mother de Saumaise spent one year at Dijon and was then elected Superior of the convent at Moulins, which she governed for three years, then her failing health obliged her to return to Dijon, where she spent the remainder of her life, dying in 1694, four years after Blessed Margaret Mary.

From the time she left Paray until her death she worked incessantly, both in her own soul and in the souls of others, to bring about the complete triumph of the Sacred Heart. She kept up a frequent and intimate correspondence with Sister Margaret Mary. In her hidden life of pain and ill-health she realised in herself the prediction made by the servant of God: "The reign of the Sacred Heart will only be established by those who are poor and hidden."

"You know, my dearest Mother," wrote Sister Margaret Mary in 1686, "that you are the first to whom Our Lord wished me to make known the ardent desire of His Heart to be known, loved and glorified by men. The reign of His Sacred Heart will be established by those of whom He makes choice, and you are one of them. Therefore He desires me to manifest to you the secrets of His Heart as well as I can, so that you may help me, ignorant as I am."

Again, in 1687, we find these remarkable words: "For a long time Our Lord has inspired me with the thought that He has chosen you to fill our holy Father de la Colombière's place, in establishing the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This is one of the greatest graces He could give you."

When in 1690 God called Sister Margaret Mary to Himself, Mother de Saumaise, who admired her greatly and loved her dearly, wrote a few reminiscences of the years she had spent with her at Paray.

“The desire she felt to resemble Our Lord Jesus Christ as closely as possible led her to do and suffer much which was very crucifying to nature with incredible peace, patience and gentleness. If she received any humiliation, contradiction or mortification from her sisters, she begged earnestly to be allowed to take the discipline or perform other penances for their intention. She was never better pleased than when she was despised. I will say nothing of her exactness in all the practices of religious life, and of her severe and rigorous mortifications, as others have already spoken of them. . . . Our Lord sometimes allowed her to see the pleasure He received from certain souls. Thus He once showed her three who were going to Holy Communion, and said to her: “I will give them three kisses, of peace, love and confidence.” She felt inexpressible delight in seeing Our Lord’s delight in these three souls. . . . Having seen all that has been written of this perfect religious, I can affirm that it coincides completely with all I saw of her during the six years I had the honour of being with your Community, and also with all that I have learnt of her from the letters I have since received, in which she gives more detailed explanations of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Persons of great merit who knew the virtues of Sister Margaret Mary had, and still have, a great respect for her, and declare that what passed within her came from God; the signs were too strong to admit of any doubt, especially that of her sincere humility.”

CHAPTER XII

UNDER MOTHER GREYFIÉ

(1678-1684)

MOTHER PÉRONNE ROSALIE GREYFIÉ seems to have had a twofold mission regarding Sister Margaret Mary. She was a woman of great energy of character, and was most zealous in maintaining regularity and the primitive spirit of the Order in the Communities she governed. A lover of simplicity and obedience, she possessed a sound judgment and great discernment of character, joined to a real tenderness of heart. These qualities fitted her admirably for her office of Superior at Paray, where she served not only to manifest the undoubtedly divine origin of the favours received by Sister Margaret Mary, but helped also to direct and encourage her in the ways of eminent sanctity.

Writing in 1690, a few weeks after the death of the servant of God, to Mother de Lévy-Chateaumorand, then Superior at Paray, Mother Greyfié says: "When I entered upon the service of your house, although your Community was very good and full of virtue and piety, I nevertheless found opinion very much divided about this true spouse of Jesus Crucified. I was without experience or help for guiding her in such extraordinary ways, and therefore I trusted greatly to the assurances she gave me that Our Lord would lead me to act according to His Will in her regard. On this account I followed my natural liking for peace and

tranquillity, and in order to maintain this, I hardly ever let any one see that I believed anything extraordinary about her. I never spoke of her either inside or outside the house. If she did anything that displeased others, even by my orders or permission, I allowed others to blame her, and blamed her myself, if it was done in my presence. She always thought herself in the wrong, and continually asked for penances to satisfy the Divine Justice. If she had been allowed, she would have tortured her poor body with fasting, watching, disciplines and other penances."

Our Lord soon gave Mother Greyfié a proof of the reality of the graces He bestowed upon His chosen one. Sister Margaret Mary had obtained permission from Mother de Saumaise to make the Holy Hour every Thursday night prostrate upon the ground. Mother Greyfié first told her to kneel during the hour and shortly afterwards withdrew the permission for her to make it at all. She was implicitly obeyed, and herself gives the account of what happened:—

"Often during that time Sister Margaret Mary came to me full of apprehension, telling me that it seemed to her that Our Lord was angry with me because I had forbidden the Hour's prayer, and that she was afraid He would exact satisfaction in a way I should be sorry for and feel deeply. I was inflexible, but the sudden death, on October 14th 1678, of Sister Mary Elizabeth Carré, at the age of twenty-one, together with other circumstances, made me think seriously on the matter, and I lost no time in restoring the Hour of prayer to her, for I was convinced that this was the punishment with which she had threatened me on the part of Our Lord."

Towards the end of the year 1678, Our Lord

desired Sister Margaret Mary to renew in writing the entire offering she had made of herself to His Sacred Heart. About this she writes: "My Sovereign Lord required me to make in His favour a written testament or donation, whole and without reserve, as I had already done by word of mouth, of whatever I could do or suffer and of all the prayers and spiritual benefits that should be made for me either during my life or after my death. He told me to ask my Superior if she would draw up this act, for which He promised to reward her abundantly; if she refused, I was to address myself to Father de la Colombière. My Superior, however, was willing to do it, and when I presented it to the only Love of my soul, He expressed great satisfaction."

This act, written by Mother Greyfié and signed by Sister Margaret Mary in her own blood, runs as follows:—

"May Jesus ever reign in the heart of His spouse, Sister Margaret Mary, for whom, in virtue of the power God gives me over her, I offer, dedicate, and consecrate, purely and inviolably to the Sacred Heart of the adorable Jesus, all the good she may do during her life, and whatever shall be done for her after her death, so that the Will of this Divine Heart may dispose of it as He pleases, and in favour of whomsoever He may think fit, whether living or dead, Sister Margaret Mary protesting that she voluntarily strips herself of everything in general except the will to be for ever united to the Divine Heart of her Jesus, and to love Him purely for the love of Himself. In testimony whereof, she and I sign this writing. Made the last day of December 1678.

"Sister Péronne Rosalie Greyfié, at present Superior, for whose conversion and final penitence

Sister Margaret Mary will pray every day to the Divine Heart."

Then follows Sister Margaret Mary's signature, written in her own blood in this form: "Sister Margaret Mary, disciple of the Divine Heart of the adorable Jesus."

Our Lord then made over to her the treasures of His Heart. He told her to write the words He would dictate to her in her blood:—"I make thee heiress of My Heart and of all Its treasures for time and eternity, permitting thee to use them according to thy desire. I promise thee that thou shalt never fail in obtaining assistance until My Heart shall fail in power. Thou shalt be for ever Its beloved disciple, Its delight and the victim of Its Will. It alone shall be the object of all thy desires; It will repair and supply for all thy defects, and will fulfil all thy obligations."

Sister Margaret Mary, having written this consoling promise, thought she ought in turn to give Our Lord a proof of love, so taking a penknife she engraved upon her breast the Holy Name of Jesus in large and deep letters.

Shortly afterwards Our Lord spoke again to her: "My Saviour told me that He would take care to recompense a hundredfold all the good that should be done to me, as if done to Himself, since I no longer wished to lay any claim to it; and in order to reward her who had drawn up the testament in His favour, He would bestow on her the same reward that He had given to St Clare of Montefalcone. Therefore He would add to her actions the infinite merit of His own, and by the love of His Sacred Heart would enable her to merit the same crown as this Saint."

Sister Margaret Mary's remark upon this shows us how tenderly and for what supernatural motives

she loved her Superior. "This promise gave me great consolation, for I loved her much, because she nourished my soul abundantly with the delicious bread of mortification and humiliation."

Early in January, in 1679, Father de la Colombière arrived in France. He paid a passing visit to Paray, much to the joy of his revered spiritual daughter and of her Superior. Mother Greyfié still hesitated in believing that the work in Sister Margaret Mary's soul was entirely God's. She was quite reassured on this point by Father de la Colombière. He told her that he had no hesitation in believing her to be led by the Spirit of God. "What does it matter," he said, "even though it were an illusion of the devil, provided it produce in her the same effect as would be produced by the grace of our Lord? But there is no appearance of the devil having any part in it, for in that case, in wishing to deceive her, he would be deceiving himself, for humility, simplicity, exact obedience and mortification are not the fruits of the spirit of darkness." At these words, says Mother Greyfié, "I felt greatly reassured, because whatever course I took, I always found Sister Margaret Mary faithful in the practice of these virtues, and in the exact observance of her duties."

It was, however, to Sister Margaret Mary herself that Father de la Colombière's visit was especially well-timed. She was suffering terribly from the temptations about which she had been warned by Our Lord. At one time it was to despair. The devil represented to her that it was useless for her to hope for Heaven, void as she was of all love of God, and that she would be deprived of Him for eternity. "This made me," she says, "shed floods of tears." At other times she was tempted to vainglory, and very often to what she calls

“that abominable temptation of gluttony.” “He made me feel,” she confesses, “a ravenous hunger; he represented to me whatever was most calculated to excite my appetite, and this during the time of prayer.” The hunger never left her except when she entered the refectory, when she was seized with such a disgust for food that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she could eat anything. Scarcely had she left the table when her hunger returned more violently than ever, and thus she passed her days either in an absolute loathing for food, or an intense longing for it. Mother Greyfié, from whom Sister Margaret Mary concealed nothing, told her to come and ask for something to eat whenever she felt hungry. It is easy to imagine what a humiliation this was to her, especially as she knew it to be a quite useless remedy. Sometimes, on these occasions, Mother Greyfié told her “to reserve her hunger and satisfy it in the refectory with the rest of the Community;” at other times she was told to go to the Dispenser and ask for some food. She did exactly as she was told each time, and, as she says, she “remained at peace” in her sufferings.

By far the greatest of these trials was the fear lest she had offended God and would be eternally deprived of Him. In this suffering she found no relief except before the Blessed Sacrament, or in opening her heart to her Superior.

Mother Greyfié encouraged her to write down her difficulties, and she herself often replied by notes. Some of these have happily been preserved to us.

“I pray Jesus Christ, our Almighty Lord and Saviour, to command the tempest within you to cease, and I say to you in His name: Remain in peace. Your soul belongs to Our Lord, and He

is its portion. In spite of your enemies you will ever love Him in eternity and in this life, suffering for Him whenever He gives you the opportunity. Eat what you wish with the Community at the ordinary time of meals; at other times endure your hunger patiently. Humble yourself before God on account of your temptations. Hope firmly in His grace, and let your enemy clamour as much as he pleases."

In another note she writes: "All that I can say, my child, about the state of mind you describe to me, which is the cause of your suffering, is that you complain of being too well off. I should look upon it as a great grace if God allowed me to suffer as you do. I have often told you that it is to think wrongly of and to misjudge the Divine Goodness when you allow your mind to dwell on the thought that He will for ever abandon to the privation of His love a heart whose only desire is to love Him in time and eternity. He has never done it, nor will He ever do it. He does not condemn the poor and miserable unless they are such through their fault. If in doing you the favour of giving you some extraordinary insight into His divine attributes, He at the same time shows you something of your own unworthiness; if He makes you feel that your sins deserve nothing but hell, you must not make bad use of this knowledge; it is given to you that you may confess the greatness of Our Lord's divine mercy, who, setting His merits against your demerits, desires to save you from your sins and the punishment they deserve. So you should dispel all desponding thoughts with these words, 'The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever.' Yet we owe something in this life to His justice: patience, humility and submission of heart in the

trials and sufferings which befall us whatever they may be. Bear yours in this way. You ought to esteem and cherish them; receive them then, with gratitude, peace, and humility. You will indeed be happy if they lead you to feel your own nothingness, and no longer to seek yourself in anything."

Father de la Colombière only saw Sister Margaret Mary once during his visit of ten days or so to Paray-le-Monial in 1679; and even that visit, consoling and strengthening as it was to her, was accompanied with humiliation on account of some remarks that were made as to the length of the interview.

The director's opinion of his penitent may be gathered from a note he wrote to Mother de Saumaise on 23rd March 1679:—

"I was able to see Sister Alacoque only once, but I derived great consolation from the visit. I found her, as usual, extremely humble and submissive, with a great love of the Cross and of humiliation. These are the marks of the good spirit by which she is led; they are such as have never deceived any one."

From Paray, Father de la Colombière went to Lyons, where he was employed as spiritual father to the young scholastics. He recommended himself and his work to the prayers of Sister Margaret Mary. We can easily form an idea of how fervent those prayers were, and of how deep an interest she took in seeing the devotion to the Sacred Heart begin to take root among the Fathers of the Society of Jesus.

In the autumn of 1681 Father de la Colombière returned to Paray-le-Monial, but his health was completely broken. On his arrival he was strong enough to take a few walks and to say Mass in the

Chapel of the Visitation Convent, where he renewed his consecration to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. One day he saw the assembled Community, and in a voice scarcely above a whisper, he addressed a few words of consolation and advice to them. Shortly after this he was entirely confined to his room. Sister Margaret Mary, who naturally would have wished so much to profit by his direction during his stay in Paray, saw him but twice. She mentions this in a note to Mother de Saumaise: "I have seen him twice, he converses with much difficulty; perhaps God has so arranged it that He may be able to speak more abundantly to his heart." On one of these visits she had said to him: "Our Lord has revealed to me that were you to recover you would doubtless glorify Him by your zeal, but that in your sickness He glorifies Himself in you."

Father de la Colombière grew so ill that the Rector wrote to his brother, who hastened to Paray. He asked the Doctor and the Rector to allow him to take Father de la Colombière to St Symphorien to see if his native air would not restore him. Permission had of course to be obtained from the Provincial, and before asking it Father de la Colombière wished Sister Margaret Mary to be consulted on the subject. A mutual friend, Mademoiselle de Bisefrand, was commissioned to ask her advice. Sister Margaret Mary thought for an instant and then replied: "I beg him not to leave Paray, if without infringing the orders of his Superiors he can remain." The message was carried to the invalid, who dictated a few lines to his spiritual daughter, asking her the reason of her decision. The answer was returned: "He has told me that it is here that He wills to accept the sacrifice of your life." Upon

this Father de la Colombière begged leave to remain at Paray. He died on the 15th of February 1682, in the forty-first year of his age and the twenty-second of his religious life.

The news was carried to the convent by Mademoiselle de Bisefrand shortly after five o'clock in the morning. The Saint on hearing of his death exclaimed: "Pray, and entreat others to pray for him." At ten o'clock she wrote the following note: "Weep for him no longer, rather pray to him, and fear nothing, for truly he is more powerful to assist us than ever."

Mother Greyfié expressed surprise that Sister Margaret Mary did not ask permission to say any extra prayers or perform any penance for one to whom she owed so much. "Dear Mother," she replied gently, "he does not need them, being highly placed in heaven by the goodness and mercy of the Sacred Heart. He is in a position to pray for us rather than we for him."

Father de la Colombière's death was a great sorrow to Sister Margaret Mary, who was bound to him by such intimate spiritual ties. Yet deeply as she must have felt his loss, she never once complained. Her Superior writes: "It was a terrible blow to her, for she lost in him the best friend she had in the world. However, she did not grieve for him, since she loved her friends not for herself, but for the glory of God and their advancement in divine love. I never heard her regret him, but often heard her rejoice over his happiness, in which she took part, by giving thanks to the Sacred Heart for all the graces showered on her friend both during his life and at his death."

Sister Margaret Mary celebrated Father de la Colombière's anniversary as though it had been a

feast-day, and truly the saintly Jesuit must have richly experienced the words of his humble spiritual daughter: "It is sweet to die after having had a constant devotion to the Heart of Him Who is to be our Judge."

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER MOTHER GREYFIÉ—(*Continued*)

(1678-1684)

IT will be remembered that when in 1674 Our Lord had shown Sister Margaret Mary the ineffable secrets of His Heart, He had, in proof of the reality of His revelations, communicated to her some sparks of Its divine fire which caused her intense pain in her side, a pain which in a greater or less degree lasted as long as she lived. This was by no means her only physical suffering, but the more her bodily pain increased, the more she rejoiced.

Our Lord sent her about this time such an intense and continual thirst that nothing could quench it. Instead of seeking to lessen this torment, she tried to mortify herself rigorously, and resolved to drink nothing from Thursday until Saturday. However, Mother Greyfié thought it wiser to forbid such mortification, and told her to drink not only in the refectory but two or three times between meals. She obeyed, but thinking to join penance with obedience, she drank the water in which the dishes had been washed. Her little ruse was soon discovered, and she was severely rebuked by her Superior, who told her that true obedience obeys not only the letter of the command but the spirit in which it is given.

Sister Margaret Mary refers to this same trial of thirst in the following words: "One day my

Sovereign Lord gave me to understand that He wished to withdraw me into solitude, not that of the desert where He Himself had retired, but into that of His Sacred Heart, where He would converse intimately with me, as a friend with his beloved; and where He would give me new instructions as to His Will and new strength to accomplish it, and fight generously until death, because I still had powerful enemies to contend with. Then He asked me to honour His fast in the desert by fasting for fifty days on bread and water. My Superior, however, would not allow this, so He told me it would be equally pleasing to Him if I passed fifty days without drinking, in honour of the burning thirst He endured upon the Cross and the continual thirst of His Heart for the conversion of sinners. I was allowed to practise this penance, which was much harder for me than the other would have been, on account of the terrible thirst which always tormented me."

Not content with welcoming every pain sent to her by God, Sister Margaret Mary sought to inflict sufferings on herself for the love of her Divine Master. About a year after she had proved her love for Our Lord by cutting His Holy Name upon her breast, the wounds healed, and consequently the letters began to be effaced. This time she was determined that the writing should be indelible, so taking a lighted taper and applying the flame she slowly renewed the engraving of the Holy Name of Jesus. The result succeeded even beyond her expectations, and the wounds were so serious that she thought it was her duty to mention them to her Superior. Mother Greyfié thought they might be dangerous, and told her to use remedies and to apply whatever was recom-

mended by the Infirmarian, whom she would send to her. Great was Sister Margaret Mary's distress. "O my only love," she prayed, "wilt Thou allow others to see the wound which I have made solely for love of Thee? Art Thou not powerful enough to cure me, Thou Who art the Sovereign Remedy for all evils?" Our Lord heard her prayer and promised to cure her the next day. She was in fact cured, but before she had been able to tell Mother Greyfié about it, the Infirmarian, Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures, came to her with a note, putting her under obedience to show her the wounds. Sister Margaret Mary thought the miraculous cure sufficient to dispense her from obeying, so she thanked the Infirmarian, told her she was cured, and therefore no longer needed her services. Then she went at once to her Superior. Mother Greyfié reproved her severely, and deprived her of her next day's Communion, "a penance," says Sister Margaret Mary, "which was the severest pain I could suffer in this life." She also ordered her to show the Infirmarian the injury she had inflicted on herself. Sister Mary Magdalen found the wounds healed, though the scars were still to be seen tracing the Holy Name in large characters. "Nothing could be compared," says Sister Margaret Mary, "to the grief I felt at having displeased my Divine Master, Who to punish me for my reluctance to obey, kept me under His Sacred Feet for about five days, showing me how much the slightest faults against obedience displease Him in a religious. At last He dried up my tears Himself and restored life to my soul." In punishment of this fault Our Lord told her that the traces of His Holy Name, which had cost her so dear, should be effaced, and that the first marks also should entirely disappear. After her death Sister

Mary Magdalen des Escures wished to see if the letters still remained, but not a trace of them was to be seen.

We have seen how constantly Sister Margaret Mary was troubled with the fear of being deluded in her spiritual life. This difficulty, as every other, she carried to the Blessed Sacrament, and Our Lord on one occasion gave her certain signs by which she might always judge whether or not the favours she received came from Him. "He taught me first," she writes, "that His special graces would always be accompanied by some humiliation, contradiction, or contempt on the part of creatures; secondly, that after having received any of these divine communications, of which my soul is so unworthy, I should feel plunged in an abyss of self-annihilation and interior confusion, which would make me feel as much sorrow at the sight of my unworthiness as I should have experienced consolation at the liberality of my Saviour, thus checking all vain satisfaction and every feeling of self-esteem. That the graces and communications which I received, whether for myself or for others, would never make me have the least feeling of contempt for any one whatever, and that whatever knowledge they gave me of the interior life of others, I should not esteem them less, but rather be led to feelings of compassion, which would make me pray more earnestly for them. That all these graces, however extraordinary they might be, would never hinder me from observing my Rules and obeying blindly." "My Divine Saviour gave me to understand," she protests, "that He designed that they should be so dependent on obedience, that were I to swerve from it ever so little, He would withdraw from me with all His favours. Finally, that this Spirit

which led me, and which reigns so forcibly in me, would lead me to five things—

1. To an extreme love for my Saviour Jesus Christ.
2. To obey His example perfectly.
3. To suffer unceasingly for the love of Jesus Christ.
4. To wish to suffer, if possible, without any one noticing that I suffer.
5. To have an insatiable thirst for Holy Communion and for being before the Blessed Sacrament."

"It seems to me," she continues, "that all these graces have hitherto produced these great effects in me. As for everything else, I see more clearly than the day that a life without the love of Jesus Christ is the greatest misery."

In the direction of this soul so especially dear to Him, Our Lord seems to have made an especial point of the virtue of obedience, and to have given Sister Margaret Mary frequent and notable opportunities of practising it. Mother Greyfié gives us an account of one of these instances.

"She was recovering from a severe illness and had not yet left her bed. I went to see her (whether on a Saturday or on the eve of some feast I do not remember), and she asked permission to get up for Mass the next day. I hesitated at the request, and judging from my manner that I did not think her well enough, she said, 'Mother, if it is your will, it will be God's Will also, and He will give me strength.' I then gave orders to the Infirmarian to give her something to take and allow her to rise in time for Mass. During the evening the invalid told the Infirmarian that she was very anxious to remain fasting, so that she

could go to Holy Communion. The Infirmarian promised to ask my permission, but forgot it until the next morning when, having allowed Sister Margaret Mary to rise fasting and earlier than I had said, she left the Infirmary to look for me, to tell me of this arrangement and to obtain my approval. God allowed that as she left the Infirmary by one door I should enter it by another. Scarcely had I caught sight of the invalid and heard that she was fasting with the intention of going to Holy Communion than, without waiting to hear any explanations, I gave her a sharp reprimand and exaggerated her fault, which I said was the effect of self-will and a want of obedience, submission, and humility. I told her she could go to Mass and Communion, but that since her self-will had given her sufficient strength for this, I would in my turn give my commands: she was to take her bed-clothes down to her cell, to go to Office when the bell rang, and to follow all the Community duties for five months without making use of any remedies during that time, or setting foot in the Infirmary except to visit the sick and assist them if the Infirmarians had need of her. She received my correction on her knees, her hands joined, and with a calm and peaceful demeanour; before rising from the ground she humbly asked my pardon and a penance, and then proceeded to carry out my orders to the letter."

Sister Margaret Mary remained in perfect health for exactly five months, that is until the Feast of the Presentation. On that day, after the renewal of her Vows, all her former sufferings returned, increased twofold.

This was not the only occasion on which Our Lord gave Sister Margaret Mary perfect health for a given period at the request of her Superior.

The year 1682 was one of constant suffering for her, so much so that she was only free from pain for four days in the whole year. On December 21st she received the following note from Mother Greyfié:—

“I command you in virtue of holy obedience to ask of God to let me know if what passes, and has passed in you since I have had charge of you, comes from His Spirit or not, and as a sign that it all comes from Him, to suspend your bodily ailments for five months only, so that during that time you may not require any remedies, nor be obliged to quit the ordinary course prescribed by the Rule. But if it is not from God, ask Him to leave you in your ordinary state, sometimes better, sometimes worse. We shall thus be assured of the truth.”

Sister Margaret Mary was told to leave the Infirmary as soon as she had read this note. She went at once to the Blessed Sacrament and made her request, and Our Lord answered: “I assure thee, My daughter, that to prove that thou art led by the good Spirit, I would willingly have granted thee as many years of health as she has asked months, or indeed any other proof she might have desired.” At the moment of the Elevation of the Sacred Host at Mass on the following morning, Sister Margaret Mary was restored to perfect health. “I felt all my infirmities sensibly taken from me, just as one might take off a dress, and I felt perfectly strong, like a person in robust health.” She took part in all the ordinary labours of the house, and was able to write in April to Mother de Saumaise: “I have been in such perfect health since December that it seems to me as if nothing could affect it.”

And yet no sooner had the evening of May

21st arrived, and with it the expiration of the five months, than she was seized with oppression and pain, and became as ill as she was before. Mother Greyfié acknowledged in this a clear sign of the truth of the favours Sister Margaret Mary received, but on account probably of some members of the Community who were still very incredulous, she again sent a note to the sufferer :—

“May 25th. I confess that I have remarked that health in you which I commanded you to ask of God, and by this manifest sign I ought to be persuaded that the incomprehensible mercy and goodness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the author of what has passed and still passes in your soul. I am willing to believe this; but I command you once more to pray to God the Father, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, that for love of Him and to free me from every doubt, He will continue your health for a whole year from the first obedience. That period passed, I abandon you to His Will as regards your health, but I require this space of time to give me complete assurance.”

Again God granted the request. The whole time passed without Sister Margaret Mary having once to go to the Infirmary or ask for any remedies. This fact is proved by original documents. In 1714 several of the Sisters who had been living at the time, and were witnesses of it, testified to the same. One among them relates that she ventured to say to Mother Greyfié: “Since you have succeeded so well, you ought to command Sister Margaret Mary not to re-enter the Infirmary for two years.” But Mother Greyfié wisely answered: “No. This is sufficient to convince me that our Sister is guided by God.”

During the days of Carnival, which preceded the Lent of 1682, Our Lord favoured His servant

with another vision, destined to make her understand more than ever the extent of the suffering to which He called her.

He appeared to her in the state in which He was when Pilate, presenting Him to the people, exclaimed "Ecce Homo." He was covered with wounds and bruises ; His Blood flowed from every part ; He bore upon His shoulders a heavy cross. and said sadly, "Will no one have pity on Me and compassionate My grief? Will no one take part in My sorrow in the pitiable state to which I am reduced by sinners, especially at this time?" Sister Margaret Mary threw herself at His feet and offered herself to Him. Our Lord accepted her offering and placed upon her shoulders a heavy cross, set with sharp pointed nails. "Feeling crushed with the weight, I began to understand," she says, "the malice of sin. He told me that it was not enough for me to carry this cross, but that He wished me to attach myself to it with Him, that I might keep Him faithful company by sharing in His sorrows and opprobrium." "I abandoned myself," she added, "to whatever He wished to do with me ; and in fact He fastened me to His cross by a violent illness, the pain of which had been represented by the sharp pointed nails."

From this day she was attacked every year at the time of the Carnival with pain and illness ; and that it might be known that her sickness came from no natural cause, she was always cured on Ash Wednesday and able to fast during Lent.

In 1681 the Turks threatened to overrun Europe. Pope Innocent XI. had recourse to prayer, and so as to secure the intercession of all the Faithful, he published a Jubilee, giving special privileges to all who prayed that the power of the Turks might be checked. The Holy Father was not deceived

in his hope. The Ottoman army was completely overthrown before the walls of Vienna. John Sobieski gained a magnificent victory and gladly referred his success to the prayers that had been offered. Whilst the *Te Deum* was being sung in the Cathedral of Vienna, he lay prostrate on the ground, in thanksgiving for the marvellous victory.

Sister Margaret Mary prayed most fervently during this Jubilee, and Our Lord taught her the spirit in which she should plead for the great object put before all Catholics by the Pope. He appeared to her as a Judge, and told her that His justice was irritated, not so much on account of the Infidels, but because of His chosen people, who had revolted against Him and made use of their easy access to Him to persecute Him. "If they do not amend," He said, "I will make them feel the weight of My avenging justice." Just at this moment the bell rang for Matins. Sister Margaret Mary rose to go, but the vision did not cease, and Jesus continued to speak to her. "Weep and sigh continually that My Blood should be shed unprofitably for so many souls, who abuse it greatly in these Indulgences. They are satisfied with cutting down the bad weeds that grow in their hearts without ever trying to root them up. But woe to those souls who remain uncleansed and insensible in the midst of these living waters; they will never be either washed from their stains or find their thirst quenched." Sister Margaret Mary knew that Our Lord was Himself thirsting for these souls; she therefore addressed herself to His Sacred Heart: "Place all these souls herein, my Lord, so that they may be sanctified and glorify Thee eternally. "Yes," replied Our Lord, "I will do so, if thou wilt answer for their perfect amendment." "Thou knowest well, O my God,"

she rejoined, "that this is not in my power unless Thou Thyself enable me by the efficacious merit of Thy Passion."

Then Our Lord taught her to ask for three things specially in time of Jubilee.

First, to offer to the Eternal Father the superabundant satisfaction He had made to the Divine Justice for sinners upon the cross, and to beg of Him to apply the merits of His Precious Blood to all souls in mortal sin, that they might be raised to a life of grace, and glorify God eternally.

Secondly, to offer to Him the burning love of His Sacred Heart in satisfaction for the tepidity and cowardice of His chosen people, and to beg of Him, by the ardent love which made Him suffer death, to rekindle the fire of His love in those tepid hearts, so that they might love and glorify Him eternally.

Thirdly, to offer the submission of His Will to His Eternal Father, and to beg of Him, through the merits of His Son, that He would complete and perfect His graces and consummate the accomplishment of His Will.

There was yet one more favour, one further trait of resemblance to her Divine Master which was granted to Sister Margaret Mary about this time. Our Lord called her to share in His Crown of Thorns. "As I went to Holy Communion," she says, "the Sacred Host appeared to me resplendent as a sun, the dazzling brightness of which I could not bear. Our Lord was in the centre bearing a crown of thorns. Shortly after I had received Him He placed this crown on my head, saying to me, "Receive this crown, My daughter, in sign of that which will shortly be given to thee, so that thou mayest bear a closer resemblance to Me."

At the time Sister Margaret Mary did not understand what this meant, but she soon had experience of the truth of the promise, by receiving accidentally, and on different occasions, three blows on the head, which caused her such pain that it seemed to her as though her head were continually encircled with thorns. She would not have exchanged this mysterious gift for any earthly crown. Often at night she could not lay her head on the pillow because the pain was so great, and this was a joy to her, for she found in it a resemblance to Christ, Who, dying on the Cross, could find no rest for His Sacred Head; besides, the impossibility to sleep gave her more time for intimate converse with her Beloved.

Mother Greyfié's term of office expired in May 1684. It may surprise us that one so enlightened and so truly virtuous as she was held out so long against giving complete credence to the way in which Sister Margaret Mary was led, in spite of the many and manifest signs she received as to the truth of her call. That she should act thus was undoubtedly allowed by God in order to stamp His dealings with His servant as unmistakably divine, and thus render the work He gave her to do more efficacious. We must not think, however, that Mother Greyfié was in any sense hard or unjust towards her spiritual daughter. On the contrary, they were bound together by ties of mutual admiration and love. We have only to read some of the notes written by the Superior to be convinced of this.

“I promise you that I will humble and mortify you willingly and cheerfully when occasions occur, because you have need of this help; it is a charity to give it to you, and I desire the good of your soul. But do not let this take away your confi-

dence in coming to me or writing to me, if you wish or have need of doing so. I shall always be willing to help you, for your soul is dear to mine, in spite of all that may make you disagreeable, importunate, or a burden. I must imitate our Heavenly Father, Who bestows His favours without any merit on our part. Come then, not only three times a day, but six if you like."

"I have lost the beginning of Matins in order to read your note and write these few words of reply, and to tell you, my dear child, to remain in peace in the midst of the war within you. He Who has raised it wished to save you, this is why He pursues you. Allow yourself to be caught by Him, or rather cast yourself to-morrow morning at Holy Communion into the arms of that loving confidence you ought to have in Him. If you have not already got it, find it in the adorable Heart of Our Lord and make use of it as you require it. No, *ma mie*" (a French expression, denoting both tenderness and intimacy, which it is impossible to translate into English), "I do not wish our intimacy to cease, and even were you a hundred times worse than you are, I should wish it to continue always."

In the next extract we find that Mother Greyfié strikes the note of downright common sense on the subject of mortification, and this, it must be remembered, to one who was called by God to great exterior practices of penance. It may be noted in passing that Sister Margaret Mary practised the ordinary forms of mortification perfectly. She did not neglect these on account of the great austerities she undertook. She knew well that the great precept is that of self-denial, and also that self is often more efficaciously put to death in the small occurrences of daily life than on great occa-

sions. The following note which she received from Mother Greyfié must have suited and pleased her much :—

“ . . . Be faithful to the obligations of your religious life and to the practice of virtue. . . . Your most excellent practice of mortification and penance will be to adapt your humours and inclinations to each occasion as it comes, and not to show exteriorly what you suffer interiorly. Be gay at recreation, always amiable and kind to your Sisters and with anybody you may have to deal with ; and be devout in all your duties to God. Whether it thunders, blows or hails with you, always bless God peacefully and humbly, and He will grant you the favour of praising Him through all eternity.”

The last note received by Sister Margaret Mary during the time of Mother Greyfié's Superiority at Paray was this :—

“ May Our Lord, Who afflicts you according to His good pleasure in body and mind, be also, by His grace and the mercy of His loving Heart, the strength and consolation of your whole being, both bodily and spiritually. Such, my beloved Sister and dear child, is my wish for you and the reply I make to your note describing the state of your soul. I see nothing in it which need make you fear. Suffer or rejoice in peace according as God gives you crosses or consolations. During the rest of the time that I remain in charge of this Community, I grant you Holy Communion on the First Friday of each month, according to the desire of Our Lord's Sacred Heart ; moreover, until my deposition, you may communicate also on the last Saturday of each month in honour of the Blessed Virgin, that she may obtain from the Divine Heart of her Son a Superior according to His Will, and for me the grace of a true and profound humility.”

Towards the end of April 1684, the last event of Mother Greyfié's Superiority took place. One of the children, Antoinette Rosalie de Sennecé, lay in a dying state, having been suddenly stricken with apoplexy. The child was quite unconscious, and Mother Greyfié told Sister Margaret Mary to ask Our Lord to restore her to consciousness so that she might receive the Sacraments. Our Lord was willing to grant the request, but on one condition, Sister Margaret Mary was to make a vow never to show repugnance to any employment she was given, to answer all the letters she received and always to go to the parlour without resistance as the Rule enjoined. Nothing could have cost her more. "She appeared," says Mother Greyfié, "afraid to bind herself, but I exhorted her to do so. She obeyed, and the child recovered consciousness and received all the help we were anxious to secure for her for her last journey."

Sister Margaret Mary's repugnance in fulfilling this Vow never left her. To the end of her life she had to force herself to obey whenever she was called to the parlour.

Indeed, her strong repugnance to many of the things Our Lord required of her is a remarkable trait in her character, and one which throws her faithful and self-forgetting love for Christ into strong relief.

Mother Greyfié left Paray-le-Monial in May 1684 to take up the post of Superior at Semur near Auxerre. She corresponded frequently with Sister Margaret Mary, encouraging her and assisting her materially to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER XIV

MISTRESS OF NOVICES

(1685-1686)

MOTHER MARIE CHRISTINE MELIN was a professed Sister of the convent at Paray-le-Monial. She had led an exemplary religious life there for thirty-four years when, in 1684, she was elected to succeed Mother Greyfié as Superior. Her contemporaries wrote of her that she was "gentleness, prudence, and devotion itself." Mother Melin had had ample opportunity of seeing and judging of Sister Margaret Mary's virtues, and consequently had great esteem for her. She knew how severely the humble Sister had been tested by Mother Greyfié, and determined now to treat her as she felt she deserved. Accordingly, she at once named her as her Assistant. What this meant to Sister Margaret Mary, and how much it cost her to keep her vow of accepting any employment without showing repugnance, can perhaps be best shown by the following note which she wrote at this time to Mother Greyfié :—

"My very honoured and dear Mother, how is it possible that one so full of defects and miseries as I am should yet so hunger for humiliation and suffering? When I remember that at least sometimes you did me the favour to nourish my soul with this delicious bread, bitter though it be to nature, and that now I am deprived of it, no doubt because of the bad use I made of it, I am

overwhelmed with grief. Nothing attached me so strongly to you as this conduct on your part. I cannot think of it without feelings of most tender gratitude towards you. . . . When I think of Our Lord on the Cross, life without suffering becomes insupportable to me. . . . I could not make up my mind to follow your counsel and ask for a long life unless every day could be employed in honouring the humility, silence, and patience of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and unless all my time could be passed if possible before the Blessed Sacrament."

Later on she wrote on the same subject to one of her directors: "I acknowledge that Our Lord leads me in a way entirely opposed to my inclinations. I have a great aversion to being in any Office, and also to writing letters and going to the parlour. I have continually to sacrifice myself as to all these things, for Our Lord left me no rest until I had made a vow to obey blindly about them, and as far as possible not to show any repugnance I felt. My dislikes seem rather to increase than diminish. However, I accept this cross as well as every other it pleases my Divine Saviour to send me. I assure you I should think God had abandoned me if He left me without suffering."

Sister Margaret Mary was indeed never to be without suffering, but at this time the special trial of holding the post of Mother Assistant was not long left to her. God was about to give His servant an opportunity of planting devotion to the Sacred Heart in the souls of several who were well fitted to receive it. In January 1685 the Novice Mistress fell ill, and Mother Melin at once appointed Sister Margaret Mary to fill her place. She held this important office for two years, years

which were perhaps among the most important of her life.

The novices, seven in number, four of whom were already professed,* looked upon Sister Margaret Mary as a Saint, and eagerly welcomed her as their Mother.

The noviceship at Paray-le-Monial must have been a beautiful picture in the sight of God and His angels during the years 1685 and 1686. Fervour reigned there supreme, the novices seeming to vie with each other in trying to carry out the instructions of their saintly Mistress.

Sister Margaret Mary began by making herself all to all. She soon won the confidence of her novices by her gentle kindness and prudent firmness. There was nothing hard in her firmness or soft in her kindness, but she gave herself up to the study of each character committed to her care, and led each one in the way best suited to draw her to God.

She never exacted anything from them that she did not herself practise, but sought to instil into their souls a strong love of their vocation, and led them gradually to see the necessity in religious life of interior and exterior mortification of their senses and of their own will and judgment.

The point, however, which specially characterised Sister Margaret Mary's training of her novices was her constant and emphatic teaching on the subject of detachment. "Raise yourselves above trifles," she urged, "and attach yourselves to God alone." She tried to inflame their hearts with a real love of a humble, hidden life, and thus led them by degrees to devotion towards

* It is usual in Communities for the young professed Sisters to spend one or more years in the noviceship after they have made their vows.

the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus hidden for their love in the Tabernacle.

The novices were enchanted, and Sister Margaret Mary, seeing how well disposed they were, often spoke to them of the love of the Sacred Heart for men, who make Him so little return. This theme of love recurred so often in that little noviceship at Paray, that the novices used to say: "Our Mother is like another Saint John, and can only speak the language of love," but, unlike the disciples of the Evangelist, the Paray novices were never tired of hearing the burning words which fell from the lips of their Mistress.

In this way it came about that the humble and obscure little noviciate of Paray-le-Monial became the cradle whence the devotion to the Sacred Heart went forth to the world kindling love in the hearts of men and calling all to "taste and see that the Lord is sweet." The very simplicity of the life of Sister Margaret Mary and her novices recalls the simple life of Bethlehem and Nazareth. There was nothing extraordinary about it, except that each one vied with the others in the fervent practice of those virtues which are particularly characteristic of the Heart of Jesus. Charity, humility, and detachment, together with absolute obedience, were the virtues which shone out in that little circle. Surely the fervour of her novices must have been a real consolation to Sister Margaret Mary, whose one and only desire was to see the Heart of her Lord praised and loved and served.

Of one of the novices, Christine Bouthier, we are told that she passed her noviceship in a very weak state of health, barely able to follow the common life. She was, however, received for her Profession. On the day on which she was

to make her vows, Sister Margaret Mary told her to ask God to cure her. The novice prostrated herself as is customary during the ceremony of Profession, feeling and looking unusually ill; when she arose, she was strong and well, her face showing unmistakable signs of health.

Another of the novices, Marguerite Billet, was one day walking with Sister Margaret Mary in the garden. The Novice Mistress stopped, and pointing to the filbert tree near the place where, during her own noviceship, she had looked after the ass and her foal, "Look," she said, "that is the place where God gave me such great graces. Our Lord showed me there what advantage there is in suffering, by revealing to me many things about His Passion."

In the simple duties of a novice's life, the first six months of the training of those seven favoured souls passed away. The Festival of Saint Margaret, July 20th, 1685, was near at hand, and the novices asked each other how they could best unite in keeping the patronal feast of their Mother, which happened that year to fall on a Friday. Sister Margaret Mary knew that they would want to do something for her on that day, so she told them that nothing would give her greater pleasure than that they should pay to the Heart of Jesus all the little marks of respect and honour which they had thought of bestowing on her and in fact that they should together offer the first united homage to the Sacred Heart.

In this way the first feast of the Divine Heart took place at Paray-le-Monial as a family feast, improvised by seven young novices who wished to please their Mother. The tiny stream of love and homage has swelled to a mighty river of praise.

See the bishops and priests prostrate before the

altar, offering acts of reparation and of consecration to the Divine Heart; look at the thousands of faithful adorers before the Tabernacle wherein beats the Heart that has loved men so much; see the churches erected in honour of this same most Sacred Heart; and look to-day over the world into the countless homes where Jesus reigns as King. Surely, in noting these things, our thoughts go back to that humble beginning at Paray, and we say to ourselves, "the finger of God is here."

The details of the preparations for that humble feast, 20th July 1685, have been preserved to us in the archives of Paray, and are written by one of the novices who was present.

"Our Venerable Sister Margaret Mary became Mistress of Novices in the year 1685, to our great joy. As she had a great desire to enkindle devotion to the Sacred Heart, she began by teaching it to us by the practice of the two special virtues of this Divine Heart. We remarked this in her conduct towards us, and we were charmed by it, and by her instructions, which were full of unction and of the love of God. She gave us practices in honour of the Sacred Heart, so that we might unite ourselves to It in all our actions from morning to night. In this way she continued to speak to us about the Divine Heart until her feast, which, as it fell on a Friday, she asked us to keep, by paying to the Heart of Our Lord all the honour we should wish to give to her. She had fastened, on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, a small etching of the Sacred Heart to our altar.

We were so anxious to accomplish her wishes that we got up soon after midnight to get an altar ready, on which we put the etching, surrounded

by all the ornaments and flowers we could get. As we wished to be free after Prime, we went to prepare the refectory, but we were not quiet enough over our work, and drew down upon ourselves a correction from Reverend Mother Melin, to whom we were sent half-an-hour after the call for rising. We explained all to her, and she was quite satisfied.

“After Prime our dear Mother came as usual to the Noviciate. She read us a Consecration she had composed in honour of the Divine Heart, and seemed very pleased with our altar. She invited each of us to write our own consecration, promising to add a word to each, according to the dispositions of each one.”

Here the quaint account abruptly ends. It is valuable, as it gives us a glimpse into the simple everyday life of Sister Margaret Mary's novices.

The day passed in great joy in the seclusion of the Noviceship, but it was not to end without being marked, as were all the joys of this favourite of the Sacred Heart, with the cross of humiliation. She was very anxious that the Community should have an opportunity of taking part in the honour paid to the Divine Heart, so she sent one of the novices to invite some of the elder Sisters, on whose piety and discretion she thought she could rely. In this she was mistaken; the novice was sent about her business, and told that the 18th Constitution forbade any to adopt new prayers or offices under any condition whatever, and that it was not the place of the novices or of their Mistress to introduce novelties. “Go and tell your Mistress,” said Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures, who was a great friend of Sister Margaret Mary—“go and tell your Mistress that the best devotion is the practice of our Rules and Constitutions, and

that this is what she must teach you, and what you should practise."

The novice, Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère, to whom these messages were given, was greatly surprised, and not wishing to hurt Sister Margaret Mary's feelings, went back and simply said that the Sisters had been prevented from coming. "Say rather, that they will not come," replied the servant of God, "but the Sacred Heart will make them yield. They are opposed to it to-day, but the time will come when they will be the first to give themselves up to it. The Sacred Heart will have all from love, nothing by constraint. We must wait for the time which He has fixed for Himself."

Sister Margaret Mary repeatedly thanked her novices for the way they had spent the feast. "You could not have given me greater pleasure, my dearest Sisters, than by the honour you have paid to the Sacred Heart in thus consecrating yourselves to It. What a happiness it is for you that Our Lord has chosen you to begin this devotion. We must go on praying that He may reign in all hearts. Ah! what a joy it is to me that the Divine Heart should be known, loved, and glorified. Yes, dear Sisters, that is the greatest consolation I could have in this life. Nothing could give me so much pleasure as to see Him reigning. Let us love Him then without exception! Let us give all and sacrifice all to obtain this happiness. In the Divine Heart of Jesus we possess all things. He will be All in all to the soul that loves Him, but this will only be by suffering for Him."

The joy of that simple feast was soon destined to be checked. The events of the Noviceship got noised abroad in the Community, and many complaints were made against both the novices and their holy Mistress. Mother Melin, who was of

a peace-loving nature, thought it better not altogether to forbid the devotion, but to confine it within the walls of the noviciate. She forbade Sister Margaret Mary to attract or associate to it any member of the Community, or without her permission to place, where any of them could see it, any image or representation of the Sacred Heart which might excite this devotion. She also forbade her to go to Holy Communion on the First Friday of the month.

There is no need to record how exactly these directions were carried out, but they were the cause of great suffering to Sister Margaret Mary, because she feared that God might be displeased by this opposition.

She turned as usual to our Lord. He comforted her: "I will reign in spite of My enemies and of all those who oppose Me." "O my dearest Lord," she rejoined, "when will that happy hour come? In the meantime I place in Thy hands the defence of Thy own cause, whilst I will suffer in silence."

It may be interesting to give here a description of the etching of the Sacred Heart which was honoured by the Paray novices under the direction of their venerated Mistress. The representation is of a Heart, from which flames are issuing, encircled by a crown of thorns and surmounted by a cross. The nails are placed two above and one below. In the centre of the Heart is the opening made by the lance, and in this is written the word "Charitas." About the crown are inscribed the names Jesus, Maria, Joseph, Joachim and Anne. This picture has been in the possession of the Visitation nuns at Turin since 1738, when it was presented to them by the Community at Paray.

Shortly after July 1685, Mother Greyfié, who was

in constant correspondence with Sister Margaret Mary, and who was doing all she could to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart, sent her a framed picture. In it the Sacred Heart was represented surrounded with flames and encircled by a crown of thorns, the symbols of love and suffering. Sister Margaret Mary and her novices were delighted. "I cannot tell you," wrote the former, "the consolation you have given me in sending me the lovely picture of the Sacred Heart, and by telling me that you and all your Community will join with us in honouring this Divine Heart. This news gives me a thousand times more joy than if you put me in possession of all the treasures in the world."

"I can no longer occupy myself with anything but the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Provided that I love It and that It reigns, I am satisfied. The contradiction I have met with has often brought me to the verge of ceasing to speak of It, but the vain fears by which Satan tried to discourage me have been so strongly reprov'd, and I have felt so strengthened and encouraged, that I have resolved, cost what it may, to carry out to the utmost what I am allowed to do with the novices, who are warmly attached to the devotion. Yet if obedience did not allow this, I would give it up entirely, because I submit to obedience all my own views and inclinations."

Some of the Paray Community were so upset by what they considered the "new" devotion, that they threatened to denounce Sister Margaret Mary to the Bishop. This, however, could not trouble the peace and serenity of one who cared so little for her own reputation as she did: what really cost her, was the deprivation of her First Friday Communions. She used often at this

time to encourage herself by saying these words :—

“ Je veux tout souffrir sans me plaindre
Puisque son pur amour m'empêche de rien craindre.”

Our Lord, however, was about to give her back the Communions she had sacrificed by obedience. Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère, one of the young professed Sisters who were still in the noviceship, fell dangerously ill and appeared to be dying. As Sister Margaret Mary was praying for her recovery, Our Lord made known to her that the Sister would remain in her suffering state until Mother Melin renewed the permission for the First Friday Communions. Sister Margaret Mary was greatly troubled. On the one hand she wanted to obey her Superior, and on the other Our Lord continually urged her to let Mother Melin know how much the prohibition had displeased Him. She made up her mind to consult one of the elder Sisters, and chose Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures, on whose virtue she knew she could rely. She explained her difficulty in a note :—

“ I write you this in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, my dear Sister, because it is His Will that I should do so. Do not be astonished at my appealing to you in the trouble I am in concerning Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère. This morning, on rising, I seemed to hear these words : ‘ Tell thy Superior that she has displeased Me greatly. Wishing to please creatures, she has forbidden thee the Communion I told thee to make on the First Friday of every month in order to satisfy the Divine Justice by offering Me to the Eternal Father for the sins against charity of which I have chosen thee to be a victim. As she has forbidden thee to do My Will in this, I am resolved to

sacrifice to Myself the victim who now suffers.' This is what torments me, I can think of nothing else, and am continually urged to speak to our Mother about it. To tell you the truth, I fear to do so, in case it may all be a stratagem of the devil, who wants to make me appear singular by this communion, or else that it is merely a delusion, for it is not to a miserable hypocrite such as I am that Our Lord would show such a favour. I implore you to tell me what you think about it, both to relieve me from my difficulty and also because He wishes it. Do not flatter me, because I have such a fear of resisting God, and I cannot endure to see our Sister so ill. Ask Him to make known the truth to you, and what He wishes you to say to me, after which I will try to think no more about it. I beg you to burn this note and to keep my secret."

Sister Mary Magdalen kept the note and urged Sister Margaret Mary to explain the whole matter to the Superior. Mother Melin consented at once to what was asked, on condition that Sister Margaret Mary would pray for the recovery of the invalid. At once Sister Françoise Rosalie rallied and the danger was past. Whether or not the Superior forgot actually to tell Sister Margaret Mary to resume her Communions, or whether the humble Novice Mistress misunderstood and thought a more definite permission was necessary, we do not know, but the invalid though out of danger did not get well. Several First Fridays passed without Sister Margaret Mary resuming her Communions: she was afraid to make herself singular by asking a second time for leave to go. Our Lord was not pleased, and gave her to understand that until she actually communicated on the days He desired, the invalid would continue to suffer.

So once again Mother Melin was approached, and this time she made it quite clear that she wished Our Lord's request to be fully complied with. Sister Françoise Rosalie was immediately restored to full health.

The first year of Sister Margaret Mary's term as Novice Mistress was now drawing to a close. The devil did all in his power to get her removed from office, but on Christmas Day 1685, Our Lord, wishing to show her that He intended to leave the novices under her charge, said to her as to Saint Peter, "Feed My lambs." She understood by this that she was to lead them on to a still more solid practice of devotion to His Sacred Heart, and this she did by encouraging them to be strictly faithful to their Rules. "Feed your hearts with them, my dear Sisters," she would say, "they will introduce you to that interior life, that life hidden with Christ in God, which leads us to pure suffering, in which the perfection of love is found."

In the late autumn of 1685 the Provincial of the Jesuits sent Père Rolin to Paray-le-Monial as Rector. He had a great reputation for sanctity, and it was not long before Sister Margaret Mary wrote to him, asking to be allowed to place herself under his direction. Père Rolin, however, had been strongly prejudiced against her by some who considered that she was at best a weak-minded and highly imaginative woman. Nevertheless he went to see her early in 1686 and at once changed his opinion of her. In a second visit he recognised that she was a soul particularly favoured by Our Lord, and he resolved to do all he could for her advancement in divine love. Sister Margaret Mary on her side gave him her complete confidence, and received great help from him, especially

during a severe trial to which she was subjected about this time.

To prepare her for this fresh difficulty, Saint Francis of Sales appeared to her on his Feast, January 29th. He made her understand what a great desire he had to see the Sacred Heart known, loved and honoured in his Institute, saying that this was the most effectual means to prevent it from succumbing to the spirit of pride and ambition, which was about to try to ruin the spirit of humility and simplicity upon which it had been based. In general, this probably referred to the spirit of Jansenism, which wrought such havoc, especially in France, but doubtless it also had reference to the ambition of individuals, from one of whom Sister Margaret Mary was to suffer so severely.

The family of de Vichy-Chamron, one of the best known and best connected in the Province of Burgundy, had given several of its members to the Visitation Convent at Paray. The influential d'Amanzé family had intermarried with the de Vichy-Chamrons. Three sisters of the former family had been professed at Paray, one of whom was still living. Two other members of the Paray Community were cousins of a Mademoiselle de Vichy-Chamron, who after having been brought up in the convent school together with two of her sisters and three more of her cousins, asked and obtained admission as a postulant in 1686.

It is probable that her father, the Count de Vichy-Chamron, had urged his daughter to enter the convent where she had so many relations, and that the poor girl stood too much in awe of him to tell him that she had no real vocation.

At first she managed to conceal her feelings so well that the Community thought she was called to

follow their life. But Sister Margaret Mary, who saw things in the light of the Sacred Heart, knew otherwise. She took every possible means to assure herself that her opinion was correct, and then, convinced that it was so, she told Mother Melin about the postulant, urging that, in order to avoid all publicity, Mademoiselle de Vichy-Chamron should withdraw quietly to her family.

This decision of the holy Novice Mistress provoked marked displeasure among several in the Community. As for the members of the postulant's family and of her other friends in the world, many of whom were extremely influential people, it was as if a thunderbolt had fallen among them.

Sister Margaret Mary was a hypocrite, a visionary, deceived by the devil, incompetent to form any judgment! These and many other things were said against her. Nevertheless the maligned Novice Mistress remained firm in her decision, and bore all the abuse with the greatest meekness and in silence.

Perhaps the most bitter of her opponents was the Cardinal de Bouillon, an intimate friend of the de Vichy-Chamron family. He was Lord of Paray in virtue of his dignity of Abbot of Cluny. But Sister Margaret Mary looked wholly to God for support, and did not quail before the power even of one so great as the Cardinal de Bouillon. She was threatened with dismissal from her office, and even with imprisonment, but she remained so calm and peaceful that she won the admiration of the whole Community.

Among those who caused Sister Margaret Mary most suffering was a religious in a high position, who held among the people a great reputation for sanctity. He knew the family de Vichy-Chamron

well, and was probably prejudiced by them against her. In any case he lost no opportunity of speaking against her, charging her with hypocrisy and obstinacy, and saying that her seeming virtue was nothing but delusion.

In a letter to Mother Greyfié, we have Sister Margaret Mary's own account of how this affected her.

Lent 1686. "I see nothing in myself but what deserves eternal punishment, for I have not only been deceived, but I have been unhappy enough to deceive others by my hypocrisy, without, however, intending it. What confirms me in this opinion of myself is, that it is also the opinion of that good servant of God. I have reason to bless God a thousand times for having brought him here to put an end to the false opinion people had of me. . . . Pray that I may be perfectly converted to the Sacred Heart."

A little later in March she wrote :

"Our Lord has sent me quite unexpected help. A great servant of God has written, telling me that he feels strongly urged to offer Mass for me every Saturday for the rest of the year, that is, to say it for my intention, and I can dispose of it as I like, so I will share it with you on alternate Saturdays. We shall also participate in every Mass he says. . . . This good religious does not know me, nor I him, except by name. I never felt more at peace. Do thank the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ for this."

During all this time of trial Père Rolin showed himself a staunch friend to the persecuted Novice Mistress. He wrote to encourage her :—

"My dear Sister in Christ,—I have read your two letters, and thank God for all His mercies to you. . . . I do not think, after considering the

matter before Our Lord, that it is the devils who are unloosed against you. These spirits of darkness have no part in the persecutions you endure. Rather is it divine love, and it consoles me to think that He uses those who are dear to Him to make you suffer. The martyrs had not this consolation in their torments. . . . I allow you to attribute all that happens to you to your faults, although in reality it is rather the effect of God's goodness than of His justice. All the names people call you, which are so humiliating, only ought to make you thank God, and pray for those who say such things. Do not regret anything you have said: a cause which produces such good crosses cannot be bad. Fear nothing for me, the holy Father de la Colombière is my guarantee. Believe me, I know from a long experience that things which are repeated are never said as they were originally. Even if the whole world were to hear all that is said against you, it would only be a greater grace. Then let them tell whom they will, and only rejoice the more. Dismissal, imprisonment, all is the love of Jesus Christ for you. I ask of you an entire abandonment of yourself to Him and a heart ready to do or suffer anything."

However supernaturally these trials were borne by the Novice Mistress, it was not to be expected that the novices would put up with all that was said against their dearly-loved Mother. They contradicted the misstatements whenever they could, and emphatically proclaimed the truth. This was more than Sister Margaret Mary's humility could bear. She wrote them a severe letter, begging them to remember the meekness and silence of Our Lord.

"I cannot express the grief I feel at seeing

the bad use we are making of so precious an opportunity of giving God proofs of our love and fidelity. Instead of lovingly embracing this cross, we only try to rid ourselves of it, and not being able to succeed, we commit a thousand faults which fill the Divine Heart with sorrow. Whence comes this, if it is not that we have too much love for ourselves, and fear to lose our reputation and the good opinion of others! This it is that makes us seek to justify our conduct. We believe that we are innocent and others guilty. We think we are right and they wrong. Oh! believe me, dear Sisters, humble souls are far from entertaining such thoughts. . . . Abstain from speaking of —, do not mention her among yourselves. . . . Let there be no more excuses of self-love, but let us be silent. We must be charitable and humble in our thoughts as well as in our words. If you are faithful in this, the Sacred Heart will be more liberal to you than ever; but if, on the contrary, you are not faithful, I will myself ask Him to punish you. Give yourselves to God, yes—all to God; carry His cross, and carry it cheerfully, joyously, courageously, otherwise you will have to render a rigorous account of it.”

It was by means of this severe trial connected with the dismissal of Mademoiselle de Vichy-Chamron, that God prepared the soul of His servant for the great joy He was about to bestow on her—a joy beside which all others would appear to her but small, for it was nothing less than a triumph for the Sacred Heart of the Master she loved so well.

CHAPTER XV

TRIUMPH OF THE SACRED HEART (1686)

THE month of June 1686 was the time chosen by Our Lord for establishing the devotion to His Sacred Heart in the Community at Paray. He Who ordereth "all things sweetly," and Who is Master of all the hearts that He has made, knows how to draw those hearts to Himself when He so wills. "Fear not, I will reign," He had said to Sister Margaret Mary, and she, placing all her trust in Him, knew that He would triumph in spite of all obstacles.

Outside the convent the storm raised by the dismissal of the postulant without vocation was not yet spent. Within the cloister peace reigned once more, but the devotion of the noviciate was not allowed to pass beyond its walls.

From Mother Greyfié at Semur and Mother de Saumaise at Moulins, and later at Dijon, most consoling accounts came to Sister Margaret Mary of the progress of devotion to the Sacred Heart in those Communities. Both of these good Superiors did all in their power to propagate the lessons they had learnt from their former spiritual daughter, and she on her side gathered the first fruits of her zeal from the hands of the Mothers by whom she had been so severely tested. Nevertheless she yearned to see her own Sisters in religion yield to the sweet attraction of the

Heart of Jesus, and just when there seemed to be no immediate sign of this, it was brought about by what was, manifestly, the work of grace.

On the last day of the Octave of Corpus Christi, Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures was convinced by an interior light that she had been quite mistaken in opposing the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This venerable Sister was one of the elders of the Community, and was looked up to by all as a "living Rule." Sister Margaret Mary loved her dearly and, in spite of all the opposition she met with from her, she continued to consult her on many points, because she knew her to be a most virtuous religious.

When, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Sister Mary Magdalen saw that she had been mistaken, she was overwhelmed with grief, and resolved to do all in her power to make amends. She went to Sister Margaret Mary and asked her to lend her the picture of the Sacred Heart, which had been sent by Mother Greyfié to the novices, at the same time telling her that she wished to expose it on a small altar in the Choir, and that she would ask the Community to join her in paying it honour.

Sister Margaret Mary was delighted; she gave her the picture without making any remark, and awaited the result in silence and prayer.

The next morning, the day fixed by Our Blessed Lord Himself for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Sister Mary Magdalen prepared a small altar just in front of the grille in the Choir. This she ornamented with flowers, and upon it she put the picture in a gilt frame, then with her own hand she wrote a card, which she left on the altar, inviting all the religious to come and pay their homage to the Sacred Heart.

The Community were greatly surprised, especially when they saw the handwriting of the Sister who had been foremost in opposing the devotion. All difficulties vanished. The religious gave up their hearts to the Sacred Heart as if by common consent. Sister Margaret Mary had the immense consolation of seeing this change, and she felt she could never sufficiently thank God for it. The whole Community saw in it the work of God and the verification of Our Lord's words so often repeated to them by their humble Sister. He said: "I will reign in spite of all those who oppose Me."

Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures then invited the religious to do what they could towards getting a picture of the Sacred Heart. The children of the school got their parents to contribute towards it, and the Lay-sisters worked hard in the garden so as to gain something by selling the produce, and God so blessed their labours that a fairly large sum was realised.

Mother Melin thought it would be better to wait until they were able to build a chapel in which to place the picture, so renewed efforts were made, and the building was begun that very year, and solemnly opened in 1688. This chapel is still to be seen in the convent garden. Our Lord, Who is never outdone in generosity, rewarded Mother Melin with abundant graces for thus honouring His Sacred Heart. Sister Margaret Mary told her that "Our Lord was so much pleased with the care she had taken to erect a sanctuary where His Heart might be adored, that as a reward He promised her the privilege of dying while making an act of pure love."

It would not be easy to exaggerate the joy which filled the heart of Sister Margaret Mary on the

joyful day of the 21st of June. In the evening she gathered her novices round her, and together they sang a Te Deum of thanksgiving. "I have nothing more to desire," she said, "since the Sacred Heart is known and begins to reign in the hearts of others. Do what you can, my dear Sisters, that It may reign in yours for ever as your Sovereign Lord and Spouse."

Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures came in for a special word of thanks. "It is in obedience to the adorable Heart of Jesus, my dear Sister, that I congratulate you on your happiness in having been chosen to render this service to the Heart of our good Master, by the courage you have shown in being the first to procure Its being loved, honoured, and known where it seemed almost impossible for It to gain access. He wishes to have the love and homage of His creatures from a free and loving will, without constraint or dissimulation. It seems to me that the great desire Our Lord has that His Sacred Heart should be honoured by a special worship is in order to renew in souls the effects of His Redemption, by making His Divine Heart, as it were anew, the Mediator between God and man. The sins of mankind are so multiplied that it requires the whole extent of Its power to obtain mercy for them and the graces of salvation and sanctification which It desires so earnestly to give them in abundance. Especially does the Sacred Heart desire to impart them to our Institute, which has so great a need of this help. I think it is one of the most efficacious means for raising it from its falls, and for providing, as it were, an impregnable fortress against the assaults which the enemy is constantly making upon it, so as to overthrow it by a foreign spirit of pride and ambition, in place

of that humility and simplicity which is its foundation. I acknowledge that it seems to me that our Holy Founder earnestly desires to see this devotion introduced into our Institute because he well knows its effects. I write you these few words as my dear friend in the Sacred Heart."

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was no sooner established in the Community at Paray than an extraordinary renewal of fervour took place. The Rule was most exactly observed by all. Prayer, silence, and mortification were faithfully practised by those who had perhaps been somewhat negligent on these points. In fact, true love for Jesus Christ was better understood now that all had abandoned themselves to His Divine Heart.

Mother de Saumaise and Mother Greyfié came in for a share of Sister Margaret Mary's joy. To the latter she wrote:—"I shall die happy now that the Sacred Heart of my Saviour begins to be known and myself unknown; for it seems to me that I am now, by His mercy, almost annihilated as to esteem and reputation in the opinion of others. This gives me greater consolation than I can express."

In return for the favours He had bestowed on her, Our Lord now inspired His servant to make a Vow of Perfection. For this He prepared her by placing her under the special protection of Saint Francis of Assisi. On the day of his Feast, October 4th, 1686, she saw the Saint surrounded with light, and raised, as it were, above other saints, because of his conformity with the suffering life of Our Lord and his special love for the mystery of His Passion. She understood that it was this that had urged Our Lord to bestow the Stigmata upon him, and make him a special favourite of His Sacred Heart, and that in con-

sequence he possessed great power in applying the merits of Christ's Precious Blood, particularly on behalf of sinners, and of appeasing the offended justice of God. She saw, too, that he used his power especially in favour of religious who had fallen from their first fervour, and that he constantly pleaded for them. "After showing me these things," writes Sister Margaret Mary, "the Divine Spouse of my soul gave him to me to be my guide, as a mark of His divine love, that he might protect me in the trials that awaited me."

One of these trials was the serious illness of her brother, the Curé of Bois-Sainte-Marie. He was attacked with apoplexy, and the doctors declared the case hopeless. Chrysostom Alacoque, who was mayor of the same town of which his brother James was Curé, sent to Paray-le-Monial to beg their sister's prayers. Both the brothers loved and venerated their holy sister, and she had for them a deep affection which gave her great influence over them, a power she used to lead them to a true devotion to the Sacred Heart. She succeeded so well that Chrysostom proposed of his own accord to build a chapel in Bois-Sainte-Marie in Its honour.

A messenger then was sent to Paray, and Sister Margaret Mary, as of old the Sisters of Bethany, carried her trouble to Our Lord. She left the chapel calm and smiling, fully convinced that her brother would be cured. She gave the messenger three small billets, on each of which was inscribed an invocation to the Sacred Heart, and told him to tell her brother Chrysostom to give some water, in which these billets had been dipped, to the invalid. Her advice was followed, and the priest rose from his bed strong and well. Sister Margaret Mary took the opportunity to urge him

to redouble his devotion to the Divine Heart, which he evidently did, as we find in a letter to Mother de Saumaise that Sister Margaret Mary writes :—
 “My brother, the priest, is founding a Mass in perpetuity to be said on every Friday in the year and to be sung solemnly every First Friday of the month. I tell you this, so that you may thank the Sacred Heart.” From that time the practice of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart was permanently established at Bois-Sainte-Marie.

When at the close of the year 1686 Sister Margaret Mary left the office of Novice Mistress, several of the novices, whose time of probation was over, resolved to take with them to the Community a little picture of the Sacred Heart, which they had been in the habit of wearing by turns, so as to pay it every mark of honour during the day assigned to them. This little picture they placed in a small alcove opposite the staircase leading to the noviciate. Later on this alcove was arranged as a little oratory and the original picture replaced by a larger one. The oratory was much frequented by those Sisters who were not able, from one cause or another, to visit the chapel in the garden. It was of course ready long before the chapel was finished, and it is of this oratory that Sister Margaret Mary, in writing to Mother de Saumaise, says : “This little chapel is the first that has been raised in honour of the Sacred Heart. Our dear Sister des Escures has charge of it. It is a little gem, such taste and care is bestowed on it.”

The chapel in the garden was blessed on 7th September 1688 with unusual solemnity. Twenty-five of the Clergy attached as members of a Confraternity to the parish church of Paray-le-Monial, as well as the Curés of the neighbouring parishes, came in procession, and with them a large

number of persons, whom it was found impossible to prevent entering the garden.

The ceremonies lasted for two hours, and during all that time, and for long afterwards, Sister Margaret Mary knelt motionless in the convent chapel, wholly absorbed in God. What passed in her soul during that time we do not know. The secret is her own—and God's. Her contemporaries in writing of this event suppose that the words she had written to Mother Greyfié two years before found an echo in her heart during those hours of prayer. "I shall die happy now that the Heart of my Saviour begins to be known." Probably her Sisters were right, but looking back on that day in the light of this twentieth century, may we not venture to suppose that perhaps Almighty God gave His servant a glimpse into the future, and that her heart superabounded with joy in seeing that a time would come when thousands of all nations would love and honour the Divine Heart; a time when Our Lord would be enthroned as King in many and many a Catholic home all the world over, and that in this, God showed her the fruit of that first humble yet most loving Enthronement with which she and her novices had striven to honour Him as King and Lord of their hearts.

CHAPTER XVI

ADVICE TO NOVICES

It is impossible to give here fully all the treasures of advice and direction which we find in the writings of our Saint. Some examples are given, however, both because they show forth the heart and soul of Sister Margaret Mary in a very special way, and also because they contain such valuable teaching for those who have to train souls for God, and for those who wish to give themselves up entirely to the love of the Sacred Heart.

I

To a Novice . . . on Detachment

I have only one little word to say to you, my dear Sister. It is this: that you will only find true peace and perfect happiness in entire detachment from yourself and from all that is not God; for having nothing, you will possess all in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Who desires to save you by this means. So do not make much of anything except that which helps you to this detachment. Be deaf to all the arguments of nature and self-love; blind to all views of human respect, for all this is a great obstacle to pure love, which is not given to the tepid, but only to those who are humble and fervent. This is what I have to say to you. Be faithful to your good resolutions. . . . Love Him, and leave and forget yourself.

II

On the same Subject

My dearest Sister,—I recommend you particularly to attach yourself to God alone. If you divide your heart with Him, if you do not give up this human respect and all this self-love which prevent you from leading an interior life, He will withdraw Himself from you. Remember, my child, that virtue does not consist in pious thoughts and resolutions, nor in fine words, but in doing good and keeping one's resolutions. Unless you do this, they will only serve to condemn you. Be faithful then, and give God all you have promised Him, trying your utmost to become meek and humble towards your neighbour, taking reproof and correction from all without excusing yourself, and receiving all that Divine Providence sends with submission, saying always: "My God, Thy Will be done."

III

To another Novice

Before reading your note I wanted to say this to you. When I was offering you yesterday to Our Lord, this thought came to me: Let her go her way faithfully, suffering without complaint, for she cannot be of the number of the perfect friends of My Heart unless she is purified and proved in the crucible of suffering. Suffer then, and you will please the Divine Goodness to Whom you ought always to be immolated and sacrificed, with a firm hope and confidence that His Sacred Heart will never abandon you, for He is nearer to you when

you suffer than when you rejoice. Only Divine Love can make our desires effectual and give us grace to triumph over our own hearts and all human respect. Do not think so much of yourself. Be indifferent both to joy and suffering provided that the Sacred Heart accomplish His Will in you.

IV

*To a Novice on the Necessity of Overcoming
Oneself*

I think the Sacred Heart asks three things of you: First, that you love Him with a love of preference, which will enable you to overcome your repugnances, and trample on your human respect, which says: "What will they say if I do so-and-so?" All such thoughts must be despised when there is question of pleasing this Divine Heart. Then you must look down upon, judge, and condemn no one but yourself. By doing this you will practise humility and charity, and will avoid the judgment and condemnation of your Judge. Thirdly, Our Lord desires to be the one Object of your affections; you must delight in no other, so that you may be worthy for Him to take delight in you. Model your heart on the virtues of His. If you only knew how you sadden Him when you fail in charity or humility, or when you neglect the inspirations He gives you to withdraw from dissipation and thoughts of self-love. All this prevents Him from giving you His abundant graces. I think I have said all this to you before, but I want to remind you of it again, for it seems to me that He does not ask anything new of you just now, but that you will please Him very much if you are faithful to these practices He has given you. Try then, to corre-

spond with His love. Give Him all yours by an exact fidelity to all our holy observances, banishing all vain curiosity, and all surprise and discouragement at difficulties. Keep your soul in peace without complaining of anything, trying to find your delight in self-abnegation. If you love, nothing will seem difficult to you.

v

To One in Interior Affliction.

I beg the Sacred Heart of Our Lord to be Himself your support, as it is not His Will to calm the storm within you. Then you will be steadfast and peaceful in the midst of the tempest, about which you must not be troubled as long as you keep close to Jesus by loving confidence and calm strength, whatever you feel and however much your enemy disturbs you. It is a good sign when the devil makes a noise; he has not got what he is aiming at as long as he clamours for it. However, you must be faithful in not consenting to his suggestions; turn away from them quite simply without forcing yourself to feel your will acting. The Sacred Heart of Jesus knows well what passes within yours, and this is why He allows you to suffer. Keep calm, and abandon yourself to all His designs for your soul. Hope in His Goodness, and when your troubles increase, let your confidence also be redoubled. Be faithful, and never wilfully neglect opportunities of practising virtue. Look upon yourself as a tree planted by the river-side, and bearing fruit in due season; the more it is swayed by the winds, the deeper it strikes its roots into the ground. So in the same way the more the winds of temptation

surround you the deeper must you bury yourself in the Sacred Heart of Jesus by profound humility. I beg Him to surround you with His power as with a wall of sure defence.

VI

To One who was about to Enter the Noviceship.

As God has placed you in the barque of Holy Religion you have only to abandon yourself to Him, and let yourself be guided by obedience, the sure sign of God's Will for you. In all that you do, try to please God and see Him alone in all that happens to you. His good pleasure must suffice. Rest, like a child, without anxiety on His Heart; His love will take care of you. Be humble towards God and gentle towards your neighbour. Judge and accuse yourself only, and always excuse others. If you wish to honour the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, make Him the Depositary of all that you do or suffer. Offer Him all your actions, so that He may dispose of them according to His Will, uniting yourself to Him in all that you do, and in all that happens to you. Dwell in this adorable Heart; take all your small troubles and all that is bitter to Him, He will sweeten it all; there you will find the remedy for all your evils, strength in your weakness, and a refuge in every danger. Treat with Our Lord with entire simplicity. Do not amuse yourself with reflecting too much on your faults; that only leads to the flattery of self-love and to discouragement. When you have done wrong, humble yourself before God and ask His pardon, and then set to work again with renewed courage.

VII

On Purity of Heart

I do not see that there is anything to add regarding your note except to urge the faithful practice of all that it contains. Try with all your strength to neglect nothing which can help to make you conformable to your Crucified Spouse. This must be by the faithful practice of all that the Rule enjoins, living in loving abandonment to the care of Divine Providence; banishing all thoughts of self-love and conversing simply with the Sacred Heart, so as to unite yourself as much as possible to His love and His intentions in all that happens to you. Whether you act or whether you suffer, keep your soul in peace, resting on Him. Whatever you feel, do not allow yourself to be troubled, but let God act and unite yourself to His Will. This is what it seems to be He desires of you, for the purity which you speak of in your note comprises freedom, not only from sin, but from all voluntary imperfection which could sully your heart, which ought to be the throne of your Beloved. Give Him love for love with the fidelity you know He requires of you.

Abandon all for love and to love, without any more reserve. Make good use of all the occasions of mortification and humiliation which may come to you, without trying to avoid them, for this is the principal means of uniting yourself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

VIII

I am quite willing, my dear Sister, to send you a little word as you wish it, and because I hope very

much that you will give yourself up entirely to Our Lord. It seems to me that He is asking of you great fidelity in sacrificing to Him all that He shows you to be most pleasing to Him, whatever it may cost you, for we cannot be saved without suffering and sacrifice. As Jesus is jealous of your heart, and wishes to possess it for Himself, so do you be jealous of His love, by loving Him more than others if possible. And as love produces a likeness between the lover and the beloved, so if you want to be the beloved of Jesus, you must become meek and humble as He is; His humility will teach you to rejoice when you are despised, and to be silent when you are accused, saying to yourself: "Jesus was silent."

IX

To a Novice going into Retreat

Go into retreat to learn to leave and forget yourself by a complete abandonment of yourself to the Providence of the Sacred Heart. Leave yourself in His hands, as a statue in the hands of a sculptor, so that He may fashion and model you according to His Will! Let Him act and remain in peace, for you must be made fit to dwell in His Sacred Heart. He will be your Director and your All.

X

Keep all your interior and exterior senses enclosed as it were, in the Heart of Our Lord, by the profound silence you will impose upon them. Interior silence by the retrenchment of all useless thoughts and reflections of self-love that you may be prepared to hear the Voice of the Spouse.

Exterior silence by never saying anything to praise or excuse yourself or to blame or accuse another. Be silent as to all the little sallies of self-love to which our nature is prone, in order to show pleasure when things go well and displeasure when they displease us. Cut off all superfluous words. Your silence will be in honour of Our Lord's silence in the Blessed Sacrament. By this means you will learn to converse with His Sacred Heart and to love Him in silence.

XI

To One who was very Fervent

Remember if I die before you, that you are to take my place before the Blessed Sacrament and ask pardon for all the irreverences and outrages He has received from me. And if God has mercy on me, I promise not to forget you, but to do everything in my power for you. Let us love each other in the Sacred Heart. Let us love Him for each other ; love Him under all circumstances and take for motto "Thy Will be done." Love and do what you will, for whoever possesses love has all. Do everything by love, in love, and for love ; for it is love which gives value to everything. Love does not desire a divided heart—it must be all or nothing. Love will make all things easy to you. Give Him then, love for love, and never forget Him Who died for love of you. You will love Him in the measure in which you suffer in silence and prefer Him to all creatures and eternity to time.

XII

My dear Sister, if you want to become the disciple and child of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

you must conform yourself to His holy teaching and become meek and humble like Him. Be meek in bearing with the small defects and humours of others. Do not be vexed at small contradictions, but, on the contrary, render your neighbour all the small services in your power, for this is a sure way of pleasing the Sacred Heart. Be meek, calm and unruffled, not only in all that happens contrary to your inclinations, but even after the faults that you commit ; never excuse yourself, for Our Lord did not do so during His Passion. Do not look for the praise and esteem of creatures, but reject all such thoughts. Rejoice when you are forgotten or despised, for the true means of establishing Our Lord's reign in your heart is to be humble and to allow others to humble you. When you are allowed to do so, try to choose for yourself that which is worst and most repugnant to you. . . . I beseech you, by all the love you bear the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to attach yourself constantly and firmly to your Rule and to all that you have been taught in your Noviceship. Study how to become a good religious, faithful to silence, the practice of the Presence of God, and the mortification of your senses. Humble yourself with true humility of heart on all occasions.

Spiritual Treasures.

Your treasure will be the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whence you will draw the love of a child towards God ; the love of a father towards your neighbour ; and the love of a judge towards yourself.

Your treasure will be in the Wound of Our Lord's right hand, whence you will draw wherewith to satisfy for all your faults against charity and against purity of intention.

Your treasure will be in the Garden of Olives with Jesus sorrowful unto death. He will make satisfaction for all your love of pleasure. His prayer will repair the time lost during yours, and will obtain for you a gift of prayer and union with God.

Your treasure will be Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in Whom you will find a hidden sweetness which will disgust you with all earthly things and lead you to prefer His hidden and self-sacrificing life.

On the Presence of God.

One of the ways most pleasing to God of remaining in His Holy Presence is to enter the Sacred Heart of Jesus and give ourselves up entirely to Him, so that His power may take the place of our weakness. When we fall into any fault, we must ask this Divine Heart to satisfy His justice for us and to give us His grace and mercy, although we are not worthy. Have recourse to Him always and everywhere; He delights in doing us good. Let us unite ourselves to Him in all our actions, for thus alone shall we merit. Above all, let us try to please Him by a loving confidence.

*The Sacred Heart of Jesus, an Abyss of
Wisdom and Love.*

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is an abyss of love, in which we must lose all other love, especially self-love and its evil fruits, such as human respect and the desire to follow our own inclinations.

If you are in an abyss of privation and desola-

tion, enter into this Divine Heart. There is all consolation, and we must plunge ourselves into this abyss, without, however, desiring to taste of its sweetness.

If you are in an abyss of resistance and opposition to the Divine Will, plunge yourself into the abyss of submission and conformity to the Divine Pleasure which you will find in the Sacred Heart, and there losing your resistance, you will clothe yourself with conformity to His Will in all that may happen to you.

If you are in an abyss of dryness and weakness, go and bury yourself in the loving Heart of Jesus.

If you are in an abyss of poverty and stripped of all things, go to the Heart of Jesus, He will enrich you.

If you find yourself so weak that you fall at every step, go and bury yourself in the strength of His Sacred Heart, He will deliver you.

If you are in an abyss of misery, go to the Heart of Jesus, He is full of mercy.

If you are filled with pride and vain self-esteem, bury yourself in the humility of the Sacred Heart.

If you are in an abyss of ignorance, go and plunge yourself into the loving Heart of Jesus. He will teach you how to love and please Him.

If you find yourself in an abyss of infidelities and inconstancy, go and hide yourself in the constancy and stability of the Heart of Jesus.

Are you buried in poverty? Go to the Heart of Jesus, which is a treasure-house of all riches and of all good.

If you find yourself in an abyss of ingratitude for the great gifts you have received from God, go and hide yourself in the Heart of Jesus, the Source of all gratitude. He will supply for you if you ask Him.

If you find yourself in an abyss of agitation, impatience, or anger, go and bury yourself in the sweetness of the loving Heart of Jesus, so that He may render you meek and humble of heart.

If you are in an abyss of distractions and dissipation, go and rest in the tranquillity of the Sacred Heart, and He will infallibly gain the victory for you.

If you combat generously, you can lose yourself in the abyss of His purity and consolation, and there purify your intentions, and obtain all your desires.

If you are lost in darkness, He will clothe you with His light, so that you can give yourself up blindly to His guidance.

When you find yourself plunged in an abyss of sadness, go and lose yourself in the joy of the Sacred Heart; there you will find a treasure which will cause all your sadness to disappear.

If you are in trouble and anxiety, go and plunge yourself into the peace of His adorable Heart—no one can take this place from you.

Often plunge yourself into the charity of this loving Heart, so that you may never do anything to another which could wound this virtue, but in all things act towards your neighbour as you would wish him to act towards you.

If you are plunged in suffering, hide yourself in the Heart of Jesus, where you will find a treasure of joy which will make you submissive to His Will. Remain in the abyss of His Heart silently and without complaint.

Are you in an abyss of fear? Bury yourself in that of the confidence of the Sacred Heart and your fear will give place to love.

If you feel overwhelmed with discontent and bitterness, bury yourself in the Sacred Heart so that you may find your joy in Him alone.

CHAPTER XVII

MOTHER ASSISTANT

(1687-1690)

WHEN in January 1687 Sister Margaret Mary left the office of Novice Mistress, she was named Assistant Infirmarian. In this employment she showed the same kindness to the sick, the same humility and obedience as she had shown when, on first entering religion, she was engaged upon this work.

A very few weeks later her charge was changed, and this time she was renamed Mistress of the School. Here, again, she showed the same devotedness and self-sacrifice, though it will be remembered that she had a particularly strong dislike to this office. Her love of mortification had not lessened with her years. The children used to see her collecting the crusts and scraps which they left on their plates and carrying them off to the nuns' refectory to form part of her next meal. They were full of admiration, too, for the way in which she bore physical pain. About this time she suffered from very bad gathered fingers; she bore the pain in silence for a considerable time, but, as one can well imagine, she got no sleep at night. As she was in the children's dormitory, she sat quietly by the fire avoiding the slightest noise so as not to disturb her charges. One of the children, however, saw her, and told Mother Melin about it. The Superior at once asked to see

Sister Margaret Mary's hand, and inquired why she had said nothing about it. "Oh, Mother," was the reply, "it is such a small thing that I did not think it worth while." Doctor Billet, however, was not of the same opinion. He lanced the fingers in two or three places down to the bone. The patient neither moved nor spoke, which greatly edified the Doctor; but when this happened several times he, knowing what the pain must be, remarked smiling, "It is well to be a Saint!" Far from seeking any sympathy from others in her suffering, Sister Margaret Mary was troubled when she received it. Shortly afterwards she wrote to Mother Greyfié: "I think it must be in punishment for my sins that I am not allowed to bear the slightest cross without every one knowing about it. . . . Believe me, dear Mother, nature so loves to be flattered and sympathised with, that I cannot count my gathered fingers as a suffering, because every one kept remarking how much I suffered. I thought in the end they were mocking me, because I made such a fuss over so small a thing, and I have learnt by experience how agreeable it is to nature to have such consolations. Nature cannot make up its mind to suffer without support amidst humiliations, contempt and abandonment from creatures. Yet this it is that pure love requires."

Other physical sufferings were not wanting. From the Feast of the Epiphany until Ash Wednesday, she felt, she says, "as if stretched on a cross of pain."

On Good Friday Our Lord consoled her. She had passed the day in a great desire for Holy Communion, shedding tears because it was impossible for her to receive Our Lord on that day. "Most loving Lord," she repeated, "I wish to be

consumed with desire for Thee, and as I cannot receive Thee to-day, I at least will never cease from desiring Thee." In the evening Our Lord said to her: "My daughter, thy desires are so pleasing to My Heart, that if I had not already instituted this Sacrament of My love, I would do so now to be the Food of thy soul. I take so much delight in being desired that as often as a heart forms this desire, so often do I gaze lovingly upon it to attract it to Me."

In May 1687 Mother Melin was re-elected Superior for a second period of three years. She at once named Sister Margaret Mary as her Assistant, and this time all in the Community eagerly welcomed her as such. Her humility charmed every one, and she was held in such great admiration that she met with very few exterior crosses.

This was a source of grief to her, but Our Lord never intended the spouse of His Heart to be without suffering, and her interior trials were multiplied. She confided them to Père Rolin: "It seems to me that I suffer so strangely, that I acknowledge that if His infinite mercy did not uphold me in the same measure as His justice makes me feel its weight, it would be impossible for me to bear up for a moment. . . . I hardly thought I should be able to write to you, for in the state in which I am, I only want to repeat my Saviour's words, "My soul is sorrowful unto death," or else, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

In January of this year 1687, she had as usual a visit from Saint Francis of Sales. She was praying for special graces for the Order, and was told by him that a true daughter of the Visitation should be a living sacrifice in imitation of Jesus Christ.

Five months later, on the Feast of Our Lady's Visitation, Sister Margaret Mary was again pleading for her Sisters, but Our Lord seemed to turn a deaf ear to her prayer. "They do not listen to My Voice," He said, "and they destroy the foundation of the building. If they think to raise it on any other foundation I will destroy it." At these words she saw Our Blessed Lady, surrounded by angels, prostrate herself before her Divine Son, pleading in her turn for the religious: "They are the daughters of my heart; I will be a mantle of protection to them to receive the blows Thou wouldst inflict upon them." Then Our Lord, turning tenderly towards His Mother, said: "My Mother, thou hast all power to bestow My graces upon them as thou wilt." Our Lady then begged that punishment might not be inflicted at least till the Feast of her Presentation, promising to do all in her power to conquer their hearts for her Divine Son and to re-establish amongst them that spirit of humility and simplicity which He had said should keep the daughters of the Visitation hidden in Him, their Crucified Love.

The devil seems at this time to have redoubled his fury against the Community. It is related that he twice tore into pieces the curtains in front of the grille in their choir, saying, "Thus would I destroy the Order of the Visitation, were it not supported by this strong column (Our Blessed Lady), against whom I have no power."

On several occasions Sister Margaret Mary saw Our Lady wearied, as it were, with the efforts she had made to rescue the hearts of the religious for her Son, and complaining sadly that there were some who "despised the help she offered them."

From the beginning of her religious life Sister Margaret Mary had been especially devout towards

the Souls in Purgatory. Many were the penances she inflicted on herself in order to relieve them, and very intimate was her intercourse with them. They often appeared to her, asking earnestly for help, and nearly always telling her the reasons for which they were detained in their place of purification. During the years 1687 and 1688 Sister Margaret Mary seems to have been especially afflicted with interior sufferings on behalf of the Holy Souls.

"I never remember," she wrote to Mother de Saumaise, "to have passed such a year of suffering. It seems to me that everything serves as an instrument in the hands of Divine Justice to torment me. Nothing makes me suffer more than the sanctity of justice."

And again we read: "The Sacred Heart of Jesus often gives His poor victim to the Souls in Purgatory, in order to help them to satisfy His Divine Justice; and at such times I suffer pains very like theirs, and I get no repose either day or night."

Mother Greyfié gives us an account of two among many of the apparitions connected with the Holy Souls which were granted to Sister Margaret Mary. "I have heard from herself that two religious, for whom she prayed after their death, were shown to her in the prisons of divine justice, but the pains of the one were incomparably greater than those of the other. The first greatly reproached herself, saying that on account of her faults against charity and the affection which ought to reign in religious communities, she had incurred, amongst many other punishments, that of not being allowed to have any part in the suffrages that the Community offered for her, only receiving relief in her frightful pains from the prayers of three or

four Sisters for whom during life she had had less esteem and liking. She also lamented the great facility with which she had exempted herself from her Rules and the practices of Community life. And, in the third place, she deplored the trouble she had taken to procure her own personal ease and comfort, adding that if it had not been for Our Blessed Lady she would certainly have been lost.

“The other soul suffered less, and did not ask for any help; Sister Margaret Mary was very much astonished at this, and was told that she was forbidden to ask, because she had not corresponded to the attraction of grace which God had given her, of going to Him through pure suffering. He wished her to merit this crown, but in opposition to His designs she had eagerly sought her consolation in creatures.”

Still one more example may be of interest. Doctor Billet, who so devotedly attended the Paray Community during the whole of the life of our Saint, lost his wife in 1683. Madame Billet appeared to Sister Margaret Mary, asking her prayers and begging her to tell her husband two secrets, on which depended the purification and deliverance of her soul. Sister Margaret Mary told this to Mother Greyfié, who would not pay any attention to it, but the fearful noises she heard in her room during the night made her change her mind. Doctor Billet, on being told, acknowledged that the advice came from God, and acted upon it.

Although Sister Margaret Mary suffered from such great interior trials, she was not left without equally great consolations.

On the Feast of the Visitation 1688, she passed the whole day before the Blessed Sacrament, and Our Lord gave her to understand how intimately

the Devotion to the Sacred Heart was connected with the spirit of the Order. He spoke to her of the Mission He had entrusted to the daughters of the Visitation and the sons of the Society of Jesus to make known this devotion.

She saw Our Lord as on a throne of flames. From His Sacred Heart came bright and burning rays that warmed and lit up everything around. Our Blessed Lady was on one side, and on the other were Saint Francis of Sales and Father de la Colombière. The daughters of the Visitation seemed to be there protected by their guardian angels. Our Lady invited her daughters to approach, that she might give them a precious Treasure. Then showing them the Heart of her Son, she said: "Behold the divine Treasure which is manifested to you through the tender love my Son has for your Institute. You are not only to enrich yourselves with this inexhaustible Treasure, but you must distribute It freely, trying to enrich all with It, without fear of Its failing, for the more you take, the more will there be to take."

Our Lady then turned to Father de la Colombière: "And you, faithful servant of my Son," she said, "you have a large share in this precious Treasure, for if the daughters of the Visitation are called upon to make It known and loved, it is reserved for the Fathers of the Society of Jesus to make known Its utility and value, so that all may profit by It, receiving It with the respect and gratitude due to so great a benefit. In proportion as they shall do this, the Divine Heart will shed Its blessings and graces on their ministry. They will produce fruit beyond their labours and hopes, and at the same time they will receive abundant graces for their own salvation and perfection."

Saint Francis of Sales then invited his daughters to come and draw the waters of salvation from the Source whence their Constitutions had sprung. "In this Divine Heart," he said, "you will find means of acquitting yourselves perfectly of what is enjoined you in the first point of your Directory, which contains in itself the whole perfection of your Institute — 'Let the object of their whole life and of all their exercises be to unite themselves with God.'"

"To attain to this," he continued, "the Sacred Heart must be the life which animates you and the love of that Heart your constant exercise ; for this alone can unite you to God so as to help Holy Church by your prayers and good example, and to advance the salvation of your neighbour."

The year 1689, the last complete year of Sister Margaret Mary's life, was passed without any very notable exterior event. The duties of the office of Mother Assistant occupied the servant of God, and to these duties she often added those of a Lay-sister by helping them in every way she could, always ready to sacrifice herself in the cause of charity.

But though the year passed uneventfully in the eyes of others, the Saint's deep interior life of union with God flowed on ever more fully and more strongly.

She had, as was usual on the 29th of January, another visit from her Holy Founder, and this time he was accompanied by Saint Jane Frances de Chantal.

Saint Francis of Sales gave Sister Margaret Mary to understand that God had promised that He would receive as His spouses all true daughters of the Visitation, and Saint Jane Frances spoke of the marks which these true religious should

bear. . . . "They should rejoice only in the Cross. Let them put aside all idea of doing either more or less than is required by the Rule. The best means we have of rising from our falls is the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. . . . Satan will never succeed in his design as long as our Institute has the Sacred Heart for Defender and Support."

On the Feast of the Sacred Heart another vision was vouchsafed to her. "Our Lord showed me," she says, "the devotion to the Sacred Heart as a beautiful tree, which He had destined from all eternity to take root in our Institute and to spread its branches through all our Houses, so that each might gather its fruits according to their will and taste. These fruits are to renew in us the primitive spirit of our vocation."

Then the Mission reserved for the Society of Jesus was more fully revealed to her. "Our good Father de la Colombière," she writes, "has obtained that after our Institute, the Society of Jesus shall be favoured with all the graces and special privileges of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our Lord promises that He will shed His blessings in abundance on their labours for the salvation of souls. It seems to me that this Divine Heart has so ardent a desire to be known, loved and adored, especially by these good Fathers, that He promises them, if I am not mistaken, so to shed the unction of His love on their words and to accompany them with such strong and powerful graces, that they will be like two-edged swords to penetrate the hearts of the most hardened sinners. But for this they must draw all their light from this inexhaustible Source of the science and charity of the Saints."

A few days after this, Sister Margaret Mary wrote to Père Rolin, and with this letter which

contains an account of Our Lord's most consoling promises, we will close this chapter.

“Why cannot I make known to every one all that I know of this most amiable devotion? I beseech you, Father, not to neglect anything by which you can make it better known. Jesus Christ assured me most unmistakably that it is by means of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus that He wishes to establish this devotion, and by it to secure for Himself a number of faithful servants, perfect friends, and grateful children.

“I do not know of any devotion in the spiritual life more calculated to raise a soul to high sanctity in a short time, and to enable it to taste the true sweetness there is in the service of God. Yes, I repeat, if one knew how pleasing this devotion is to Jesus Christ, there is no Christian who would not practise it.

“Do all you can to get religious to practise it, for they will draw so much help from it that they will want nothing else to re-establish their first fervour and the most exact regularity in their Communities, even those which are the least regular. And it will draw those who live according to their Rule to the height of sanctity.

“Our Lord gave me to understand that those who work for the salvation of souls will receive the power of touching the most hardened hearts, and will work with marvellous success if they are themselves penetrated with a tender devotion to His Divine Heart.

“As for secular persons, they will find by this means the graces necessary for their state of life, that is to say: peace in their families, help in their labours and the blessings of Heaven on all their undertakings. They will find in this adorable Heart a place of refuge in life and particularly at

the hour of their death. Ah! how sweet it is to die after having had a constant devotion to the Heart of Him Who is to be our Judge.

“Finally, there is no one in the world who will not experience every kind of help from Heaven, if only he has a grateful love for Jesus Christ such as one shows Him by the devotion to His Sacred Heart.”

CHAPTER XVIII

LETTERS

IF the life of Blessed Margaret Mary reveals her to us as an heroic soul, a privileged virgin, and the confidant of the Sacred Heart, her letters will give us a picture of her as a devoted sister, a loving subject, a religious simple in the practice of her Rule, in the discharge of her employments and such always as the Founder of her Order would have had her to be. They speak to us of self-sacrifice, self-immolation, self-annihilation and of the love which alone makes these things possible.

The graces given to her were not for herself only; this she tells us: "My Divine Saviour made known to me that the graces He had given me were not for myself so much as for those whom He would send to me, to whom I was to reply simply as He inspired me, because He would attach the unction of His love to my answers and thereby draw many hearts to His love."

Between one hundred and thirty and one hundred and forty letters have been preserved. Extracts from only a small number of these can be given here, but they will serve to make Blessed Margaret Mary more dear to us, and will, perhaps, stir up in the hearts of some a desire to study her writings at greater length.

I.

To Mother Marie Françoise de Saumaise.

End of June 1678.

Very honoured and dear Mother,—It was not for mortification nor through any want of affection that I intended to deprive myself of the consolation of writing to you and telling you that I have always the same esteem for your Charity, because, as you well know, our good Master has united my heart so intimately to yours, that I have no fear of any separation. And as I have no words with which to express my gratitude for your maternal kindness, it must suffice for me to tell you that I shall never forget it before Our Lord.

I beg Him to bestow on you His most precious graces and loving consolations in your retreat, the delights of which I share with you. I must say a word about those I am at present receiving from His goodness, and I can only express them by telling you that everything seems a cross either to my body or my soul. Yet I cannot complain or desire any consolation save to be without all consolation in this world and to live hidden in Jesus Crucified, unknown in my sufferings, so that no creature may have compassion on me or remember me except to augment my pain. I flatter myself that you are still sufficiently interested in me to rejoice with me and to thank our good God, Who has nothing more precious after Himself than His love and His Cross. It is His mercy that allows me to share in them, for I am most unworthy of so precious a gift, as I am too of the kindness He has shown us in giving us our honoured Mother (Mother Péronne Rosalie Greyfié, who had arrived

as Superior at Paray on June 17th), for whom I cannot express my esteem and affection. I have an entire confidence in her charity, which I have already often experienced, and I assure you that I think God will accomplish His promise in her. (Our Lord had promised to Himself inspire her Superiors with that which should be most conformable to His greater glory and His designs on her soul.) I hope He will receive from her all the glory He desires. It is she who has told me to write to you to-day ; I was going to put off doing so on account of a small indisposition and also because I feared you would be overwhelmed with letters. But do not hurry to answer me ; whatever you do I shall never doubt of your affection for one who will be in time and eternity yours in the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I have felt our separation, although only in body, more than I can tell you ; but whether I am consoled or afflicted does not matter much, provided you are content. And as I believe you are, that is sufficient.—Your very humble and unworthy daughter and servant in Our Lord,

SISTER MARGARET MARY ALACOCQUE.

II.

To Mother de Saumaise.

June 1680.

My very honoured Mother,—It was a consolation to me to get news of you. Although I feel indifferent about others, you are always my kind Mother for whom Our Lord has given me a special affection. I never forget you before God, and I beg Him to accomplish His Will in us. . . . You

ask for news of the Reverend Father de la Colombière, whom I recommend to your prayers. He tells Madame de L—— that his health is not yet re-established. I have had no letters from him. Not that I have not written to him, but he has not seen fit to answer me. But however he treats me, I am always content, because I know we both want only God's Will, to which he is very submissive.

On Ascension Day, the 30th of May, having gone to the choir before midday, Our Lord appeared to me in a resplendent light, and said: "I have chosen thy soul as My resting-place on earth; thy heart will be a throne of delights for my divine love." You see He continues to shower His favours on His unworthy slave.

Do not be astonished, dear Mother, at all the contradictions you meet with in trying to establish the reign of the Heart of Jesus. I beg Him with all the affection of my heart not to allow you to give up your holy undertaking; for difficulties are an assurance that the work is God's and that He will be much glorified by it.

III.

To Mother de Saumaise.

November 1680.

My very honoured Mother,—I have no secrets from you, and I take special pleasure in telling you of Our Lord's mercies towards the most ungrateful of His creatures. . . . He treats me as a most tender, loving father treats his little child. In my retreat especially He has filled me with consolation, still I only find true happiness in

crosses, contempt and suffering, which are the real treasures of the lovers of Jesus Christ. Ask Him, dear Mother, never to leave me without these in the accomplishment of His holy Will. This divine Will also reigns in Father de la Colombière's sufferings, for recommending him to God, I heard these words: "The servant is not greater than His Master, and there is nothing more advantageous to him than conformity with his Master." So that although from a human point of view his health would seem to be more to the glory of God, his sufferings are really far more so; for there is a time for everything. A time to suffer and a time to act; a time to sow and another to water and cultivate. This is what he is doing at present; for the Lord takes pleasure in attaching a great price to his sufferings by uniting them to His own, in order to shed them like dew on the seed he has sown in so many places, and also to increase love in his own soul. We must submit ourselves to the orders of our King and confess that, in spite of all that seems hard to us, He is good and just in all that He does, and always merits our praise and love. If you only knew how He constrains me to love Him with a love of conformity to His suffering life. Wishing my life to be a continual sacrifice, He Himself gives me the means by the employments in which He puts me, where everything is a trial to me on account of the great repugnance He allows me to feel. This pleases Him, and I am often obliged to say, in spite of all my natural opposition, that it is good to walk in the strength of His love, contrary to one's own inclinations, without any other consolation than that of being deprived of all comfort. It must suffice that God does His Will as He wills.

IV.

To Mother Louise Henriette de Soudeilles (Religious of the Visitation at Moulins).

October 1682.

I did not want to go into retreat without having answered your letter, and at the same time asked for your prayers. I have great need of them, and I hope Our Lord will make known my need to you, or at least make me such as you believe me to be, for I am far from being what you think me. I wish I could prove to you how much I love and honour you in the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. I beg Him to guide you so that all may be done according to His Will. I know He will not refuse His light to you because He wishes you to go straight to Him. If you want Him to have special care of you, abandon yourself entirely to His adorable Heart. Leave all your own interests and throw yourself heart and soul into the work He has given you to do, so that you may be able to say that, as far as you have known it, you have accomplished His Holy Will. I ask Him with all my heart, dearest Mother, to give us His pure love which will unite us in time and eternity.

V.

To Mother de Soudeilles.

(This letter gives some practical advice regarding devotion to the Sacred Heart.)

November 3rd, 1684.

. . . I am going to speak to you simply, as a true friend in the adorable Heart of Our Lord

Jesus Christ. Whenever I pray for you, this thought comes to my mind : If you desire to live entirely for Our Lord and to arrive at the perfection He desires of you, you must sacrifice yourself and all that depends upon you without any reserve to His Sacred Heart. You must will only by His Will ; love with His affections ; act only by His light, never undertaking anything without first consulting Him and asking His help. You must give Him the glory of everything, thanking Him alike for failure as for success, and remaining content with whatever He sends ; for it must suffice us that His Divine Heart be pleased, loved, and glorified. If you wish to be among the number of His friends, offer Him this sacrifice of yourself some First Friday after Holy Communion. Offer your Communion for this intention, and consecrate yourself to Him entirely, so that you may procure Him all the love, honour, and glory in your power in the way in which He inspires you. After this you must look upon yourself as belonging to, and being entirely dependent on, the adorable Heart of Jesus, having recourse to Him in all your necessities and making your dwelling in His Heart. He will repair all that is imperfect in your actions, and will sanctify those that are good, if you unite yourself to His designs for your soul, which are great, and which will procure Him much glory if only you allow Him to act as He wills.

You must pardon my pride, dear Mother, which permits me to speak to you so freely. Do not be vexed, but be sure that it all comes from one who has for your Charity all the friendship, esteem, and respect possible, but who is not pleased to think that you imagine she forgets you. Can one forget those whom God has made so dear ?

VI.

To Mother de Saumaise (Extract only).

August 24th, 1685.

I acknowledge, dear Mother, that the suffering state to which I am reduced overwhelms me, so that I can hardly recognise myself, and it makes me quite incapable of doing any good. The only thing left to me is the power of speaking of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I must say a little word about some special graces I believe I have received from Him. First of all, He made known to me how much He desires to be honoured by His creatures, and then it seemed to me that He made the following promises :

That those devoted to His Sacred Heart should never perish.

That being the Source of all blessings He would abundantly bless the places where the image of His Sacred Heart should be exposed, and that by this means He would bring together the members of disunited families.

That He would protect all in need.

That He would pour out the sweetness of His love on all the Communities where the image of His Heart should be honoured ; and that if the members had fallen away by sin, He would shield them from the just anger of God by giving them the grace of repentance.

That He would give a special grace of sanctification and salvation to the first person who should honour Him by causing such an image to be made.

This, my dear Mother, is the little word I tell you as a secret . . .

VII.

*To Mother Greyfié.**February 1686.*

I cannot express my joy at the growth of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of my Saviour. I seem to live only for that. Sometimes He enkindles in my heart so great a desire to further His reign in all hearts that it seems to me there is nothing I would not do or suffer for that end.

Once, when I was before the Blessed Sacrament, overcome with this desire, the ardour of the Seraphim for this same end was shown to me, and I heard these words: "Wouldst thou not much rather rejoice with them than suffer and be humiliated and despised in order to contribute to the establishment of My reign in the hearts of men?" Immediately and without any hesitation I embraced the cross studded with nails and surrounded by thorns which was presented to me, and I repeated again and again: "Ah! my only Love, I would far rather suffer to make Thee known and loved, if Thou dost honour me with this grace, than be deprived of it and be one of these ardent Seraphim." These dispositions have continued ever since, together with such proofs of tenderness from this Divine Heart that I am altogether incapable of expressing them.

VIII.

*To her Brother, the Curé of Bois-Sainte-Marie.**April 1687.*

My very dear Brother,—May the Sacred Heart of Jesus establish His reign in our hearts. I feel

quite ashamed of the interest you take in my health, which is of little use for the glory of God. My life up to now has been so injurious to this glory that I count it among His greatest mercies that He allows me to suffer something here below by conforming my life to His own suffering life. By this means I hope to pay off some part of the great debt I owe on account of my sins, and you must help me by your Masses, upon which I count so much. Please continue to bestow this charity on me, for all my hopes are founded on it, and I promise never to forget you whenever I have the happiness of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice.

I have returned fervent thanks to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord for the great graces He has given you, asking Him to continue them and to make you correspond faithfully to them, and so to persevere in the holy desires He has given you to make Him better loved and glorified by making Him better known.

. . . You are quite right in saying that our hearts are united in the Sacred Heart. This is why I tell you my thoughts so frankly ; if I loved you less I would not do this. You will console me greatly if I hear that you are living up to your vocation and to the promises you have made to the Sacred Heart.

IX.

To her Brother, the Mayor of Bois-Sainte-Marie.

(Chrysostom Alacoque had, at his own suggestion, proposed to erect a Chapel in honour of the Sacred Heart at Bois-Sainte-Marie.)

April 1687.

My very dear Brother,—You could not have given me greater pleasure than in telling me that

your devotion to the Sacred Heart is always the same. I was afraid it had grown cold, and was distressed about it. I did not dare speak to you of it, because no devotion is solid which does not spring from the inspiration of grace. I have no doubt yours does come from grace, as it gives you such good desires. I wanted things to be just as you propose, but not knowing if your love for the Sacred Heart would extend to such an expense as you name, I did not dare say anything, and turned my thoughts to the other place I mentioned to you, thinking that the greater number of people there would supply what was needful. Now, however, you must put into execution what you have proposed without ever turning back. This will be one of the greatest consolations I could possibly receive, because nothing really gives me joy except to see the Divine Heart of Our Lord loved, honoured, and glorified, and to suffer myself for His love.

Oh my dear brother, how happy you will be if He gives you the grace to accomplish your plans!

Hold firmly to the graces He gives you, so that you may not fall short of His designs to make you a saint. His grace will never fail you, but He asks from you a very faithful correspondence to it, in return for the great love He has for you.

I hope our brother, the priest, will further your plans for the glory of the Divine Heart as far as he possibly can, and that they will draw down many blessings and graces for your family.

X.

To her Brother, the Mayor of Bois-Sainte-Marie.

January 1689.

My very dear Brother,—I received your letter so late that I have only time now to wish you a happy and holy New Year, and to tell you how grieved I am at my dear sister's illness. (His wife, Angélique Aumônier.) She is quite wrong in thinking that I forget her. I should like her to believe that I would much rather forget myself! I love her dearly in the Heart of Jesus and I am going to begin a novena for her. I beg her to put all her confidence in the Sacred Heart, and to have five Masses of the Passion said in Its honour on Fridays. I send this dear sister of mine every tender message. I suffer much, knowing that she is in such great pain. Send me news of her soon, for I love her dearly. I beg her to make use of her sufferings so that they may sanctify her though they torment her . . .

XI.

To her Brother, the Mayor of Bois-Sainte-Marie.

February 1689.

I wish I could tell you how much I feel for you in the crosses Our Lord is sending you, especially in the illness of my dear sister (his wife). I think the Divine Heart of Jesus wishes to sanctify her by this means. Therefore exhort her to make good use of her illness, for I am in no state to console her myself as you wish, being so ill that I am hardly able to write this little note. But do

assure her that I do all that is possible for her before Our Lord, though my sins make me unworthy of being heard. This is all I can write this time, except to beg you to continue the erection of the Chapel of the Sacred Heart. (Difficulties had arisen about its construction.)

XII.

To Sister de Thélis at Lyons.

(The Extracts from the two following letters show us that Sister Margaret Mary could reprove severely when she considered it necessary.)

September 1687.

In all that your Charity tells me of yourself, that which is most hopeful is the account you give of the constant urging of divine grace in spite of all your falls. This proves the ardent desire God has to save your soul, but He will not do this unless you co-operate with Him. It is no use flattering ourselves, if we continually resist Him He will leave us by degrees, and we shall be insensible to our loss. If, therefore, you hear Our Lord's voice to-day, do not harden your heart, but try to profit by the retreat you are about to make. You must conquer yourself with a strong will, doing violence to yourself, being detached from yourself and from the other stumbling-blocks you know of. But there must be no more question of deliberate faults if you want to please Our Lord, otherwise you will seek Him in vain. I have no doubt that it is God's Will that your confessor should treat you as he does, for I believe him to be a holy man. There is no use in a doctor if we do not wish to be cured and will not use the remedies prescribed, or refrain from that which will make

us ill. But as an evil known is half cured, all that is wanting now is a determined "*I will*," and all will go well. . . . If we could only understand the harm we do our poor souls by depriving them of so many graces and exposing them to such evident peril by these frequent voluntary falls! God cannot listen to us or to those who pray for us as long as we refuse to listen to Him and be converted to Him. . . . Let us profit by the time He gives us, and not put off any longer, but do not let us be troubled, for trouble only augments the evil. The Spirit of God works in peace. Let us have recourse to Him with love and confidence, and He will receive us in the arms of His mercy; but after that, we must be careful not to withdraw from Him again, for voluntary faults are most dangerous, especially for a religious.

XIII.

To Sister de Thélis at Lyons.

As you ask me, I will tell you simply what I think. There is no middle way; it is a question of saving one's soul or of losing it for eternity. Both one and the other depend on us. Therefore either we must choose to love God eternally with the Saints, after having done violence to ourselves by mortifying and crucifying ourselves here, as they have done, or else we can renounce this happiness and give nature all it desires.

Why such disputing and reasoning about keeping resolutions which seem to me so useful to your perfection that without them you will not make much progress? You say it is because they keep down and mortify nature. That is the very reason you must practise them faithfully; for nature and

grace cannot exist together in the same heart, one must give place to the other. What is the use, dear Sister, of making resolutions in retreat, if we do not put them in practice afterwards when occasions occur? What is that except writing our own condemnation, which will be shown to us at judgment, when it will be said: "This is what she wrote, and that is what she did!" But I have said enough. All you have to do is to keep the resolutions you have made, whatever it costs nature; there is no need to make others. . . .

XIV.

To Sister F. M. de la Barge.

(Fifteen of Sister Margaret Mary's letters to Sister de la Barge have been preserved. Extracts from two of these are given here).

August 12th, 1688.

. . . . It matters little of what wood our cross is made, provided that it be a cross, and that the love of Him Who died upon it keeps us close to it. That should be sufficient for us; and I consider you happy because your employments give you the means to do this by making you act contrary to your inclinations. All that is good, except the grief and trouble, which you must cast away far from you, for Our Lord makes His dwelling only in the peace of a soul who truly loves to see itself annihilated so as to be, as it were, lost in the love of its abjection. In reading your letters I always feel convinced that Our Lord had traced out this way for you. Whether He leads you Himself, or by means of creatures or of yourself, matters little. If He is satisfied, it is sufficient. Leave Him to act in you. Let your

occupation be to love Him, and pay attention not to resist Him or put any obstacle to His Will. You will see how much progress He will allow you to make in a short time. What have you to fear, since He invites you to repose in His Heart? Is it not the throne of His mercy, where the most miserable are the best received, provided that they love? If we are cowardly, cold, sin-stained and imperfect, His Heart is a burning furnace where we must be perfected and purified as gold in the crucible. Fear not, then, to abandon yourself without reserve to His loving Providence, for the child will not perish in the arms of an All-powerful Father. . . . Since He loves you, what have you to fear, save not giving Him all the return of love He desires from you. This consists in a perfect abandonment and forgetfulness of self! Abandon self, and you will find God; forget self and He will think of you; bury yourself in your nothingness, and you will possess Him. . . .

May 27th, 1690.

. . . . The Sacred Heart will take especial care of you in proportion to the inviolable fidelity with which you confide in and abandon yourself to Him on those occasions in which you have an opportunity of showing your love to Him, which, it seems to me, should consist particularly in that perfect forgetfulness of self and a love of contempt which can endure everything in silence. . . . If you can do nothing at prayer, content yourself by offering that which Our Saviour makes for us in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, offering His fervour in reparation for all your coldness. In each of your actions say: "My God, I wish to do or suffer this in the Sacred Heart of Thy Divine Son, and according to His holy intentions, which

I offer Thee in reparation of whatever is impure and imperfect in mine ;” and so of all the rest. When any pain, affliction or mortification befalls you, say to yourself: “My soul, take what the Heart of Jesus sends thee to unite thee to Himself.” Try especially to preserve peace of heart, which is better than all imaginable treasures. The means of preserving it is to have no longer any will of our own, but to put that of the Divine Heart in its place, so that It may will for us whatever is most for Its glory. This loving Heart will supply whatever is wanting on your part, for It will love God for you, and you will love in Him and through Him.

xv.

To Sister Jeanne M. Joli (Extract only).

April 1690.

You can hardly believe, dearest Sister, how greatly I rejoice at your zeal in making the Sacred Heart of Jesus better known and loved, and of the trouble you are taking that this may be so. He will never forget it and will be your eternal recompense. After all, the Divine Heart will reign in spite of all who oppose Him, and Satan and his followers will remain confounded. How happy are those whom He uses to help Him to establish His reign. It seems to me that He is like a king who does not think of giving rewards whilst he is conquering and overthrowing his enemies, but who gives them largely when he reigns victoriously on his throne.

The adorable Heart of Jesus desires to establish the reign of His love in all hearts by ruining and destroying the reign of Satan. It seems to me

that He desires this so much that He promises great rewards to those who take part in this work according to the lights and means He gives them. Do not, then, let us fear either trouble or suffering in so holy a work, but rather let us consider ourselves happy that He deems us worthy to suffer for so good an object—to suffer, I say, even in contradiction, calumnies, and every sort of trial. The more suffering there is, the more I feel encouraged and the more hope I have that all will succeed for the glory of this loving Heart and the salvation of souls. However, it is a devotion that must neither be forced or constrained. Let us only make it known, and leave the Sacred Heart to pour the sweetness of His grace into the hearts that He has chosen. How happy are those who are of this number!

CHAPTER XIX

NOTES OF RETREAT

No date, probably 1674 or 1675.

Resolutions of my Retreat

I will always speak of God with respect and humility; of my neighbour with esteem and charity; of myself, never.

I will take pleasure in seeing others loved and esteemed, well-treated and made much of, thinking that all that is due to them and not to me, whose only glory must be in carrying my cross, upon which I wish to live poor and abject, unknown, despised, and forgotten—only desiring to be noticed in order to be humiliated, accused and contradicted. In spite of all the repugnance of my immortal nature, I will try to hide myself behind humiliations.

I must learn in the Sacred Heart of Jesus to bear everything without complaint. Purgatory should be sweet to one who has merited hell.

I will try not to do anything for the mere pleasure of doing it, turning away my attention by some holy thought and renouncing the pleasures of sense in such things as eating, drinking, sleeping and warming myself, trying to unite myself in every action to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I wish to live, suffer, and act according to His Will, and by Him I desire to learn how to suffer well and to love it.

I give Him all my actions so that He may dispose of them and repair all my defects.

I will never inform myself curiously of the faults of others ; if I am obliged to speak of them, I will do so in the charity of the Sacred Heart, putting myself in my neighbour's place, and seeing if I should be content if others spoke or acted so towards me.

If I see others commit a fault, whether against charity, humility or anything else, I will offer to the Eternal Father that virtue in the Heart of Jesus which is opposed to the fault, so as to make reparation for it and to obtain grace for the person to amend.

I will never take notice of the actions of others in order to judge them.

1678.

This is what my Divine Master taught me during my retreat in 1678. I complained that He gave me consolations in too great abundance and that I felt unable to bear them ; He told me that they were given to strengthen me against what I should afterwards have to suffer. " Eat and drink at the table of My delights," He said, " to refresh thyself, so that thou mayest walk courageously, for thou hast a long and painful way to go, and thou wilt often need to take breath and rest in My Heart, which will always be open to thee, so long as thou continuest steadfast in these ways. I desire thy heart to be a refuge for Me where I may dwell and in which I may take pleasure when sinners reject Me from their hearts. When I make thee understand that the Divine Justice is irritated against them, come and receive Me in Holy Communion. Place Me upon the throne of thy heart

and adore Me, prostrating thyself before Me. Offer Me to the Eternal Father in the way that I will teach thee, so as to appease His just anger, and move His mercy to pardon them. Thou shalt offer no resistance to My Will when I make it known to thee, nor to the way I shall dispose of thee through obedience, for I wish thee to serve Me as an instrument, to draw hearts to My love." "But I cannot understand, my God, how this will be accomplished." "By My Almighty power which made all things out of nothing. Never forget thine own nothingness, and that thou art the victim of My Heart and must always be ready to be immolated in the cause of charity. But thou shalt always possess the treasures of My Heart, as I have promised thee, in exchange, and thou mayest dispose of them as thou dost desire in favour of those who are well disposed. Do not be sparing of them, for they are infinite."

1681.

The retreat of 1681 was in some respects remarkable. At the time it was to take place Sister Margaret Mary was confined to her bed with fever. Mother Greyfié, trusting to the power obedience had over her, told her to leave the Infirmary and take her place among the rest of the Community. "I consign you," she said, "to the care of Our Lord Jesus Christ. May He direct, govern, and cure you according to His Will." "Though the order rather surprised me," writes Sister Margaret Mary, "for I was at that time shivering with fever, I went my way, nevertheless, full of joy at such an obedience, both on account of the pleasure I felt at seeing myself given over to the care of my good Master and at having an opportunity of suffering

something for His love." The obedient Sister had no sooner got to her cell than Our Divine Lord appeared to her. She was lying on the floor, benumbed with cold and prostrate with pain. "He raised me up," she says, "and loaded me with caresses, saying to me: 'Now thou art wholly Mine and entirely under My care. I will therefore give thee back in good health to those who placed thee sick in My Hands.'" She was immediately cured. "I never spent such a retreat," she wrote, "I seemed to be in Heaven, so great were the constant favours, caresses and intimacy I enjoyed both on the part of my Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ and also on that of His Blessed Mother, my Guardian Angel and my Father, Saint Francis of Sales."

1684.

My Sovereign Master bestowed His graces upon me in such profusion that it would be difficult for me to express all He did for me. . . . On the first day Our Lord presented His Sacred Heart to me as a furnace of love, into which I seemed to be immersed and so penetrated with its flames that I thought I should have been reduced to ashes. I heard these words: "This is the divine Purgatory of My love, where thou must purify thyself during this life; later, thou shalt find in it an abode of light, and finally one of union and transformation." He allowed me to feel this so effectually during my retreat that sometimes I hardly knew whether I was on earth or in Heaven, so entirely was I filled with God and lost in Him. The first few days I was troubled at this, as I could not think of my sins. However, the night before the day on which I was to go to confession, I felt myself awakened, and in an instant my sins were set

before me as though they had been written out. I made my confession with so many tears and such contrition that I thought my heart would break with sorrow at having offended such Infinite Goodness, Whom all the time I felt sensibly present within me.

After the first three days of this retreat Our Lord consoled His servant so abundantly that she says one hour of such delight would be sufficient to outweigh all the martyrs have ever suffered. "He espoused my soul to Himself in an ineffable union, changing my heart into a flame of the fire of His love that it might consume every earthly love that approached it."

Our Lord also gave her to understand that as He had chosen her to honour Him as Victim in the Blessed Sacrament, she was to sacrifice herself to Him by love, adoration and self-abnegation, and practise her vows in imitation of His Eucharistic life.

This retreat led her to make the following Resolutions:—

I must abandon myself into the hands of my Superiors, whoever they may be, to be disposed of according to their pleasure, without showing the least repugnance to anything, however contrary to my inclinations.

To be transformed into Jesus, it is necessary to lead a life without curiosity, a life of love and privation, rejoicing to be despised and forgotten so as to repair the forgetfulness and contempt that my Jesus receives in the Sacred Host.

My interior and exterior silence shall be to honour the Divine Word hidden in the Blessed Sacrament.

When I go to the refectory, I will think of the

divine support with which He feeds our souls in the Holy Eucharist.

My repose shall be in honour of the eternal repose which God the Son takes in the bosom of His Father and of His mysterious repose in the Tabernacle.

I will offer my trials and mortifications in reparation for the insults He receives in the Sacred Host.

I will unite my prayers with those which the Sacred Heart of Jesus makes in the Blessed Sacrament; when I recite my office, it shall be in union with the praises which the adorable Heart there gives to His Eternal Father.

In all that I do or suffer, I will enter into the Sacred Heart to find there the intentions which should animate me, to unite myself to Him and to beg His assistance.

After every action I will offer it to the Divine Heart that all my defects may be therein repaired.

After every fault I will do penance for it and offer one of the virtues of the Sacred Heart to the Eternal Father in reparation.

In the evening I will place all my actions in the Divine Heart, so that they may be purified and rendered less unworthy to be accepted by Him.

When Sister Margaret Mary had written all these Resolutions she felt afraid lest she should be unable to keep them, but Our Lord assured her as she went to Holy Communion that He would come Himself and impress the life He leads in the Blessed Sacrament upon her heart, and give her strength to do all that He desired of her.

Our Blessed Lady also appeared to her, holding her Divine Child in her arms, "Here is He Who will teach thee all that thou must do," she said, and giving the Infant Jesus into Sister Margaret

Mary's arms, she allowed her to hold Him and embrace Him as much as she desired. When she could do so no longer, Our Lord said to her: "Art thou now content? Let this serve thee for the rest of thy life, for I wish thee to abandon thyself to My power even as I have done to thee."

1686.

Sister Margaret Mary's retreat of 1686 was marked by the Vow of Perfection, which she made at its close with the permission of her director, Père Rolin, S.J., under the condition that if it proved a source of trouble or of scruple to her, she was by that fact dispensed from it.

I make this Vow to unite myself more closely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to engage myself to do whatever He makes known to me to be His Will. I feel such weakness and inconstancy in myself that I should not dare to make it except in reliance upon the goodness, mercy, and charity of the Heart of Jesus Christ, for the love of Whom I make it.

Vow made on the Vigil of All Saints in the year 1686, to unite, consecrate and sacrifice myself more directly, absolutely, and perfectly to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. In the first place, O my Only Love, I will endeavour to subject all that is within me to Thee, by doing whatever I believe to be most perfect, or the most conducive to the glory of Thy Sacred Heart. I promise to do all that is in my power, and not to refuse to do anything, so that It may be known, loved, and glorified.

2. I will neither neglect nor omit any of my exercises, or the observances of my Rule, except

through charity, real necessity, or obedience, to which all my promises must be subject.

3. I will try to find pleasure in seeing others exalted, well treated, loved and esteemed, thinking that this is their due, and not mine, which is to be buried in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, making it my glory to carry my cross well and to live poor, unknown, and despised, only desiring to be seen that I may meet with humiliation, contempt and contradiction, in spite of the repugnance my proud nature may feel.

4. I will suffer in silence and without complaint however I am treated, and never try to avoid any suffering or pain either of body or mind, nor any humiliation, contempt, or contradiction.

5. I will neither expect nor seek any consolation, pleasure, or satisfaction, except that of being destitute of all sensible comfort. When Providence sends me any of these things, I will accept them simply, renouncing the pleasure I may find in them, and only thinking of the love I owe in return to my Sovereign Lord.

6. I will obtain no other relief than that which I find really necessary, and this I will ask for with the simplicity exacted by the Rule. This is to free myself from the continual fear which haunts me, that I pamper and allow too much to my body, which is my most cruel enemy.

7. I will leave to my Superior the entire liberty of disposing of me as she thinks best, accepting humbly and indifferently any occupation obedience may assign to me, in spite of my very great repugnance to all offices. I will try not to show any sign of this, especially that which I feel about writing letters and going to the parlour, but I will try to do these things as though I like them.

8. I will abandon myself wholly to the Sacred

Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to be consoled or afflicted according to His Will, without reference to my own, contenting myself with adhering to His action in me and His desires for me, looking upon myself as His victim, always ready to be immolated and sacrificed for Him, and desiring nothing but to love Him and to satisfy Him by acting and suffering in silence.

9. I will never inform myself of the faults of others; when I am obliged to speak of them I will do it in the charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, considering if I should be content for the same to be done to or said of me. If I see any one commit a fault I will offer the contrary virtue of the Heart of Jesus in reparation to the Eternal Father.

10. I will look upon all those who afflict me or speak ill of me as my best friends, and try to render them all the services I am able.

11. I will try not to speak of myself, or only very briefly, and never, if possible, either in praise or justification.

12. I will not seek the friendship of any creature, except when the Sacred Heart of Jesus calls me to do so, to draw it to His love.

13. I will always be attentive to conform and submit my will entirely to that of my Sovereign Lord.

14. I will never willingly consent to any useless thought, much less to one that is bad. I will look upon myself as a beggar in the house of God, who ought to be submissive to every one, and to whom all is done and given through charity. I will always think that I receive too much.

As far as I can, I will neither do anything nor leave anything undone through human respect or to please creatures.

15. As I have asked Our Lord not to allow His extraordinary graces to appear in me unless they draw down on me contempt, humiliation and confusion, so I will think it a happiness when whatever I say or do is despised and blamed, trying to do and suffer all for the love and glory of the Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ and in union with His intentions.

16. I will try to make my words and actions glorious to God, edifying to my neighbour and salutary to my own soul by being faithful to what God requires of me, and by never, if possible, committing a voluntary fault.

17. I will only grant to nature what I cannot refuse it without making myself singular, a thing I wish to avoid in everything. In short, I wish to live without choice, to cling to nothing, and to say on all occasions "Thy Will be done."

I felt so overcome with fear that I should fail in the multitude of these things, that I should not have had courage to make this vow had I not been strengthened and reassured by hearing these words in the depths of my heart: "What dost thou fear, since I will answer for thee and be thy guarantee. The unity of My love will supply the place of attention to the multiplicity of these things. I promise thee that it shall repair the faults thou mayest commit and revenge itself upon thee." These words impressed upon my soul so great a confidence and assurance that in spite of my great weakness I no longer fear anything, having put my confidence in Him who can do all things and from whom I hope for all things, and nothing from myself.

1687.

The second day of my retreat, when before the Blessed Sacrament preparing for confession, the sight of my sins, by which I had so much dishonoured God, threw me into such great sorrow and confusion that I could not cease weeping for the five or six hours I had the happiness of remaining in the chapel.

After that my Divine Lover presented Himself to me, and said: "My daughter, wilt thou sacrifice to Me the tears thou hast shed, to wash the feet of My beloved which are sullied in following a stranger?" "O my Lord," I replied, "Thou knowest that I have sacrificed everything to Thee, and have reserved nothing to myself of all that I do, except the desire of pleasing Thy Sacred Heart."

Another time, when I was in the same state, He made me the same request, telling me it was for the soul of His beloved, who had fallen into sin, and who desired to be released from it.

Again, a third time, He made me the same request, saying that His beloved was in Purgatory, and that I ought to help her, because she desired to be united to Him. Shortly afterwards He asked me if I knew who His beloved was; and told me that it was the Community of the Visitation which should have but one heart and one soul, and that the Purgatory of which He spoke was the retreat on which the religious had just entered

1690.

Sister Margaret Mary died at the time of the Community Retreat in the autumn of 1690. During the July of that year she asked and obtained

permission to make an interior retreat of forty days as a preparation for death, which she felt to be approaching.

The notes of the two first days only of this retreat have been preserved.

July 1690. — Since the feast of Saint Mary Magdalen I have felt greatly urged to reform my life, so as to be ready to appear before the holiness of God, whose justice is so severe and whose judgments are impenetrable. I must then keep my accounts ready that I may not be surprised, for it is a terrible thing to fall at death into the hands of the living God, when during life we have, by sin, withdrawn from the arms of the God Who died for us.

In order, then, to reform my life, I propose to make an interior retreat in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. I expect and hope for all the grace necessary for me. I place all my confidence in Him, for His great goodness never fails me when I address myself to Him ; on the contrary, He seems to take pleasure in finding me so poor and miserable as I am so that He can fill my nothingness with His infinite riches. Our Blessed Lady will be my Mother, and Saint Joseph and our Holy Founder my protectors."

The first day of my retreat I was occupied in thinking whence came this great desire I have to die, since it is not usual with criminals, such as I am before God, to wish to appear before their Judge—a Judge, too, whose holiness of justice penetrates even to the marrow of the bones, to whom nothing is hidden, and by whom nothing is left unpunished. How then, my soul, canst thou feel so great a joy at the approach of death? Thou thinkest only of ending thy exile and art

transported with joy at the thought that thou wilt soon leave thy prison. But take care, lest from a temporal joy, which may only come from blindness and ignorance, thou be not plunged into eternal sadness ; and that from this mortal and perishable prison thou dost not fall into that eternal dungeon, where there can be no more hope. Leave, then, my soul, this joy and these desires of dying to holy and fervent souls for whom great rewards are prepared ; and let us, whose works deserve only punishment, if it were not that God is still more merciful than He is just in His dealings with us—let us consider what will be our fate. Wilt thou be able, my soul, to support for eternity the absence of Him Whom thou so ardently desirest to enjoy, the privation of whom causes thee such pain ?

O my God, how difficult it is for me to settle this account, since I have wasted my time and know not how to repair it. To whom can I address myself, but to my adorable Master, whose goodness is willing to do this for me. This is why I have placed in His Hands all on which I am to be judged—our Rules, Constitutions, and customs. By these I shall be justified or condemned. After placing all my interests in His Hands I felt a deep peace, there at His Feet where He has long kept me, buried as it were in my own nothingness, while awaiting His judgment.

The second day, all that I have been and am was shown to me in prayer. “My God, where could a monster more horrible or deformed be found? I saw there no good, but so much evil that it was a torment to me to think of it. It seems to me that everything condemns me to eternal punishment because of my abuse of so many graces to which I have been so unfaithful.

O my Saviour, who am I that Thou shouldst have waited so long for me? I, who have a thousand times deserved to be buried in hell because of my malice—and each time Thou hast prevented it by Thine infinite goodness. Continue, my Lord, to exercise Thy mercy on Thy miserable creature. Thou knowest that I accept from my heart all the pains and punishments with which Thou mayest afflict me in this life or the next. I sorrow so much for having offended Thee, that I could wish to have suffered all the punishments due to my sins as a preservative against them, rather than have offended Thee so many times. I submit to any punishment save that of being so abandoned by Thee, that left to myself I should fall and offend Thee again. O my God, do not deprive me for ever of Thy love. As for the rest, do with me as Thou wilt, all that I have and am is Thine. All that I can do cannot repair the least of my faults but through Thee. I am insolvent. Thou knowest it well, O my Divine Master. Put me in prison, I am willing, provided it be that of Thy Sacred Heart; and when I am there, keep me a close captive, held by the chains of Thy love, until I have paid Thee all that I owe Thee. And as I can never do this, so do I wish never to leave that prison.”

CHAPTER XX

LAST DAYS AND DEATH

(1690)

WE now come to the last year of Sister Margaret Mary's life. Early in March she had a visit from her brother Chrysostom and his wife, Angélique Aumônier. Chrysostom was not a little surprised to find that his wife, instead of showing pleasure at seeing his sister, did nothing but weep.

No man likes to see a woman in tears, so he left the parlour, leaving his sister to comfort Angélique as best she could. Half an hour later he returned and found his wife calm but quite unable to talk. At this he apologised to Sister Margaret Mary, but she replied, "Oh! I am well pleased at such tears as these!" She then told him under secrecy of the conversation she had had with her sister-in-law. It appears that Angélique had begged her to ask of God her salvation, cost what it might. "Have you considered the matter well?" asked Sister Margaret Mary, and on receiving the reply that she had, "I will ask your salvation of God with as much fervour as I would my own," responded the holy religious, "but I assure you that it will cost you dear." "No matter," replied Madame Alacoque, "I submit myself entirely to the Will of God, to do with me as He pleases."

Then turning to her brother, Sister Margaret Mary remarked: "So both of you must have

patience, and beg this grace of God. Her submission and yours will put an end to all."

Chrysostom and his wife went away mystified. Two days later, after their return to Bois-Sainte-Marie, Angélique was seized with violent pain in her head—so violent that she could not refrain from screaming. Every doctor in the neighbourhood was called in, but no remedies were of any use. Hearing of a clever physician in Lyons, Chrysostom took his wife to him, but he gave up the case as hopeless, saying that it was beyond all medical science. Then a consultation of all the doctors of Lyons was held, but nothing could be done, and on seeing the surprise of the patient, they said to her: "Madame, we do not lay claim to more than human power."

Chrysostom now turned to God for help. He visited several religious houses to obtain prayers, and amongst others the Visitation Convent at Bellecour, Lyons, where he went to fulfil a vow he had made to visit the heart of Saint Francis of Sales. He also went to the Jesuit College at Lyons. The Rector was Père Billet, uncle to the doctor at Paray-le-Monial. Père Croiset, a great friend of Sister Margaret Mary, happened to be at Lyons at this time; he frequently visited Madame Alacoque and led her to resign herself wholly to God's Will. However, the husband and wife returned to Bois-Sainte-Marie, and sent word of their arrival to Sister Margaret Mary. She wrote them a note, saying that as soon as Angélique was perfectly resigned to God, her troubles would cease. Madame Alacoque read the letter, made an act of entire resignation, and died the next day. She was buried in the family vault at Bois-Sainte-Marie, beneath the recently completed Chapel of the Sacred Heart.

The year 1690 was the year of the completion of the term of office of Mother Melin. A new Superior had to be chosen, and so changed was the opinion of the Community about their humble Sister, that all eyes were turned on Sister Margaret Mary as Mother Melin's probable successor.

Sister Margaret Mary herself had received an intimation of this on Maundy Thursday, March 23rd. Our Lord presented her with a cross, which she accepted, without understanding what it meant. Hearing rumours, however, of what the Community intended to do, she was overwhelmed with distress. "Is it possible, O my God," she exclaimed, "is it possible that Thou wouldst allow a creature such as I am to be exposed to danger by being placed at the head of a Community? I beg of Thee to remove this cross from me; I submit to any other."

Our Lord granted her request, and Mother Catherine Antoinette de Lévy Chateaurand was chosen Superior, to the great joy of Sister Margaret Mary.

The office of Mother Assistant, however, again fell to her lot. She begged her Superior to relieve her from it, but Our Lord rebuked her for this: "What, My daughter, I gave into thy will, and now thou wilt not do violence to thyself for love of Me." At this she returned to Mother de Chateaurand, begged her pardon, and told her she was willing for anything she wished her to do. The Community were all glad to have her installed again in the office, and they addressed themselves to her with great confidence and profited greatly by her counsels. Her conversation was all of God, and she spoke so movingly of Him, that every one was drawn to His love. Often, too, she spoke of submission to God's Will from the motive of love,

and declared that this was one of the surest ways of attaining to sanctity.

Sister Margaret Mary's health gave no little cause for anxiety. Her Superior, seeing how weak she was, forbade her the practice not only of the Holy Hour every Thursday, but of every sort of austerity. The saintly religious accepted this prohibition with absolute submission, to the great edification of all. Mother de Chateaurand redoubled her care of her, so that Sister Margaret Mary said: "I shall not live much longer, for I have nothing to suffer; our dear Mother takes too much care of me."

Another time she said to a Sister: "I shall die this year without doubt, so that I may not hinder the great fruit which Our Divine Lord designs to produce by means of a book of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." This book was one compiled by Père Croiset S.J. He had intended to publish it in 1690, but circumstances having prevented him from doing so, he was able to add to it an account of the virtues of Blessed Margaret Mary, and of the wonderful graces she had received. The book sold rapidly and produced great fruit.

In July Sister Margaret Mary, urged by the presentiment she had of her approaching death, asked permission to make an interior retreat of forty days, without, however, omitting any of the duties of her office. This permission was allowed her. During those forty days she made a general confession of her whole life to Père Rolin. The experienced director hesitated for some time whether or not he should oblige her to put her confession into writing and keep it, so that after her death all might see the extreme innocence of this spouse of Jesus Christ, and the height of sanctity to which one could attain who had been watched over by

God and favoured with His special graces from her cradle.

Sister Margaret Mary had for years been so united to God that no occupation could distract her. She was entirely detached from herself and from all creatures. Her only suffering arose from the fact that she no longer suffered. "I do not know what to think of the state I am now in," she wrote to Père Rolin, "every desire has so ceased within me that I do not know what to think. I am afraid that this peace may be only an effect of that tranquillity in which God sometimes leaves faithless souls. Doubtless my great unfaithfulness has drawn me into this state, which is perhaps a mark of reprobation. I declare to you that I am unable to desire or wish for anything in this world, although I find myself quite destitute of virtue. Sometimes I wish to grieve for this, but I am not able to do so, it is no longer in my power to act. The only thing I feel is a perfect submission to the good pleasure of God and unspeakable delight in suffering. The thought which consoles me from time to time is that the Sacred Heart of Our Lord will do all for me, if I place no obstacle in the way; It will resolve, love and desire for me, and will supply for all my defects."

Towards the last weeks of her life all remarked that, if possible, the virtues which had characterised Sister Margaret Mary all her life became more and more faithfully practised. Her mortification was seen even in the smallest things. Everything was too good for her, and she never showed the least repugnance for anything whatever. She buried herself deeper and deeper in the virtue she loved best—profound humility—her one object was to remain hidden with Him Whom she loved.

The time of the annual retreat approached. On

the eve Sister Margaret Mary was attacked by a slight fever. One of the Sisters asked her if she were able to make the retreat. "Yes," she replied, "but it will be the great retreat!" The next day, October 8th, she was unable to leave her bed, but no anxiety was felt about her, as she had very often been apparently far more dangerously ill.

Doctor Billet was called in, but said there was no occasion at all for alarm. Sister Margaret Mary knew better, and prepared herself for the coming of her Spouse. Day by day, Doctor Billet came to see his patient, for whom he had great respect, but up to the very day of her death he found no dangerous symptoms. One day the Sisters were asking the invalid how she could persist in saying she was dying, in spite of all the doctor said. "Oh!" she replied smiling, "it is better for a secular to speak untruly than for a religious to do so!" She implored her Superior to allow her to have Holy Viaticum, but as this was refused, she begged to receive the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Communion, as she was still fasting. This was granted to her, and she received her Lord, knowing well that it was for the last time.

One of the Sisters, seeing that she suffered greatly, tried to get her some relief. Sister Margaret Mary thanked her, but told her that the short time she had still to live was too precious to be lost. All around her were struck with the joy with which she welcomed death. But she had yet one more proof of love to give to her Beloved, one more trial to suffer for Him. She was seized with a terrible fear of the judgments of God. She trembled from head to foot, and kept repeating, whilst kissing her crucifix, "Mercy, O my God, mercy!" And then once again the storm was calmed, and joy radiated from her face. "The

mercies of the Lord will I sing for ever," she exclaimed, and again and again, "What have I in Heaven and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?"

Long before, when Mistress of Novices, Sister Margaret Mary had predicted that she would die in the arms of two who were then her novices. And so it was for, being unable to breathe, Sister Françoise Verchère and Sister Péronne Rosalie de Farges supported her in their arms. "I am burning, I am burning," she exclaimed, "would that it were with divine love! But I have never known how to love my God perfectly." "Beg pardon of Him for me," she entreated, "and love Him with all your hearts to make reparation for all that I have failed to do. Oh! what a happiness to love God! Love Him then, for He is Love, and love Him perfectly." When told that the doctor did not think she would die, she said: "Lord, when wilt Thou withdraw me from this place of exile? Yes! I hope that through the mercy of the Sacred Heart we shall go into the House of the Lord."

During the afternoon of October 17th, she begged those around her to recite the Litanies of the Sacred Heart and of Our Lady, and to invoke her Holy Founder, Saint Joseph, and her Guardian Angel. She begged her Superior to promise never to repeat anything she had told her which could redound to her praise. And turning to Sister Péronne Rosalie de Farges, she asked her to write to Père Rolin, to implore him to burn her letters and keep inviolably the secrets she had confided to him.

About five o'clock she asked to receive Extreme Unction. When it had been administered, she thanked her Superior and all her Sisters for all

they had done for her, saying that she no longer needed anything in this world but to bury herself in the Heart of Jesus Christ and there breathe forth her last sigh.

Then for a time perfect calm reigned. Once or twice those watching heard the Holy Name of Jesus—that was all—and with that most sweet Name upon her lips Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque gave up her soul to God.

She died between seven and eight o'clock in the evening of October 17th, 1690, in the forty-fourth year of her age and the eighteenth of her religious profession.

“The Saint is dead, the Saint is dead!” was the cry, not only in the convent, but throughout the town.

Relics were demanded on all sides, but Sister Margaret Mary died as she had lived—a poor spouse of Jesus Crucified—nothing was found in her cell but her Rule Book and her discipline.

Blessed Margaret Mary's body was laid in the ordinary burial-place of the Community, beneath the choir. In 1703 the coffin was opened and the precious bones collected and placed in an oaken case near the spot where she had been buried.

Each year, on the 17th of October, the Community of Paray go in procession between seven and eight o'clock in the evening to the room where their saintly Sister breathed her last. The cell has been turned into a Chapel, and there the nuns join in prayers and hymns, confident that she, who loved Our Lord so dearly, will obtain for them the grace of living and dying as the devoted servants of His most Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER XXI

BEATIFICATION AND STEPS TOWARDS CANONISATION

FROM the very day on which Sister Margaret Mary breathed her last, constant recourse was had to her intercession, and numerous favours were obtained which continually increased the reputation of her sanctity. In 1715 the first process of inquiry was held regarding the life and miracles of the servant of God. It was made through the Bishop of Autun, Monseigneur d'Hallencourt, at the earnest entreaty of Mother Anne Elizabeth de la Garde, at that time Superior of the Visitation Convent at Paray. This juridical process instituted during the lifetime of many of Sister Margaret Mary's contemporaries, forms the basis of all subsequent proceedings. The original documents relating to it are preserved in the archives of the Bishop of Autun and in those of the convent at Paray. Owing, however, to public events which greatly affected the interests of the Church, and especially to the Revolution, the Cause was suspended for more than a hundred years. It was only by a Decree of March 30th, 1824, that it was actually introduced at Rome, thus conferring the title of Venerable on the humble disciple of the Sacred Heart. Things were destined to proceed very slowly. Everything that Sister Margaret Mary had written or taught and all her acts were subjected to the minute and severe scrutiny of the Sacred Congregation. Her revelations, her

writings and sayings were constantly touching on points of dogmatic, moral, and mystical theology, so much so that the advocate of the Cause, a man of great learning and experience, declared that of all the numerous Causes he had defended at Rome, none had cost him more labour than this. In May 1864, the Decree establishing the heroic character of the virtues of Venerable Margaret Mary was prepared, but Gregory XVI. died that same month, and it was reserved for His Holiness, Pope Pius IX., to promulgate the Decree in August of the same year.

Sixteen years, however, were still to pass while the miracles attributed to the intercession of Venerable Margaret Mary were under discussion.

In 1859 the English Bishops united in Council under the Presidency of Cardinal Wiseman, addressed a Petition to the Sovereign Pontiff in favour of her Beatification.

On the 24th of April 1864, the Decree was published, establishing the truth of the miracles, and on the 24th of June the same year, the Decree of Beatification was published with great solemnity in the Lateran Basilica.

The Solemn Exaltation of Blessed Margaret Mary's relics took place on the 13th of July, the ceremony being presided over by Monseigneur Borghi, Chamberlain to the Pope and Postulator of the Cause. The reliquary was taken in procession from the cloister to the interior of the convent, where the relics were placed in a rich case, sealed, and then borne in procession to the throne which had been prepared in the centre of the Choir.

The day fixed for the Solemnity of the Beatification was September 18th, 1864. One reads accounts of the "splendour of St Peter's, the illuminations, the inscriptions, the notes of joy

pealed forth to the city by the bells and thundered by the cannon from the Castle of St Angelo as the Te Deum was intoned on the reading of the Apostolic Decree of the Beatification, and the veil fell from before the picture of Blessed Margaret Mary, representing her ascending on her way to Heaven.

What the joy at Paray and in all the Convents of the Visitation must have been, can be better imagined than described. The enthusiasm of the public was shown in the erection of a beautiful Chapel near the entrance to the town of Paray, in 1865.

Preparatory to the celebration of the solemn Triduum of Thanksgiving fixed for the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th of June 1865, the relics of Blessed Margaret Mary were placed with great care in a magnificent case of silver, adorned with gold, enamel, and precious stones, the united gift of France, Belgium, Spain, and the British Isles.

Blessed Margaret Mary's cell, the little room in which she had held such loving converse with her Lord, and in which she had breathed out her soul to Him, was transformed into a Chapel. This Oratory was blessed on June 10th, 1866, by Monseigneur de Marguery, Bishop of Autun, who there offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This same Prelate took every opportunity of advancing the Cause of Blessed Margaret Mary. Urged by him, many Cardinals, Bishops, and persons of rank petitioned the Holy See to resume the Cause, and the order for so doing was signed on September 6th, 1866. But many long years were still to pass before the final Decree, bringing the Cause of Canonisation to a conclusion, was to become an accomplished fact, during the fourth year of the Great European War.

On the 6th of January 1918, a solemn session was held at Rome, in which His Holiness, Pope Benedict XV., pronounced upon the authenticity of the miracles which are to be used at the Canonisation.

On the 6th of February of the same year, 1918, His Holiness spoke the following memorable words: "We thank the Lord for the opportunity afforded us to-day of giving new proof of our benevolence towards the French nation of which Margaret Mary Alacoque is a shining glory and will be a loving protector. Equally grateful to Him are We for the opportunity of holding up to public esteem the Religious Institute in which the spirit of St Francis of Sales ever lives. . . . Engraved on Our heart, beloved children, is the record of the hope that We expressed on the day of the publication of the Decree on the two miracles attributed to the intercession of Blessed Alacoque. On that memorable occasion there rose to our lips, spontaneously, because it was formed in Our heart, the hope that the solemn recognition of the prodigies wrought by God at the intercession of Margaret Mary Alacoque might serve to spread ever more the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, because the pious daughter of St Francis of Sales received from Jesus Christ Himself the mission of making known the riches of His Divine Heart that men might come to Him as a Fount of graces and a model of virtue. We should praise God that there is such evident connection between the prodigies attributed to Blessed Alacoque and the devotion to the Sacred Heart that there followed from that, universal agreement on the necessity of helping in every way the apostolate of the pious virgin of Paray-le-Monial. It gives Us special pleasure to be able thus to bear witness publicly

to Our satisfaction in hearing of the further development of the work of the consecration of families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the sadness in which Our Pontificate must go on, as it was born, more and more does the Lord make Us feel His hand of a father, and We wish that all the members of the Christian family may praise and thank Him for it.

“ But to-day’s Decree, which brings to its conclusion the Cause of the Canonisation of Blessed Alacoque is far more eloquent than that on the miracles. To-day, too, We must turn Our ear and hear the word of God, Who shall determine *if and when* the humble inmate of the cloister of Paray-le-Monial shall be raised to the honour of the altars. Nevertheless, the historian may say that to-day her story is completed ; the theologian and the canonist have carried their researches and examinations to the full length ; in the hands of even the most critical the arms are broken and not even any outside circumstance hinders the sentence, that now it is possible to go on with security to the Canonisation of Margaret Mary Alacoque. So this happy event may be greeted as imminent by those, too, who do not allow themselves to be guided by a too warm imagination. But does not he who knows that he is close to his goal hasten and move more quickly ? So should all those devoted to Blessed Alacoque hasten and perfect themselves in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in proportion to their present hope for the approach of the Canonisation of the heroine, the efficacy of whose apostolate has grown ever since the day of the approval of the miracles attributed to her ; indeed by the means of that approval.

“ We said on another occasion that all the

faithful should help forward that apostolate by welcoming and making their own all the holy activities suggested by devotion towards the Divine Heart of the Saviour. But, as we approach the Canonisation of Margaret Mary Alacoque, this duty has become even stronger, because *motus in fine velocior*, and there can be no room for delay in recognising the universal character of her apostolate. That is the important lesson taught us by the new Decree in the Cause of Canonisation of Blessed Alacoque. May all the children of the Church accept it, and may it be a further incentive to you, beloved children, for whom the first Decree was motive for increase of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Did the approval of the miracles attributed to Blessed Alacoque place on the lips one of the prayers with which she was wont to assail the Heart of Jesus? Then may the declaration which the Church makes to-day, that it is possible to go on with security to the Canonisation of Blessed Margaret Mary, bring to your minds the desire of emulating the frequency and ardour of ejaculatory prayers with which she salutes her Beloved. The previous Decree enlightened you as to the sanctity of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, to-day's Decree should fill you with love of it. The first Decree might counsel virtue, the last should convince you even to heroism in the practice of the devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. . . . May the blessing of God descend copiously on France, cradle of Blessed Alacoque, and bring about that from the place whence came the first ray of devotion to the Sacred Heart may come ever the example of constancy and fervour in this beautiful devotion, to rejoice not only the Salesian cloisters but the entire Christian family."

That the actual ceremony of Canonisation should be postponed was inevitable, owing to the awful War that was raging in Europe up to November 1918. Now that God has heard our prayers for peace, we may surely hope that Blessed Margaret Mary's final triumph may soon gladden the hearts of all true lovers of the Heart of Jesus. "If," said the Holy Father in January 1918, "if from that Canonisation there results a more complete diffusion of the worship of the Sacred Heart, who would not by desire and deed thus hasten the spread of so excellent a devotion (that of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in families, and their consecration to It)? The dawn gives us an idea of what the midday will be like, and we, who, in this praiseworthy consecration of families to the Sacred Heart, recognise the dawn of that much-desired day when the sovereignty of Jesus Christ shall be acknowledged on all sides, repeat with confident joy the words of St Paul: *Opportet illum regnare*—He must reign."

CHAPTER XXII

TO-DAY

MORE than two hundred years have come and gone since the humble Saint, whose life we have been tracing, lay on her death-bed at Paray. The devotion to the Sacred Heart, which had been so lovingly revealed to her, has since that time increased and gone forth to all nations and to all countries with its blessed message of love. During the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, in spite of all the efforts of Jansenism, the devotion spread throughout the length and breadth of France, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and even Canada. Numberless books in honour of the Sacred Heart were published in all languages, and confraternities, enriched with many indulgences by successive Pontiffs, were established in all countries.

When, in 1870, the Franco-Prussian War broke out, France, crushed beneath the foe from without and torn by strife within, remembered the requests made in 1689 to Blessed Margaret Mary by Our Lord Himself. These requests had been made known to the then reigning monarch, Louis XIV., by Blessed Margaret Mary through the intermediary of Père de la Chaise; they were: First, that an edifice should be erected to receive a picture of the Sacred Heart; Second, that there should be a solemn consecration of the Nation made to the Sacred Heart by the Head of the

Nation ; and Third, that the image of the Sacred Heart should be painted on the standard and engraved on the arms of the French to render them victorious over all their enemies.

None of these requests had been complied with by Louis XIV. The wife of Louis XV., Queen Marie Leczinska, wrote upon the subject to the Sovereign Pontiff. Her daughter embroidered magnificent church hangings with the symbol of the Sacred Heart ; and the Dauphin erected a Chapel at Versailles in honour of this Divine Heart : but he died before ascending the throne. Louis XVI., who in his extremity thought of trying to realise the three great designs, perished on the scaffold without having accomplished anything. The devil who doubtless believes in divine promises tried again and again to bury them in oblivion. Jansenism, Voltairianism, the horrors of the Revolution, Positivism, Anti-clericalism, all lent their aid. However, in 1870, the hearts of the French were stirred, and in a meeting of several influential and truly Christian Frenchmen at Poitiers, it was proposed to make a Vow to the Sacred Heart, promising to erect in Paris a church in Its honour, if the Divine Heart would grant the cessation of the troubles with regard to the temporal power of the Pope and the troubles of France itself. "Let us go to the Sacred Heart" was the cry, and the words were taken up and echoed from country to country throughout the entire world. The Basilica of Montmartre was the result. It was voted for by the "Assemblée nationale" in 1873 by a majority of 382 votes against 138. In July 1914, at the close of the Eucharistic Congress at Lourdes, the Papal Legate, before ten cardinals, two hundred bishops, two thousand priests, and an immense

crowd of people, announced that the consecration of the Church of Montmartre was to take place on the coming 17th of October, the Feast of Blessed Margaret Mary. Eight days later the Great War broke out and the ceremony had to be postponed, but by the express wish of the Sovereign Pontiff, the Bishop of Autun read on that day, the 17th of October 1914, in the Chapel of the Visitation Convent at Paray-le-Monial and in the Basilica in that town, a solemn act of consecration, repeated by the people, imploring the Sacred Heart to establish His reign over France.

During the last forty years the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has gone on rapidly increasing. In 1856, Pope Pius IX. decreed that the Feast which up to that time had been confined to certain dioceses, should now be promulgated throughout the Universal Church. A step further, and a very important one, was taken during the Pontificate of Leo XIII. Mother Mary of the Divine Heart Droste zu Vischering, a holy nun of the Order of the Good Shepherd, felt impelled by Our Lord to petition the Holy Father to consecrate the entire world to the Sacred Heart. This Leo XIII. was very willing to do, and on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 9th, 1899, in a voice trembling with emotion, the venerable Pontiff implored Christ to be the King of all, Catholics, heretics, schismatics, infidels and pagans. "From pole to pole," he prayed, "let one only voice resound: Praise to the Divine Heart which has given us salvation; to It be honour and glory for ever and ever." "I will reign in spite of My enemies," said Our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary, and He seems to have echoed the same words to Mother Mary of the Divine Heart, for in her letter to the Holy Father we find that

speaking of her communications from Our Lord, she says: "He added, Confide in Me, My Heart will reign, My Heart will triumph."

On the 21st of July of the same year, 1899, Cardinal Mazella, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, addressed a letter in the name of the Holy Father to all the Bishops of the world, urging them to spread and develop the devotion to the Sacred Heart by confraternities, devotions during the month of June and the celebration of the First Friday of each month, so that these practices, becoming customary among all people, may be as a frequent and perpetual affirmation of the royal and divine right that Christ received from His Father over the whole human race, a right which He acquired by the shedding of His Precious Blood.

Now in our own day, when the world is but slowly emerging from the terrible shocks that have convulsed it during the years of War, the Sacred Heart pleads once more with ever-growing tenderness and persistence for our homage and our love. The words of Our Blessed Lord, "I will reign," "I will give peace to their families," "I will bless the houses wherein the image of My Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honoured," are vibrating through the Catholic world to-day, and finding their fulfilment in thousands and thousands of homes in every country where the Sacred Heart has been enthroned as King.

The devotion of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus took its rise in the Convent Chapel of the Visitation nuns at Paray-le-Monial, in that very Chapel where, two hundred and thirty years ago, Blessed Margaret Mary received her wonderful revelations and divine promises. In 1907 a priest, named Father Matthew Crawley-Boevey, of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and

Mary, the son of an English convert father, born in Peru, came to Paray-le-Monial in a dying state, suffering from what the doctors at Rome had pronounced to be incurable heart disease. Prostrate in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in the Convent Chapel, he found himself suddenly and entirely cured. At the same time his soul was enlightened and he received the inspiration to reconquer the world, household by household, for the Sacred Heart. He was convinced that this was what Our Lord was asking him to do ; it was for this, he felt sure, that his health had been restored to him. "If Society is to be conquered, it will be by beginning with the unit of Society—the family ; if Jesus is to receive external homage in the State, He must be first enthroned as Lord and King in the sacred shrines of our homes."

A few days later Father Matthew Crawley-Boevey, kneeling at the feet of Pope Pius X., made known to him the mission he believed Our Lord had entrusted to him, and begged permission to undertake the work. "No," said the Holy Father with a smile, "this is a magnificent work ; I do not give permission, I command you to devote yourself to it." Father Crawley-Boevey, thus encouraged by Christ's Vicar on earth, returned to his convent in Chili and began his apostolate. The spread of the work was so rapid, the supernatural results so great and unexpected, that Pope Pius X. gave a special blessing in March 1911 to the work and to the priests who should become its apostles. Later on, the same Holy Father enriched the devotion of enthronement with indulgences, by a decree of July 24th, 1913. These indulgences have since been extended in April 1915 to the whole world. Within a year or two over two hundred bishops, archbishops and cardinals had given their approval

and recommendation to the practice. Jesus, the King and Centre of all hearts, has been enthroned in homes innumerable all over the world. In January 1918 Father Crawley-Boevey himself wrote: "The solemn Enthronement of the Heart of Jesus as King has been made in the palaces of Kings and Princes,¹ and in the homes of thousands and thousands of workmen and of the poor; it has been carried out in Parliaments; amidst whole populations, hearth by hearth, where these house-to-house consecrations have been crowned by an official Enthronement at whose public performance the ecclesiastical and civil authorities have presided. There have been Enthronements of rare beauty, performed in the seclusion of the cloister, in brilliant gatherings held in the halls of Catholic clubs; Enthronements full of divine poetry carried out in convent schools, homes and orphanages, hospitals—even in prisons; splendid Enthronements in the houses of bishops and priests (especially in France), the homage of shepherds and their families to the Shepherd-King; the official Enthronement of a nation whose Chambers ratify by law of the land a national homage which sets up the Heart of Jesus King, as sole Lord and Master above the powers of the State (Columbia)." In another place Father Crawley-Boevey goes on to say that the hosanna of love to the Sacred Heart is "sung amid Arctic snows and in the centre of Africa; it resounds from the archipelagoes of Oceania to the distant lands of Tibet and China." It has penetrated even to the leper settlement of Molokai, into the Congo, Ethiopia, Alaska and the Fiji Islands, as well as to all the

¹ (Luxemburg and Spain): "He desires to enter with pomp and magnificence into the houses of princes and kings" (Blessed Margaret Mary).

countries of Europe and America. By January 1917 the Enthronement had taken place in more than five million families. Since that time the number has greatly increased."

The British Isles are not behindhand in the devotion of the Enthronement. It will be remembered how it was to England that the message of love from the Sacred Heart was brought by Blessed Margaret Mary's own confessor, the Venerable Claude de la Colombière. It was in the English Court, in the Chapel Royal of St James' Palace, that the devotion to this Divine Heart was preached; and it was Mary Beatrice of Modena, Queen of England, formerly Duchess of York, who in 1697 petitioned the Holy See for the institution of the Feast of the Sacred Heart. Catholic England can never forget these facts which connect her closely with Our Lord's chosen apostle of devotion to His Heart, Blessed Margaret Mary. Nor do we forget that the actual devotion of the Enthronement, as we now practise it, sprang from an inspiration received at Paray by a priest of English parentage.

The Bishops of England, Ireland, and Scotland have urged their people in their Pastorals to proclaim Our Lord as their King. Our own Cardinal Archbishop Bourne wrote on October 12th, 1917: "We earnestly commend to the piety of the Faithful the Work of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart, whereby families place themselves collectively under the protection of our Divine Master, and consecrate to Him all their hopes and joys and sorrows, so that in all things they may live in accordance with His Holy Will, and guard all the members of the family against any thought, word or deed contrary to the law of God."

We have seen how the first ceremony of Enthronement of the Sacred Heart took place in the noviciate of the convent at Paray-le-Monial; that the devotion now being propagated differs in no way from the devotion practised by the humble Novice-mistress and her novices is proved by the words of the great theologian, Cardinal Billot, who, writing on April 26th, 1915, to Father Matthew Crawley-Boevey, says: "The work is the pure, simple and unalloyed devotion to the Sacred Heart, which has been handed down to us in the revelations of Blessed Margaret Mary, and such as the Church has sanctioned by her supreme authority. It is nothing more; nothing less. For what is the object of the work? To introduce, that is to say, to set up in the place of honour in each household a representation of the Sacred Heart in recognition of the supreme rights of Jesus Christ over the family as a whole, and over each of its members; to recite family prayers each evening before it, and to renew each night by the lips of the father or mother the consecration made on the first day; to be faithful to the practice of Holy Communion, and as far as possible to that of the Holy Hour on the eve of the first Friday of the month; to meditate upon the lessons and examples given us by the Sacred Heart; to have recourse to this Fount of all graces in the family joys as well as in its sorrows, in good as well as in evil days, in sufferings, in reverses, in partings, amid the tears shed at the graveside and the smiles bestowed upon the cradle—in a word, amidst all the events that interrupt the normal and regular course of the family life. . . . I see in it a simple and practical method for realising the desires expressed to Blessed Margaret Mary. Our Lord asked of her that His Heart should be the object

of special worship. . . . One has but to read in the life of Blessed Margaret Mary the description of the first Enthronement carried out with closed doors in the part of the convent reserved for the noviciate. One would require above all to read of the expression of joy that inundated the soul of Margaret Mary on that occasion. Had she at that time a presentiment that in this small grain of mustard seed was the great tree beneath whose branches for more than two centuries the birds of heaven have found shelter? I do not know. But what I do know is this: that if the book of the future had been opened to her at the page entitled the *Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home*, she would have recognised in it the expansion of the act so delicately outlined by her little novices, and seen in it the unmistakable accomplishment of the august wishes that had been entrusted to her."

What then each one of us can do, in however small a measure, to further this devotion to the Divine Heart of our Lord and King, that surely we should do. And in doing it, may Blessed Margaret Mary's words echo in our hearts: "He reserves the treasures of His graces for all who shall employ themselves in it (the carrying out of His designs) according to the power which He will bestow upon them."

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst reveal unto Blessed Margaret Mary the incomprehensible riches of Thy Sacred Heart, grant that by her merits and example we may love Thee in all things and above all things, and so deserve to have a dwelling-place in this Thy Heart, Who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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