

Mother Elizabeth, Mother Foundress of the Order of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

# INTO THE DEEP

THE STORY OF THE  
CONFRATERNITY OF THE DIVINE LOVE  
AND THE ORDER OF  
ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

Mother Elizabeth, Mother Foundress of the Order of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and foundress also of its parent society, the Confraternity of the Divine Love, wrote two books about the Confraternity and the Order. The first, "Into the Deep", dealt with the first five years. The second, "Letting Down the Nets", was not only a record of the next five years, but also dealt with some of the matters nearest to her heart. The present volume is a revision and amalgamation of these two books. Except for the chapter on the financial position of the Confraternity and of the Order and the record of the work in Australia, which has been written by one of the other Sisters, Mother Elizabeth's own words have been kept almost entirely, though the material has been rearranged and abridged.

This has been a labour of love by an associate of the Confraternity, who received much of her early religious training from Mother Elizabeth. While working on it, precious memories of her intimate conversations as well as of addresses heard have been revived, and certainly if anyone lived out what she preached to others, that person was Mother Elizabeth. In some of the passages depicting her ideals, one could almost take them as a description of herself – and yet how simply and graciously did she act and speak, that one would never have guessed at the long years of self-discipline, and of outward and inward trials by which the Master fashioned her as His instrument for dealing with souls.

## THE CONCEPTION OF THE CONFRATERNITY

In the spring of 1903 three friends peculiarly united in faith and aspirations were drawn to consider the need of workers in the great district of Fulham. None were pledged irrevocably to any special work, two were absolutely free to respond to any need, the third partially so. Without any special call, the fact fastened itself upon their minds that here was a large district of industrial life, with new churches springing up to meet the needs of new parishes, but with evidently very few inhabitants who would have any leisure to devote themselves to parish work of any kind whatsoever.

After some interval of prayer and consultation, the then bishop of London was approached, to ask him whether he would consent to a very tiny effort being made to form a settlement, which would at the first consist of only two and a half members. He wrote back cordially, referring us to the bishop of Kensington (Dr. Ridgeway), and saying there was a very real need and that they would welcome any practical proposal.

On the Sunday prior to our first interview with the Bishop of Kensington at St. James', Piccadilly, two of us were in an old Sussex church. It was the fifth Sunday after Trinity. The wonderful Gospel was read which includes the words: "Launch out into the deep!" As we left the church, one of us said to the other, "That shall be our motto". The motto it has been ever since. We might here note that ten years afterwards we both found ourselves again in that Sussex village. We remembered we had not been there on a Sunday since 1903. Alluding to the tremendous changes we had seen during those years and realizing the change above all in ourselves, we entered the church. The Gospel was the same one, containing the words, "Launch out into the deep." We were both impressed with the fact and felt quite a supernatural power attached to the repetition of that message, the significance of which was realised during the events which followed so soon afterwards, the establishment of the mission flat at Fulham.

But to return to 1903, the interview with the kindly bishop put the proposal for the tiny settlement upon an excellent basis. It was decided to launch forth after the summer holidays with his blessing and approval. During the following two months pilgrimages were taken down into the neighbourhood to reconnoitre; and the end of all the expeditions seemed to be "The Grey'ound". It seemed a kind of centre whence all the Fulham poor directed your steps.

"You know the Grey'ound?" "You comes round by the Grey'ound." "When you see the Grey'ound." Now, near the Grey'ound, we often met a vicar, whom we named "the cheery parson", for on the wettest, muddiest, most Fulhamite day he always had a smile which cheered the most despondent mood. We have since learnt we were not the only souls that knew the power of Father Johnson's smiles. The cheery parson belonged to St. Alban's Church, and we secretly hoped that our first centre would be in St. Alban's parish.

The next development, however, was a most unexpected one. In the autumn a letter was received from the bishop asking us to come and see him. He then told us that Mrs. Creighton had communicated with the bishop of London about a proposed settlement in Fulham. His wish was that we should fall in with her proposals and seek to be attached to her scheme, as of course, it was certain of success.

However, in an interview the bishop kindly arranged between us and Mrs. Creighton at Hampton Court, we learnt that she was not intending to start work for two years. As she kindly told us of her plans, we saw that any movement on our part in that neighbourhood then would be the greatest possible mistake. She was evidently the one for the establishment of the settlement and our right course was to withdraw. We like to remember how very reluctant the bishop of Kensington was to accept our resignation and how he hoped, to use his own words, "something might yet come of it", a wish which later years certainly saw realised; but for the moment the door was closed. Our feeling at the time was that we might have been called to prayer in preparation for a larger scheme of work than that which we could have then undertaken.

Fulham was written deeply in our hearts, and we continued to pray that all God willed for its future good should be carried out, whoever His instruments might be.

All this took place in 1903; we none of us undertook any other special work, although there was, of course, always much to do. In the summer of 1904 the writer received her call to the Religious Life, and entered one of our large Communities. With this step we three finally abandoned any thought of work in Fulham, which until that time had still lingered in our minds.

It was all the very best thing that could have happened; the six years that immediately followed, 1904-1910, were years of wonderful discipline in character to us all. God only knew how we needed them.

Activity in outside work was at a standstill, but experience of the best possible kind was gained and it was only one more instance of the blessing of God's "shut doors". Three years later another of the three was called to the Religious Life; the other was still needed in her home life.

Then followed a period of strenuous mission work; wonderful days in which the spiritual condition of the people and the unspiritual condition of the people were burnt into one's soul. The details do not belong to this narrative and must not take up space; but the condition of things was a familiar one; two sides of the parish divided by a river, in actual fact, however, divided much more effectually by the difference in social condition. One had the respectable, well-to-do class on one side; the failures, the submerged and the lower paid workers upon the other; and the church standing between the two, attended in a measure, by the one, almost entirely neglected by the other. It was in that place that the great fact was realised so intensely that it was impossible to get that poorer side to church. The language was unintelligible to them. Services designed for communicants were boring to a degree to those who had not learned yet to love God; and individual effort was continually balked by the need of a real genuine mission service which would really attract the people.

We realised that individual visiting was not sufficient. Good as it may be, we needed also the witness of united gatherings for prayer and worship, with the clear, simple instruction in the Faith such as the people love. It needed the *atmosphere* where "two or three are gathered together" in His Name: it is the strength of such gatherings of witness which pierces the hearts of those who often desire to love God, and to be lifted out of their degradation and shame. If they are confronted with a Prayer Book Service and a conventional congregation, they feel hopelessly at sea and long never to be found there again. Is it not so?

Well, we thought it was. Several of us used to meet and dream dreams and indeed made practical efforts too, efforts which in the end died from necessity, not from any choice of ours. We met in our mission room and prayed and conferred; doubtless we made mistakes, but we were terribly in earnest and the love of God for souls burnt more and more deeply in our hearts.

Of those five we remember Frederick Brown, planning to go to Africa, and James Langdale, who longed to become a contemplative - both killed at the Front in the 1914-1918 War; and Sister Agnes, called to be the first Sister of our now established Order to represent us beyond the veil.

How vividly now do I realise that those early mission days, born only apparently to fail, were in reality the foundation of all that followed in the fulfilment of our consecration to God's service! In 1912

our group was scattered, but the bond which bound us together was never to be broken.

The Confraternity now appears upon the scene. During a Retreat in the last week of July of 1912 the thought of all we had been realising was borne more strongly than ever in upon our minds. The Life of St. Francis gave the final touch. How well I remember the day and hour – the feast of St. Peter's Chains – when, putting down the volume of that wonderful life, for the first time our Confraternity prayer was breathed to heaven, literally with eyes raised to the great blue vault overhead. "Baptise us, O God, with the Holy Ghost and kindle in our hearts the fire of Thy love."

Yes, that was what we needed! Returning to London, we talked things over and proposed that three or four of us should unite in praying that prayer, and should call ourselves by the name of the Confraternity. We decided to ask others to pray also, but that we should form no society, nor have any enrolment. For convenience we decided to print the prayer upon a slip of paper, and we drew the cross for a design upon this slip, setting in the centre of it the Heart containing the Holy Name. It was all so simple, so entirely without any idea that it would appeal to any number; but within a fortnight between twenty and thirty others had joined us and had spoken of the simplicity and beauty of the idea. Still, there we left it; no definite idea had formed within our minds. Then totally unexpectedly, on St. Bartholomew's Day, the call came. Of those secret hours with God alone the soul cannot venture to speak. It is enough to say that whereas at one hour I knew nothing, before another had passed the course of my whole life was changed, by one of those marvellous interior illuminations which bring conviction by their perfect simplicity and calm. "God spake, and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast."

Great mystic theologians tell us we do not dishonour God, when in all humility we believe we *may* be mistaken as to an interior locution, and so we may well test the voice by discipline and the lapse of time. For such a momentous step as this involved, the leaving of the Community in which I had been professed (although the vow of stability had not been taken), the launching forth to found an Order and a Society which in itself was such a stupendous responsibility, the absolute dependence upon God for all resources to establish an untried Society – all this rose vividly before my mind, together with the realisation that there would probably not be a single soul in the whole world who would really believe I had received such a call, or approve of such a step.

Those succeeding days were such as never can be forgotten. Spent as they were, outwardly engaged in all the organisations of parochial life, inwardly in unceasing prayer, they will remain for ever as some of the most remarkable and most spiritually intense of my whole life;

and as is so characteristic of the divine working, they were days of no emotion whatever; simple blind obedience and naked faith, with no further communications from God. But the vocation remained, an unquestionable conviction which nothing could ever shake.

## 2

### THE BIRTH OF THE CONFRATERNITY

The supposition that there would probably be no one who would believe that a call had really been given to found the Confraternity on a permanent basis was fully justified during the ensuing months. After a due time had been given to quiet prayer, in order to test interiorly the permanence of the conviction, a letter was sent to the authorities of the Community to ask for permission to test the value of the idea. The reply was a very kind but definite refusal to countenance any such thing, coupled with an earnest entreaty that the whole subject might be put away as a temptation from the enemy. As circumstances made it impossible to meet the Superior for several months, that time was specified as an opportunity to overcome any such unsettling idea, and to determine resolutely to continue the work then appointed to me in the north.

The only further move that was made, therefore, as the weeks passed by and the vocation only deepened, was to write to a priest who was pre-eminently fitted to answer any questions upon the Religious Life, and who had a very comprehensive knowledge of the history of Religious Orders, and to place before him as clearly as possible the whole position. This was done and his answer, although tentative of course, was the only real encouragement that was given in those first difficult months. He saw in the statement the possibility of a special vocation and encouraged the hope that ultimately God would open the way if I continued in fidelity and obedience meanwhile.

No progress otherwise was made for four months, but at the end of that time the conviction was far stronger and the whole future of the Confraternity and the Order of Sisters was as clear and definite in my mind as though I had read its foundation, scope, and rule, in a book, and was simply called upon to carry out what was before my eyes. Every detail ranged itself out most clearly without any personal effort of thought, and its destiny filled the whole horizon of the future.

It was with this consciousness of absolute conviction that I came up to London to meet the bishop who had received my professed

vows, and who alone could really sanction any strong action. The scheme was laid before him, and he gave his most hearty approval to all that was proposed, together with some valuable suggestions and some definite instruction. I told his lordship the Community did not approve of my desire to leave, nor did they believe in my fitness to carry out the proposed work, with which latter fact I entirely agreed. But it did not seem to me the choice of the leadership rested with me! His lordship answered that he thought I could hardly expect any Community to agree with the ideas which differed from their own ideals. So far, however, he gave permission for me to leave with the sanction, although not with the approval, of my Community, on condition that I formed an Order to which I could be attached within a reasonable time after leaving, or joined another Community if my plans were found to be impracticable. With this proviso of course I heartily concurred. His lordship also himself kindly made inquiries, as we were most anxious to do, as to whether any Community was already in existence which in any way realised my ideals, in which case I should be only too anxious to join them instead of endeavouring to multiply new enterprises.

In a subsequent interview with the Reverend Mother of my own Community, I put the whole matter again before her and asked the pointed question as to whether if I waited and did nothing for a period even of years, or as long as she should appoint, she would in the end believe it was a real call. The answer was in the negative, but she added, she felt that I was so firmly resolved in my own mind that it was, that she believed it to be impossible for me to settle down again, and therefore she said she felt they must consent to my departure but would never approve.

With her permission I further took counsel with two other priests, one of whom later became our chaplain, and they considered that under the circumstances I could take no other course but leave, and so the matter was decided, and the date of my departure left to be fixed by the Reverend Mother. This eventually proved to be April 8th, 1913.

During the period of three months which remained I agreed to do nothing whatever about the future, and to tell no one of my intentions. I therefore ceased even my correspondence with the Bishop; only, with the Mother's aid and sanction, still made enquiries as to the rule of other Societies – in fact, it was suggested that I should even go and stay in one or two. However these proposals were not carried out by the arrangements of the Societies themselves.

A remarkable incident, however, occurred during those months. I was, through parish work, brought into contact with the vicar of a neighbouring church, and discovered to my great surprise that he had formerly been the vicar of St. Alban's, Fulham, the "cheery parson" in fact. He spoke quite naturally of his former parish, and I

told him of the early dream of a settlement working there. He remarked: "How I wish you were working there now!" Seeing in the circumstances a very remarkable feature, I told him of my position as it was at that time, and that it was my intention to seek some such sphere in which to test the value of the Confraternity. He immediately said, "May I write to the present vicar?" Impressing upon him the absolute promise I was under, to do nothing personally in the matter until I left the Community, I told him that if he cared to write and describe something of what my aims for the future were, and that I greatly desired to make my centre in some poor district, notably in Fulham, I should be only too thankful if I might have something in view. Therefore the letter was written by him without giving any clue as to the Community or individuality of the Sister who was likely to be free. The answer came by return.

"Your letter was a God-send. My present lady-workers are leaving, and I have written to several Communities asking whether they can send Sisters, all to no effect. I should be only too glad to hear more of the Sister you write to me about."

Here then was a wonderful link in the chain of God's providence. Exactly ten years after we had relinquished the hope of working in that precise parish, without any effort whatever of our own, I was apparently to be led back to that very place; and by the hand of its former vicar.

There seems no reason for dwelling longer upon these intervening days. They were difficult ones, and at times very sad ones; but throughout there were those wonderful tokens of the providence of God, which bore in upon my heart the knowledge that He was with me, guiding, controlling, preparing. Never for one moment did one's star fail to shine on the darkest night. I had but to follow.

Often and often when it was suggested, with somewhat forcible expressions, how totally unfit I was to attempt so stupendous a work, I would go wearily enough into the church which had witnessed so much, and falling on my knees in utter abandonment cry from the depths of my soul, "*I know*, O God, how well I know!", concurring so entirely with the accusation of total inefficiency, only falling back upon the thought commonly attributed to St. Francis, that in starting his Order God chose the most hopeless person He could find, in order that all the glory should be of God and nothing of man.

As I looked back upon the nine years spent in Community life, all the failures, all the infidelity that marked those years assumed gigantic proportions; and yet – there was the remembrance of that interior Voice which had spoken and which could not be gainsaid.

Through all those early months since the call had been realised there had been almost nothing but discouragement and utter isolation, nevertheless I saw with wonderful clearness that, had the idea been received with human encouragement, there could not have been such

a clear realisation of the call of God. I would have become confused by the approval of human friends, and might have been doubtful afterwards as to whether I had listened to the voice of man and followed my own inclinations.

But although it is with reluctance that we ever raise the veil which conceals the hours of our deepest intensity of feeling, it is well now to record a crisis in those days when upon a memorable night I entered dimly into the agony of St. Paul as he recorded – "No man stood with me". – Letters of warning and regret had brought the realisation that to be true to this venture of faith would be to go against the approval of every human friend. It was after the forlornness of that hour that writing to the almost strange priest saved me from thinking the whole thing was a mistake. So again the star did not fail to shine on the darkest night.

How I thank God now for that hour of desolation producing in the soul the conviction which was expressed in the prayer. "O God I have no one but Thee. If this is Thy voice calling me, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters, and I will step forth from all and come." And in the depths of my heart I knew He had answered "Come!"



# 3

## OUR IDEALS

God's preparation in a soul is often so unconscious, that it is only long afterwards we realise how much we have been learning. It was markedly so at this time. Inasmuch as the idea had never entered my head of ever being brought to lead any movement such as an Order or a Confraternity, there had never been any conscious thought with regard to the details necessary to such a work, or especial training required.

When the future became clear, there came also the realisation that unconsciously to myself the ideals had been forming all the time, and when the hour for action drew near, the preparation seemed to have been made to a very great extent. We so often do not see at the time why God leads a soul in so many different ways, why one work is checked and experience in another is given; but at this time a most wonderful harmony in all my past life appeared. Many mysterious experiences were made perfectly plain. Standing at last face to face with a future to which I had been led all along, for the first time in my life there was the sense of having reached a final goal.

What then were some of these ideals I hoped to see realised?

There was, first of all, the conception of the Confraternity itself. A wide and simple body closely united in fellowship of faith and love, yet not embarrassed with any burdensome rules for intercessory prayer or the devotional life. This, I felt, should enable those who were already attached to existing societies such as our great missionary ones, to co-operate in fellowship with others so that their union of prayer might be wider than their own society, while they might have the strength of our prayer for the greater realisation of the love of God strengthening and deepening their own work wherever they might be; and so through our organisation those of different societies might be brought into closer fellowship one with another. For this end there should be no subscription and no rule which would exclude any one from uniting with us. Then, as the object was to realise more deeply the love of God, I felt that we must be ready as a Confraternity to put

that ideal into practice wherever we might be; we must be prepared to respond to every call of love which might meet us in any direction, in order to realise the answer to our own prayer. How that developed we shall see later on.

There appeared also the possibility of an Order of Sisters who should be under a Religious Rule, but one so simple in its demands upon the daily life that it would not prohibit the necessary readiness to respond to any unusual call for service. This would be possible, I felt, by a sharing of responsibility and a close co-operation among the Sisters. The offices, for instance, would be sung, but the individual responsibility might be merged into the corporate responsibility, so that there should be no burden resting upon the individual and no arrears of devotion to be made up if she were by the necessity of loving service called elsewhere. In the same way I felt we should more perfectly realise our ideal, if we lived in small groups, so that there would be no feeling of being cut off from the people in a large institution; and also there would be no necessity for the larger number of restrictions absolutely essential in the government of a considerable body.

There appeared to be a need to guard against a Community losing sight of its own end, i.e. devotion to God and loving service to His people; and to become engrossed in its own body. This must always be a danger where the company is a large one with an important centre. To scatter into smaller groups would surely tend to reduce this danger very considerably.

It was of immense value to find that one great leader in the Religious Life, St. Teresa, strongly advocated this measure. In her decision that no house of her Rule should contain more than thirteen nuns we see her great spirit of caution. As we study her writings we see what stress she lays upon this as a principle. In small groups the unity of Sisters in one spiritual family can be maintained. We must always remember that very large bodies made up of members of one sex, living a common life, bring an unnatural condition of things. This makes a very difficult ship to steer unless the spirit amongst them is extraordinarily supernatural; and for the most part, alas, we are not extraordinarily supernatural.

Then there arose the question of poverty. What does the vow of poverty entail?

There are two generally accepted courses. One is that the Community may possess invested funds, and the individual may not; or the other view, that the Community may not possess any invested property, but that the individual members may, so long as he or she does not retain the right of personal distribution, or what is called a "private purse". But there is surely a third course which is more rarely followed, namely that the vow of poverty should entail the relinquishing of all invested property or storing up for the future; giving a very

literal interpretation to the injunction, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth", and many other passages in the New Testament which can only bear one interpretation, namely, an absolute dependence upon God for the needs of the present time. This seemed to us to be the ideal we should accept if we were going to take the vow at all; and to be, for us at least, the only consistent one.

Difficulties arising therefrom were presented to our minds, but these were only such as undoubtedly the disciples had in their time to face as they were trained in the heavenly wisdom of their Master.

One can imagine the countenance of many hard-headed business men of our own time if they were instructed to fetch the wherewithal to pay a tax out of a fish's mouth! Yet those who have launched out into the deep of God's providence and a life of faith learn to see in these strangely unworldly procedures laws which are not of this world's wisdom, but which belong none the less definitely to the code of a spiritual kingdom.

This question of poverty further appeared to affect greatly the question of the distribution of money in charitable relief. Ought Sisters to accept the responsibility of this? We felt unhesitatingly sure that they should not. The argument for us doing so is the one so often brought up that our Blessed Lord relieved the needs of the body. He *healed* the body, did He ever give away money? What did St. Peter say? "Silver and gold have I none, such as I have, give I thee." was the answer given to the beggar who asked for alms. There was organised relief in the early Church, carefully distributed by the body not the individual. In these matters of social condition, however, every century must have its special developments; is it not better that Sisters in Religion should leave the matter alone as being outside their sphere, if they are to be effectual in their work?

At any rate, in our conception of the Order of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, we felt that the most directly spiritual result would be attained through carrying out absolute poverty into all our work, and separating ourselves entirely from the possession of accumulated property in buildings or invested income; in the making of money in payment for any of our works; and in the distribution of money. This would entail the using within a reasonable period any sum of money given to us for the support of ourselves or our work: the rule of not taking payment for any service rendered, offering it all solely and only as an act of love to God without earthly remuneration of any kind; and the refusal of responsibility for the distribution of any individual gift or of being the agent for any charitable relief.

I have touched more especially upon the features of the proposed Order than upon the special aims of the Confraternity, because it was in connection with the Religious Order that the more critical questions were to arise. Naturally that would be more open to criticism; and needed greater foresight than a society of more general

aims, owing to its interior and spiritual character. Nevertheless all felt from the beginning that the union between the Order and its parent Confraternity should be an intensely close one; and that they should be a mutual strength to each other, the daughter being a spiritual centre which should safeguard all the activities of the Confraternity, and the Confraternity reaching out on all sides to gather in fresh recruits to perceive the beauty of a life of consecration to God, whether under the evangelical vows or in the sphere of civil life.

These were some of the deep realisations of those seven months. Open to criticism? Yes, of course they were; for are we not always learning, always doubting, and always questioning? But surely in every effort we are rising nearer to the truth which lies at the heart of all things, and every individual representation of truth as we perceive it is necessary to the perfection of God's Kingdom on earth and contributes its microscopic beauty to the glory of the Redeemer.

To this end we felt we were not venturing to find fault with any existing method, as some thought we were. God forbid! We were venturing forth only to add to the number of existing methods in order that perhaps our tiny witness might save some soul to whom it might appeal. Some needed us then, some we feel need us still. That is all we desire. God is so infinite, there is room for every star which may shine forth from His firmament each in its own place, moving in its own order, borrowing its light from the one Infinite Source without detriment to any other star. Each may be the individual light which reaches some stray soul.

# 4

## THE FIRST VENTURE

When we speak of depending upon the providence of God alone for the supplying of all our need, there are some who seem to connect a certain laziness of mind with the idea. They seem to look upon it as a sort of excuse for making no effort of our own. "To live by faith" has at times been the expression used by some whose manner of life we may deprecate, but we must remember that faith, to be real faith, is a very difficult thing indeed, needing constantly renewed efforts of the will. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us it is the "evidence of things not seen", (Heb. 11:1). It is a matter of growth, as the will has ever to make fresh efforts of response as fresh trials are put upon it.

So with such a life as that I purposed for myself, I realised that God would call upon me by the existence of trials to increase my faith in Him and to prove His sufficiency. I might trust Him and I might humbly hope I did; but I could not know with any certainty of fact how He would lead me in the coming days and the weakness of my spiritual character often trembled before a future which was so uncertain as mine at that time.

So in the closing weeks before the date came for actually leaving the Community and venturing forth, the question did arise – where to go? And upon what was I going to live, seeing that any money I had ever possessed had been disposed of long ago? No plans were allowed to be made and as I was starting forth upon what the human understanding would undoubtedly account a most perilous adventure, it was equally certain that I was not going to fall back upon the generosity of relatives and friends.

But God was overruling, and some weeks before the date actually arrived a cheque for fifty pounds was received from a very dear friend, who nevertheless was more than alarmed at the undertaking itself. So the immediate future was supplied with all that was needful. Nevertheless the strain of that time was very great, and increased by many influences of which I can never speak. It was little wonder that my first instinct upon coming up to London was the intense desire to

hide away in solitude, and recover from a very great amount of fatigue. With the bishop's sanction given in January the habit was changed to the proposed one of the new Order and the first weeks were spent in solitude and prayer.

It will be remembered how during the waiting period in the north the prayer "If it be Thou, bid me come, Lord, unto Thee upon the waters", was impressed most deeply upon my heart. The Sunday in the week I came to town, the lesson at Mattins contained that passage; the first sermon I ever heard in St. Alban's Church, when I went there before entering the parish, was again on the same text. It is so immensely significant, the way God thus uses passages of Scripture to impress upon us His desire for us. Upon each occasion the words, "And He said, Come" were such a wonderful encouragement and source of peace.

It was of course necessary to let friends know at once all the proposals that had up to that time been kept secret and especially to write to those whom I had reason to believe would join the new Order. They were desiring the Religious Life and were heartily in sympathy with its special aims. There were three I was almost confident would come. But they did not. It was quite natural, the venture was too uncertain, all the excellent advice given to them by friends tended to persuade them they would be most unwise to trust their future to an untried scheme: they had much better attach themselves to an established Society. Then two others unexpectedly came and offered themselves and it seemed as though they were sent to take the place of the old. A short while elapsed for consideration and one was again persuaded by her friends not to come; and the other I refused because of her obvious attraction to the Roman Church, although she stoutly denied it; she has since gone over, so I have been thankful I was cautious at the time.

This was all very wise and excellent according to human judgment, but if it continued it did not seem particularly likely we should ever be established.

Meanwhile the time was not to be wasted. There were many things our new Rule would necessitate me learning to do; for all the work necessary for our daily maintenance and comfort was to be done by the Sisters themselves without domestic aid. So as soon as it was possible a tiny flat of three rooms was taken in Twynholme Mansions, Fulham Cross, a lovely little flat from the missionary point of view, right in the heart of the poorest part of Fulham.

Previously, however, to that, our first call was made upon the Rev. G. G. Elliott, who had asked Fr. Johnson to send us to him. Truly we had little to tell. We had left our old diocese, coming by necessity to London, we had no prospect of any immediate novitiate and I was practically unknown. It was true I possessed one friend in London of value in the ecclesiastical world – subsequently our dear chaplain,

the Reverend Willoughby Carter – but one only. With this wholly encouraging statement of our position I called upon the vicar of St. Alban's and told him quite candidly the extremely precarious footing upon which we stood, and that no priest in the world could be expected to welcome us into his parish. At the close I said, "Do you still desire to have us when we can come?" The answer was, "More than ever, please." It was charming and it touched me very deeply, striking the first note of a chord of friendship between him and the Order which remained unbroken until his death in 1951, after having been our chaplain at Heathfield for some years after his retirement from parochial work.

It was agreed that nothing should be attempted until September, but that observation of the parish and its need should be made during the summer from the tiny flat, just outside the parish, at Fulham Cross.

Those were very memorable days, fraught with deep lessons. The solitude, although giving grave scandal to respectable church traditions, was immensely beneficial at the entrance of an untried endeavour. In that little top flat, with the kindly, if at times riotous, neighbours all around, to whom I was a grave perplexity, many experiments were made in simplicity of diet upon economical lines and in thinking out the safeguarding of the Religious Life in conjunction with a life lived amongst the people. Many friends came down, to climb those grubby stairs, picking their way through cats and babies, while lively remonstrances took place between the inmate of the flat and the visitors when they came clad in too gay garments or jewels.

"It's all right, Sister", cried two charming girls one day; "you needn't worry about being seen with us, they will only think you are saving our souls. It's our reputation that will suffer, not yours."

Almost immediately my work commenced. I was made probation officer for a prison case and by the kindly welcome of the existing workers at St. Albans, the parishioners began to call.

Then came an invitation to go up and speak to the mill girls at Leek; and I went for what proved an eventful visit. Several meetings had been arranged and one of these was for the communicants of All Saint's Church. One of the devout members of that church had long desired to enter a Community and the vicar was in correspondence with several about her. Hearing of our new venture, he bade her wait until I had been and at the close of my address, he said, "Go and see the Sister in the morning; you may find your vocation there."

So on the morrow, unexpectedly, she came and described what her position was. She said all was arranged with her home and she felt deeply convinced in her own heart she was to come and prove her vocation with us. This was in August, and early in September she arrived, not to our little flat in Twynholme Mansions, for in prepara-

tion for this real start, I had taken a workman's flat actually in the Greyhound Road, that place of so many memories.

The flat possessed four rooms; a sitting-room which served as a parish room, a study which was transformed into a bedroom at night, an additional tiny bedroom and the kitchen, which was practically our living-room. So many blessed memories cling around 125a Greyhound Road, that it will always constitute our ideal for a mission flat.

Then we really started. We divided our hours between domestic work and the parish, and contrived as far as possible to make our flat the home of our people as well as ourselves. As we were of course no Order yet, I was given the title and admitted in Church as the Reverend Sister Warden of the Confraternity, an office which lasted for three and a half years.

The expediency arose of having us recognised as workers in the diocese, so Fr. Elliott kindly arranged for an interview with the Bishop of Kensington, who gave some very practical counsel and his blessing; there was of course no question brought up then as to our future position, that had all to be developed and we could only be recognised as workers, which we were only too thankful to be.

All the unfailing courtesy which the vicar of St. Alban's always showed to us and to our Confraternity smoothed the way for us on every side; but it need scarcely be said that opponents were not wanting; and we have reason to believe that he had many battles to fight on our behalf in those early days. Some came to our knowledge, doubtless there were many which only came to him; but we plodded on and he shouldered the burden. We knew one day we should win through the storms and pass into calmer waters.

From the earliest conception I had decided our habit should be the colour of St. Francis' sparrows – grey and brown – and so it was made. Amongst ourselves we were always called the sparrows. One day as I had just received an extra crushing blow, I was walking down the Greyhound Road and I observed a sparrow attempting to eat a crust in the road. Struck with the scene, I watched it. Again and again it was driven off by foes on every side, traffic, passers-by and other birds; but it persisted and in the end accomplished its desire. I remember that sparrow and the encouragement it instilled into my heart that day!

Our poverty was very real, but we were never without the means of sustenance. Sometimes we came to our last pound. One day I remember we had drawn all out of the bank that was possible without closing the account altogether. That afternoon a visitor called, of whom we had never heard; but she loved Sisters and was so glad to hear we had come that as she left she quietly laid a sovereign upon the table, and we went on again.

It does not seem especially necessary to relate too many instances of this sort; it was what was to be expected as long as we pleased God

in intention at least; but on another memorable occasion when the exchequer was very low, I was obliged to visit a wealthy house and was asked how we carried on our work.

"Do you beg?"

"No, we never beg!"

"Do you just trust to chance?"

"Oh no – *we pray*. We believe if God wants our work it will be supported all right. We trust to Him."

"Well, you seem wonderfully cheerful over it."

As a matter of fact that was a day of very real effort of soul; more were joining us who were giving up their means of livelihood in order to come and we had no reserve of funds. After I had left the house I wondered for a few moments. Had I overdone it? One word of anxiety, or plea of poverty, and I am certain a cheque would have been given; but I had only appeared cheerful and well-to-do! Then the conviction came again that that was just how we ought to appear if our motto was "Trust in God". So I lifted up my heart to Him and went home. On the table amongst my letters was a cheque from an absolute stranger for ten pounds. *Laus Deo!*

## THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

The mission work in St. Alban's parish did not differ so materially from the mission work elsewhere that we should feel justified in spending much time upon its description.

Naturally the girls fell at once under our notice, and from the commencement we kept our rooms open to them at all hours; with the result that in the evening as many as twenty and more would come in to our tiny sitting-room and use the floor when the chairs were all occupied. The more unorganised and natural this habit became, the more good it did; much was learnt by those girls sharing our home life with us in its extreme simplicity, but we hope, cleanliness. Our rooms at times were cleaner, alas! before those dear young people entered them than afterwards. On one night I remember knocking at Sister Miriam's door in a craving for human sympathy and ejaculating through the keyhole, "I have killed *eight!*" "I am so glad", was the response, "there will be less of a crowd in your room now."

Our largest room measured 14 feet square and into this space we packed on frequent occasions 22 industrious and enthusiastic girls, or I might more truly say, they packed themselves, for no ingenuity on our part could have done it: it was carried through by sheer desperation to get in somehow. What was the attraction? We never found out. The only thing we did was to tell them they could come from the age of 14 upwards, and they came. We supplied them with occupations of a useful character and by their own request, for as a matter of fact, we were afraid to suggest it; they made themselves clothes or altered old ones to fit. One of them very often read aloud to the others or else they carried on a brisk conversation. More excellent behaviour or more charming manners could not be found and this was from sheer loyalty – we only had on one occasion to rebuke them for noise *outside* the mission and that was only a piece of mischief.

Now the remarkable thing was that these girls were from the poorest homes and they came because their old occupation had been only to race the streets. "There ain't no need to run the streets now,

is there, Sister?" remarked one of them. "Mother says I've been a different girl since I came round here every night."

Day places and laundry work, which leave the evenings free, were the general employment for these girls, fostered by parents, who, by this arrangement, secured the wages for home consumption and also got a tidy piece of work out of the girls between whiles. We often fought a hard battle with both parents and girls before persuading them how very much better it would be to "sleep-in" and have neat clothes and lead a regular life. However, the appearance of some of our "old girls" in our midst, did what argument could never have done. As the well-dressed figure and glowing face of the girl on her evening out appeared at the door, delighted to come and show herself off, cries of "My, don't she look nice!" greeted the object of their admiration and produced an entire conversion of mind. Going into service began to be popular!

We smiled at times – Nora, one of our best and dearest girls, produced many of these. We got an excellent place for her, really persuading the lady that if she would only give the thin slip of a girl the chance; she would soon find she had a treasure, for we had proved how Nora could work and how utterly honest her naive simplicity was. She got the place and we dressed her up. In proper clothes she looked twice the height, and twice as dignified. A week after, on entering the mission, Nora was found seated in a chair with her boots on the floor beside her!

"Good evening, Sisters", and she added all in one breath, "I've had a tip and I've brought you tuppence for the poor, and oh! my new boots do hurt!"

When, after getting a place, Phoebe suddenly appeared in church one Sunday morning, we simply could not think who she was for the moment. She had always had a pretty face, but on the first evening that she had attended the mission, one of the girls called across to her "Come here Phoebe and I'll sew the clothes on your back". So it was little wonder we were not prepared for the shock of this charming looking girl in neat black clothes although her smile would have betrayed her anywhere.

One of the effects, however, of those nightly gatherings expressed itself in a remark made by a mother who with a disapproving sniff said, "Our home don't seem clean enough for our Polly now; I guess you're making her too particular." We thought that augured well for Polly's future home.

We started systematically upon house-to-house visiting, choosing by preference the poorest districts first. The usual interesting results followed which led the mission Sister to form some very clear impressions of the conditions of work amongst the poor; and on the persuasive power of patience and love. There was one three-storied house containing four families, in which Sister Miriam had won entrance

to three, but an obdurate old woman occupied the top room. No, she would have none of us! She was left severely alone. How long she listened over the balustrade to what went on below, we do not know; but at last one day when the Sister was saying goodbye to family No. 3, she heard a voice, "i, yer can come up 'ere if yer like. I don't mind!" The battle was won!

Then we worked on to our first Christmas Day. That was a red-letter one. We had preparation classes beforehand to teach our girls the meaning of the Christ Mass. Their sweet, reverent behaviour in church and their remembrance of all we had told them about the solemn parts of the service stirred our hearts very deeply, it seemed so hopeful, if we could retain a hold of them through these impressionable years.

In the afternoon we had invited all the lonely women we could find to tea. I will describe it as it appeared to my brother who was suddenly inspired with the idea of giving us a Christmas call.

It was a foggy afternoon, very dark at four o'clock: he had not the slightest idea of our whereabouts, only our address, so was directed to 125a Greyhound Road. Striking a match to investigate the number on the doors, he then groped his way up our tiny pitch-dark staircase and came upon someone else: lighting another match, he found his companion was an old woman. He inquired for his sister. "I don't know where she is. She ain't in," answered the widow, "she invited me to tea at four o'clock, but I dessay it's not four yet." After exchanging a few more remarks in the dark, he descended the stairs cautiously and was accosted by a small boy.

"D'yer want Sister Elizabeth? She ain't in. I knows where she is. I'll tike yer there, if yer like."

Thanking him politely the caller decided to wait, as the widow's appointed hour of four o'clock was near. Seeing a tiny sweet-shop alongside, a bright idea struck him and he went in. Two urchins were before him.

"What's yer goin' to 'ave? Peppermints?"

"No, I ain't, I'm a goin' to 'ave a 'aporth o' corf drops."

However, the young woman turned to her more distinguished-looking visitor.

"Give me half-a-crown's worth of sweets, anything you like – mixed", he said, but was not prepared for the expression on her face. After staring at him hard, she disappeared through the doorway at the back and he heard her say in a hushed voice of awe.

"'E wants 'alf-a-crown's worth o' sweets." Instantly a gentleman in shirt-sleeves emerged, and with his best bow did them up for so superior a customer.

Coming out of the shop, he ran into his sister coming home with a cripple on her arm and other folk of very varied aspects gathered round her. They all tried to mount the little staircase together, but



had to wait on the landing whilst the Sisters lighted up the Mission flat. Then they came in, and found such a transformation scene from the fog and gloom outside.

In one room a sweet little Christmas tree was lighted up to its full brilliance; and in the other a sumptuous tea was spread, the result of recreation hours on previous days. It was a tea so inviting that I afterwards heard loud complaints from my crushed sister-in-law who declared that when her husband returned from the "slums of Fulham", he looked with contempt upon his own well-spread tea-table and remarked, "I wish I'd had my tea at the mission." The next day the mission had a letter. "My dear, it's splendid; here's five pounds for you."

But nevertheless it is noteworthy to find that the poorest and most forsaken soul all the year round seems to find some relative or friend on Christmas Day. We have often since tried to hunt up folk who have nowhere to go, but although our invitation has been received with gratitude, we have nearly always found an established custom of going to some especial place upon that day. We are glad to find it is so. We like to think there are not many who are lonely on the birthday of our Lord.

Close on the heels of this festal day came a night of tragedy; an example of the sordid conditions of the poor at that time. A knock at 11.30 p.m.; we asked through the letter slit, "Who is there?" – a necessary precaution where intoxicating liquor is not unknown.

"Mrs. White's dying and is askin' for yer, can yer come? No. 118."

"All right; I will be round in five minutes."

Six people were in the tiny room and obviously the poor woman was very ill. But oh, the horror of that dying face with all the results of haemorrhage left untouched!

"Doctor's given 'er up, says she won't last the night."

Gently I persuaded the daughter to give her poor mother the chance of more air and with firmness added: "She must sleep, if possible. She cannot sleep unless she is alone. I will call you if she gets worse." The poor docile souls, children always, recognising as they always do, authority in any form, went into the next room, all except the husband whom I asked to stop. Then I went to the woman and bent over her. She whispered faintly, "I'm agoin', I can't sleep, I wish I could. I'm glad you've come."

An old trick practised years ago in my home life stood me again in good stead, but it meant endurance and patience. I rested my arm upon that hideous pillow and began a soothing stroke that had never failed me yet. Her expression softened at once. If I could but get her to sleep! Perfect stillness prevailed – the tall figure of the man seemed to enter into understanding of my hope, for two hours he never stirred. But, picture it, after the first five minutes, when already her staring eyes had closed and rest was creeping over the face, when I knew that

I dared not move any more, I suddenly became aware that creatures were creeping towards me from every direction; not one or two, but dozens. Where they did not crawl, they hopped! If ever I sent up a prayer for endurance I did then, but of course I knew it could be done and when at length I knew by her breathing she really slept in peace, then thankfulness made it an easy task at intervals to brush them off my clothes! When after two hours she woke and sucked some ice, I saw by the brightness of her smile she had passed the crisis.

"I'm better," she whispered; and I answered, "Yes, thank God, you are!" I left her as comfortable as I could at two o'clock and outside the house, on the moonlit pavement of the Greyhound Road with no one to witness what she did, this little Sister shook and shook herself and shook herself again.

But it was a festival of joy when I took Mrs. White up the church on my arm when she came to make her thanksgiving, and troubles of that sort seem very light when you see old eyes fill with tears and their owners point at you and say, "She saved my life".

Dear Mrs. White, she wasn't much of a triumph in many ways, her spiritual efforts were never very great, but yet I hope that some day we may meet beyond and renew that friendship which was a very close one in its way.

## 6

## EXTENSION

Early in 1914 the prospect of another probationer made us wonder where she was to be housed; our mission flat was already fully occupied. Well do we remember one night when a newcomer was put into the tiny bedroom. She had come bringing with her much that she considered would be useful. After we had retired for the night, such violent sounds emanated from her room, I was forced to inquire into the cause. I found her putting her furniture into the kitchen! "I am so sorry, Mother", she said, "but I thought if I might just put the furniture out for the night I could unpack my boxes and bring it back in the morning. I hoped you wouldn't hear."

However, about that time a worker who was in the neighbourhood called and asked whether we would take over premises she had been using as a working men's club, which she was reluctantly bound to close. If we would like to take over the end of her agreement she would make us a present of all her fixtures and "plant". It was a generous and tempting offer in view of our over-crowded sitting room at night. We viewed the rooms and were delighted with them. We found upon inquiry that the upper part of the house could also be obtained, which would give us three bedrooms, an oratory and a sitting-room. Negotiations were soon completed and as the offer was made to us on the feast of St. Catherine de Ricci, we dedicated the house to her. It was distempered and gifts came in for our oratory, including our first altar, which will always be a very dear one to us. This was made for us of plain oak with our Confraternity cross carved on it and significant texts illuminated in gold. Our chaplain came over and blessed the house and we were immensely pleased with our new acquisition – for a short time.

The rooms downstairs were open every night to the poor girls of the neighbourhood and a very good number came in. The laundry girls were the fish we most wanted to catch and we soon found they were going to be very difficult ones. However, we had a nucleus of them to begin with and one evening were intensely amused by a certain

"May", who stood in the doorway and grasped the jackets and collars of girls who passed by whom she knew. From within we heard, "Come in 'ere." (Struggles) "I ain't comin'." "Yes, yer are: *come in*." "I ain't, I sy," "An' I sy yer *are*: come in." Then the fish was landed and brought to a game table and settled in with some cocoa. On another occasion we missed one to whom we had become accustomed. Meeting her in the street we asked her why she no longer came. The answer was: "If you please, Sister, mother don't like me to come to such places as that." And we retired discomfited.

It was a strange but significant fact, however, that with the opening of a *club-room* our numbers declined. This made us realise that any kind of public footing destroyed something of the spirit of the *home* which they so appreciated in our first little room, and this led us to return to the original method. Of course we offered them no entertainments or dancing; probably where they used a club-room at all they preferred to go where these more lively amusements were provided. It made us resolve not to compete with that kind of work and we have since adopted only the more private methods.

But all too soon the blow fell. We had inadvertently announced in the magazine that there were rooms upstairs where the "*Sisters permanently slept*", a remark which had caused very considerable amusement. The Sisters were vastly indignant at the aspersion upon their character; now this proved all the more bitter in its irony when the fact was soon discovered that the Sisters could not sleep "*permanently*" at all, owing to the previous inhabitants of that upper part. It was already occupied, they found, by hundreds of undesirable guests. When they were told they must immediately retire and that other accommodation would be at once provided, each exclaimed, "Oh no, Mother, we must fight it out, we never shall if we retreat." Pleading for an extension of tenancy which was very reluctantly granted, two of them attacked the foe, with really heroic efforts. They persevered by night and by day; we took in quantities of mortar, soft soap and paraffin and worked at all the cracks. Humour saved us from despair. How well I remember being arrayed in an overall engrossed in hunting and slaying and plastering and in the middle receiving a message through the locked door, "Please, Mother, C— wants to know whether she can be admitted as a probationer on Whit-Monday?"

"Yes", I responded, "but you will probably all be walled up with mortar, soft soap and paraffin by then."

In the end we had to retire and apply to be released from the agreement. The landlord asked for three weeks for fumigation and we left the house in his possession. It was hermetically sealed and the workman climbed a ladder to survey the effect of his fumigation inside. An ironmonger who was a great friend of ours and much annoyed at what he called a "let in" for us, stood below that ladder



and with bitter scorn shouted up, "What's the matter, won't they let you get in?" – meaning of course, the former inhabitants, not us.

We returned when it was pronounced clean – for one night – then we withdrew finally for ever. St. Catherine's had a short life and a very blessed one; it contributed an excellent test of vocation, for it had the result of sending one aspirant flying precipitately, and it taught us much in practical ways. A beautiful memory of that first dear little oratory, which, remarkably remained untouched by the plague was that it was the spot where God's call to the Religious Life reached our dear Sister Agnes, who had hitherto been only my very best friend.

Circumstances therefore made it impossible to find more accommodation, and we saw that the really deep training necessary for the novitiate could not be given in a parish where our life was so irregular and open to public gaze as it was at St. Alban's. So after consultation with authorities, we went to seek a house out towards Uxbridge, where some measure of quiet could be obtained. The first we found was 49 Uxbridge Road, Hanwell. We went over it and were immensely attracted by it, although we feared the rent would be too high, but that was not so.

Another remarkable feature of God's leading revealed itself. We had been asked a year before to pray for a parish, where a great work was being done for God's kingdom and where it was hoped we might some day work. The parish was merely a name, we knew nothing of it. Walking out of the gate of this house to post a letter, I found this church was within three minutes of the house. We had come unknowingly to the very parish. This impressed us very much, of course, and we made an offer to the landlord which he accepted. At the same time I wrote to the vicar and asked if he would approve of us becoming parishioners. We received the most cordial answer welcoming us in every way. So in July 1914 we took possession, calling the house after our patron saint, St. Elizabeth of Hungary. The title led to a slight confusion afterwards in the minds of the scouts, who invariably called me St. Elizabeth; this was varied by the coal merchant, who always addressed me as the Right Reverend; but these are mere details.

St. Elizabeth's was never able to be a house only for Sisters. From its earliest days we were constantly filling it with visitors of all kinds; those in distress or those needing rest. In fact, at times it became a very cave of Adullam. The history of these visitors is not for publication, but there are those who will bless its name always and will look back to it as the home which enabled them to see all life from a better and more hopeful point of view.

It was remarkable how soon we proved the possibility of doing away with all social prejudices and distinctions in our homes. In our Order from the commencement we had only one grade, all were simply Sisters in Christ; but amongst our guests we found the same

thing quite possible. Anyone who needed to come, came and was at once made welcome. We have always found the atmosphere of love and sympathy entirely does away with any recognition, or even realisation, of different grades. The question has simply never had to be considered at all.

The mission work at Fulham was carried on from a new house at 34 Tasso Road. Some of us feared at first it was too aristocratic. "Is it?", one Sister remarked, "There's a child's head poking through every hole in our back paling."

Sister Miriam and Sister Agnes were in charge at Fulham and I as Sister Warden was down at Hanwell with the probationers, but going up to London almost daily.

Meanwhile our associates were increasing in number and we began to feel the necessity of making some provision for their meetings. They came to Greyhound Road and to Hanwell; but both localities were a little inaccessible to those who were the other side of London and our accommodation at Fulham was too small to entertain any number at a time, so we sought a room that should be especially theirs and found it at 36 Richmond Road, Earl's Court, in the parish of our mother church. We called it St. Mary's Room, and at once organised a weekly meeting there with a devotional address by the Sister Warden. It was appreciated from the first, and was a means of our associates growing into far closer touch and co-operation with us and with one another.

Later, the whole house next door was taken as a hostel for associates and it proved to be of immense value. Often associates stopped there with us as they passed through London. It was dedicated on St. Francis' Day, 1915. The tiny oratory, which was considered a specially beautiful one contained our first altar removed from St. Catherine's.

In August, the First World War broke out. We telegraphed to Sister Agnes, who was proposing to join in September, asking her to come at once. She did so and we held a council as to our own actions. What were we to do, offer for service or not? The Rev. Reginald Moseley, a Senior Chaplain of the Forces, when asked for his advice, suggested we should get in touch with the Chaplain General. This was done, but he thought we should be making a great mistake if Sisters left the parishes where they were at present working and where he felt they would be needed enormously later on. We therefore obeyed his instructions, as he was in authority, and relinquished the idea. I have always felt sorry that Sisters of our Church were not more represented in the spiritual side of war work and in the R.A.M.C. but the responsibility ended for us when we had offered and had not been encouraged to do anything more.

That decision practically fixed our work at home for war-time, because it decided the question of taking the children who came to our

notice in parish work as requiring care and protection. Having once undertaken the responsibility of looking after some of these, we were not free to offer for direct service again.

# 7

## THE CHILDREN

It is impossible to work any time in our great towns without being forced to wonder what is the best thing to be done with the children who have no proper care at home. The problem is more possible of solution when the parents realise the circumstances are impossible, and aid us in finding the most desirable substitute.

This was the case with a young widowed mother, who had brought her two little girls up very carefully morally and materially, though they were unbaptised. Then owing to the father's death, she was obliged to go out to work. She felt extremely anxious about her daughters, the more especially as the younger one showed signs of a consumptive heritage. She appealed to us. We were extremely loath to send them to a large institution, as they were sensitive, delicate children. Their mother was most anxious they should be under our care. We could not promise that, but consented to have them down to St. Elizabeth's for a few weeks' change, while we considered what was best to be done. The little four-year old son of one of our workers was already staying there. So the three settled down and endeared themselves to us all so much, the thought of parting with them never arose and the weeks passed by. Then four or five times a workman called at our mission, whom we had known at the time his wife was taken away to the asylum. We had been interested for a long time in his two dear little girls, the younger of whom seemed still almost a baby and the elder Violet delighted us with her gentle ways and loving motherly little heart. We longed to do something for them. Their father begged us to do so, but still we hesitated to launch out into the deep.

One morning the Sisters said, "Mother, *do* take a little house and have those other children."

My own mother's heart said the same, but I replied, "Well, I will wait until I see a house to let; I am not going to hunt for one."

That very morning a board was put up in a house close by, as though to invite us to take it. We laughed, because it seemed as though

it had known what had been said. In two weeks we entered in. The next magazine recorded:—

“The move down was quite an event. They had only an hour’s notice to quit St. Elizabeth’s owing to unexpected events. What a bustle there was! Donnie’s fish in the bathroom, Ellen’s dolls in her bedroom, Pattie’s doll’s clothes in the wardrobe, all had to be collected, together with the contents of the toy-drawer, many and varied. Their appearance was rather like walking Christmas trees when we started at last and the inhabitants of the quiet town were greatly interested. We hurried because it was raining and then in the middle of the road Ellen stopped and in a voice of terrible tragedy exclaimed: ‘Teddy Bear is left behind.’ This *was* serious, but with promises to send for him soon, we restarted, and a chattering, excited family reached the house. The first five minutes was a procession with war-whoops and cheers running round and round the playroom, for they had been so quiet for weeks at St. Elizabeth’s. Then followed bread and milk; and they made ready with absolute glee to get into those lovely little beds with their inviting pale blue blankets. Ellen slid down into her soft little nest with a wriggle of delight, then, peeping out with mischief all over her face, she exclaimed: ‘Oh, we do want to go back to Fulham, we do!’ which, of course, was witheringly sarcastic. Half an hour later the soft wings of sleep were closing over them. We bent over Ellen’s bed and called her softly by her name. They were very sleepy eyes that opened, then she saw — and with a glad whisper, ‘Oh, Teddy, I’m so glad you’ve come,’ she gathered the last arrival to her heart.”

Baby Rosie was meanwhile in the Infirmary as she had conveniently contracted bronchitis, which meant other people would have the task of cleaning her up instead of us — an arrangement we did not regret.

Now it was so significant of God’s goodness that the first two children should have been those whose careful up-bringing meant that they were able to set a lead in sweet refined ways to all the other children who came. We always felt that the excellence of the tone in which we always rejoiced was due greatly to that first start.

The house was very tiny and it soon became impossible to take in more. Eight completely filled it. Then we moved up to St. Gabriel’s which had an extra room and considerably larger ones. That became so full that we turned the boys back to St. Michael’s and kept St. Gabriel’s for the girls. In the winter of 1916 our little Peter came to us and became a centre of interest. He was only eight months old and when we first saw him had been for eight hours absolutely alone with no one near him and yet he put out his tiny arms and smiled. It was no wonder we coupled him somehow, as it was just Christmas-time, with the Holy Child, and the sweetness of his tiny face was extremely suggestive. Peter was given into our care by his father whilst his mother went to an inebriates’ home. Peter himself ought never to

have been! But there he was, asking very loudly to be adopted and loved. And that we unmistakably did. His name was not Peter, by the by, but we gave him that name at his baptism. His mother was never again in a fit condition to have him back and his father always supported him. We had a tussle to rear him in the first year, but afterwards he was always well and radiantly happy, and the centre of activity in the baby home.

Of course the question of illegitimate children at once confronted us. We adopted the course that we would only undertake them when we could also keep in touch with the mother and be assured of her good progress. This worked admirably. We encouraged the closest intimacy possible between the mother and child and encouraged her to maintain responsibility as far as she could. We nevertheless tried to lift the burden a little so that all the wages earned should not have to be used in her child’s maintenance and therefore this meant supplementing by a large amount from other sources.

A considerable expenditure in clothes and food at an early age may mean so very much to the future well-being of such a child and we reckoned that in no case did a child cost us less than £20 per annum without rent and taxes.

It would have been far less costly to group them together in large numbers, but this would have entailed institutional methods which we always studiously avoided. “Ours is not an orphanage, is it?” one of the children cried, “but just *home*, without our mummies and daddies.”

One night, when I had just heard that the poor mother in the asylum was worse, I turned my steps with some sadness to the children’s home, asking myself that old question, “How can one really ever compensate for the mother they have lost?” I passed up the stairs, praying in my heart, and entered the darkened bedchamber. I dimly saw two little arms stretching out eagerly from one of the beds. It was the child who had been specially in my thoughts.

As I stooped down, the little arms were clasped in a close embrace about my neck and the little voice whispered, in intense love, “Mother, Mother, Mother.” Surely in those words one found the answer to one’s prayer.

We felt the need of a house in London for children requiring only temporary accommodation because of a mother’s illness or other circumstances. The need was providentially met by taking over a house in St. John’s parish, Richmond Road. As housing accommodation became more scarce we realised that we ought not to keep our children in small groups occupying three different houses, which were so sorely needed at the time. So a large house in Earl’s Court Square falling vacant, we took that and moved the thirty-four children into it. It served its purpose for some time, but served also to prove that a London square is scarcely the place for such a home. Neighbours

are seldom anxious for the healthy exercises of youth and the long school hours under L.C.C. discipline in crowded schoolrooms was not at all ideal. Poor children in poor districts live in the open street and probably thereby save their lives, but the civilisation of London squares renders such play impossible. We dreamed of some place in the country for our children and our dream came true in the Children's Colony which was established at Mayfield, Sussex looking away from that glorious hillside with its wide wooded valley, leading to the beautiful ascending slopes on the further side. Where could be found a spot more favourable for the realisation of the hopes we had cherished through so many years? The group system, yet with the fellowship of a colony! All unknown to us, it was being planned and built. When we were seeking a tiny cottage where a few of our more delicate children could be removed for at least a time, we were asked to wait while the agent interviewed a prospective client and we wandered round a lane and there upon the hillside was the red roof of Rosemary. Ten minutes' inspection caused both of us to decide this was the very thing. We could have it at once, the keen young builder was only too glad of such a ready sale, it could be ready in three days. In a week we had furnished it and a priest associate having tea on the verandah, while awaiting the first arrivals, remarked, "My word, I should not like to be buried by the Confraternity, you wouldn't have much chance of coming to life again."

For a long time we discussed whether it would not be necessary to have at least some provision for more Sisters if the one in charge of the temporary children were not to be too isolated from the fellowship of Community life. It was not all at once that we recognised God was all the time building up our heart's desire. Very soon, however, it became clear that the rough foundations laid for a complete group of bungalows besides Rosemary were really the foundations of the plan we had talked of in the earliest days and God had prepared it for the day when we should be allowed to know! No alterations were needed. Sydney Lea, the builder who became a valued associate, entered into the whole thing with an enthusiasm kindred to our own. Three additions, the chapel in the garden of the convent, a bungalow of three rooms for the workroom and its workers, a play room for the winter months, these only served to complete the whole design.

It was only when the call came to the Order to send out Sisters to Australia, that the children's work closed down. It was felt that other Communities and other organisations did cater for the needs of children requiring care then, while the need in Australia was not being served.

The Colony at Mayfield as St. Mary's-in-the-Fields, has since then been a haven of peace for elderly ladies, who in their last years need the care and support of the Sisters.





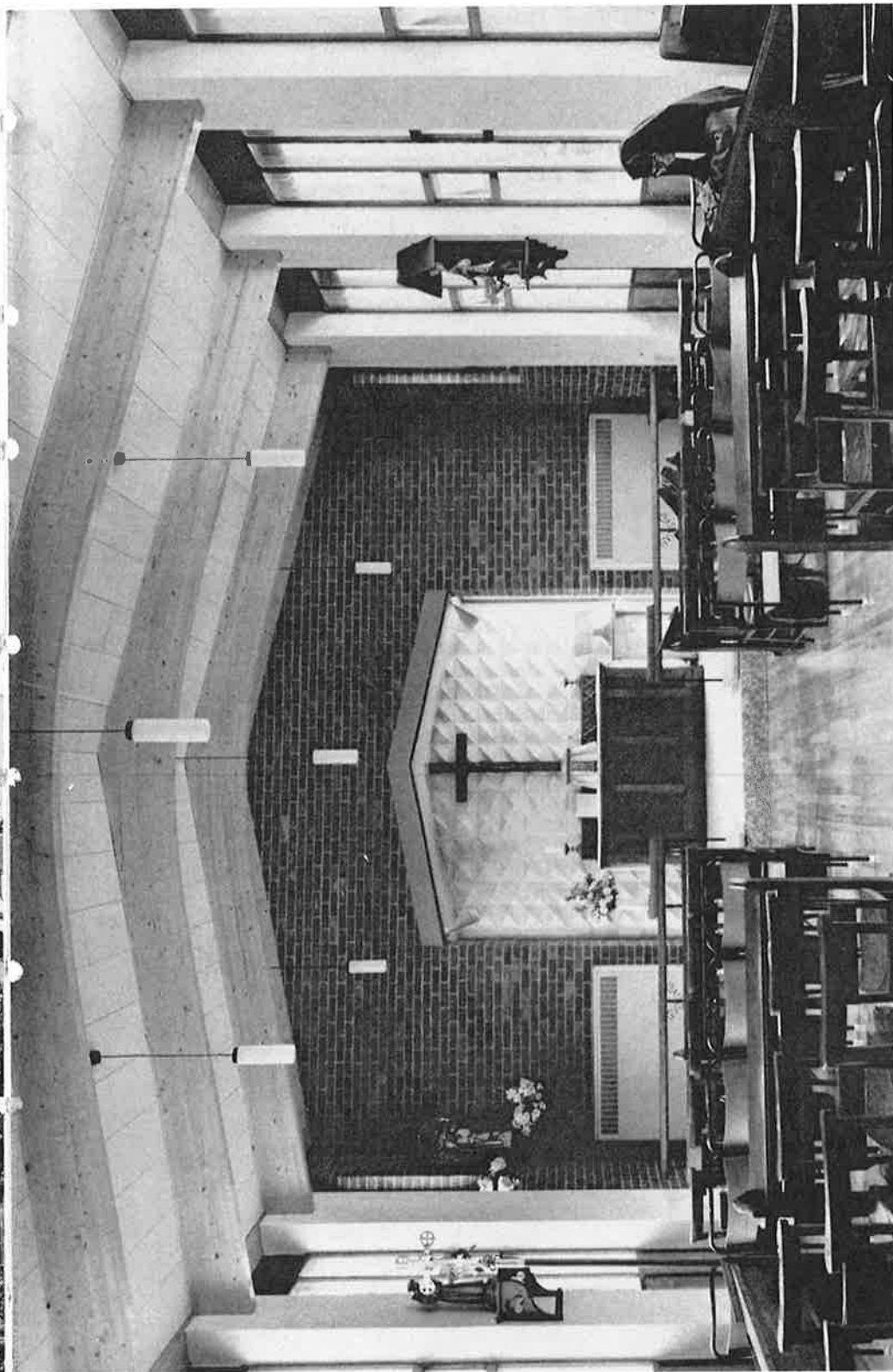


## ST. MARY'S RETREAT

*Left: The Cloister*

*Below: The Guest House and  
Garden*

*Opposite: The Chapel  
of St. Elizabeth*





*Above:* Margaret River in the Australian Bush.

*Below:* The Mary Clementina Hostel, now the Diocesan Conference and Retreat House, Bunbury.



### *Village Missions*

From our earliest conception of the work of our Order I had in mind the country villages. I had always realised that there was no place where the need for more spiritual aid was greater, or would be more welcomed. Of course the hope that we might one day be allowed to do something had to be set aside until we had a sufficient staff of trained visiting Sisters who could be spared from regular work to go on occasional missions. Therefore little was said about it. However, in the beginning of 1916 I mentioned to a friend staying at our hostel that we hoped one day we might be able to hold missions amongst village folk. She then told me about the Pilgrimage of Prayer. I had a conference with Bishop Hook and it was decided that it would be best to work out our own scheme, though we would co-operate with them by letting them know where the Sisters went, and they would pass on to us the names of places where the Sisters might be welcomed.

A few months afterwards we were ready to start. We obtained the warm approval of the bishop of Kensington to visit villages to the west of London and we sent out a circular letter to several parishes, and received a favourable reply from Hayes, Middlesex.

Our method of campaign was to stay separately in the poorer houses of the parish with any one who would offer us hospitality, making the church-room our headquarters for conference. There we met at 10 o'clock after our meditation in church, went through the list of parishioners, kindly supplied us by the vicar, divided them into three or four sections, then proceeded on our several ways, visiting first of all the church people and then house to house generally, as far as we had time. We found with three Sisters we were able to accomplish about 150 visits in the mornings and between the hours of our afternoon and evening meetings in the church-room. The numbers attending the addresses in all cases rose steadily each day. We tabulated the result of every visit in a notebook and these were copied into a summary book which we gave to the vicar when we left. Thus any fact worthy of notice was reported to him.

We had intended to direct our mission entirely to the poor. But in Hayes we found it could not be. The more well-to-do people besought us to come to them too.

We wondered, of course, how we should get on with regard to the different denominations, especially as we imagined the Sisters' habit would repel many. We found no difficulty whatsoever. The Dissenters and the Roman Catholics welcomed us just as much as the Church people and came along to our meetings.

We saw also the possibility of holding meetings for the children in the three-days' mission. Children can always be got together and we know many instances when the seed which has been received in childhood has borne much fruit in adult life.

The fact that God gave us a Sister in Sister Mary who had the gift of a most beautiful and cultivated voice aided us very greatly in this work. Many came, we know, to "hear the Sister sing", who probably would not have come at all otherwise, and few could hear those songs without being touched at heart.

#### *The Power of Personality*

Upon no subject, perhaps, are ideas undergoing greater change than upon that of "mission work". Whether or not the entire reaction from the old feudal spirit is altogether a gain is not for us here to discuss. The *via media* is always difficult to maintain. Nevertheless we realise that today the old order has passed away and that which has come in its place entirely alters the *status* of the professional religious worker. Today our influence is measured by what we are. Few care what we profess to be. The world has accepted the independence of the individual; so those who would fain do Christ's work are placed in a strong searchlight and valued at their essential worth with no glamour such as was cast over them in the past by their official authorisation.

All this is very trying to a certain type of mind, but nevertheless it is not altogether untrue to the fundamental ideals of the gospel injunction, so oft repeated, to *teach*. This was intended in no dictatorial sense, we understand, but as the call to witness. A witness merely testifies to what he *knows*. Therefore no technical training can produce a witness unless the experimental knowledge of the Gospel is the foundation upon which it is built. What value is set in the Gospels upon the study of sociology, psychology, and so forth as the *equipment* of a witness? Knowledge of these is not to be despised, but it is not essential; whereas it is apparent that every Christian witness should be one who has pondered long and deeply, under the searchlight of the Holy Spirit, upon the fundamental teaching of Christ, and whose life has been transformed from the spirit and standard of the world, by the renewing of the mind, until some approach at least is made towards an experimental understanding of the mind of Christ, (see Romans xii, 2).

It is remarkable, moreover, that in studying the precepts of Christ, we pass unconsciously very far into sociological and psychological knowledge, because the greater includes the less. Those who approach the subject through the channels of human research will one day reach the tremendous fact that *Christ was always right* in His judgments and methods with regard to the relationship of man to man; so we may just as well start from the top instead of laboriously climbing step by step the ladder of knowledge which Christ has surmounted for us. But blessed be the dear scientists who in their search for truth are daily endorsing the teaching of our Lord by approaching nearer and nearer to His standpoint, although with reluctant steps and patient short-sighted gaze.

Surely then, the "workers" of a church ought to be the communicants one and all; and the "work" ought not to be understood as so much organisation, but the activity of God the Holy Ghost expressing Himself through each earnest soul, some teaching, some visiting, some sewing or cleaning. Of course it is necessary to have some who are set apart for the carrying on of special work; but this can still be done naturally in the spirit of witness and not as an *official*; above all, without any sense of a superiority which is altogether lacking in grace. The more we can become one with those around us, yet maintain a clearness of religious principle, the more effectually shall we serve; and we shall grow into a clearer value of the individual witness in every sphere of life, apart from that work we are doing or the amount of time we are able to give to the service of the Church.

Let us mark that it was our Lord's method to be readily accessible, but not to seek to penetrate where people were unwilling to give Him entrance. He stands at the door and knocks; therefore His disciples dare not force themselves in on the plea of official right. Nevertheless we shall be *given* the right of entrance when the hunger of the soul sees in us the overflowing supply of its most real need. It is known to be useless to deal bread to those who are not hungry; but the lack of hunger is often only towards bread hard of digestion; we seldom find it difficult to gain a hearing for that which is really and genuinely the revelation of Christ, because God has implanted in the human heart true hunger after Himself.

Let us live more, and preach less: or rather preach more by our lives and not by speech. A Sisters' house lay side by side with others in an East End street. From one back garden, the following conversation was heard:—

"Blank – blank – !"

"Hush, the *Sisters* will hear you."

Pause.

Then: "Well, yer carn't even swear since the *Sisters* 'ave come to the street."

When there is a house of God in the midst there comes also that



unconscious sense of *safety* to violent souls, who in the storm of passion need some visible strength to which to cling. How readily they turn to such a one. I went to tea with the Sisters who were resident in a poor part of Fulham one day and both were called out upon some urgent matter. Left alone, a third knock came to the door.

"Please, will Sister come at once? Mrs. White and Mrs. Brown are 'avin' an orful row."

Obviously the only Sister left had to go. When the house was reached, I found Mrs. White panting, injured and exhausted in the lower room, obviously put out of the fight temporarily, and harmless, so I started upon the ascent of a perfectly dark staircase towards the sound of raucous voices overhead. As there was nothing to be seen, it was somewhat alarming to hear the angry descent of a man, making such a clatter that my own mere footfall could not possibly be heard.

"Who are you?" I asked faintly.

"I'll soon let you know who I am", was the answer, "When I reach you."

But instantly broke in another voice, "Stop it, Jack, don't you know that's Sister?" – and the skirmish ceased – Why? Because it could not go on where "Sister" was, whoever that Sister might be.

We must not, however, forget that those who express their differences with such violence are not the only people who have difficulties. The presence of those who stand for the Spirit of Christ is needed in all ranks of life and must be found wherever people congregate of whatever rank. Therefore how necessary it is for us to realise the call to witness that is incumbent upon *all* communicants to be centres of strength, devotion and clear Christian principle wherever their lot is cast. Such a witness may also do much in leading souls into touch with those who by special prayer and study are equipped to deal with the more difficult spiritual problems.

To multiply organisations, or to substitute new methods of work for old is a matter of utter indifference to those who are outside the ranks of Christians who believe and practice the Faith. The discussions of divers schools of Christian doctrine or of ritual leave the onlooker cold, but the witness of a Christlike life never does. It is this power which breaks down the barrier between the world and the Church and it is the only way in which the living power of Christ can be proved to exist in the world nineteen hundred years after His death and resurrection.

Details of doctrine and worship will be studied later; but not until someone has won the new convert by a very real vision of the Lord. Yet there has been a tendency to believe that souls may be saved by the reverent ordering of the sacraments, by the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament itself, apart from human witness. This idea is proved to be erroneous: it has no warrant from Holy Scripture, nor from the history of the conversion of human souls. Souls are saved by

the power of the *outcome* of the Presence of Christ in the sacrament shown forth in a transformed life, a veritable witness to the indwelling of Christ in the individual soul.

Where this truth is realised, we would need less "to go out to the people", than to live our life in quite ordinary ways: it needs all honest spheres of work to witness to the perfection of the Incarnate Life. It is probably true that where we have witnessed faithfully to Catholic ideals in our daily work, there will be many who will come in to us, as a well full of water is trodden round by the coming of many feet. So we shall need less to go forth in search of souls, to find those whom we often describe as "needing help", for they will find us.

This is certainly true of our houses. A glimpse of a day of typical callers will show what I mean

1. A priest calls to represent to the Rev. Mother the urgent necessity he has for Sisters to come to work in his parish: he is single-handed. A large district of unvisited, unknown, souls lies beyond his power of reach and he is overwhelmed with the inability to cope with the work. Can we come? (This request is triplicated in one month with minute variation in detail).
2. A grandmother calls to know whether her motherless grandchild can be received into our Children's Colony. (Several applications of this sort are received every week).
3. A woman, with two children arrives, led by a well meaning associate who wants us to provide the woman with immediate work and take the children into the Home. They have just fled from the husband of the woman, (and in all probability will be re-united in a few days!).
4. A maidservant announces that she has been turned out of her situation at a moment's notice, can we take her in? (Obviously we must, pending enquiry into the case, which as often as not means that the girl has taken herself off in temper).
5. A woman arrives, well-known to us all, who tells us that she has absolutely failed to find any room to which to take herself and her child now they have come out of the infirmary; could we take them in until they have found a place?
6. A social worker comes to know whether we could take a woman in who needs nursing and spiritual help until she is strong enough to get work again.
7. A Sister calls to ask if we could receive the children of an inebriate while she enters a home.
8. A priest comes to ask advice about a girl who needs further character training, as she never seems to "get on".
9. A woman arrives who needs advice about the difficulties of her married life.
10. Another woman wants us to trace the present whereabouts of her child.



11. A worker in a parish wants to know if she may use our chapel for Retreats.

12. A son wants advice as to what to do with a mother with whom no one can live. (There are many such!).

13. A father cannot understand or help his motherless girl.

14. A perfectly mental case, with a varied list of needs.

And so on, and so on; sometimes there is a lull, sometimes they all seem to come at once; and over and beyond these our Mother House chapel furnishes a place of quiet and refreshment for many who need Retreat or spiritual aid. At a moment of really desperate pressure, when we were trying to clear our way through a pitiful human debris, the "Church Times" elected to advocate that some correspondent with a difficult girl to place could not do better than consult us. It was so funny, that we had to laugh – as we saw a probable consequence in a stream of people bringing to us all their best impossibilities. Nevertheless we are thankful that we were able to aid for a time the individual case in hand.

The greatest need of all that makes its claim upon us arises insistently through those who have need of time for rest and healing, mentally or physically, and who cannot get it because of the conditions of their life. A great number of final wreckages could be avoided if the sufferer from the early symptoms of strain could take time to recover. Many such as these cross our path, *and their age is far younger than it used to be*. This is a great deal due to the blindness of parents who cannot or will not see that "only nerves" is in itself a manifestation of ill-health not to be ignored. It is also apparent that much nerve disorder is due to the starvation of certain faculties which find no outlet and burn as a fire within. These are intellectual problems, far more than moral. We believe far too much stress is laid upon moral repressions nowadays, and far more attention should be given to repression of mental energy. The wars have made the youth of our country more capable and more alert; and this will give trouble if we endeavour to drive our young folk solely along old paths prescribed by a parental code already obsolete.

To be *understood*, to be able to let out a torrent of self-repression, to be able to call an injustice by its true name, will be the surest way to call forth also the fount of generosity and self-sacrifice that repression will never be able to produce. The noble characteristics that lie in every heart will become evident – the soul will be saved.

At one time we were housing a friendless girl who reported to us that she had to go twice a week to a hospital for trouble in her leg. She walked very lamely, and looked desperately ill; we cared for her all we could. At the end of some weeks we went to consult the almoner of the Hospital; we heard that she had not been there for over a year and that her leg had been practically healed. At a subsequent interview we found that the leg was exceedingly well bandaged by *herself*,

and that her regular absences had been a hoax. But now comes the point. The girl had appeared to be really good, had given no trouble and had been most devout. We pressed her for an explanation of such great deceit. With heart-broken sobs, she explained: "Oh Sister, you don't know what it is to be alone in the world and to have no one who cares: you have been so good to me, don't send me away."

The girl was out of health, alone in the world and in need of definite care; could we be angry, however necessary it was to put an end to the deceit?

Such as these require someone to build them up and to find for them some permanent anchorage; but these are not the only ones. There are others of whom the world will never hear their need, who bear within their hearts some interior distress of soul which has defied doctors and baffled friends, but who have been led by some exterior cause to stay in a house where they have found all unwittingly one who could understand and draw forth confidence through a sympathy more than human, drawn from communion with our Lord Himself. Perhaps only those who set apart time for long meditation and who really believe in the supernatural gifts of wisdom and knowledge, can really understand the interior workings of the human soul. It is possible that less mistakes in direction would be made, were there more houses where the atmosphere of prayer is the strongest thing felt, and the working of the Holy Ghost actually experienced.

This is the work called our evangelistic work. It can never be tabulated nor shall we ever publish a list of stories with initials attached. Remember, you who read, however, that the stream of such never ceases and we plead with you to be amongst those who help others to find their own vocation, in thanksgiving to God for the fulfilment of your own, whatever it may be. A happy marriage; an attained profession; a congenial home! What do these stand for in the sum of our daily life? As we thank God for them in our prayer of thanksgiving, let us give an expression of our gratitude practically by helping someone else to find a haven for their life.

It has been the aim of our Confraternity always to go out from a centre; therefore every associate is instructed to go forth to be a better member in his or her own church and congregation – to realise in short that every convert to Christ is bound to win another and not to remain a spiritual invalid or a pauper dependent upon the bounty of a spiritual State.

How is this work of conversion to be affected? Alas, have we not substituted organisations and social entertainments to draw people in, for the supreme attraction of individual influence? Are not our somewhat pitiful and amateur efforts at entertainments and amusements, *when organised to attract others in*, the signs of an effete faith in the gospel of Christ?

We all know that the excessive demand for entertainment is a bad

sign in our national life; why then as Christians do we add to it, by exhausting money, time and strength upon that which we can rarely do well, in the vain hope that it may exalt religion in the minds of the people? Surely the natural demand for recreation might be better met in the support of all that is noblest and purest in the professional world of art.

It is certain that the proportion of those who are drawn into religion by such methods is extraordinarily few; whereas if we were all more intent upon becoming a strong spiritual influence, we should undoubtedly reap a far greater harvest. One of our associates made a point of asking every new girl who entered her house of business to come to church with her on the following Sunday. She met her, asked her home to tea, took her to church, and rarely met with a refusal. In time she could point to quite a considerable number of communicants won in this way.

*"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* We need not therefore seek to segregate our young people lest they should be contaminated; but teach them from the outset that Christ's power is no meagre power to save them from the spirit of the world. Also we have surely to witness to the fact that if anyone is really keen about their life's work the constant desire to find diversion and amusement ceases to exist. To witness is the life's work of every Christian; and it illuminates the drudgery of any task and it will fill our life with zest.

All classes of people have the same interior need, all seeking that something which so often is not given. To such seekers are the associates of our Confraternity called to go, meeting them in the simple ways of life, and speaking perfectly simply of their own inner peace and conviction. Two others again come to my mind, whose lives have been lit up with the love of Christ. One, a musician, working always in the artistic set, leading first one and then another to hear, to ponder, and perchance to experience, truths of eternal value. Another, an authoress, passing through a period of excessive trial, then through one of our priest associates brought to peace in God. She also now moves among her old friends with a great impulse of love ever surging forth in the desire to bring the same joy into the barrenness of other lives. So indeed, less and less may the organisation of our Confraternity be apparent; but the work goes on, a leaven leavening the whole and silently increasing as one soul after another is enkindled by the Fire of Love.

## 9

### THE CONFRATERNITY

*"Baptise us, O God, with the Holy Ghost, and kindle in our hearts the fire of Thy Love."* (Confraternity Prayer)

The "Confraternity of the Divine Love" is no empty name. It holds no lifeless members within its ranks, for any noticeable defections are at once abstracted from the roll. "Baptise, us, O God, with the Holy Ghost" is a prayer, however, that expresses above all our desire to be positive and not negative, to be ever instinct with a Personality above us and raising ours ever upwards. In this prayer we ask that we in our generation may inherit not only that Spirit of life inherent in us through our baptism, but also the character and power of the Incarnation in each individual member of the Church. In few directions is the negative teaching of protestantism more evident than in the neglect of the Third Person of the Blessed and Holy Trinity. Scarcely realising any new birth at all, few outside the full Catholic Faith have any understanding of the actual union of the soul with God through the Holy Ghost, more than by a vague faith in union of spirit only, which leaves the soul and body of man on an earthly level, while we vaguely strive to imitate the goodness of our Lord. With, however, the realisation of the sacramental life there dawns upon the hungry soul the realisation that he can be a new creation in himself, that we are not left alone to struggle against an evil tendency which is stronger than our strongest self, but that Christ *in* us is the hope of glory and a glory into which we are being changed from day to day.

Thus to pray further – *"Kindle in our hearts the fire of Thy Love"* is to lead us on into the very heart of God with which we are now united, so that love may become both the transforming power of sanctification within our own soul and also the transmitting power of uplifting, saving influence to those who through our life of love come into contact with its warmth.

Glorious destiny! A Confraternity called not only to do, but to be; to work only as we are driven to it by the compelling power of Christ!

So often we are asked: "What does it mean to be an associate?" The answer is simply that we are all pledged to pray this prayer in order that we may be caught up into the work of the Spirit of God, which of course is really to make Jesus known to men. It is impossible to pray such a prayer without yielding ourselves to a more complete surrender both to His interior work within our souls and also to whatever form of expression He may call us to in service.

It was in 1915 that we began to realise that the work of the Confraternity was not to be only amongst the poor, but that it had a mission to the other classes as well. One of the great results of the first world war was the breaking down of conventional religion. A theoretical faith had seemed to suffice for many, who were comfortably settled in the general condition of things; but when the tragedy of war came to shatter their homes, to claim their best-loved and to fill their minds with new perils, it was natural that the soul should awaken to its dearth of vital faith and cry out: "Where is God?"

We have always to keep before us the truth that Christianity is not a mere religion of ethics, but essentially a life – and that a supernatural life. We have lost sight of that as a nation. We are in our sermons and in our common belief endlessly platitudinous and it is little wonder we have sunk to a conventional standard of religion that claims little and therefore effects little. To believe vitally in the need of supernatural life placed in the soul in baptism is to enter into the experience of a gradually increasing supernatural life, with a supernatural faith in God and His providence, wherever and in whatever manner it manifests itself – a faith, in short, which will tend to the ever deepening union with God which is the ideal of our holy religion.

One who had the Confraternity most deeply at heart expressed its mission as illustrated by a pool into which a stone was dropped, causing circles to form in ever-extending rings. "Only", she added, "It was in this case, not a stone, but a heart, and that the Sacred Heart!"

It is a beautiful thought for us to cherish that God may have chosen us to be a shrine wherein that Sacred Heart may manifest itself and touch more and more souls with its warmth of love, as our influence widens through the coming years.

It was this that we began to realise, as the number of our associates increased and hearts were opened to us with the expression of deep soul-hunger. We woke up to the fact that people looked to us for help because of the attraction which lay in the name even of the Confraternity. It was not teaching alone that was needed, so much as the manifestation of the love of God. Of course, to us the true manifestation of love is through the Catholic Faith and through the blessed channel of the sacramental life, but it is also true that the evangelical effect of that Faith is through the living witness to its truth and power. Now, as of old, they will take knowledge of us that we have "been with

Jesus", (Acts 4:13) and by that knowledge will be led to find Him for themselves.

We intended that our Confraternity should bind together those who had found these truths effectual in their own experience. We learnt, however, that many souls were to be led to us because they desired to find this for themselves and looked to us to teach them how. Were it possible to speak of the secret experiences of such as these, we should have a wonderful history to relate; but those to whom this volume will be especially dear, will be able to fill in blank pages from their own interior knowledge and will be amongst the number who say, "Thank God that I was ever led to know the Confraternity of the Divine Love!"

So a company grew up, not in great numbers, but very great in soul. Its members are continually deepening their experience of prayer and of love and are themselves going forth to bear witness of a deeper life in God to those who are failing from the lack of just such knowledge. The realisation that the Sacred Heart has been placed by the Incarnation in the very centre of our being is our inspiration and our strength. The circles will enlarge ever more and more.

"That the love wherewith Thou has loved Me may be in them and I in them!", (St. John xvii, 26), was illuminated upon our first altar, but far more is it engraven within our hearts as our great missionary power.

We are growing beyond the thought that some Christians are gifted with a missionary spirit and some are not. We know that the missionary spirit is simply the overflowing of love which increases beyond our capacity to contain it within ourselves. God's love is literally a heart-breaking love and as our heart is broken, the glorious river flows forth in its healing and life-giving power to reach other souls. God cannot use us effectually while we are still quite comfortably able to contain our religious experiences within ourselves. It is proof that our religion is only human in its substance. The natural must always *break* when it comes into contact with the divine and God gathers up the fragments so that nothing is lost and uses them for the feeding of other hungry souls. In this way we can give them ourselves to the uttermost, multiplied by the power of Christ which possesses us. All illustrations must fall short of the reality, for God is too great to be contained in any. He needs all our powers of expression, and even then we can hardly express anything of the joyous and infinite and supernatural manner of His ways, for they are "past finding out".

But we see in all this the ideal for our associates and have watched with joy the working of it out in some faint measure in practical ways. The Confraternity associate must be intensely *real*; because the whole thing is meaningless without. There is no kind of place in such a Confraternity for self-seeking, or personal consolation, or even provision for a vent of human energy. When we are asked, as is frequently

the case, "Can you give me any work to do?" the answer to be true would obviously be: "What is *God* giving you to do?" The Church cannot really benefit from that fever of activity which is a form of great unrest, or a cloak for interior poverty of soul. The associates have no rule of conduct other than is incumbent upon us all by our baptismal vows, but they are bound to pray the Confraternity prayer. The result of sincerely praying this prayer is that they go forth from their homes into the highways of daily practical life to "live Christ".

When our Blessed Lord made so much of the widow's mite, He overturned all our conception of values and made the standard of worth depend upon the motive of love. We have seen this glorious motive breaking through the atmosphere of the Confraternity as a beam of light is made visible by the vibration of dust particles in the air. Tiny deeds have thus been seen in the light of divine love; garments made for babies, stamp forms filled up with pennies; wages carefully saved until personal needs must have claimed practically nothing; these have produced a veritable beam of light which gleams down the history of the Confraternity. Then we have seen those who had greater possessions stripping themselves of all, unknown to any living being, in order that some children might be saved, or some gift be given to God – deeds of spiritual heroism wrought without the slightest outward sign. We have seen here and there a life lived in the monotony of ceaseless household activity in order that others may be set free to obtain greater spiritual privileges. We have seen that interior courage needed by one more advanced in years who for the first time sets forth upon a path of absolute sincerity towards the attainment of true self knowledge. What do all these things stand for but an expression of that conception of love which the Confraternity seeks to bring into our midst? Few have entered into it with any heart earnestness and remained unchanged. It is too vital to produce no effect. God grant it always may be.

How much we as an Order of Sisters owe to the prayers and love of the Confraternity is indeed impossible to say. Without in any way striving to modify our ideal, they have furthered our efforts in every direction. The position is not that which is usual in relation to a Religious Community, for in most cases particular friends become associates of the Sisterhood, while in our case the Order is a development of the Confraternity. Associates may or may not take an interest in the Order according to their individual desire. Since the Confraternity exists first for the purpose of prayer only, it is not of any obligation for the associates even to help forward the mission work of the Order or of the Confraternity itself. These are mere natural out-comes of the desire to put love into action. The rule affecting money necessitates that no subscription should be "begged" for, in the sense that it ceases to be a free-will offering and partakes of the nature of a compulsion or expediency.

The belief is often stated that we shall find no cure for our social and world-wide disorders save by the acceptance of the teaching and spirit of Christ. True, but the point to consider is that the world will never know what that teaching and spirit are until it sees them interpreted by a human life. The Confraternity exists to inspire people to do just this and suggests a way of receiving power to do it through the praying of the Confraternity prayer.

When, in short, are we going to show a true brotherhood of spirit even towards our fellow Christians? When are we going to show forth that brotherhood by the practical interpretation of loving them as ourselves in our daily life – by never considering ourselves? How silly! Yes, the foolishness of Christ against the spirit of the world!

When are we going to find it impossible to enjoy a life of luxury while we know that there are fellow communicants of our own Church who have not the daily necessities of life, for whom, although we are "afraid they are very poor", we have never parted with one of our superfluous coats!

When are we going to keep "under the flesh" and cease to spare ourselves every exertion which could even distantly approach the name of "labour" – not complaining that we are tired, but being ashamed of the fact, if we are not tired.

When are we going to become sufficiently merciful never to repeat one ill-natured word of another soul, or to *listen* to one such word?

These are some points well within our reach. It is all very well to set them up as an ideal for members of a Religious Order and to be justly shocked when *they* fall short; but we want men and women in the ordinary ranks of life, natural human souls, who will base their line of everyday conduct upon these ideals.



# 10

## HOUSES OF RETREAT

When we were seeking, in 1916, a cottage in the Heathfield district for rest and quiet, we found a house which charmed us, although it was larger than we intended to take. It occurred to us that possibly we might have some of the associates down in the summer and thus use the extra rooms. We took it in May and issued invitations from that date. We thought we would attempt informal Retreats later when we could get a room erected in the garden.

This was carried out most effectively by a local builder and proved to be perfectly delightful as a devotional room. Gifts were given, the crucifix, statues, etc., and an atmosphere grew around it from the first day it was used.

We were also impressed by the enthusiasm of the first retreatants. The early morning walk to the church, the open-air feeling of the Garden Room, the quiet of the gardens and the wonderful exhilarating air of Heathfield, all appealed immensely to those who came. The addresses were given by a Sister who could speak from long experience of work amongst souls. This was, of course, such an entirely new departure that it incited criticism, but the first results gave such encouragement that we felt it was well to continue.

Two Retreats were held that year and were well attended. Then we decided to develop the proposed Chapter for the Sisters only into a summer conference, inviting associates and friends. This was held in August and we overflowed three houses and rented single lodgings as well.

The spirit of that first week will always be remembered. We were all more than happy, we simply brimmed over with joy. It was all delightfully informal and full of fresh air – meals out of doors and with five windows and a door all wide open, we may almost say meetings out of doors also. With one more Retreat the summer closed. Four vocations for our Order were realised, as well as the fresh light and hopefulness which poured in upon every soul.

The following year the season was even more remarkable. The

illness of our dear Sister Agnes made it impossible to contemplate any summer gatherings at Heathfield, where she was, as absolute quiet was essential. We had given up all idea of them. On the last day she was with us on earth, she, who had been the life and soul of our gatherings, pleaded that they might be held again in spite of her illness, saying she would give no trouble whatever. We knew that would be true enough, but also we knew that it would be impossible to hold them. That night she quietly passed away in her sleep. As soon as the last services were rendered, we determined that she should have her heart's desire and we issued invitations at once for a summer conference and took the house next door which she had set her heart upon. Naturally many letters were received from those who had made their summer plans and could not alter; but in spite of only three weeks' notice, we again more than filled the three houses at our disposal and had to hire rooms outside.

How we made St. Margaret's ready in a week only those four who did it know. The workman and his boy papered and distempered it throughout and we scrubbed, stained floors and made fifty-five curtains *somehow*. We ransacked second-hand shops for the delightful shabby old chairs which Sussex knows so well how to produce and all the firms of furnishers and upholsterers seemed to vie with each other to produce exactly what we wanted at a moment's notice. In all that week there was not one hitch, and we were cool and calm and collected as though we had been in for years when our first visitors arrived, irrespective of the fact that the last paint pot had only just disappeared round the corner. The one of the four who could not be called a Sister, so called herself the "Staff", sat down and breathed deeply and remarked:—

"Well, anyway, I have learned how the C.D.L. gets into a house."

The August conferences have continued now for many years and many have come to know there is abundant love and life in our Church, and realise the need to carry it far more earnestly into the heart of the nation that other people may know it too. We have all of us been awakened by our fellowship with each other at Heathfield to a far greater realisation of the underlying principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ fully experienced in all its transforming power.

There are still many, who when asked by their friends to come to stay at Heathfield, reply:—

"With Sisters? Oh, I can't stand the rules."

It is our own fault, we have earned for ourselves the reputation of being hedged round with rules and of endeavouring to hedge our friends. But why should we? Rules were made to be our friends, not our masters, and there is no need to thrust them upon our dear people who have no intention of entering a life of cloistered discipline. Therefore we have only one rule for our visitors – and that is that blessed habit of silence after Compline and in the early morning. It is true to

say that this rule is valued immensely by all who come. During the regular Retreats silence is observed and desired by all; but not at other times.

How little in 1917 did we foresee either the rapid advance the Retreat movement would make in our branch of the Church, or our part in it!

Our tentative gatherings for silent meditation in "The Garden Room" at Heathfield, before we possessed a chapel, our conferences, during which we felt our way into a fuller comprehension of God's vocation for our Confraternity, these remain now as a blessed memory because so many souls were blessed through them. Neither was persecution, that accompanying sign of God's blessing, absent; for bitter invectives were hurled at these gatherings by those who require the hall-mark of conventionality to be branded on all Church efforts.

Nevertheless as we prayed and pondered, we learnt the deep practical value of Retreats; and we learnt also that fresh air, light and easily digested food and a certain friendliness of demeanour prove to be great assets to the hours actually spent in chapel.

In 1919 we found that the Forestry Girls' chapel at Chilgrove was for sale and its Franciscan character appealed to us, as well as its association with the girls themselves who had visited us while they were working at Cross-in-Hand. One of our associates immediately gave us a cheque for its purchase and removal, as well as providing a considerable amount towards necessary additions to its rather primitive structure. In 1920 it was finally erected, but as the Order was still on probation, no sanction could be obtained from the bishop of Chichester (Dr. Ridgeway) for its dedication, in spite of the earnest effort made by Canon Humble Crofts, Rector of Waldron, in which parish we really are, towards this end. Indeed, no story of the Confraternity would be complete which did not honour him as one of the most kind and loyal friends we ever possessed. However, it was clear that we had to wait. The priests and retreatants who were willing to come to us, consented to go to Cross-in-Hand for Mass, with the willing consent of the priest-in-charge. The obvious inconvenience of this in no way checked the enthusiasm of those who loved St. Mary's Retreat.

Nevertheless it was with intense joy that in 1921 we received the consent of Dr. Burrows, who had become bishop of Chichester in the meantime, to dedicate our chapel. That day, May 23rd, remains as one of our very happiest memories. The particular strike on at that moment happened to be the coal strike; so we were obliged to limit the number of our guests as we were uncertain as to the possibility of material provisions, but we had a representative gathering of priests and associates. The bishop stayed with us overnight and the chapel was dedicated at an early Mass. Archdeacon Upcott, who was so kind

to us on that occasion, passed away that same year; also it was the last important function of ours in which our dear Father Willoughby Carter was able to take part.

Since that time the Heathfield Retreats have gone steadily forward. The death of our neighbour, brought us again the offer of St. Margaret's which we had lost in 1918. It was so evidently providential that we laid out our last available money in securing this house and purchasing additional furniture. This with an increased number of little garden huts added to the capacity for guests and gave us also ground upon which further extensions may be made in the future. Heathfield stands for something all its own; it has a wonderful spirit and a wonderful atmosphere. We may term it reality or we may term it love; but it is irresistible.

Retreats are arranged during the summer so that it is possible for retreatants to come as visitors beforehand to rest, or if they desire, to remain on afterwards. Often this has proved to be of inestimable value. It gives time for thought, for intercourse with kindred minds and perhaps gives an opportunity to open out some of those inner difficulties which need time to bring to the surface.

It has been suggested that there would be great gain if we could get others than regular communicants into Retreat. This is precisely what Heathfield has done. We do not think this can be accomplished easily, unless there is a time for social intercourse surrounding the Retreats. We must approach all souls in natural paths before we can lead them to the supernatural; but where this is done it is not difficult to lead them on. In fact the Spirit of God does the rest. One visitor, whom we had invited merely to rest, said: "I do think you are trustful: you did not know whether I was an atheist or a mohammedan." The point was, we knew she was a dear kind soul and we risked the rest! The result was that she herself asked to come into the next Retreat and her whole spiritual point of view was fundamentally changed.

In 1921 we received letters from Canon Randolph of Ely and the Rev. G. H. B. Coleridge, vicar of Christ Church, Erith, asking us whether we could take over the responsibility of Oakhurst Retreat House in that parish. The house had been given to the dioceses of London, Rochester, and Southwark by the family of the late Rev. Robert Wood, a former vicar of Christ Church. The cost of working it had far exceeded the receipts and it had proved impossible to continue with a salaried staff. The benefit of having Religious in control of houses for Retreats was also felt.

We had been interested in Oakhurst for some time. The house presented such ideal possibilities; the garden was so beautiful, and it was quite impossible to realise how near it was to the great industrial centres which surround it, when one sat under the trees, listening to the myriads of birds, without another building in sight. Our Council voted for the acceptance of the responsibility for a year's trial. The

Sisters' financial committee was called upon to meet a heavy necessary expenditure, for the house was made to lose its depressing reminder of the days when it had been a war hospital. It was a bilious mustard colour from roof to basement. We replaced this with wall-paper and the charming architecture of the house became more apparent. With this material change we began also to feel that something was lacking in atmosphere; and the discovery was made that the house had never been dedicated to God by an actual service of benediction. The bishop of Rochester kindly consented to come to do this on March 4th, 1922. Up to that time, Retreats had languished; influenza had devastated; but the clouds broke on the day of the Blessing and we all rejoiced in the beautiful service and in the enthusiastic gathering of friends who met for the occasion. Then things went forward. Many Retreats were held, including parish Retreats which were then something of an innovation. We are glad that these have also in recent years been revived at Heathfield.

To turn for a few moments to the general question of Retreats, we would like to comment on the purpose of Retreats. We note that the increase in the number of priests who are willing to conduct Retreats has not meant that the *object* of a Retreat is clearly understood. Without becoming unhealthily introspective we certainly enter a Retreat *in order to review our life in relation to God*: in fact, to set our house in order. This is not necessarily done by listening to a series of more or less discursive meditations, which is more like listening to seven sermons instead of the one or two we are accustomed to subject ourselves to on Sundays. No, the Retreat addresses must be skilfully combined in a clear psychological scheme. There is a science of religion as well as of other subjects, and God leads the human soul according to direct spiritual laws which are not incompatible with the attraction of love. The understanding, the affections and the will must all be brought to the point of response in an effective Retreat and an effective conductor must have a practical knowledge of this, though the retreatants may not understand anything of the process by which they are being led. Of course, quiet, time for rest and reflection always in themselves produce benefit; "beautiful thoughts" are pleasant to receive. Often those who enter Retreats are not expecting more than this; and such souls therefore go forth in quiet contentment. Nevertheless those with deeper knowledge realise that an opportunity has been missed and that so much more work in receptive souls might have been effected.

It is not, by any means, to the educated only that Retreats appeal: neither have we ever found it in the least necessary to alter the usual time tables for even quite young girls. We have had retreatants from such as these who have entered with all earnestness into an ordinary Retreat. One, a pottery girl from Staffordshire, repeated from memory after a Retreat was over all that had most helped her; and

two months afterwards, when placed in new and difficult surroundings, she wrote: "But I try to remember and act up to all I heard at Heathfield." Another was found in tears during a Retreat at Oakhurst. When the cause was discovered, it appeared that one of the new girls she had brought with her had giggled during the silent meal and her sponsor was so much ashamed!

Neither is it true that we only by these means reach those who are already firmly established in religion. In one week-end Retreat for girls, there were three who were recalled from mortal sin, incurred through merely drifting. Each attributed her recall to the persuasion that she had responded to, to enter into Retreat and thus to have time to review her life with God.

If we have been allowed to help any souls by ministering materially to their needs, so that they may have been enabled spiritually to drink in more deeply of God's store of riches, to His Name be all the praise and glory for such a privilege.

## THE ORDER OF ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY

The year 1916 found us with eight novices and two aspirants, in addition to the Mother. By our Rule, it is decided that after the noviciate, simple professed vows should be taken for five years, before the solemn profession. The two senior novices were prepared to take the simple vows: therefore within the octave of the feast of our patron saint, November 19th, the first profession was held in St. Matthias' Church.

The simple beauty of the service appealed to all present and we were so thankful to be allowed to hold it in the parish church. (One of our strongest tenets is that we should share as much as possible in the spiritual life of the parishes in which we live). We were cheered also by the kindest letter from the bishop of London sending his blessing to all the Sisters.

This profession was significant, not only for its being the first, but by the fact that three professed Sisters constituted us an Order and so this service marked a considerable milestone in our existence. There is not always a very clear idea in people's minds upon these matters, so it may therefore be as well to mention that simple vows are for a specified period, but that solemn life vows, received by a bishop or his delegate have permanence and can only be dispensed with upon certain conditions. Some of the great historic communities only take simple vows at any time, but the more usual procedure is that simple vows should lead on to solemn life vows. Now, an Order or Community is such by virtue of its having at least three professed Sisters, three being necessary for the taking of votes.

Furthermore, it is necessary for the discipline of the Church that such Orders or Communities should be recognised authoritatively by the Church. This official recognition is given by the bishop of the diocese in which the Mother House of the Order is situated. An Advisory Council for Religious Communities now assists the bishops of the Church in England to act with some uniformity in this regard, as well as giving advice to the Communities themselves.

Now, it has been the custom in all centuries for Religious Orders to work on for a considerable number of years to prove themselves worthy to receive episcopal recognition. Generally speaking, the bishop needs to be assured upon three points. First, that there is a sufficient *raison d'être* for a new Society to be formed at all; in the second place, that the Rule itself inspires confidence; and thirdly that there is reason to believe the Society is sufficiently stable to continue after its founder has passed hence. One can readily see the wisdom of these precautions. We knew that the bishop's kindly letter must not be inferred to be in any way an episcopal recognition of our Order and that we were but entering upon our probation.

It was not until March 5th, 1921 that episcopal recognition was given to the Order, when the Lord Bishop of London solemnly installed the first Mother of the Order in St. Matthias' Church, Earl's Court.

With the constitution of the Order we now felt that the time had come to gather under a central roof and establish our Mother House. St. Elizabeth's, Hanwell was not large enough and it had been proved important for everyone to be together during the training period. We began looking for a house. We yearned towards the idea of a block of flats amidst working people's dwellings, but the demand for these was very great and if we took several, we should be merely selfishly increasing the overcrowding in poor districts. Our duty was obvious: less than a mile away from the Fulham district in which much of our work was done, were large empty houses, crying out for tenants. We inspected 94 Redcliffe Gardens, then in a deplorable condition, and made an offer for it. The owner accepted us as tenants upon the conditions we proposed, notably that in asking for a reduced rental, we should be responsible for all interior repairs. Our splendid workmen took it in hand, aided by engineering knowledge contributed by our chaplain and the results were very satisfactory.

The whole of the repairs and furnishing were given as her profession gift by Sister Agnes. We entered the house on Monday, January 22nd, 1917. All the extra gifts of crucifix, statues, lamps, altar linen and lace, lectern, missal and Bible were given by our generous friends and we could not be thankful enough for every dear token of God's love and providence. The house was blessed for the service of Almighty God on February 10th.

Too much stress cannot be laid upon the value of careful training in the first years after entering the Religious Life. There is absolutely nothing more effective than the home to bring to the surface points of weakness in character. When the peculiar difficulties which arise from lack of natural kinship in Communities are added to the ordinary wear and tear of daily life, there remain few points of a character, good or bad, which are not revealed! But the discipline is magnificent, the opportunity to attain to supernatural grace and virtue invaluable, as all who have truly benefited from their noviciate can testify.



Likewise, the mere idea of being a Religious, or even the actual vocation, does not mean that aspirants always understand how very much there is to learn of God's methods in the progress of the spiritual life, or how necessary it is to rise above a religious impulse to a firmly founded life of prayer. Few really appreciate how essential the formation of *character* is, if we are to be indeed the instruments in God's service He would have us to be. If these great points are neglected before profession, it is seldom likely they will be fully realised after. We see here the wisdom of deterring novices from entering too soon upon outside activities, although that may be a necessity at times. This seems hard when much has been done in former days in connection with their parish church. It may lead to a sense of being "set back"; but only those who desire to find competent workers know how essential this "setting back" is until the foundations are more firmly laid.

It is often apparent in those who join our ranks, that they are eager to carry on their special interests in the habit of the Religious Life; and it is irksome to them to find that all that is expected of them, for certainly twelve months, in actual work, is a weary round of domestic toil. Yet it is precisely here that the soul may learn to concentrate upon essential spiritual values which could never be so well learned if exterior work were engrossing to our natural tastes. Not only that, but who is of true value in the Kingdom of God save he who has learnt that he can be done without? We learn more of our self-importance in one hour of hiddenness than in years of hurried bustling, when our self-love is concealed by satisfaction in our outward measure of success.

Many come from a life of incessant activity, flushed with the fever of organisations and are set to the quiet routine of prayer, offices, and household work. "Waste!" cries the world; but the soul which lets herself grow in quiet obedience learns secrets concerning her interior life which she would never have learnt in the world; and if her vocation is really responded to, she will prove that the value of these days in establishing a simple direction of her soul towards God is immeasurably finer than the expression of her self-love and self-importance in the mixed service of the life outside.

*In time* true values will assert themselves: and the soul which is great, whether also naturally gifted or not, will find its special vocation in service and will do great deeds as well for the Kingdom of God. But the greatness of spirit is attained in the vale of humiliation, in hiddenness, in the rejection of much that the world esteems; wherefore our Lord meant it quite literally, when He said: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant."

"Nothing", wrote one, "did me more good, or taught me more, during the Retreat, than the sweet and quiet spirit with which the Sisters waited upon us." But these were they who had not just bustled in from the world, they were those who had passed through the quiet paths of discipline!

We have a great desire that there should be nothing secret, nothing mysterious, in our life; that God's dear people outside the cloister may not feel in any way estranged from us. Our chapel is open to them at all times; how much more our hearts and sympathies! There seems to be a great prevalence of the idea that friendship with a Sister must mean something quite different from the general conception of friendship, something, in short, wholly cold and unnatural. Whence comes this idea? Is it not from a want of understanding of what friendship really is? Where affection is merely emotional and human, set upon the gratification of self-love, we may well regard it as outside the pale of the Religious Life; but where it is founded upon the sympathy of a really spiritual attraction, when the whole aim and object of it is the mutual up-lifting of character and mind and soul, then we must welcome such attractions as a most real gift of God. In this way one can conceive of the tie which binds a Religious to her friends as a very blessed one; of mutual benefit, the one bringing a wider outlook upon life, and the other the communication of a more spiritual ideal maintained by her friend's greater privileges in Religion.

Surely we are set free from many difficulties of social life, not in order *only* to spend more time in prayer, though that is our great privilege, but also that we may be "more at leisure from ourselves" to outspend ourselves upon others.

If we want to realise the beauty of a spiritual relationship we cannot do better than study the chapter on this in St. Teresa's "Way of Perfection". There we see the difference between all that is emotional and harmful, and that which is for the uplifting of those who are attracted to one another in the love and will of God.

But beyond these greater friendships there are all the lesser privileges of intercourse which may cause a Religious House to be a centre of blessing in a district where it is placed. We desire assuredly that all should feel welcome to come with their needs at any time. We do not welcome those who would come for idle talk. Our life must be strenuous and real and at all times engaged on things which essentially matter; hence there are visitors who must be discouraged; but how much more do we rejoice in every possible service that can be rendered in an hour of need!

We recall one delightful occasion when the Mother was returning from a two days' absence, having by letters learnt that two Sisters had been called away upon an errand of love. "Anyhow", she thought, "Sisters M. and J. will have been left to keep things going at home." To her surprise she found the house quite empty; and shortly after Sister M. appeared with an apologetic but unmistakably humorous expression.

"I am so extremely sorry, Mother; but Mrs. M's cook's baby was born unexpectedly, and as no doctor or nurse were available, they came for us!" Who was gladder than we?

In every endeavour the time must come when the glamour of the first romance passes and life must settle down to the reality of common things. The test of true vitality is found in the ability to grow and expand. In some organisations it is often possible to secure continuance by material forces, such as endowment which may ensure a continuity of the body alive or dead. But surely the only hope of any *religious* society continuing in vigorous and healthy life and usefulness lies in its recognition of the place and power of the Holy Ghost, Who alone can thrill with strong vitality the machinery of our human thought. Often the human instrument may reel before the difficulty of his or her vocation; often antagonistic forces may attack and almost wreck the enterprise. It is then that the utter hopelessness of unaided human strength falls before Almighty God and casts itself upon the promises secured to those who seek the pathway of His will.

Certainly our Order, whatever faults it may possess, has been no hothouse plant. From its very conception, its birth and progress have been effected against all the winds of opposition and adversity. Nevertheless the protection of God has upheld it through all its darkest hours.

In all our difficulties we were blessed with the faithfulness of many friends and notably our priest-associates, who upheld, advised and strengthened our hands through the difficult years. Those, too, are to be remembered with thanksgiving, who gave their all to maintain and carry on, whose love for the Order needed no outside assurance, because they themselves had found God in the heart of it all. These were they who never wavered even in the darkest days and who wrote words such as these, most dear and cherishable for all time:—

“You know that whether recognition is ever given or not, it cannot make the smallest difference to our love and loyalty or to our gratitude to God for the immense blessing we have received through all that you have done and been.”

Who would have not passed through any trials to have proved the force and unity implied in the possession of such friends? Yet, beyond even these gifts, lay the more blessed experience of faith. To God alone we turned, Who alone could vindicate His call. With God alone we walked when no human soul could understand the intricacies of the path we were called upon to tread. How well worth while our own betrayal, the slander, the subtle falsehood founded on some truth, if through these we learnt the deep lessons of “naked faith” which nothing could ever disturb!

Once when a party of us had strayed unwittingly into a private part of Fulham Palace gardens, we met the bishop, who advanced with hand outstretched.

“Where have you come from, Sisters?”

“Through the churchyard, my Lord.”

He laughed and explained that he had meant from what Com-

munity. As it happened to be during one of the darkest periods we were called upon to pass through, and as a resurrection of our hopes was shortly afterwards revealed, we have often looked back with amusement upon our symbolical reply.

“Through the churchyard” – where it seemed that we might be buried, we approached in actual fact Bishop Winnington-Ingram and found in him the first friend in authority who dealt fairly and squarely with our difficulties, in all that gentleness of handling for which many learnt to love him so well. It became clear that we would have to live down the statements that had been made against us. We shall never forget the few words of tender reminder of the Passion of our Lord, which the bishop spoke to us on that Maundy Thursday when he told us that it was his own desire that we should continue and persevere.

The existence of our Retreat House at Heathfield involved the Chichester diocese in this question of recognition. The bishop gave careful consideration to the story of the Order and the submissions of our priest-associates and listened to the explanations of the Rev. Mother very kindly. Then followed some months of careful revision and amendment of the Rule and Constitution under the wise criticisms of the bishop of London’s Advisory Council, after which time the promise of formal recognition was accorded. If, as may God grant, the Order of St. Elizabeth goes down to posterity true to the Faith and true to its first principles, the names of these two bishops will be honoured as indeed Fathers-in-God, to whom under His providence we owe more than our hearts can ever venture to express.

So on March 4th, 1921, the then bishop of London, Dr. Winnington Ingram, installed the first Mother of the Order. The ceremony took place in the mother church of the Order, St. Matthias’, Earl’s Court.

Eight years only had we then been on probation. This had seemed long to some, yet, as we read the history of the great Orders of the past, we find often that twenty or thirty years were allowed to elapse before they were allowed to reach the stage we were given in 1921. Times move more quickly now; but those who are impatient in these things scarcely realise how essential it is for a Rule to be proved and tried before it can be accepted as a basis upon which to work; and not the Rule alone, but those who live by it need proving too by the discipline of time.

The effects of the first world war tested the strength of the Religious Communities to the uttermost. Few vocations were realised and afterwards characters were still unbalanced and unable to endure. Nevertheless, by the mercy of God, our novitiate never declined, although the percentage of those rejected was increased fourfold. After the war those who offered for the life were stronger than before, more responsible and more capable. The chapel at the Mother House became inadequate for our needs and a larger chapel was built at the rear of the house, the gift of a much loved soul in gratitude for blessings

received. Indeed the history of our houses is the history of our souls, as one and another have given tokens of their love and gratitude. We recall how one statue was placed upon our walls in memory of a brother drowned – the processional crucifix in memory of a soldier son – how “St. Elizabeth” was carried home on the eve of her festival by the loving hands of one who longed to express her thankfulness. Even the folding doors which make two rooms into one were given by one who exclaimed with joy, “Oh, I should love to break down walls and make open doors for you!” So do material things get taken up and transformed into spiritual joys by those who find in religion a ladder to link earth to heaven and transform this old world by the golden mists of love.

Still the work of our Order must be to a great extent undefined. It is in the very nature of our ideals that we should be ready to fall in with any genuine need that may arise, and to keep ourselves unattached to all engrossing regular work. Indeed, how otherwise could we be true to the tradition of our patron saint? St. Elizabeth of Hungary was chosen for her prompt response, for the love of her Lord, to every human need. Thus are we led in our mission work less to organised parochial routine, and more to establishing our Sisters in centres where we may live in readiness to serve wherever we may be called. It may be to nurse someone who is ill, to care for a motherless babe, to teach the Faith, to wait on those in Retreat, to take charge of a home where there is illness, to settle some quarrel, to comfort the bereaved – we know the varied ills of life, and we know too, that those who have learnt in solitude and prayer the *answer* to wild questionings of grief, are those who are sought when the shadows gather round. Certain it is there is always enough to do, and certain it is that it is possible to combine many varied ministrations under the shelter of one roof; but what we have also proved is that, were we first of all blocked by innumerable duties of organisations and committee work, we would not be free and ready to respond at once to the many and varied needs which occupy us now.

In a life of great activity, such as the Order of St. Elizabeth knows, is there a danger of too little prayer? This need never be the case. First and foremost are the undisturbed hours of prayer so arranged that they are seldom broken into by any outside call. Then surely when the habit of prayer has been attained, when the true spirit of prayer has become the natural life of the soul, it is possible for that spirit of communion with God to remain unbroken in any sudden call to self-sacrificing work. It is possible also, when the demand is removed, to return again, to the practice of the daily rule and thus maintain the quietness and confidence which is the spirit's greatest strength.

# 12

SISTER AGNES

It is fitting that a chapter should be devoted to the one whose death closed, as far as this world is concerned, the history of the first five years of the Order. It might well be called the memorial of a great and wonderful friendship, the most perfectly unselfish friendship I have ever known.

It was early in 1902 that she came down to stay with me at Oxshott, with the express desire of learning more of the Catholic Faith. That year revealed to me the sterling truth and depth of her character. She resolutely steered her way through seas of prejudice, difficulty and doubt, never faltering, although always hesitating until she was compelled by conviction to act upon some new light. She would often lament her long hesitations and what she described as extreme timidity, but we who looked on knew that from the moment she was fully convinced that any course of action or article of faith was of God, she would never again swerve or go back from it.

It will be readily seen how such a character won respect upon every side. Together with this mental and moral strength there was the brimming-over kindness of heart which ever made her so dear to all who really knew her and which gathered round her friends amongst the ranks of the poor as well as the rich. That rare gift of being able to anticipate every need of others before they realised it themselves was hers to a marked degree. Very many instances became accidentally known to us of this, though we kept the secrets sacredly.

On one occasion, long after pew rents were for the most part abolished, she discovered one of her dear old friends was “put about” by finding her usual seat in church so often taken by others. The old custom prevailed there and she was obliged to resort to the “free seats”. Without appearing to have noted the fact at all, Sister put things right by having a seat taken for her and given to her by the sidesman without any explanation; but the old dear guessed, for she said sententiously: “That’s Miss S— again, I know.” It was silent little deeds of this sort that led an author to write to her one day and

say, "It's you again, I suppose! If you don't take care I shall be putting you into a play some day. It is you people who do these deeds and don't talk about them that we all respect so deeply."

Must we not also in sketching the foundation of her character, record its most delightful humour? How absolutely any description would be inadequate without it! If she were ever misunderstood, it was most often because you could detect no glimmer of a smile when she would propound some most outrageous statement, and we all know how some people can only interpret literally, however hyperbolic a statement may be. She would preserve her gravity by the hour amidst convulsions of laughter upon every side.

I remember one instance when her host, whom she knew most intimately, had embarrassed us all with an outburst of irritability over the untidiness of a relative. His visitor was anxious to relieve a strained situation, so for over an hour she quietly and imperceptibly placed obstacles of every conceivable kind in his path wherever he went, hastening to clear them with apologies whenever she saw him approach them, as she knew he must. Only she could have done it and succeeded in restoring him to his normal and delightful amiability. Her appreciation of other people's witticisms was just as keen. She hoarded "character studies" in every shape and form, delighting in clever books designed for children, and drawing out to the uttermost the capacity for humour in all around. Often have we had to threaten to leave her, when during "tramps" in Devonshire, delightful days we enjoyed for many successive years, she would carry on a conversation with quaint old souls, with the keenest relish for the answers she succeeded in extracting from them. Then for years afterwards she would suddenly say, "Do you remember that old woman at Haytor who told us her son had lived for weeks without lungs at all?" or "Oh, I wish we could go again to the inn where they hung all their legs of mutton up over the front door!"

I look back in vivid memory to the years of early companionship, when we did much together and passed through the events recorded in the first chapter of this book. She was the one who proposed to give half of her time to the Settlement. Then came the week when I knew she must be told of the coming break through the realisation of my vocation. It is difficult at this time to write without deep emotion of all those days. Perhaps even I had not realised how deeply our friendship had entered into her very soul; but when I told her, she received it with the same quiet strength with which she faced everything. I was staying at her house and we talked it over in her room at night, quietly and without visible emotion.

"When will you go?" she asked.

I reminded her that I had an obligation to refund a hundred pounds borrowed in preparation for work I was then doing. "So you see", I added, "I cannot go until I have earned and repaid that." We parted

quietly and I went to my room and slept. In the early hours before dawn I awoke, hearing her in my room.

"I cannot sleep, dear", she said: "but I am not unhappy. Only I think I can give you up to God best if I pray about it by your side. May I stay here a little while?"

It revealed more than she ever showed again what it meant to her. I left her next day, and in the evening I received a letter:

"I cannot bear that you should wait at least a year before you are able to obey the call. I can pay that hundred pounds and so set you free. Oh, I do want to be really happy in giving you up to God. I know I shall only gain you more, in spite of the human loss."

She might have had her dearest friend near her for another year; but no, she loved God best and made the sacrifice for Him. When that hundred pounds was refunded to her some years later, as I knew it could be, it was given again for God's service, as she would not take it back for common use.

When in 1912 the call to found the Confraternity was received, she became one of its first associates. She was the first friend to whom I confided the greater call. Well do I remember sitting upon the shore at Heyburn Wyke and telling her all I then could see of the future. She confessed that she went home to go through what she expressed as "a bad time of it". Believing absolutely as she did in my sincerity and that I could only follow what I believed to be right, she yet feared greatly I was making a mistake. Yet she never showed anything of this to me at the time. She felt I was certain about it all and had enough to bear, so she would keep her fears to herself. So she gave me all the help she could and trusted that somehow God would bring good out of it all. It was, of course immensely characteristic again of that cautious, clever brain of hers, that was not easily moved by enthusiasm until she could see a reasonable basis upon which it could rest. That especial trait in her character has been of immense service to me all through. How eager she always was, when things proved to be God's will in the end, to blame herself for her slowness of perception; but she never gave herself credit for the *sureness* which was such a tremendous strength to her friend.

Then came the year of her own unexpected vocation. Of course to her friends it was not unexpected, but it was to us: and she and I were the only ones after all who really knew. It is customary for those who look on and see a great friendship with a Sister, to suppose that there is an attraction to the life. It is looked upon as a foregone conclusion, but, as a matter of fact, she and I never thought she would be called to the Religious Life. She had for all these previous years been the sister at home to care for her aged mother; and she had never any intention of doing more after her death than help us in our work as splendidly as she had always done. Yet some months after God called her mother home, her views about her own future were completely changed. She



came down to me one day at Fulham and told me she had decided to devote her life to mission work; still anything further did not suggest itself to me. "Shall you take a flat at Earls Court?" I asked. "Oh, no. Please, Mother, let me come and live with you", she answered. I was speechless, at the moment, and then said, "Do you really mean it?" "Oh, yes", she continued; "I could not work anywhere else."

So it was settled that she should come as a worker. But later on as God's will was more clearly revealed to her, she saw He was calling her to the entire dedication of a Sister's life. As I have already recorded, she joined us at last suddenly on the outbreak of the first world war.

If we had ever wondered whether she would be able to adapt herself to the new life, our fears were soon dispersed. She was the leader in every enterprise, in the forefront of every endeavour. At first, when she only visited us, she used to confess that she walked through the cemetery in order to get a "bit of green" instead of the slum streets; but later on she entreated me to allow her to live in the Fulham Mission instead of the easier work I had planned for her. She learned to love the scenes of poverty and squalor, and cherish the clinging grubby hands of the little children that hung about her as she walked along.

It was characteristic that it was only after twelve years of intimate friendship, that I discovered she had very high certificates for teaching. It had never appeared to her worth mentioning. Now the idea grew that we should lay the foundation for a school for our children and perhaps see it develop into something really useful.

It was in this that during her last six months of activity she found her keenest delight. When I felt she was working beyond her strength, she said at once, "I don't think I am, but whatever you take from me, leave me the children." As soon as I was convinced she was really far from well, all else was taken off her shoulders but this, her great delight. She told me afterwards, when her work was for ever laid down, that often when she felt too worn out to speak to anyone, the touch of those children's arms would be to her a comfort beyond words.

Then in the spring of 1917, after consultations with doctors had availed nothing, just before Passiontide I made a firm stand; no work at all was to be done for three months. She pleaded, but she was carried off to Heathfield at twenty-four hours' notice and told to settle down and rest in the place she loved best of all. We never thought for one instant that it was really more than extreme debility needing absolute rest. In three days she was so much worse that I had to telegraph for another Sister to come down. Then the doctor's fiat was given. It was beyond human hope.

It was all so sudden, so incredible, so mysterious; but somehow, some day we should understand. *And she could not at present know.* There was just the faintest hope that with the will to live and the hope of

recovery the disease might be thrown off. And so we fought with fresh air and sunshine pouring in at the window across which her bed was drawn – with all the gifts of flowers and fruit that were heaped upon her from all her dearest friends, and above all with her dear, grateful, happy spirit that never failed to triumph over every setback. How often, as we saw the disease advancing by some sign she did not herself understand, we watered the pillows behind her back with our tears – she never knew! Until we were certain we would not take away her hope. Then one evening, when it was useless longer to make any pretence, she said quite quietly, "Mother, I am not getting on, am I?" I crossed to her –

"No, darling, you are not."

"Will it be very long?"

"We cannot say at all."

"I should be glad – if God is willing – if it might not be very long." Then her old love, which was the strongest human thing she knew, made her think instantly of me instead of herself.

"Except for your sake, darling Mother – how selfish I am! Oh, but you will not mind *very* much, will you? I shall always be so near. You do believe, don't you, I shall be nearer than ever?" I assured her that I did.

"I believe I shall be able to do more for the Order on the other side. I expect that is why God wants me to go."

From that time we talked always about the other world whenever some fresh thought struck either of us. She lived for over two months more, months that will remain in my own memory, and in the memory of the two Sisters who nursed her so devotedly, as being some of the most beautiful in our lives. Her illness was without pain of any kind and with very little discomfort. Her spirit grew more and more radiantly happy as the weeks went by. She never ceased to take the keenest possible interest in all that passed, reading the paper to the last and planning with me every detail of our life. God was so near to her that she simply waited to see Him face to face; she felt there would be scarcely any conscious transition.

And so it came to pass. She had been speaking of her desire not to hinder the coming of our guests. That night she looked so worn and white that Sister Alice said, "We do not want to leave you alone at all to-night Sister."

"Oh, but you must", she answered. "I can touch my bell. I am all right: tell Mother I am just going quietly to sleep." We did not cease to watch, but without her knowledge. We were always within sound of the slightest movement. At four o'clock she was raised on her pillows, and said, "Thank you, that's so nice." At four-thirty they fetched me – she had passed beyond.

Oh, Sister, Sister, with what unspeakable yearning did we follow you in heart into the presence of your Lord!

It is a record of a life of love, the most perfectly unselfish love we have ever known. Surely it will be to us for ever the foundation upon which our Order rests. Our first Sister to be professed on earth, our first Sister to represent us in the courts of heaven.

# 13

## OUR FATHER IN GOD

Few there are who realise how much we owe to our first chaplain and director, the Rev. Willoughby Carter, for twenty-one years vicar of St. Matthias', Earl's Court. So often interior guidance, patience, and wisdom, working in secret ways, may only find its result in a work achieved by someone else. He or she, who may be named as the founder of a society, may be conscious all the time that the one whom God primarily used to establish the work was one whose name appears very seldom in its annals.

To twelve years of such personal instruction in faith and principle therefore do we trace the foundation of all the main characteristics of the Confraternity and Order of Sisters. No one was less conscious of this than Father Carter himself; nevertheless, a clue is given in the fact, which all who knew him recognised, that his whole heart was in the movement, and that it represented to him the practical fulfilment of many of his greatest aspirations.

Ours is not the task of making any actual record of his life; we hear of him as a chorister in Salisbury Cathedral, and one speaking from knowledge of his early youth described him as always a "Sir Galahad". We have heard him speak of days, when as a layman, he fought for the Faith at St. James', Hatcham. Later, he became chaplain to Mr. Gladstone at Hawarden Castle. Then we know of him at Holy Trinity, Stroud Green, under Dr. Linklater, and at All Saints', Margaret Street, with Canon Allen Whitworth; from thence in 1901 he was transferred to St. Matthias', Earl's Court, to take the place of the saintly Mr. Davidson.

It was there that I first came into personal touch with him; it was there that almost at once his influence on our future career began. Five of our senior Sisters were being trained under him, although four of us were personally unknown to one another and only joined the Order at intervals of years apart.

What were the main characteristics of his training? Fundamentally, I would say the dependence upon God the Holy Ghost. Indisputably

his chief work was that of a confessor and director of souls; but how rarely he ever directed! How familiar to our ears were the words: "Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, dear child." How rarely would he positively advise any distinct course of action. "Let thy soul be ever open to the voice of the Divine Wisdom, let thy will be ready in response, so shall He guide thy steps." To those who were reluctant to employ their thoughts either in meditation or initiative action this method of his was often trying; but he knew no other way.

Secondly, we would place his intense conviction in the balance between the Church and the Holy Scriptures. Both were to him sacred beyond words; and in the knowledge of both subjects he was almost unique. Day after day without fail found him first of all offering or present at Mass; then if a necessary interruption must be made later in the morning, he was invariably found with his Bible outspread before him. It was impossible to ask him any question upon what he always described as the "Historic position of the Church" or upon the "Impregnable rock of Holy Scripture", which was not met with an instant and lucid reply. How humorous this colossal memory of his would appear at times; to one venturing a question upon some subject one day, he instantly replied: "Ah, Bishop ——— preached upon that very thought in ——— Cathedral in 18—; I have it here", and his hand reached down a volume from the hundreds on his shelf. Hours of research could be saved by a five minutes' interview with him and one never found him at fault.

When it came therefore to any unwarrantable departure from the oecumenical Faith, or any attempt to do away with the canonical truth or value of the Holy Scriptures, the gentleness of the man would give place to a fluency of speech which bespoke the ardour which lay beneath an apparently inviolable reserve. Thus the appeal to history was the basis of his intense repugnance to the position of the Church of Rome; he often quoted Cardinal Manning's view, that the appeal to history was treason, as illustrative of his condemnation of her system.

An amusing instance of his readiness to defend the position of the English Church was told in his presence when he was taking the chair at a meeting. He had been written to twice upon some subject by someone in his parish, and had made no reply: someone commented on this and the writer patiently remarked, "I shall write again and get a reply by return of post, for I will include a question upon the claims of Rome!" It was effective, and the story was immensely appreciated by the vicar himself.

His reverence for the sacraments marked the true type of Catholic priesthood. It was never for one instant laid aside; it could not be, for it was an integral part of his nature. All who attended his daily offering of the Mass could never forget the solemnity of the service. Yet it never exceeded by one moment the allotted half-hour. Recollection was never for an instant absent. The same consciousness of divine

mystery characterised all the other offices of the Church. The baptisms he took were times to be remembered; one felt the regenerating work of grace going on. The atmosphere in the confessional was just the same; and it was obviously for this very reason that he never encouraged any conversation during the use of that sacrament: if there were matters to speak about they were brought, if possible, at some other time. The effect of this was that no other thought intruded but the greatness of the gift of absolution and that alone remained upon the penitent's mind afterwards. Many might well ponder these words for their own guidance!

Thus it came about that Father Carter was well known only to those to whom he directly ministered: these hidden gifts of wisdom and ministerial beauty were not such as to attract those who were outside the number of his spiritual children.

His preaching was never, in late years at least, popular or attractive, save to those who were themselves accustomed to meditation. His hesitation about adopting even reasonable methods of church organisation did not serve to make the machinery of his parish run on lines of rapid advance. Whilst imbued with an overwhelming faith in the providence of God, he could never be brought to concern himself with material things: for example, on one occasion when a meeting was called to consider the grave deficit on the church schools, only half the required sum having been provided, all his agonised churchwardens could bring him to say to the assembled company was: "We have half the amount. Let us give thanks to Almighty God that we have half: it is indeed much to be thankful for!"

So also when the congregation was from various causes showing a rapid decrease, an excitable member of the church attacked him upon the need of some effort to stem the retreating tide and exclaimed hotly:

"The whole Robinson family has gone now!"

"May the Lord go with them!" murmured the Father quietly.

When the question of the Religious Life was raised, it always met with such an entire response that one wondered sometimes why he had not been called to enter that state himself. His association with it had always been very close. An aunt and both his sisters had entered the community of St. Mary, Wantage. He had himself been chaplain to the All Saints' Sisterhood and was an associate for a considerable period of St. Margaret's, East Grinstead. Yet he never even spoke of it as a vocation to a soul, until the idea had entered their own minds and they spoke to him: then it was encouraged with wisdom and enthusiasm. When therefore the foundation of our Order was believed to be a divine call, his advice was sought. Realising how full of import the proposed steps were, he would not give an approval at first, but only advised further waiting upon God: at last however when the venture had to be made, he went into every detail with the greatest

possible care and no time or thought was spared. Not that alone, but amidst all the acute persecution and opposition that arose, he remained silent and immovable in the calm certainty that if this thing was of God, it could not be overthrown.

One well-known characteristic of him was marked at such a time as that. *He never offered sympathy for any spiritual trial.* He was right, of course, but few are strong enough to bear it. To him it was such an exceeding honour to be allowed to suffer in the cause of religion, that it would have been untrue to offer sympathy for the pain. His manner would always suggest the inestimable glory! Therefore our own progress through those years of heavy trial was supported by the simple knowledge that he was there in his immense spiritual strength, never for one instant faltering in the faith that God who had begun the work would bring it to perfection. When after ten years the formal recognition of the Order was proclaimed at the Installation of the first Mother by the Lord Bishop of London, he rejoiced over every detail of that fact as no one could, who had not known every detail of the years of trial. It is not easy to forget his face of joy as he went over and over again every detail of that ceremony.

St. Matthias' Church was during all the days of his vicariate, our spiritual Home. Our novices were received in the Lady Chapel, Professions were made there and the associates were admitted to the Confraternity there. It was only after Father Carter's retirement that we had to establish a chapel and chaplaincy of our own. We had hoped that he could continue there with us, but that was not to be. It was at his desire as well as our own that the Rev. Jesse Brett was invited to come to us instead.

There is no question that although he led many into new health and strength by food reform, he himself was far too prone to making experiments upon himself; experiments that left us aghast at their wholesale character! In our opinion it was clear that in this way he entirely undermined his health and that owing to this, characteristics of mind which were always apparent and to which we have alluded began to develop rapidly. There was no moving him. Even fellow food reformers did not have the slightest influence. One could only watch experiments that surely pointed to an inevitable collapse. It was enormously tragic, the physical strength was far greater than that of the nervous system which was always very highly strung and this led to the eager and self-sacrificing way in which he gladly did everyone else's work besides his own. He was always convinced by his splendid bodily condition that he really could. The strain was felt, however, and everyone realised that all too soon the final collapse had to come.

Yet how wonderfully the providence of God ordered his latter days! When we look above our sense of personal loss, which so often blinds us to the real ordering of life, we know that the call to leave the church

which he so dearly loved came at the right time. He left before his health entirely failed, which those who knew him best were convinced was very near. He was enabled to minister to one of his dearest friends, passing through a last period of terrible suffering. Also his last year of life was spent in surroundings where every thought and deed were prompted by devoted love and care. We who loved him could not really wish it had been otherwise; at any rate one who trusted so immeasurably to the providence of God could not have been forsaken by that providence in the end.

Death to him was always a thought of glory. "The good vicar" said one old woman "is never so happy as when he is laying one of his children in the grave." There is some truth in the statement, for he always looked beyond. An oculist once told him that his eyes were focussed for infinity! We remembered that on the eve of Sister Agnes' funeral, after Solemn Vespers were over, and the congregation dispersed we returned to the church with flowers. The Father was standing at the head of the bier with a look of inexpressible love and *triumph* on his face, as he visibly rejoiced in the passing of that dear soul from her long illness into the great beyond.

"Oh, what the joy and the glory must be:  
Those endless sabbaths the blessed ones see!"

We can hear his wonderful voice ringing through the church still, utterly unconscious of any weariness in the praise of Almighty God. "Endless sabbaths" they seemed to us at times on earth, when *hours* would pass unheeded by him in the services of the church! Humour was always bubbling out where Father was concerned; no one enjoyed the humorous reminiscences more than he; but if the congregation found the services too long, it seemed to him so obvious that it must be their loss. Who could possibly be wearied of the worship of God?

Now there are no longer limitations for that most saintly soul. We follow him over in thought to the great beyond; seeing him in vision with that look upon his face that made us think of St. Ambrose as he passed by in the processions of the church. There was a light in his face, that corresponded with the silver halo that was so often seen on his head.

"Who was that priest?" we were once asked; and when we replied the rejoinder was made: "I should like to be of the same religion as he is whatever it is, if it has made him look like that."

To those who suffered in their lives and knew the strength of his ministrations, to those who were in bereavement, sickness, or in dire perplexity and who knew what it meant when the Father came – the memory will never be effaced. "A priest for ever" – that we believe should be the inscription for his tomb. So let us see him once more in his cope, passing in one of those processions unrivalled for reverence



and beauty, amid the cloud of incense and the vision of the Cross and  
let us hear the voice of the choir upraised in the words:—

“The golden evening brightens in the west,  
Soon, soon, to faithful warriors come their rest;  
Sweet is the calm of Paradise, the blest.  
Alleluia!”

## 14

### RELIGIOUS ORDERS IN THE ENGLISH CHURCH

With the revival of the Catholic Faith in the English Church came also the revival of Religious Orders, which have formed so great a feature of the Catholic Church in all times. Because there were abuses in the past in these Orders, we must not forget that they were not relatively greater than the shadows in the rest of the Church's life. Religious, however, were rendered conspicuous by their prominence and influence; the memory of their errors lives, while the sins of the laity are forgotten. The whole moral law of those times is amazing to the student; but so much that was good in religion is forgotten in the general abuse that Protestantism has hurled at the Catholicism of the past. The story of the revival of the Religious Orders in the English Church has been too often told to necessitate its repetition here; nevertheless it is one more evidence of our inherent Catholicism.

Those who oppose the life of the vows base their objections generally nowadays upon points of Rule. No severe criticism can be brought against the standard of conduct; yet the spiritual value of Religious Communities is not altogether realised. There is very little understanding of the life, possibly because there is so little understanding of the higher ways of prayer. Are we not still inclined to judge value by the measure of practical utility? This has not been wanting: quite the reverse. But it is not always understood why it is necessary to adopt a certain manner of life — one that is deemed “peculiar” — in order to give practical service. The real point is thus entirely overlooked, namely, that the life is one of personal devotion to our Lord and that service is altogether a secondary matter, although essentially emanating from the fundamental idea.

Now it is this life of devotion that is in England too little esteemed; indeed, too little *perceived*. Even our writings on mystical theology are apt to be speculative rather than experimental. Although we rejoice in the growth of knowledge concerning the Faith and in the advance of reverent practice, we are inclined to doubt whether the interior advance in our Church to-day is equal to the exterior, whether we are

realising our need of those who are set apart to travel the way of the saints and thus to counter-balance the material and utilitarian side which exists all too strongly in the life of the Church.

Now the fact is clear, that in past centuries of the Church, the Orders of men and women held a prominence and possessed an influence in the Church which was unique. Even when their powers were sometimes abused, it was recognised that they were of immense spiritual value to the Catholic Church and that the Church could not do without them. There has never been in branches of the Church which have remained true to Catholic ideals any lack of appreciation or any misconception as to their lawful constitution or status.

The early ventures in the revival of the Religious Life in England were for the most part private and self-contained; they were unsupported by ecclesiastical authority, often suspected by it and embarrassed by discouragement and in some cases opposition. These early founders looked to the ancient forms of monasticism for their guidance, but modified them and adapted them as circumstances seemed to dictate.

Difficulties had to be confronted for which the modern generation of our Church had no data. Internal divisions occurred consequent upon lack of fundamental training, which was natural enough because there was such lack of experience. Because of these difficulties, bishops tended to dispense from vows rather than to pronounce upon their validity or the limit of their obligations, and this led to laxity.

When internal difficulties did arise, who was there to pronounce upon them? When chaos arises in a nursery, we do not tell the children they are extraordinarily tiresome and that they must set themselves right or cease to exist! This, however, was precisely the way the early revival of Communities was treated. Now, thank God, matters are being handled very differently and in 1935 an Advisory Council of Religious Orders was set up, consisting of six priests elected by the Communities and six members appointed by the bishops, being "expert in questions connected with Community life" under the chairmanship of a diocesan bishop appointed by the Metropolitans of Canterbury and York. Its functions are: (1) to advise the bishops upon (a) questions arising about the charters and Rules of existing Communities, (b) the establishment of new Communities, (c) matters referred to it by a diocesan bishop, especially in regard to the regulations governing Religious Communities in the Anglican Communion, (d) any amendment that may seem to the Council to be desirable in the said regulations; and (2) to advise existing Communities with a view to their obtaining recognition, or in other matters if they so desire; (3) to give guidance to those who wish to form Communities and (4) to certify to the bishops as to Communities which have a Rule consonant with the regulations.

Nothing can be gained by hasty recognition. Communities that

have sprung into being in our own time have been too popular and have come to nought, perhaps through too much encouragement, like plants drawn up by the sun: a pinch of frost strengthens growth!

When we consider the impressiveness of the Religious Life, we need again to enquire, why has it not made a greater impress upon the church life of our times? Is there a lack of corporate as well as of individual personality? Has the aim been sufficiently definite or of a sufficiently wide scope. An internal examination of these questions may well prove us at fault. There is no doubt whatever that the great leaders of the revival had a clear vision of the *work* needing to be done by women, who through the environment of Community Life were best fitted to accomplish it. The early history of several of the larger Communities for women proved that they were able to rise to the altruism which such men as Dr. Butler and Dr. Neale expected of them. Then came the day when the Catholic revival rightly demanded clearer definitions and those definitions as affecting the Religious Life were easier to find in existing continental Rules than in a fresh vision of the same ideals. Hence perhaps error crept in with much that was sound and something of direction was lost in too introspective a view of the end of vocation. Most assuredly, there is always continuity in the history of the Church and the great marks of Catholic character are never lost, but each generation needs to interpret the experience of religion by reference to first ideals and not by the gradual obliteration of the original beauty which tends to develop down the centuries.

We may wonder if the failure of any Religious Order may be traced to its increase of self-centredness. As the Community ceases to contribute to the good of the whole Church and turns back upon itself, does it not languish in vitality? So with the individual: if there is an increase of intensive religion finding no evangelistic expression, the tendency verges towards barrenness. It may be urged that the Religious lives not for herself but for the praise of her Lord; but one may well doubt whether that praise is ever truly offered unless allied to the truth that love of God must include love of the brethren, so that the self-surrendered soul must express that self-surrender in the service of some other human soul.

That such service may be fully rendered by contemplative Orders is without doubt: prayer is a far more efficacious work than bodily activity when the prayer is an act of union with our Lord. To no one were the needs of the world more present than to the Fathers of the desert; but surely a Community cannot be healthy if it lives and works chiefly for its *own* maintenance and well-being.

Again, it has been difficult for us to be sure of our own conduct in Religion. Often in the past we have been too self-conscious and doubtful as to what is seemly for a Religious, forgetting that grace alone can beautify human conduct beyond all reproach. Roman Catholics are far more natural clothed in a habit than we are, because

they have been accustomed to have "nuns" around them all their lives. Also there has clung about us the wrong idea that human feelings and natural desires have to be repressed rather than disciplined or included in our sacrifice. When we find a Sister, as thank God we may find them, who has entered into the understanding that the Incarnation did not repress but sanctified all human aspirations and relationships, that a Religious is only set apart to be more perfectly controlled by the Man Christ Jesus, Incarnate still in His Church on earth, then we see that all self-consciousness has melted away in the joy and simplicity of a perfect human life, only perfect because linked on to the divine. To separate from human relationships is not to deny or despise them. To be free from earthly possessions is not to be blind to much that is beautiful; just as our Lord came into the world to reveal His Father in all His essential glory, so the Religious is called also to reveal the Son, making all life holier, more beautiful, more joyous in the radiating joy of those who have found their true end to be to glorify the Son, as He glorified the Father.

Thirdly, will not this spirit increase the numbers of those who shall find their vocation in the Religious Life? There is undoubtedly a strong conviction abroad to-day that there is insufficient scope for an able woman in Community ranks. The criticism carries justice with it; but surely it ought not to be the case. Repression, as we have said, was an error of past centuries. Our own especial personality was meant to be a contribution to the present generation of the Church. We are bound therefore to give every woman who seeks admission to the ranks of the Community opportunity for the development of her individuality. This does not by any means imply that discipline is to be lacking or that the vow of obedience is to be weaker to-day than it has been in the past. "The beginning of wisdom is the love of discipline." We shall never attain to any strength until we have realised how necessary it is for our self-will to be controlled, our self-love mortified, so that the higher spiritual values may be released and we become masters of ourselves. We know better now than to suppose that this is attained by a training which is little more than a tiresome irritation. We demand that there should be some recognition of psychology and breadth and sympathy in those who are chosen to hold a close control over extraordinarily precious souls.

We who believe that the highest efficiency is attained by the discipline of the Religious Life, simply because efficiency can never be great if merely intellectual and not supernatural, long to see a greater number seeking the expression of their finer aspirations where we know it may best be found.

We are bound therefore to give our minds seriously to trace out the weak places which have caused us to fail in attraction, and not to hide ourselves behind the excuse that Religious Vocation will never become popular because it is supernatural in character. Al-

though not popular – God forbid that it should ever be that! – yet it should command respect and it should represent more power; so that, apart from all other considerations, it should not be possible to state, as was stated with much truth by a well-known director: "The present Communities are not attracting the finest souls."

God knows this is not written in any spirit of criticism, but because of our own desire to learn the deepest wisdom in this all-important question. It is written because we long to see Communities drawing together in counsel and in humility, that we may together seek to establish in our branch of the Church a work which may in some not far distant day uplift all Christendom to a higher spiritual level and to an evangelising power which shall bring to men's minds the reality of the world to come, so that the things of this life may appear to them of little advantage against the value of things unseen. This may entail a more strict discipline, not a greater laxity; but it may also necessitate a reconstruction of some of our interior prejudices as to what a Religious may or may not do. We must not narrow too closely the sphere of operation to which we may yet be led by God the Holy Ghost.

# 15

## A LAST WORD

I remember receiving a letter a few days after the first office of the Confraternity had ever been said in church, on May 16th, 1913. In it the question was asked, "What do you feel about last Thursday?" My answer was: "We feel the Confraternity has started now upon its own existence and we are its servants." That feeling has increased with the years as they have passed. We humbly believe God wills the existence of this Society and we must follow where He leads.

While we reverence and honour the cloistered life of those who are set aside for prayer, we yet see a great possibility lying before such active orders as will live amongst the people, not behind high convent walls and a barred gateway with heavy locks, but with open doors of ready hospitality and with a Rule so simple that it will not repulse anyone who approaches us for help. We must cast ourselves upon God with no worldly wisdom in our selection of those whom He would lead into our ranks, nor with any consideration of what return in service they will bring to us. The love of money can be fostered within convent walls as well as in the world. We must not seek to gain, but to give according to this world's standards, if we are to find our treasure perfectly in the life beyond.

All this we see clearly and more than ever do we also perceive the necessity of quiet reality in our personal experience of prayer. In this respect our early training must greatly count. There is many a lesson we may learn from our evangelical companions in the Faith.

Prayer and the study, both intellectually and devotionally, of the Holy Scriptures must be laid as the foundations of purest gold. The Catholic who apprehends this is raised immeasurably beyond the mere formalism of party spirit and will be better prepared to attract other souls to Christ. There is room in our conception for those who can never go forth to ardent evangelistic work, but will spend all their days in prayer and study with a few additional tasks and they would bring a great treasure of wealth into the heart of any Order.

God grant the day may never come when we shall be able to answer

the question so often asked, "What is your special work?" We never want to sink into any channel which can be narrowly defined. A visitor was seeking one of our houses and asked a taxi-driver if he knew where the Sisters lived.

"Sisters", he answered, "There are all sorts o' Sisters. Which d'yer mean? There's the 'orspital Sisters, they're the other end: then there's Religiouses, there ain't none o' them down 'ere. D'yer mean the *Merciful* Sisters? Well, why didn't yer say so? Yes, I knows the *Merciful* Sisters, I knows them as well as me 'at."

Yes, the poor, the taxi-drivers, yes, and the educated people where we live, must know us, "as well as their 'at." We must work the works of God while it is day, and others must know that we are the ones to whom they may turn in every human need. Our work is to meet the human need with the expression of God's love. Where others are doing this, we can point the sufferer to them; where we must ourselves be God's instruments we must act in faith and promptitude. We can never say, "This is not our work", for who can say where God may need us next.

To purify our lives from worldliness and the reservations of conventionality will be to throw us as a new force against all the inroads of the enemy in our midst. We know this is true of the individual, it must be true of our societies too. We must begin again with new methods and new standards and new practices, which are not new at all, but only new to our immediate generation; we must turn to the early Church not only for purity of doctrine, but also for simplicity of life; for the literal dependence upon Almighty God for wisdom, guidance and the supplying of all our needs. The early Christians bore witness with such effective power because they lived as Jesus had lived, poor and single-hearted in their love, not gaining, but giving of their all; not grudging, but burning out as living flames for God.

It is the same for the Confraternity associates, you, too, should be known as being ones to whom anyone can turn in need. Are you? Or are you wrapped away from human sympathy in some dark cupboard of your own reserve or in some dark alley of personal distress. Out into the sunshine with you! Remember it is for us to prepare the way for the coming of the Lamb of God. None of us can give religion to any soul, but we all can give the sympathy of a human fellowship, for by courtesy and by readiness to help, we can prepare the hearts of others for the coming of their Lord.

At any rate let us realise that upon each one of us must rest the responsibility for gradually becoming ourselves more worthy of being witnesses for our Lord. As we one by one become enkindled in our own souls, it is certain that others will catch the flame from us. Those of us who have been in Jerusalem and have witnessed the ceremony of the Holy Fire, know that as the Easter flame is handed out from the tomb of Christ it is caught by the tapers of the pilgrim throngs, until

thousands and thousands of people are holding the flame aloft, each with his individual light. So from the one sacrifice and the death of Christ are we given the great inspiration of the Living Fire; we wait as close as we can press to His death and resurrection, then catching our own light, we pass away, into the great unknown of the future years. We go back for the period of our human life to the world, but bound henceforth, since we have received our light from such a source, never to forget to hold our torch aloft.

We remain one moment more, pen poised in hand; shall we thank those who have so generously, so faithfully upheld the Confraternity and the Order by prayer and action down the year? No; it would be taking to ourselves a right that is not ours. Their work has been given to God; it is God alone Who best knows how to bless those who give their best to Him.

Let us therefore only commit them as ever unto His most gracious keeping – for the beginning and ending of all our work is prayer. If through these years, through divers ministrations, through mutual encouragement, most of all through the humiliation of our own shortcomings we have learnt more of God ourselves and led even one other soul into the knowledge of His Love, to His own exceeding glory be all the praise, now and for ever. Amen.

In October 1963 the present bishop of Ely, our Visitor, gave his Charge to us after his first Visitation of the Order. His concluding words were, "My final word is to rejoice with so many of you over your happy recollections of the work in Australia. In almost every eye where a Sister had been stationed overseas, there came an Anzac glint as this fact was revealed. Whatever God in His mercy plans for the Community's future, the work done by the Sisters in the antipodes will remain a golden chapter in your history, justifying all Mother Elizabeth's hopes when she first started, and encouraging your Visitor to end with some of the words that preface your Rule; 'Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace'. . . ."

What was the writing in this "golden chapter"? It begins with a plea from the Governor of Western Australia and his wife, Sir William and Lady Campion, to the Mother Foundress for Sisters to come out and work with the "group settlers" of the extreme south-west of the continent. Linked with their names were those of the Reverend John Foley-Waling, who seems to have been the one to tell them of our existence, and "Brother Jim" of one of the Bush Brotherhoods, who had met some of our Sisters previously in England.

The Group Settlement Scheme, as it was known, had for its object the settling of emigrants from England after the first world war into comparatively small dairy farms. A new life under what purported to be hopeful conditions was offered. The emigrants were to be drawn from the same districts in England – hence the word "group" – they were to be trained by Australian foremen on blocks of land leased out on mortgage from the Government, and it was hoped that in two-thirds of the cases, the farms would be profitable, and the farmers would pay back their loans for land and tools, and make homes for themselves and their children. Unhappily, there was not careful enough selection of the candidates for farms, and in addition the world depression of the late 1920's wrought havoc with dairy prices, so that the scheme, as a whole, was a failure.



The loneliness of the town-dweller transplanted to the Australian bush can be easily imagined. "Bush" means forest country, perhaps stretching for fifty miles or more, pierced by tracks and primitive roads, and with an occasional clearing where the newly-settled would be housed in a "humpy" of corrugated iron. From that centre he would have to learn first to clear the bush, i.e. fell the ring-barked trees and fence his property, turn the rough undergrowth into pasture, and thence produce a dairy farm. There would have to live his women-folk and children, their nearest neighbour perhaps five miles away, with no shop except some little store, no doctor, no nearby school – and no church. Nearer or further there would be a township – the word "village" was not used – with a hospital and shops, but it could not be visited often, and then it would be in a group-cart, a wooden horse-drawn cart without springs. Yes, this was true only forty years ago.

So, at the very end of 1926, our Mother Foundress and Mother Margaret set out on a voyage of discovery to decide whether this was truly a call of God. Perhaps only those who have known and loved Australia can realise the welcome they received, from the Governor and his wife to the most struggling "groupie". And all, from the bishop (the Right Reverend Cecil Wilson) and his parish priests to the lonely but valiant farmers' wives begged them to return with Sisters to stay with them. Indeed, it was the actual tears of these last that moved our Mother so deeply, and which brought her and her companion to the conclusion, "Somehow, we *must* come."

But how? it was quite clear that we could not be a burden to the diocese, it was at that time far too poor to support us, we had no money ourselves to buy houses for convents, and we could not beg for our own needs. But through the Confraternity our needs were supplied, and the next year Mother Foundress returned to make the first foundation. It was obvious that our main house must be in the see town, and providentially the diocesan secretary decided that he wished to vacate his own, and proceeded to offer it to us at a very generous price. One associate alone gave the wherewithal to build a small but beautiful jarrahwood chapel. On March 26th, we "moved in". A little later two Sisters arrived from England to join Mother Margaret whilst Mother Foundress returned to England, and the next year two more were sent out, and the Community was able to extend itself to Margaret River, where a lovely little convent had been built for us, right in the centre of one of the biggest group settlement areas.

What did we go to do? How easy to make a list of our activities – and how dull! We did all the things that parish Sisters do. We visited the well and the sick, we conducted Sunday Schools, we taught religion in the day schools to our own Church of England children, we visited the hospitals, in the absence of the priest we were allowed under certain conditions to take services, we acted as enrolling

members of the Mothers' Union, and later, when more Sisters joined us we had a hostel for girls coming up to study at the Bunbury High School. We were able to open another convent at Busselton, halfway between Bunbury and Margaret River, and from there was conducted the "Sunday School by post", which reached children in the "out-backs", who lived long distances away from the churches.

During the course of years hundreds of children were taught this way and not only children, but mothers and sometimes even fathers, who helped them with their lessons.

As one writes, one's mind goes back to those early days in Australia with longing to be able to pass on the delight of them. The freshness of the life, the unspeakable generosity which surrounded us, despite the poverty of many, the amusement of "making-do" – almost anything could be made out of a kerosene tin and a bit of wire – the beauty of the bush, the parrots that flew overhead, the arum lilies that grew in thousands along the river, all these and much more, never lost their charm or failed to cause wonder. Of course, there was the other side, the world depression which brought farm prices down, and ruin to so many fair hopes, the materialism and ignorance which made the grasp of moral and spiritual principles so tenuous and uncertain, and the big disappointments in those whom we had tried to teach, and who seemed to forget it all when the moment of temptation came. There was so much one longed to do, too, that could not be attempted, and there were the failures in ourselves. But if the whole of the chapter was not golden, it was at least shot through with gold.

Bunbury, our first centre, was a real small town, with a mayor and council and a small church which was the pro-Cathedral. South Bunbury a mile and a half away, where our convent actually lay, was a network of straggling country roads, with its own church. It was a "small" parish – that is, it had only four churches to serve within a radius of fifteen miles from its actual parish church of St. David's.

Margaret River was vastly different. The parish at that time was a good forty-five miles north to south, and probably as much east to west. It was served by three young bush brothers about whose devotion tales still linger. There is the one, for example, of Brother Jim crawling out of his more than primitive humpy, which was distinguished from others simply by the plain wooden cross that stood beside it, and being greeted by an astonished passer-by with "Good God, are you the parson?" There were ricketing journeys in ancient cars that had been picked up from all sorts of odd places, when the Sisters seemed to be rather more off the seats than on them. There were celebrations of the Eucharist in little country schools with congregations that had probably gathered from miles around. And there were such struggles to keep tiny churches going by those to whom the depression was bringing poverty and failure, and even hunger, nearer and nearer.

And a word about those churches. They were in several cases the

result of an appeal by the Mother Foundress for gifts to build what she called "hundred pound churches". Perhaps it sounds incredible now that a church could be built for such a sum, but so it was then, and they were made possible by associates of the Confraternity, or by churches in England where such associates worshipped. They were built of the lovely native jarrah wood, they were homely and beautiful, cared for by both priests and people, true sanctuaries of God for hungry and thirsty souls.

Mother Foundress was always much in demand on her several visits to Australia. Both the bishop and the parish priests would ask her to visit the more remote parishes where she would be asked to speak to various groups up and down the country, explaining the Religious Life, explaining that we were not Roman Catholics "in disguise", or simply giving addresses. This sounds innocent enough, but it must be remembered that most of the so-called passenger trains of that time were actually goods trains with a few passenger coaches tacked on. They followed the timetable, if it can be called such, of the goods trains, which often meant travelling by night, with frequent stops anyway, by day or night, for delivery of goods and exchange of news, with the termination reached sooner or later according as the driver planned to go dancing or fishing on his arrival. "Why", Mother Margaret asked the bishop once, "must we arrive at Wagin in the middle of the night?". "Because" replied his lordship, "You can never arrive there at any other time!!" But she was also often asked to speak in the Cathedral parish. This kind of work was occasionally, and in a minor degree carried on by the Sisters.

In 1930 we were able to extend still more, and the Mary Clementina Hostel for High School girls was built, and named after its donor in England. It was the last public act of Sir William Campion to open this building, after its blessing by the bishop. In the twenty years of its life, it gave a home to about 120 girls who were studying for three or five years, and though we often felt that we failed to give them all that we should have liked to do, yet it is true that many a girl and many a parent has written to us telling of their appreciation of our efforts for them. A hostel is not an easy thing to manage well. Its inhabitants do not belong fully either to those in charge of it, nor to the world outside, and when they are young, as ours were, but are beginning their growing-up, their personalities are very much subject to internal tugs-of-war. Perhaps the best kind of testimonial is a letter received from one who was with us all her five years. "I do want to keep in touch with the Sisters, though I know I was awful sometimes." One may say that that sentiment was echoed many times.

We could not possibly mention the names of all our good friends during our time in Australia, but in addition to those who have already been written of, perhaps it would be permissible to set down those of Fr. Bertram Somner, almost our last rector at South Bunbury,

Archdeacon William Burbidge, our counsellor over so many years, Fr. C. S. Hardy, at one time rector of South Bunbury who later kept alive interest in Western Australia through the intercession leaflet which he edited for many years. Above all, we record with thanksgiving our gratitude to our chaplain, Fr. R. E. Davies, whose friendship and loyalty, coupled with a wise simplicity of counsel, meant so much to so many of us.

For the next few years after this we were at the peak of our work. Sisters had to be withdrawn because of illness or other reasons, but others were sent out. The Bush Brothers left, and then Margaret River never had more than a single priest. But it was then that after an interval the loved name of Fr. W. J. Clissold appears in connection with Margaret River. As with the Bush Brothers, tales still linger of him and of the way in which with such simplicity he taught his people the things of God. Then illness, and alas, the defection of two Sisters, reduced our numbers and the long years of war made it impossible to replace them.

Those years were indeed difficult. The Sisters carried on valiantly, heroically, according to outside testimony. Priests came and went, especially at Margaret River, but the Sisters stayed on. They were isolated from their home base in England, letters were irregular, and the threat of invasion from Japan was very real for some time. Two years after the war ended it was possible to send out two more Sisters, but as another had to come home, it became inevitable to close the Busselton house. Later the Hostel was also closed, and on looking back we can now see that though much valuable work was still done, during all that time we were fighting a losing battle. The real cause of our difficulties was lack of vocations at home. Possibly because church life was less developed in Australia, especially in the country dioceses, we had never found aspirants there, in spite of occasional hopes.

In 1957 we took our final decision, and withdrew our remaining Sisters.

This decision, though hard, was made somewhat easier by the developments in the diocese, especially in the few years before our withdrawal. It was no longer poor, transport was vastly improved, more churches had been built, the number of priests was rising again, and the government had built modern hostels for the High School. We should record also, that since our departure, a most lovely cathedral has been built and consecrated. Dedicated to St. Boniface, the patron saint, it is a glory of design and colour.

A Resolution from the Diocesan Synod, forwarded home by the then bishop, the Right Reverend Donald Redding ran thus:—

"The Synod last week passed a Resolution recording its sincere and lasting appreciation made to the work of the Church over a period of thirty years by the Sisters of the Order of St. Elizabeth of Hungary,

and it prays that God's rich blessing may rest upon the Order." He added, "I am confident that during my episcopate I shall witness much fruit from the seed which they have planted so well."

We have been pressed to return, but so long as vocations are so few it is impossible even to consider the request. But Australia will always be in our hearts, and it is true that the "Anzac" gleam is there, and for one Australian Sister to say to another, "Do you remember?" is to let loose a flood of memories which fill the heart with mingled pain and joy. How we loved it all! What a wrench it was to us to give up the beloved country and our work in it! But thanks be to God for all that He permitted us to share of the work of His kingdom there.

"Unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*" – so Our Lord said, and in His good time may He bring all that we were allowed to do to whatever mode of resurrection He sees to be good.

Sister Teresa, O.S.E.H.

# 17

## ABOUT FINANCE

In the original book entitled "Into the Deep" which was published in 1917, Mother Elizabeth wrote the following paragraph in the chapter on the Order.

"It has been thought by some, when they have witnessed the even tenor of our life, continuing day by day, that we must be fairly settled financially. If this means that it is thought by any that we have in our possession funds for the future, or a settled income either for ourselves or for the children, it is an absolute mistake. Our position is exactly the same as it was in 1913, a dependence upon God alone for the supplying of our daily bread: except that whereas we reckoned our needs in figures of ten, through the increase in our numbers to about fifty all told, we now need to reckon in hundreds. We have never yet seen one year's provision in the bank, more usually we can only see a month or so ahead; but nevertheless we have never been in need, and there has never come a quarter yet which has found us unable to pay our bills. But it must be clearly understood our needs are ever increasing; every distressing case we hasten to help, every child saved represents an addition to our expenditure. It must also be realised that the majority of those who join us give up their means of income to do so, and when a Sister possesses any money it is put absolutely into the common fund and passed on to the Confraternity if it is in need. This year the Order has contributed five hundred pounds to the support of the Children's Homes and Confraternity mission work."

You will realise from this, as also from Chapter III in the present book, that Mother Elizabeth's ideal for the Order she founded was one of absolute poverty. When she began her venture it was very much one of faith, as she had no money and nowhere to live. It was her wish that we should neither own property nor hold invested funds. As the Order developed and she realised that the care of children was to be one of its responsibilities and also that a house was needed for guests and Retreats she thought it was necessary to provide more security

by possessing property in order to have suitable accommodation. About this time, aspirants had joined the Order who possessed considerable means of their own and when eventually they surrendered their possessions, the money was used to purchase and furnish the houses necessary, a Mother House where novices could be trained, a house for guests and Retreats, and bungalows for the children. It does not seem that any money was retained for the maintenance of personnel or property and Mother Elizabeth was against insuring property if it could be avoided. The care of the children was accepted by the members of the Confraternity of the Divine Love as their responsibility as later on they accepted the financing of the missions to Australia.

Later she began to have a more cautious attitude. When I was elected as Reverend Mother in 1949, all our property was insured, although inadequately. Money had come to the Order when owing to the diminishing staff, we were no longer able to extend our work. Her policy at that time was to sell our investments as money was needed and she gave large sums to the Church overseas and other needs. Our very excellent and trusted solicitor Mr. Michael Winsor, although always sympathetic with her outlook, did advise a certain amount of caution and advocated that provision ought to be made for elderly and invalid Sisters and also, that in view of rising costs, money should be kept for the maintenance of our property. However, the clause still remained in the Constitution that "The Order shall not retain in its possession any invested funds". What could we do about that? We had long consultations with Mr. Winsor and finally, he suggested that all the investments should be sold out and the money placed in a deposit fund with the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England. He thought that this would bring us more into line with our first principles. This was accepted as a reasonable means of placing money in safe keeping until we could be more sure of God's will for us. It could easily be withdrawn if necessary. In the meantime the interest is used for our upkeep and the maintenance of our property. The interest from this deposit fund is, of course, not comparable with that paid by ordinary commercial undertakings which are still forbidden to us. In 1963 an amendment was added to the foregoing clause in the Constitution and passed by Chapter and now reads "The Order shall not retain in its possession any invested funds other than those provided by the Order's deposit fund with the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England."

The Bishop of Ely, who as Suffragan Bishop of Kensington became our Visitor in 1961, approved of this measure, although as we talked it over with him very fully, he realised, as we did, that it was causing a good deal of tension in the Order. However, as we look back, we can appreciate the fact that we have learned to live with the tension and it has deepened and strengthened the ties between us. We are all still

waiting upon God's will in spite of differing opinions, and we pray that we may have the faith and courage to act upon it when it becomes clear. Dear Mother Elizabeth was a woman of vision. She could see much further than we can at this present time. All Religious Communities pass through a similar experience of the first exciting days when the ideals of the founders are put into practice and ventures of faith are made. After this follows a period which our Visitor compared with the sub-apostolic age when it becomes the duty of the Community to try to ensure stability and continuity. We are passing through such a time and can only see the next step and must leave the more distant future to the over-ruling providence of God. He knows what the future holds – we do not. We are caught up with all other Religious Communities in all branches of the Church, as with the Church itself, in the "wind of change". We have to examine all our traditions, and re-assess all our values, and distinguish between the things we must hold on to at all cost, and those which are completely unnecessary and irrelevant to the time in which we have to live, and which we should be prepared to give up. We believe that the Holy Spirit is working very powerfully within the Church and perhaps we have more need than at any other time of our Confraternity prayer, "Baptise us O God with the Holy Ghost and kindle in our hearts the fire of Thy love. Amen."

Angela Reverend Mother, O.S.E.H., since June 1949