

**History
of the
Congregation
of
Bon Secours of Paris**

**History
of the
Congregation
of
Bon Secours of Paris**

1824—1902

by the author of "Allons au Ciel"

Translated from the French
on the occasion of
the Centenary of the Foundation of

THE PROVINCE
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Translated by Sister Theresa Marie Hoguet, C.B.S.

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From my infancy, mercy grew up with
me . . . I was an eye to the blind,
and a foot to the lame.

Job, 31:18, 29:15.

. . . it was I who chose you to go
forth and bear fruit. Your fruit
must endure.
John 15:16.

Acknowledgements

"I continually thank my God for you because of the favor he has bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, in whom you have been richly endowed with every gift of speech and knowledge."

1 Corinthians 1:4,5.

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Table of Contents

Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Table of Contents.	ix
Preface to the French Edition	xiii
List of Illustrations	xv
Approbation Given to the French Edition	xvii
Translator's Preface	xix
Foreword	xxi

Chapters

I	General Considerations	1
II	The Trial of Sickness.	7
III	The Beginnings of Bon Secours 1821—1824	13
IV	The Government of Mother Potel 1821—1826	23
V	Reverend Mother Geay 1826—1830	33
VI	The Foundation at Boulogne The Cholera The Providence Orphanage 1830—1833	39

VII	Purchase of Hotel de Pons Deaths of Father Desjardins and Father de Pierre Lille's Free Schools Entrusted to the Sisters of Bon Secours 1833—1836	53
VIII	Death of Archbishop de Quelen Building of the Mother House Chapel 1836—1845	59
IX	Foundation at Abbeville Focus on Lille 1845—1846	71
X	The Field Hospital at Tuileries The Foundation at Orléans Death of King Louis Philippe 1848—1850	81
XI	The Last Ten Years of Mère Geay's Government 1850—1860	95
XII	Mère Geay's Last Illness and Death Mother St. Cecile's Election 1860—1861	115
XIII	The Foundation at Dublin 1861—1863	131
XIV	The Foundation at Rozoy Cardinal Morlot's Death Sister St. Fulgence is Named Assistant Mistress of Novices The Foundation at Roubaix 1861—1863	143
XV	Laudatory Brief—1864	155
XVI	Death of Mother St. Marianne Mother St. Félicité is Named Superior at Rozoy Conversions Brought About by Her The Foundations at Quimper and Morlaix 1865—1866	161
XVII	Cholera Epidemic Providence Orphanage Foundation at Cork 1866—1867	177

XVIII	A Glance at Boulogne, Lille and Orléans Father Morel's Death General Elections Foundation at Lorient 1869—1870	187
XIX	The War of 1870 The Field Hospitals Providence Orphanage The Commune Conversions 1870—1871	193
	The Illustrations	0
XX	The Foundation at London 1870—1871	215
XXI	A Painful Trial Overtakes the Institute The Foundation at Belfast Development of the Cork and London Communities 1871—1874	227
XXII	The Revision of the Constitutions Resignation of Mother St. Cecile Election of Mother St. Beatrix Definitive Approbation of the Institute Death of the Superior General Election of Mother St. Fulgence 1874—1877	243
XXIII	The Constitutions.	255
XXIV	Focus on Lille and the Providence Orphanage 1877—1879	261
XXV	Development of the Houses at Cork and Belfast Foundation at Tralee 1878—1880	271
XXVI	Mother St. Mathieu at Abbeville Death of Father Germain General Chapter of 1880 Liacization of the Schools at Lille 1880—1881	281
XXVII	The Foundation at Baltimore—1881.	297

XXVIII	Expropriation of the Convents at Quimper and Roubaix Mother St. Fulgence's First Voyage to Baltimore Events During the Crossing and the Return Inauguration of the Baltimore Convent 1881—1882	315
XXIX	The Foundation at Pont-de-Gennes Mother St. Fulgence's Second Voyage to Baltimore Mother Mary Alice at Tralee 1882—1885	325
XXX	The Superiors' Retreat in 1885 The Distinguishing Traits of Mother Fulgence's Assistants The Trial Endured by the Congregation by the Loss of Several Outstanding Religious 1865—1886	337
XXXI	The Foundation at Morlaix The Superior General's Journey to Rome Her Third Voyage to Baltimore Mother St. Ferdinand's Death 1887—1889	347
XXXII	The Foundation at Lens — 1891—1897	365
XXXIII	The Foundation at Eu and Arras — 1895—1899....	375
XXXIV	How the Sisters of Bon Secours Die	381
XXXV	The Last Years of Mother St. Fulgence's Life 1896—1902	391
Supplement	A Few Remarkable Conversions Due to the Zeal of the Sisters of Bon Secours	401
	The Foundation at Washington.....	427
Appendix.....		429
Footnotes		431

Preface of the French Edition

The study of souls and the splendid accomplishment brought about by their actions has always been considered a joy of the highest order. According to Lacordaire, it is a real delight for a priest, and for the writer who has consecrated his pen to God's service it is also a great happiness.

We are pleased to say that this joy has been given to us in large measure while we were writing the history of Bon Secours, because, we probed the Congregation's edifying past, we experienced intimate contact with souls who were living, active and very full of God. We publicly wish to thank the Author of every good gift for this grace.

Have we succeeded in unfolding and exposing to the light the moral beauty and depth of those souls so that the reader can share our joy and experience our impressions? That is our greatest desire and we entrust it to the *One who gives increase to everything* and Who can alone make it happen.

These humble women had been sent to the bedside of the sick through a vocation which was completely new to the Church at the beginning of the 19th Century. The veil which hides their interior life is lifted somehow as they give real comfort to the needy. When the sentiments of these Sisters are analyzed, the extent of their self denial admired and their influence acknowledged, a truth which suffering and discouraged souls understand so little, is once more touched and experienced. It is this: that a Christian is a force and a light, and that no human power or Satanic ingenuity will be capable of undoing that force or extinguishing that light.

Although the Sectarrians have tried to destroy that work by trickery and terrible violence, and even should they be able to succeed in devastating all the cloisters and in closing all the churches, their plans would be crushed as long as there are hearts inflamed with Divine charity and willing to do battle in the midst of an indifferent society; as long as some apostles will go

to the blind and the lame by the same path which the Son of God followed in order to become a man: abnegation, humility and dedication.

In society, these apostles may appear to be only seeds and sparks, but who does not know the power that exists in the germination of a seed; who does not know that a tiny spark can light a fire? The Sisters of Bon Secours, whose physiognomy we have tried to bring to life again, seem to possess everything that is necessary for the moral success and fecundity of God's work and which stops, paralyses and destroys Satan's work. In reality, each of those holy religious in their simplicity was a seed and a spark.

Imperfect though the tracing may be, this portrait of their lives was etched in order to attract other persons to follow them, to encourage the fainthearted and to strengthen the weak. Their life's work consisted in devoting themselves completely to suffering humanity and to prayer so that heaven's benefits would be called down upon the sick and afflicted. They went into hovels and palaces, into the sumptuous dwellings of the rich and the shacks of the poor. They brought with them and spread all around them that mysterious power and attractive compassion which was so consoling to the afflicted. The accounts of the Sisters' great distress when alone with the dying at night is very impressive as they cried to God and refused to be comforted until some sign of pardon had been secured from the depths of Divine mercy for the sinner who otherwise would have gone into eternity unrepentant.

It was a real duty to draw such lives from oblivion; it was also a much needed protest, at this particular time, when the religious habit is exposed to all kinds of insults. It is good for the whole world to know the vision of faith, holiness of thought and height of aspirations upon which these Congregations have been founded and developed as they came into being in the wake of such blind hatred. It also must be said that the faith has been reduced to such a state in our day that the presence of a spouse of Christ in the midst of a family tried by sickness no longer inspires the same sentiments or provokes the same respect of former times. These tendencies can be explained, to a certain extent, by the profound and continued changes which have taken place in society over the last fifty years; but isn't it needful to react against them?

We shall be happy to have been able to show that, in spite of apparent defects, Holy Mother Church continues to march across the centuries, aglow with the charity of her consecrated women; and that, by multiple manifestations and creative expressions of that charity, she alone can cure a society that is ravaged by egoism and sensuality and finally resolve those social questions which are so troubling and complex. The future belongs to her, no matter what is said or done, because no human hand is powerful enough to tarnish or corrupt the source which gives life and fecundity to her energies.

List of Illustrations

Statue of Our Lady of Bon Secours in the Mother House Chapel, Paris
Hyacinthe Louis de Quelen, Founder of the Congregation of Bon Secours,
Archbishop of Paris, 1821-1839
Stained Glass Window, Profession Ceremony January 24, 1824
Father Desjardins, Vicar General of Paris
Father de Pierre, Pastor of St. Sulpice in Paris
Tribute to Mother Potel
Mère Geay, Second Superior General
Sanctuary of the Bon Secours Mother House Chapel, Paris
Mother St. Cecile, Third Superior General
Bishop Maguire, Prelate to His Holiness Leo XIII, Ecclesiastical Superior of
the Sisters of Bon Secours in Cork
His Eminence Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster.
Mother St. Beatrix, Fourth Superior General
Mother St. Fulgence, Fifth Superior General
His Eminence James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore
Father Magnien, S. S., Vicar General of Baltimore, Superior of St. Mary's
Seminary, Baltimore
Reverend Father Germain, S. M.
Mother St. Ferdinand, First Superior in Baltimore
Mother House of the Sisters of Bon Secours, Paris, and a View of the Garden
Bon Secours Provincial House, Cork, Ireland
Bon Secours Provincial House, London, England
Original Convent, 2000 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore
Bon Secours Hospital, Cork, Ireland
Original Bon Secours Hospital, Baltimore
Flag of Our Lady of Bon Secours

Approbation

given to the French Edition

I was very interested and edified as I read the proof sheets of *L' Histoire du Bon Secours* which you propose to publish. I not only authorize its publication, but I sincerely congratulate you.

The style is both refined and elegant, and you have understood and faithfully reproduced the true physiognomy of a Congregation which is nearly a century old and is entirely Parisian in its origin. The entire institute will always be indebted to you for having given them a souvenir of the past which I shall call the "livre de famille" or "family book". It will serve as a powerful source of encouragement in the years to come to preserve the spirit and traditions which have been the cause of the Institute's prosperity up to the present time.

The persons who read these pages will soon abandon the idea, which unfortunately is too prevalent, that the Sisters of Bon Secours devote themselves exclusively to nursing in families of the well-to-do class, when on the contrary, they have always been outstanding in their devotion to the poor and rich alike.

Besides, when reading your book, in which piety is attractive, there may be some who through God's grace will find a vocation revealed therein to the service of Jesus Christ's suffering members.

May it please Divine Providence to grant you this happiness in compensation for the labor that this History has cost you without diminishing in any way the reward that God reserves for all work that is undertaken for His glory.

G. Lefebvre, Vicar General,
Superior of Bon Secours.

Translator's Preface

The reader is asked to keep in mind that fidelity to the author's message has been adhered to as much as possible, thus most of the language used is as the author wrote it. Naturally, this reflects the theology and culture of the 19th Century in France. Only occasionally did I render it more modern than it was originally written.

A copy of "Allons au Ciel" has at last been located. The author's name is Cardinal Bona. It has been ascertained that many of the letters to which he refers as his sources are no longer in existence.

Foreword

This combined translation of the two volumes of the History of the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris from the French is a work prompted by the desire that non-French speaking members of Bon Secours be able to reflect on the beginnings of our Congregation to more fully understand our Charism and Mission. The translation is an expression of commitment to our Mission—a steadfast determination to remain faithful to it as we move into the future in a world so in need of “the love of the Father present in the Sister of Bon Secours,” a world in need of the healing, consoling, loving Christ.

On the occasion of the Centenary of our foundation (1881-1981), the United States Province is bringing the written history of the Sisters of Bon Secours in the United States up to the present. It is our hope that when each Province has done this we will provide the Sisters and friends of Bon Secours with a complete history of our Congregation.

Sister Justine Cyr
Provincial

Chapter I

General Considerations

The beginnings of the 19th Century present a singularly instructive spectacle to those who consider everything with the eyes of Faith. A powerful ferment was at work in souls and had urged them on to rebuild what had been destroyed by history's recent and annoying disruption. At the same time, godlessness did not acknowledge itself as vanquished, and defended its conquered territory inch by inch.

Over and above this battle between good and evil, truth and error, there hovers a mercy that is comparable to that grace of election which had made France a chosen nation. Once more it is proven that *"the gifts of GOD are irrevocable"*.¹

When that jewel and pride of the forest, the ancient, majestic oak is struck by the storm, the trunk, though mutilated by lightning, retains that generous sap which will only wait for the energy of a new springtime to burst forth again. Little by little the bare branches will be covered with fresh leaves, and as the new, vigorous growth increases, it gives the stricken oak a crown even more beautiful than the one it had lost.

This is a good image of Catholicism in France after the Revolution. The storm, and what a storm, had passed. It had struck and mutilated the superb oak whose branches had nourished foreign nations and many times had the honor of protecting the See of Peter with its shadow. Until then the ill effects of the times and the efforts of hell had been incapable of any success, and even if the religious wars shook its high point and detached a few branches, they were not able to disturb its base or diminish its splendor.

However, little by little, burning winds and dull rumblings warned of the advent of the new tempest. First there was Jansenism. Its desiccating doctrines came to substitute the spirit of fear for that of love, and limited the horizons of hope. Next came the encyclopedists of vain sophisms. Those sneering philosophers worked to plant doubt in souls, and, by a system of negation, prepared and hastened the disintegration of the religious and social order.

The Sectarrians accomplished the work of ill omen that they had plotted. These enemies of God clapped their hands because what they had dreamed of destroying appeared to be destroyed and the guardian angels of France wept over the accumulated ruins. Alas! It is only too true; the tree is mutilated and only the blackened trunk remains, but its roots continue to grow ever deeper in the French soil. Who then will tear them out? The life giving water of the baptistry in Rheims nourishes them and makes them fruitful. Who will dry them up?

No, Catholicism in France will not be conquered as it was in neighboring countries. Christ will not let a schism exist between Him and this people whom He loved in preference to all others; He will find new remedies against evil in His reserves of love. His heart will know how to accomplish that "new redemption" promised to St. Margaret Mary in favor of France, that ungrateful nation to whom He had irrevocably given His Heart.

That is why, at the beginning of the 19th century, we see that magnificent flowering of new or renewed works which are like elements of regeneration in the midst of innumerable ruins. "This rebirth of Catholicism which followed the overturning of the altars is one of the greatest marvels of history. When God has not condemned the people, He knows how to bring about good which more than exceeds the evil."²

The Concordat gave religious liberty back to France, and people, finding themselves released from the nightmare which had obsessed them, were able once more to breathe a more peaceful atmosphere. Little by little most of the Religious Orders were re-established, but their members, who had escaped the scaffold, had been scattered by the Revolution. Once reunited, they revived the ancient Rules. However, new times demand new institutions, and thus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, numerous Congregations sprang up to work for the good of souls. Hervé Bazin said: "In this work of religious restoration women have played an outstanding role." Truly, they were instruments chosen by God to participate in the rebuilding of the nation. Today we recall this in order to render them a just homage. "Oh! who will tell us the works of these humble women who have applied themselves to the instruction of the children and the relief of human suffering since the time of the Terror and the Directory! What poet will sing of the thousands of virgins who advance before the Lamb with palms of prayer, apostolate

and charity in order to repair the outrages done against Divinity by modern rationalism.”³

The teaching and education of the young was the primary work of the new foundations which sprang up after the Revolution. Indeed, the most urgent need of that moment was the religious instruction of the children which had been so neglected since 1789. Many Congregations worked toward the noble goal of forming that generation which had been born in the midst of the overthrow of all institutions: the Madames of the Sacred Heart under the impulse of Mother Barat, the Sisters of St. Clotilde, the Religious of St. Joseph of Cluny, the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary and many others.

As to the poor, they had found the Daughters of Charity at their posts again and with them were all the helpers that Christian devotion had brought forth. They imitated and emulated that vast army of holy women who came to relieve the people, dress their wounds and teach them to love Jesus Christ.

However, a void remained that needed to be filled. It was, in part, the result of the profound transformations that had been made in all institutions and which had had their repercussions in the family. The children again found teachers to help them know God, the indigent again found the Daughters of Charity to relieve their material needs, but, in a certain sense, the sick of all classes, and above all the upperclasses who were often very poor in what is truly of value, remained outside this life giving current which brought the flow of grace to souls.

The trial of sickness requires a special help that is full of compassion and tenderness and patience. This help should consist not only in dexterity and a knowledge of remedies, but it should draw its strength and goodness from a principle that is higher and completely supernatural. However, Holy Church has not yet drawn out of *her heart's benificent treasures* the means to help supernaturalize and ease this trial which is formidable because, so often, it is the doorway to eternity.

Several centuries earlier, St. Francis de Sales had already verified and deplored this deficiency in the vast field of good works and he had conceived the founding of the Institute of the Visitation. His first plan had been to create an order which united the active and contemplative life and whose members would visit the sick and poor. However, he had to abandon this project at that time because public opinion was not ready to accept seeing religious outside their cloister.

These prejudices did not exist in the same degree in other countries. In the 14th Century an institution of this kind was founded in Belgium. Some religious, called *Black Sisters*, were received in the capital of the Duchy of Brabant in 1350 under John III's reign; their mission was to give assistance to

the sick. In 1458 Pope Pius II gave them the rule of St. Augustine and blessed their undertakings.

Vincent de Paul's holy audacity, however, would triumph over public opinion in France. Carrying out the thoughts of the holy Bishop of Geneva, he sent religious into the world to do God's work and assigned "the houses of the sick as monasteries, modesty as a veil, mercy as a sister, obedience as a cloister, the fear of God as a grille and the consolation of drying tears as all the joy on earth." The poor had been provided for; then, when sickness or infirmity overtook them, they were given shelter in one of the hostels which were provided by the Religious and where everything necessary for body and soul had been supplied. If they were unable to come, then a Daughter of Charity visited them in their own homes. Despite the divine compassion which animated them, actually, the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul could only visit the homes of the poor in passing, because the number of those in need was so great. When their white cornette no longer brightened those rooms filled with pain, then the isolation of the suffering, unfortunate persons seemed even more cruel. To make the work of mercy complete, the poor patients needed continuous care that would not be interrupted at night which is a most difficult time for the sick. That this benefit was made available to them is due to the generous initiative of the Institute about which we are writing. Their example has stimulated many to imitate them.

Besides the poor and indigent, there are those other people who are envied by the world which considers them happy because they possess all that the world can give them. In spite of their possessions, or maybe even because of them, these people find themselves feeble and defenseless in the face of trials. Who will go to visit them and surround them with devoted care when sickness tightens its hold? Who will give them spiritual help when they find themselves at the door of the tomb? *Man does not live by bread alone*⁴ and there are other sufferings besides that of the poor who are hungry.

After the Revolution, the need that had already been expressed by St. Francis de Sales became felt even more. The poison of new ideas and the general indifference, the unfortunate conditions of emigration and the upheaval that had been created by the wars of the Empire had disrupted the family and broken its ties. That vital force which was its grandeur in the centuries past was lost.

Indeed, the great plan of God "from whom all proceeds and toward whom all tends"⁵ was preserved in the family in times past. Likewise, God was invoked before all acts of public life, so He was seen presiding over all acts of domestic life as well; its joys and its sorrows. Thus, when sickness came to a house it was received as a visit of the Lord, and, when death approached, it was very simply prepared for, as Christians do.

In the book, *Livres de Raison*, which was brought to light by Canon de Ribbes, we find expressed the very core and intimate thoughts and secrets of their lives. It is difficult to know whether to admire the profound simplicity or the ancient faith of these people, but we do know that they feared neither the disease nor the passage from time to eternity.

After the Revolution, however, all was changed. Society became estranged from religious practices and had an urgent need of renewal. More than ever before God needed witnesses and apostles in the midst of this world, not only in public meetings and schools, but also in the very intimacy of the home and at the bedside of the dying.

The Holy Spirit was going to raise up this witness, this apostle in the form of an angel of charity. It would be the Sister Nurse, the *Sister of Bon Secours*. She would work in the midst of and close to the disinherited of this world and those of greater means, and she would speak to them of God by the living sermon of her example and abnegation.

Together with Bishop Bougaud, let us admire the appropriateness of the hour, the order, the progress and the harmony with the times in which each Religious Congregation appeared to do God's work. "Under this holy germination a hidden spirit which determines each Order's moment and hour is sensed, unless you fail to see the incessant work of love. This love is never satisfied, not even with its most beautiful creations, but is constantly on the lookout for the needs, dangers and sufferings of humanity, so as to find an occasion to outdo itself. This is a magnificent spectacle which is only seen in the Catholic Church and which proves that this love is not only unchangeable and invincible, but also progressive and living."⁶

It was not without hesitation that some Religious decided to brave public opinion and dedicate themselves in the world to the care of the sick; where their only safeguard would be their modesty and where God alone would oversee their action. The world was also astonished to see them begin this new ministry and dared to make themselves *All things to all people*.

The future was entrusted with the task of refuting all of the objections and proving the appropriateness of the foundation of the *Sisters of Bon Secours*—their beneficent influence and their providential place in the elements of renewal. . . . A Century's experience has clearly demonstrated that the work begun in 1824 was willed by God. Furthermore, similar Congregations did not delay in forming themselves on this first model, and they give ample testimony of how desirable this type of institution was and how much it was needed.

Chapter II

The Trial of Sickness

To go back in time to the origin of a Congregation in order to throw light on its beginnings, register its progress and enumerate its works is not an invitation to its members to fall into a feeling of pride, no matter how legitimate it may be. It is, first of all, an act of gratitude to Him *from whom every excellent gift proceeds*, but it is also an act of foresight and wisdom. Today, when minds are seized by a madness which is strongly fascinated by the present, it is useful to permanently establish the history of Religious Societies which are the glory of the past. The elements which concern their birth and progress should be recorded, so that their future members will be aware of what God has done for those who were called first, and, also in what circumstances and for what reasons He had decided to choose them. We are writing this book uniquely for that reason. We hope that it will be a *family book* for the *Sisters of Bon Secours* in which they will rediscover the spirit of their Constitutions and the treasures of piety and holiness that have been accumulated by their predecessors.

First of all it is necessary to stop an instant and really look at that painful and complex trial which is the reason for their mission, if we are truly to understand the role of these humble and simple Religious.

Much has been said about the dignity of the poor, and certainly no one better merits commiseration, sympathy and respect. This is true above all when, nourished by Christian piety, they force themselves to accept the will of God and submit to Him in their painful privations and difficult work. The sick person is a being who is made holy by pain because it makes him like the

Divine Patient, *the man of sorrows*. The Saints thought like that, and, guided by that view of faith, historians have recorded that they surrounded the sick with delicate charity. What touching compassion and inexpressible goodness we see Our Lord Jesus Christ extend to the sick in the Gospel!

Isn't it remarkable and doesn't it also evoke a sense of gratitude that our Savior came into the world to save our souls, and that, during His public life He showed such tender and deep concern for the infirm, the sick and all who were physically afflicted? When *he went about doing good*;⁷ wasn't this good very often done for a perishable body? When He sows this goodness along His path, doesn't it often consist above all in cures—giving hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind and the ability to move to the paralytics? Without doubt, our Savior's plan in performing these miracles was to prove His power and reaffirm the people's faith in His divine mission. These cures were but another image of the marvelous changes brought about in souls by that grace which flows from Christ's wounds. It is true, nonetheless, that the infinitely compassionate heart of the God-Man responded with immense compassion at the sight of the many evils which afflict humanity and which are the wages of sin.⁸

The trial of sickness is unquestionably the most bitter fruit of that death to which men were condemned when they were put out of the garden of paradise. In all of the other trials which may touch their hearts or souls or material possessions, they remain on their feet, and retain the power to react and struggle; and, if their souls are really strong, they may even know how to embrace the trial and at times overcome it.

What does sickness do to a person? It makes them beings who know only how to suffer and to twist and turn on beds of pain, without energy or willpower, and whose only desire is to find relief and whose only horizon is that fiery circle with which the severity of the illness and fever surround them. No matter what their strength, abilities, moral greatness or pride may have been, in that hour they have met their master. If they are wise they will take advantage of the occasion and look at themselves as they really are in relation to God.

Perreyve writes: "Who does not know of the soul who approaches death intoxicated by the pleasures and preoccupations of life? The act by which Divine Providence takes man out of the current of life is a very great and choice grace. It puts him apart for a little while and places him in the presence of God whom he hardly knows, of his own soul which he knows even less and of suffering which knows so well how to draw the body to the soul and the soul to God."

Who will hold out a helping hand to these poor patients to help them transform this passing evil into good for eternity? Who will help them to change this bitter cup into a life giving drink and cultivate this incompar-

ably rich treasure? Who has not experienced the terrible disruption into which a family can be thrown by the sickness of one of its members? The routine of daily life is interrupted: the groans of the loved one which re-echo in all hearts, the seemingly endless wait for the doctor and the anxiety to scrupulously carry out all his orders, the terrible fatigue, the long vigils and the alternating fear and hope; all of these cause a moral exhaustion which depletes the energy of the entire household and which drives all supernatural thoughts from the mind.

How dangerous is that misunderstood and too human tenderness which so often surrounds the patient! For fear of frightening or troubling them, they are deluded with false hopes, deprived of the helps needed by the soul, and sometimes, they are even allowed to die without being provided with the means of reconciling themselves with God. What a misfortune for those who leave and what a responsibility, what bitter regrets for those who remain!

At the time willed by Him, God gave help to the mothers and spouses who had exhausted themselves in nursing their loved ones. He did this to prevent a very real evil and to remedy a very pressing need. To alleviate this terrible and often decisive trial our Lord raised up visible angels who would be messengers of His charity. Their hearts were full of a divine kindness and they brought help—*all kinds of help*—to the poor patients as well as relief and peace to their troubled homes.

These visible angels are the Nursing Sisters with the white bonnets and the calm, kind faces. Just the sight of them brings relief and comfort.

It requires a religious in order to worthily fulfill such functions and also to be an element of life and salutary influence for a family that has been visited by this trial. It needs the heart of a woman who is aware of her sexuality, who has recognized its beauty and goodness and has solemnly consecrated it to God so as to carry out her devoted and self-sacrificing mission. Her soul must have the liberty of God in order to be free to accomplish all the tasks which may flow from such a ministry. Her hands must be consecrated in order to give care that is sometimes so delicate and often quite repugnant. They will “*help the poor sufferer on his bed of pain*”⁹ and offer that soothing remedy or bitter drink with prudence and discernment.

“One of Christian charity’s most successful inspirations,” says a Catholic writer,¹⁰ “has been to replace those mercenary helpers, whom the family sometimes called to the bedside as guardians of the sick, with these women who are after God’s own heart and whose motives are entirely supernatural. The sick person is often irritable, and impatient, and unjust. He wants something and then he doesn’t want it; he demands it and refuses it. No matter what he is given, he is unhappy because no one is able to obtain what he really wants—his health.”

The same writer continues: "Who will have an understanding compassion for these sick persons, these angry children who lack childhood's charm and anger others, these captives of pain whose nights bring no sleep, daylight no brightness, springtime no greening and around whose beds fever, delirium and suffering watch like birds of prey? Who will share their pain and sorrow if not those who love them, their mothers and fathers, their close relatives and friends and the kindly religious called *Sister*? Isn't that name itself already a consolation for those who need the arms, eyes and patience of that visible angel?

Look at the Sister of Bon Secours at the bedside of those who suffer. She watches carefully over her patient's sleep and waits for them to waken, for she is concerned that they receive the medications that have been ordered. They have no need to call or awaken her for she is there—always there with eyes, ears and heart alert and attentive like a guard on watch at the foot of Christ's cross or a brave soldier before his flag. Today, she might be in a sumptuous hotel and, though honored and esteemed, remains nonetheless humble; tomorrow, she may be in an attic room and, though sometimes treated harshly, remains nonetheless gentle and eager to serve. She goes where suffering is, and when it goes away, she does, too."

These same thoughts are found again in the words dedicated to those daughters of Mère Geay, the Sister of Bon Secours of Paris, by Baron Augustine Cauchy, who was a member of the Academy of Science. He wrote: "What services have the Sisters of Bon Secours not given to those who have been saved by them! Their untiring zeal is powerful in driving out illness and soothing pain because it has the spirit of sacrifice as its principle. This spirit motivates all of the Sisters' thoughts and actions and is a treasure which they mutually possess. Occasions of sacrifice arise at every hour of every day. They are often not noticed, but sometimes they become the subject of criticism by those very persons for whom they are being made. These acts can only be accomplished by members of Religious Societies who should be considered as Heaven's most beautiful gift to the earth. How can a single Daughter of St. Vincent de Paul or a Sister of Bon Secours be successfully formed without evangelical perfection—with the Gospel or the Cross?"

Is it not her union with Jesus Christ which makes the Religious capable of complete detachment, a patience which nothing can weary, an industrious charity which inspires all her delicacy and tact and a zeal which urges her to speak at the opportune moment? She suggest holy thoughts and explores supernatural horizons with those for whom she is caring and she is concerned that God have a place in the soul which may appear before Him at any moment. She has seen people suffer and she has seen them die. She uses that mysterious word which enlightens and relieves and she knows

how to apply an exquisite balm of consolation to all kinds of wounds. The Sister becomes a helper, not only to the family and the doctor, but also to the priest and to the workings of grace. She does this by her words and her prayers which rise from her soul like a flame while her hands are at work.

The Sisters of Bon Secours can justly apply to themselves this homage given by Bishop Gay to all religious who work in the world. *"What can I say to you? You climb the heights of the holy mountain and, at the same time, you live in a very ordinary way in the valley with the people, with the crowd. Because man's miseries and needs are so numerous, you wish to establish an army. Those who contemplate are holiness: those who teach are light. You, you are mercy. All three are love: all three are a form of Jesus. All three are Jesus. One is the blood of His heart, another is the light of His eyes. You, you are the blessings of His hands. . . . In relieving the body you open souls to God. You are precursors and, like John the Baptist, you go before the face of Him who is to come. . . . O beautiful life! Sweet task!"*¹¹

These words were written by a learned and holy Bishop who was a master in the spiritual life and they admirably sum up the mission of the Sisters of Bon Secours. In the chapters which follow, therefore, we have only to demonstrate how well these faithful spouses of Jesus Christ attain this ideal, and to prove that the charity, compassion and all the virtues which should trace out His divine resemblance in them are drawn from the Heart of their Master.

Chapter III

The Beginnings of Bon Secours

1821—1824

We read, in Mr. Migne's work on the Religious Orders in France, that the first attempt of establishing Nursing Sisters took place in 1821.

A woman of the world, who was endowed with great intelligence and energy, tried to make a reality of a project which she had kept alive in her heart for a long time. She wanted to establish a group of women who would devote themselves to the care of the sick and who would agree to perform that charitable work in the midst of the family. Madam de Montale, as she was called, gathered together several persons whose piety and ability made them seem suitable for this undertaking; this was done in a building on Rue de Bac.

Great hopes were conveyed concerning this Association which responded so well to society's needs. In spite of this, the first attempt did not succeed. As far as the records permit us to judge, Madam de Montale's motives for founding this group were neither spiritual nor unselfish. Her thoughts seemed to be inspired by self satisfaction more than by charity and, though her helpers wanted a religious life, she would not even consider being subject to the jurisdiction of Holy Mother Church. She also did not have the grace that was needed to withstand the trials that are an intrinsic part of the beginnings of any work that is to contribute to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Certain circumstances, which it is difficult for us to appreciate today, made it necessary for her to abandon the project. She disappeared and her companions went their separate ways. Who has not had the experience of God intervening in such situations? Very often when He destroys something which creatures have themselves established, it is because He himself wants to build something—to construct an edifice which has a solid base and is in a condition that is able to stand up to the test of time.

The persons who had put themselves under Madam de Montale's leadership had understood that God had bestowed a great honor on them by entrusting this very holy but difficult task to them. Her desertion was a source of deep sorrow, but all of them did not accept this apparent defeat. Several of the women persevered in their original plan and continued to devote themselves completely to the care of the sick.

A number of the original companions came together again and, in a small, modest apartment on Rue de Cassette, the future Institute's cradle took form. These pious women spontaneously put themselves under the direction of Josephine Potel. She emerged from the group as the one who was the most capable and worthy to guide them according to the spirit of God.

The story of these humble beginnings could be summarized in three words: humility, poverty and charity. Thus the roots of this new Congregation were planted in the fruitful soil of the virtues which are the Religious Orders' source of life. The house on Rue de Cassette was truly a Bethlehem. Many inconveniences and hardships awaited them on their return after the fatigue and work of the day, but God's love and charity motivated them and made these burdens easier to bear.

Under such conditions it is not surprising that the Sisters' work was a real apostolate. Soon the world began to understand this too, and, wherever there were sick to be nursed or patients to be prepared for death, their presence was requested. This new work was barely begun, but the need to think about their canonical and definitive establishment was forced upon them. In order to accomplish this end, the Sisters approached Father Desjardins, the Vicar General of Paris, and asked him to present a petition to the Archbishop for them.

They requested to be established as a Community under obedience to the Ordinary. At first they were coldly received because the Chancery was aware of the original attempt that had been initiated by Madam de Montale, and its lack of success aroused suspicions. The Sisters proved their great humility on that occasion but, several other times, they reiterated the request that their petition be re-submitted to his Lordship. Their perseverance finally touched the Vicar General and he even promised to plead their cause.

It is now time for us to pause before the noble figure of Archbishop de Quelen whom the Sisters of Bon Secours so justly call their father and founder. His generous and apostolic soul revealed itself from the very beginning of his episcopacy. He initiated missions for the people—missions populaires—and he hoped to reach them by that means. The disapproving uproar which his efforts aroused are well known. Though rebuffed in that area, he nevertheless did not cease to defend the cause of the little and the weak on every occasion. He pushed his love for the poor, his concern for sinners, his care of souls and his forgiveness so far that his episcopacy received a special, incomparable mystique from those contrary events which gave him the opportunity to practice such high virtue. It is not surprising, then, that his great heart was captivated by this new foundation which he was asked to bless and protect. He subsequently understood what this Institute would be able to give to suffering humanity and what a powerful balance it would create in the ever present struggle between good and evil.

Archbishop de Quelen's prudence equaled his charity. He received the nurses' request favorably but, at the same time, he believed that experience could bring this important affair into better focus. Thus he required a year's period of probation and determined that he would come to a decision at the end of that time. Meanwhile, the prelate placed the group under the care of Father de Pierre, pastor of St. Sulpice and two distinguished women who devoted themselves to many good works. They were the Countess de Saisseval and Miss d'Acosta,* who belonged to the elite of that ancient nobility who had survived the Revolution. They had emerged from the trials of immigration both purified and enabled, capable of every kind of dedication and eager to help in the rebuilding of the ruins.

The first Sisters of Bon Secours benefited in a special way from the Countess' experiences of the people's spiritual and physical needs. It can be affirmed, without any fear of mistake, that the invariable constancy of the Sisters' life of abnegation and charity, as seen later, was due in part to the role which the Countess' influence, conversations and example played in their formation.

No one was better qualified than Father de Pierre to direct the beginnings of such a useful Congregation. His own great experience and piety could give light and guidance to this group which had such a special, fruitful future before it. He belonged to that company of Confessors of the Faith who consoled the Church during the Terror by showing such heroic courage.

One of the greatest names of Auvergne nobility was borne by Father de Pierre. He entered the Company of the Priests of St. Sulpice in 1786, having

*Translator's Note: these women were the Superior General and Assistant General of the Filles de Marie, a Congregation founded during the Revolution.

been attracted by the strong but gentle spirit implanted there by Father Olier. He was among those who surrounded the pastor of St. Sulpice, Father de Pancement, when he refused to take the oath to the civil constitution of the Clergy on January 9, 1791. Being of the nobility, he was imprisoned in the Convent des Oiseaux on Rue de Sèvres and was liberated on the 9th thermidor† after Robespierre's fall from power. When the Concordat was signed, the churches were permitted to reopen, and Father de Pierre was named pastor of St. Sulpice. He celebrated Mass on Thursday, the 26th of May, 1802, in that sanctuary which had been the scene of so many sacrileges during the terrible days that had passed. That evening, for the first time since the Revolution, the faithful were able to take part in Solemn Benediction, and a procession of the Blessed Sacrament took place before the ceremony.

Father de Pierre had formerly seen this Church resplendent with the riches which the piety of the faithful had accumulated over the centuries. When he entered it again, he found only ruins. The priestly vestments, the sacred vessels, the works of art and the precious marble had all been burned, destroyed or stolen. "Nevertheless," wrote Mr. Hamel, historian of St. Sulpice, "twelve to fifteen months sufficed for this zealous pastor to assure the regularity of the offices, the dignity of the ceremonies and the rebuilding of the altars. When Pope Pius VII came to Paris on December 23, 1804 for Napoleon's coronation, he made a solemn visit to St. Sulpice and the Church was ready to worthily receive the august Pontiff."

For thirty-four years Father de Pierre applied himself not only to the rebuilding of the material ruins of the edifice but also to repair the spiritual ruins in his parish which were even more disastrous; and he always appeared to be capable of these heavy tasks.

Such was the priest whom Divine Providence had designated as guide to the Nursing Sisters in their first steps towards religious life. These pious women knew how to make use of this grace which they had been given and, when their year of probation had expired, Father de Pierre was able to give a brilliant testimony of their devotion, their discretion and their piety. The good which they accomplished was tangible; their services were acclaimed by all; the most distinguished families requested their presence and, according to the unanimous opinion of the Clergy and the people, their definitive and canonical establishment would be a benefit for both Religion and Society.

Archbishop de Quelen was pleased that they were appreciated and found that their period of probation had been sufficient; nevertheless, he still asked for three more months to reflect.

That length of time passed; he was besieged by renewed and insistent appeals and the urgent necessity for a prompt decision was put clearly

† eleventh month of the first French Republic's calendar—July 19–August 17.

before him. Several of the towns in Provence were requesting the Sisters to come, but, as long as they had not been constituted as a Congregation with rules approved by the Ordinary, they could not make any foundations.

The Archbishop yielded to these reasons, and, evidently impelled by the Spirit of God, he opened his whole heart to his new daughters. He was not content with merely authorizing the Congregation but wished to reserve the title of *founder* for himself. The Sisters have always considered this honor as a special and providential mark of divine protection.

In an excess of goodness the holy prelate promised to personally receive the postulants whom Father de Pierre considered worthy of being presented for profession. The Chapel of the Blessed Virgin in St. Sulpice was chosen as the place for this moving ceremony which His Excellency fixed for Saturday, the 24th of January.

The Pastor of St. Sulpice wished to bring this news to these pious women himself and it is easy to understand their transports of great joy on receiving it. So it was that they reached the goal of their ardent desires, and their mission of complete self sacrifice and charity was going to receive the highest of sanctions. Until that time it was said that they were the servants of the afflicted; they were going to become the spouses of Jesus Christ. They had fulfilled the part of Martha; they were going to formulate the three vows which would give them the better part of Mary. Yes, *winter had passed*: Spring with its radiant blooms was approaching, and Jesus, through the voice of his Archbishop, was going to say to each one of them: "*Arise and come.*"¹² What joy, still more, what an honor!

The Sisters began their retreat with sentiments of inexpressable gratitude and deep joy; it was very eloquently preached by Father de Pierre.

The value of the grace which they were going to receive was increased even more by certain providential circumstances. Thus, spontaneously and without any exterior determining influence, the prelate chose a Saturday as their great day of self donation. A Saturday! day consecrated to Mary! August Nicholas called it *Her servants' Sunday*. The Church chose Saturday to give special honor to the Blessed Virgin who often showed how pleasing this was to her. She did this particularly on two memorable occasions during the 19th Century which has been called *Mary's Century*. On Saturday, the 27th of November, 1830, she revealed the Miraculous Medal, that talisman which was given to souls to do the battle against hell. During the apparitions at Pellevoisin, a Saturday was also selected for the cure of Estelle Faquette, who had been chosen as a messenger to give the Sacred Heart scapular to the world.

How delicately thoughtful it was for the Queen of Heaven to have inspired Archbishop de Quelen to choose that day for the profession of the first Nursing Sisters. Didn't this clearly declare that the new army of consecrated virgins would be presented to the King of kings under her

maternal protection?¹³ Also, from then on, that day was to be very dear to all of the Sisters of Bon Secours. They called it "*Mary's day and the institute's day*"; and it has become a custom in all of the houses of the Congregation to light a candle before the Blessed Virgin's statue on Saturday.

The choice of Our Lady's Chapel at St. Sulpice was not any less providential. This sanctuary was filled with the memory of Father Olier who had dedicated it long before the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. For over two centuries the young clerics used to go there to dedicate the first fruits of their apostolate to Mary. Still penetrated with the anointing of the Holy Oils, they love to pour out their souls before the beautiful and smiling statue of the white Virgin.¹⁴

It was to the foot of this same altar that our aspirants went to pronounce their vows. They gave themselves to God through Mary and offered Him the fruits of all the good works which this new Congregation would undertake.

Without having chosen it and by the decision of the prelate who represented God, they were to receive the name of Sisters of Bon Secours. It beautifully expressed what they were and what they wanted to be: *Infinitely helpful to bodies and to souls: always ready to give themselves and to give of themselves unstintingly*. It summarized their mission quite perfectly and, as other Congregations of that era arose, many took the same title because they could not find a name which was more eloquent or appropriate to their vocation. Thus it was that this name of *Bon Secours*, which Archbishop de Quelen solemnly bestowed on the Institute of which we are speaking, has, so to speak, become the generic name for most of the Nursing Sisters founded since that time.

A few days before their profession, as he had promised, the prelate sent the Sisters a summary of rules which were to become the basis of their Constitution and would permit them to be recognized legally when presented to the State's Council. This summary was embossed with the approbation of the Archbishop's signature and seal.

The rules were impregnated with the prelate's fatherly concern for the Sisters and with his desire to found a solid work that would last. The first article clearly expressed the Association's goal and its supernatural character. "*One proposed to oneself*," it says there, "*to make the care of the sick more beneficial and consoling by taking it out of the hands of mercenaries and putting it into the hands of religion*." Everything converges to this end. The Sisters will add to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience the promise to dedicate themselves without reservation to the relief of the sick and even to refrain from any devotional practice which could be detrimental to the perfection of the care required.

The prelate had foreseen the dangers which could result for the Sisters from their close relationship with the world; so, he gave them wise and strict rules for the practice of detachment, silence and poverty. Everything was

foreseen so as to safeguard their dignity, give them a great liberty of spirit and, also, an unlimited submission towards their superiors.

The holy Archbishop put the Institute under the patronage of Our Lady Help of Christians; and, as protectors, he also gave them St. Joseph, St. Sulpice, St. John of God, St. Ignatius, St. Camillus de Lellis, St. Anne and St. Martha. This crown of patron saints clearly expresses the spirit with which these new religious should be penetrated.

She whom the Church invokes as the *health of the sick*; who held her Divine Son's wounded body in her arms; who made miraculous water flow at Lourdes to cure all kinds of infirmities, she it is who, from the very beginning, should preside over the foundation of this new work. The Sisters of Bon Secours will draw from her heart a mother's devotion, sensitivity and delicacy, and under her inspirations they will walk through the world pouring oil and balm on all kinds of sufferings.

St. Joseph will teach them the secrets of a life hidden in God; and the examples of St. John of God and St. Camillus de Lellis will induce them to practice an overflowing charity towards the poor sick people. In hours of discouragement and disgust they will recall this consoling assurance given by Our Lord to St. John of God: *"John, I take to Myself all the good that the poor and sick receive from your hand. Their wounds are Mine and it is My feet that you wash when you do it for your brothers."*

These other words of St. Camillus de Lellis will reveal the providential reason for God's having chosen them. He said: *"These sick people have need of persons to serve them who are not motivated by love of money but who will be true mothers to them and not mercenaries;"* was he not pondering the very character of their apostolate?

The great day arrived! Divine Providence brought the small band of chosen souls to port at last. They had waited impatiently for so many months to begin their religious life; and now, it was opened before them. It was, it is true, the narrow but glorious way of the Cross. No other office of charity requires more self denial, silent devotion, forgetfulness of self and physical and moral strength than that of a nurse. The contemplative's cell, in spite of its solitude and starkness, is like heaven compared to the sick room where the Sister exhausts herself in the continual and meticulous care of the sick without ever having time to herself. During the night while the cloister doves chant the Lord's praises, Sister, like the solitary sparrow spoken of by the prophet, *Sicut Passer*, watches without rest. She is often in great agony of mind for she feels the weight of all her responsibilities and, sometimes, she is in pain within herself when she sees that she is powerless to snatch a soul who has been ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ from Satan's grasp.

The aspirants who presented themselves at St. Sulpice on the 24th of January, 1824 knew these things. Truly, it was with complete fullness of will and freedom of choice that they consecrated themselves to God and to this

laborious mission. There were neither surprises to fear nor illusions to maintain and, consequently, no restrictions to make because the work, which was to receive its sanction under Mary's gaze, had already proved itself. The Statutes inspired by Archbishop de Quelen were only the Consecration of those rules which they had already imposed on themselves.

By a remarkable coincidence the postulants were twelve in number; twelve apostles preparing themselves to conquer souls for God, vowing themselves at the foot of the altar to work for the coming and extension of His kingdom.

Thanks to the initiative of Countess de Saisseval and Miss d'Acosta, a certain number of pious persons had been called together for the ceremony and, when the Sisters arrived in St. Sulpice at eight o'clock in the morning, the chapel was filled with a numerous and recollected congregation.

At eight-thirty the Archbishop arrived accompanied by his two grand vicars. He celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at which all of the Sisters received Holy Communion; then the ceremony began.

The apostolic soul of the prelate must have been full of joy at that time, because he had caught a glimpse of the importance and beauty of the edifice whose cornerstone he was laying. Later, it gave him pleasure to say that *he regarded the foundation of the Sisters of Bon Secours as one of the most outstanding glories of his episcopacy.*

His very presence added to the solemnity of that moment. One of his historians said that his whole person expressed a certain majesty and such a mixture of holiness, greatness and affability that he seemed to descend from a pedestal when he began to walk.¹⁵

His voice was melodious and had a charming sound; his face, animated by inspiration, reflected the evangelical charity of his beautiful soul. That was how he appeared in the Sisters' eyes when he turned toward them after the *Veni Creator*. In an eloquent and moving homily he spoke of the importance of their work, the greatness of their mission, the virtues which it would demand and the expectations that his fatherly heart had of these religious whom he claimed so completely. "He put before them the example of our Lord coming to earth to cure all infirmities and made them understand how useful and fruitful their ministry could be."¹⁶ Following this, he blessed the habits which the Sisters wore as well as the veils, cinctures, crucifixes and rosaries which they were given. By this act he consecrated the attire of the first Nursing Sisters and conferred on them the name of *Sisters of Bon Secours under the invocation of Our Lady Help of Christians*. Then, after asking if they still persevered in their resolve, he received the vows of the twelve Sisters whose names follow:

Josephine Potel, aged twenty-five, received the name of
Sister Mary Joseph and was made Superior General.
 Jeanne Letellier, aged twenty-three, received the name of
Sister St. Anne and was named the Assistant.
 Delphine Fouché aged twenty-three, was called
Sister St. François and was chosen as mistress of novices.
 Victoire Langlois, aged twenty-one, *Sister St. Ignace*.
 Marie Lheureux, aged twenty-two, *Sister St. Hyacinthe*.
 Anne Deronel, aged twenty-three, *Sister St. Sulpice*.
 Madeline Galau, aged thirty-three, *Sister St. John of God*.
 Virginie Hénon, aged twenty, *Sister St. Vincent*.
 Marianne Bouthor, aged twenty-six, *Sister St. Marthe*.
 Félicité Thirial, aged twenty-three, *Sister St. Camille*.
 Thérèse Moyencourt, aged twenty-nine, *Sister St. Therese*.
 Madeleine d'Ablicourt, aged twenty-two, *Sister St. Stanislas*.

The ages of those first professed Sisters is noteworthy. All of them gave God a heart that was still permeated with the freshness of springtime, and they gave the sick their youthful energy which the world had not diminished at all. None of them came back to God after having poured out the best of themselves on creatures; this fact certainly heightened the value of their holocaust.

Each of the above named Sisters knelt at the feet of the Archbishop; they read aloud their formula of profession and were received into the ranks of the spouses of Jesus Christ.

After the ceremony, while the priests were still singing the *Laudate Dominum*, the Sisters all knelt at the feet of the new Superior; they kissed her hand and embraced her and then they embraced each other while their souls sang the psalmist's words: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum*.¹⁷ (How wonderful it is, and how pleasant, when brothers live in harmony.)

Then they went to the sacristy to write their vows in the record; this was signed by the Archbishop, the Vicars, the pastor of St. Sulpice and by the new religious.

Someone made the remark that the Sisters were all quite young. The Archbishop turned to Father de Pierre and said with a smile: "Yes, the Sisters are young, so they need a venerable pastor like you."

Thus the Congregation of the *Sisters of Bon Secours* under the invocation of *Our Lady Help of Christians* was founded, blessed and consecrated by their illustrious and revered Father in God, Hyacinth-Louis de Quelen, Archbishop of Paris and Peer of France.

Chapter IV

The Government of Mother Potel

1821—1826

The Church had watered the seed which had been sown, making it germinate; now its growth was awaited. Our Lord's words quickly became a reality, for Bon Secours, as they do for all good works willed by Him: *"Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it cannot bear fruit."*¹⁸ From the very beginning Mother Potel was chosen to be an example of that maxim.

Very little is known about this first Superior General, except that she assumed the heavy responsibility of the new foundation. The fact that Archbishop de Quelen chose her permits us to assume that she was capable of that heavy task. Her companions unanimously state that great energy and extreme goodness were well blended in her person and that her refined and charming manner were the response and expression of her moral qualities.

Once they were officially recognized, the Sisters left the apartment which they had occupied on Rue Cassette and rented a small house on Rue Notre Dame des Champs where they were more independent and better situated to lead a community life. Postulants were not long in coming and Mother Potel received them with open arms. Each request for admission brought tears of joy to her eyes, to which she added the anguished cry: "My poor children, I have no beds for you to sleep in."

Indeed, the community was in great need, but, when you intend to make a vow of poverty, a little obstacle like that does not stop you; so, they willingly

stretched out on mattresses on the floor. Everything was shared equally but necessities were often lacking. Thus, when one Sister came home from nursing, she took off her dress to give it to another who was getting ready to go on duty. Now, a small detail that speaks for itself. In the evening after a hard day's work they were content to have some coarse bread, soup, an apple and a few nuts for their main meal. Those pious women, still filled with the first ardor of their calling, generously accepted all privations.

These trials, for the most part, were mere trifles when compared with the opposition which was initiated against the Sisters, in spite of the welcome they received from the families and the esteem in which they were held. This conflict arose from *the wise and prudent of this world*⁴⁹ who judged that the work which had been undertaken was inappropriate, and they created a thousand objections.

In spite of these contrary opinions, however, the community had grown visibly by the end of the first year and numbered some thirty members. There were as many postulants as there were novices and professed. So, once again, it was necessary to look for a larger house and one was found at 7 Rue Cassette. The structural arrangement of this house lent itself to the installation of a chapel within its walls. Archbishop de Quelen quickly gave authorization for it and the Fathers of the Foreign Missions supplied their services. At any hour of the day the Sisters could go into this Oratory to find light and consolation and this was a great grace for them. How could they lack strength when they were so close to the Source of life? During those first years, Father de Pierre's and Father Desjardins' understanding, devotion and concern were another wellspring of reassurance. Archbishop de Quelen confided the new Congregation to Father Desjardins, who devoted his fatherly concern to it and, after the solemn profession ceremony on January 24, 1824, he became its first Ecclesiastical Superior, a joy he greatly desired.

He sustained Mother Potel during her short but painful Calvary and, thanks to him, she was able to die in peace for she knew that her Sisters would not be abandoned. He also perceived and appreciated Mère Geay's eminent qualities and guided her first steps along her thorn strewn path. Father Desjardins, like a father for his children or a founder for his disciples, did all he could for the Sisters of Bon Secours. He also had passed through the furnace of the Revolution, where his soul had received that special seal of holiness which characterized the great number of priests and religious whose apostolate was so fruitful at the beginning of the 19th Century. The value of souls was known because it was possible to measure the depths of the abyss into which those who pretend they do not need God had fallen.

Father Desjardins' priestly life was then drawing to a close; it had been exceptionally full. In 1797 when expelled from his diocese, he went to

Canada to prepare a place for immigrant priests. He was not able to succeed in the undertaking, so, he became a missionary and preached the Gospel in Canada until his return to France. In 1806 he was named pastor of the Foreign Missions parish and he knew how to win over all classes of society by his prudence and ardent charity. He gave hospitality to the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin; it had been founded by the Fathers of the Faith. During those troubled days it was a center of zeal and piety. After the death of Father Legris-Duval, another apostle of the poor, Father Desjardins, was named Director of the Society of Good Works. Its activities included the works of hospitals, prisons and the little Savoyards and, in that vast field, he was able to give expression to all the treasures of his heart without restraint.

Without willing it or even knowing it, this pious ecclesiastic alienated the Emperor by carrying on a continuous, friendly correspondence with the Prince of Kent whom he had known in Quebec. Napoleon wanted to see political intrigue in this exchange of letters and, in 1810, in a moment of anger, he imprisoned Father Desjardins at Vincennes; later, he exiled him to Verceil, thus furnishing him the occasion of exercising a heroic apostolate towards the soldiers who had run away from the disaster of the Russian Campaign. These unfortunate men had been ordered to Italy and their morale and their physical conditions were in a really sad state.

In 1814, Father Desjardins was able to return to France; his fall from favor, his achievements and his virtue gave him great influence. He was held in such high esteem that Bishop de Tallyrand-Perigord wrote to the Duke of Richelieu: "I would be much obliged, my dear Duke, if you would speak to his Majesty about Father Desjardins, pastor of the Foreign Missions. He is a man of much merit and I would like to propose him to fill a bishopric, but I believe my duty to keep him sometime yet for the administration of the diocese of Paris." Indeed, this holy priest had been offered a bishopric on three different occasions, but he always refused.

When Archbishop de Quelen assumed the See of Paris he also desired the assurance of such a valuable priest's services. They worked closely together in all their undertakings and both the Archbishop and the Vicar General were proud of their friendship. During those terrible days of 1830, when Archbishop de Quelen had to escape the mad frenzy of the populace, he refused, at peril to his own life, to be separated from his venerable friend. "Father Desjardins has been a father to me," he said, "and I will save him or will die with him."

God had chosen this priest as the Cyrenian for the first Sisters of Bon Secours. He guided and sustained them not only in the path of the religious virtues but also along the way of suffering.

It was not long, indeed, before a crushing trial fell on the Congregation. Little by little the valiant and generous Mother Potel felt her strength

diminish. In spite of Dr. Recamier's dedication and the best care which was provided for her, she soon had to yield to the symptoms, recognize that she had tuberculosis and that its fatal outcome was certain. Her Sisters attributed her premature death to the excessive privations and mortifications which she had imposed on herself for the success of her work, and which had exhausted her before her time.

It is not hard to imagine the keenness of the pain which this soul generously gave to God when she fully understood the sacrifice that was being asked of her. Everything she had dreamed of gave way beneath her. What would become of the newly born Congregation? What would the future hold? What responsibilities in the here and now! How could the Reverend Mother hold the reins of government and fortify her Sisters against laxity if she was paralyzed by illness? All of these thoughts tortured the poor Mother and her repeated acts of complete submission to God's will were her only source of strength.

It was at that time that Father Desjardins' fatherly concern was experienced and felt. During the summer of 1825, he accompanied Archbishop de Quelen on a trip to Rome to see *Peter* and gain the indulgences of the jubilee year. One of his first visits when he returned on the 11th of August was to the humble convent on Rue Cassette. He had many precious relics which the Holy Father had generously given him and he was filled with memories of the Eternal City. How pained he was when he saw how the illness had ravaged poor Mother Potel during his absence! The holy priest then understood all that Divine Providence asked him to be in regard to Bon Secours.

As a measure of prudence, he, himself, made all of the necessary arrangements that could hasten the government's legal recognition of the new Congregation. The spiritual aspect of this work preoccupied him even more, however, and so, he envisioned giving a fixed and unchanging Rule to the Sisters that would greatly stress those statutes which had been composed under Archbishop de Quelen's inspiration. He asked Father Debrosse, of the Company of Jesus, to join him in this task. Their wisdom equaled their holiness and together they compiled the Constitutions. They were approved by the Archbishop and have remained in force since then in all the houses of the Order. These Rules were judged to be very wise and appropriate to the Sisters' needs and other Congregations have said that they wished to adopt them.

Father Debrosse's devoted cooperation was another grace from Divine Providence. It is suitable to point it out as something for which to be grateful and also that it may be recorded in the annals of the Institute. This priest is another one of those saints whom we salute in passing. During the days of Terror, he was able to escape from prison and he went to Germany where he

was ordained. He joined the Society of Fathers of the Faith when he returned to France and dedicated himself from that time onward to the education of youth with Father Varin.

When the Company of Jesus was reestablished he was eager to enter there; the superiors recognized his eminent qualities and had him use them in the government of the Minor Seminary and in the direction of several religious houses. One day this man of God was to be the victim of the Sectarrians' hate; it was in 1823 when the war was re-ignited and was more violent than ever against religion. Father was in the third year of his tertianship; he returned to Montrouge one evening and was seen by some workmen who said to one another: "There is a missionary; he must be destroyed." They became excited by this provocation, and one of them picked up a metal garden tool and attacked the priest. He was struck twice with great force and a large, deep wound was made in his shoulder; only the collar of the long cloak which he wore saved him from a fatal blow.

Father Debrosse had a combination of great goodness, remarkable prudence and an unflinching steadfastness in the face of every duty. It seemed quite indicated, then, that the treasures of wisdom and charity which filled his heart should be put at the service of the newborn Institute. He fulfilled this task down to the least detail with a devotion that had no limits; he even taught the Sisters how to recite and chant the Divine Office.

Nevertheless, in spite of his own radiant goodness and the unlimited power given to him by Archbishop de Quelen, Father Debrosse was unable to make the modifications of the rules acceptable to all. When two of the first Sisters left the Community it was a great trial for Mother Potel. These departures, which brought to mind the young man in the Gospel whom Jesus looked upon but could not hold²⁰, only served to strengthen the bonds among the remaining Sisters.

During the year 1825 Mother received some consolation for this great trial. It has already been noted that, even before the Nursing Sisters received legal recognition, they had been requested from many sides to establish a house in the provinces. A request of this type was renewed after the Sisters' profession. It had been made by a noble and pious Christian from Lille, the Countess d'Espel, and Mother Potel believed that it was their duty to seriously consider it this time.

Thus, in the midst of her tribulations the Superior General was consoled by realizing that the Divine Master wanted her daughters' services not only for the relief of the sick but also for the instruction of that dearest part of His flock, the children. Indeed, the Municipality of Lille would not accept the foundation of Nursing Sisters except on condition that they also take charge of several free classes; and the Council voted an allowance of 3000 francs for that purpose. Thus we can understand how important they considered the

Christian instruction of the young in a workers' center. The conditions imposed by the Municipal Council were accepted, and four Sisters went to Lille to carry out the work that had been requested; they had been chosen with careful discernment by Mother Potel. This was the first branch on the trunk of the tree and it was to produce abundant fruit. Sister St. Ignace was named superior and she took Sister St. Jean and Sister St. Therese with her; they were two of the twelve foundresses. Both of them lived at that post for over fifty years, edifying their companions and saving souls.

The Countess d'Espel welcomed the little group into her own home until a suitable dwelling was found. It was not long before the Sisters were settled in a house of modest appearance: "A little stairway with three steps, a small door, a single window in front and very narrow all over;" such was the description given by some of the older Sisters. The religious who were sent to that foundation found the poverty of the Mother House there. Mother Potel had given them the example of habitual mortification and they were well able to put it into practice.

Their scanty provisions were stored in a very small corner under the stairway. There was a barrel of beer, a box of leeks, a bushel of potatoes and a few carrots. It was meagre nourishment for those women who wore themselves out in their work and vigils. There was no linen room or cloak room. Each Sister wore all that she had, and they thought themselves happy to possess a change of linen. From the Gospel's point of view these are conditions for success, and, so, it is not surprising that from the very beginning the Sisters' work had been fruitful. This can be judged from the pages which follow.

The Superior General's strength was diminishing more and more; she calmly watched her own end approaching but was more anxious for the future of the Congregation. In spite of his many occupations, Father Desjardins came to visit her quite often. One day, in the spring of 1826, as she was pouring out her troubles to him, he was inspired to ask her if she saw anyone among her Sisters who was capable of replacing her.

Mother Potel was very clear-sighted and stated that there was only one Sister who appeared to be capable of bearing the burden of government, Marie Angélique Geay, in religion Sister St. Antoine. She was a young novice who had not yet completed her year of novitiate. Father Desjardins already had had the occasion to become aware of the novice's abilities, because he had entrusted her with a very delicate mission during the last months of 1825. She went to Montmorillon because a request had been made and it was believed that some Sisters could be sent there to make a foundation. The petition, however, had come from persons who were more zealous than prudent. Sister had to either establish them as a regular community or bring them back to the Mother House.

The wisdom and charity which Sister St. Antoine displayed on that occasion did not escape Father Desjardins' notice. The circumstances required her to correspond with him about this affair; thus he was also able to appreciate her qualities as well as the devotion and zeal which filled her soul. His characteristically keen perception enabled him to understand that Mother Potel was not mistaken in her judgment of Sister St. Antoine. He arranged to have an interview with Sister, assured himself that her interior dispositions corresponded with the faculties of her mind, and then, without any preamble, he said to her: "Sister, you will begin your retreat because you will pronounce your vows in eight days. Prepare yourself to be named Superior."

Mère Geay often told the Sisters about the struggles and torment of soul that she went through at that time. She was too clear-sighted not to understand that the new Superior would have innumerable difficulties to overcome. She feared that, by force of the circumstances of Mother Potel's illness, a certain relaxation of discipline had been allowed to creep in and only a very strong and capable hand could accomplish the indispensable reforms that needed to be put into operation. On the other hand there were the difficulties of life and such poverty and want! Where could the resources to nourish the members of an already numerous community be found? In the end Sister St. Antoine was freed from all thought of ambition and had only one desire: to dedicate herself, body and soul, to her dear sick people. When she entered the convent, she believed that she had come into port and that, under the direction of a wise superior, she would be able to further develop all the virtues which she had already practiced before entering the community. Now, Sister St. Antoine was asked, nay rather imposed upon, to take the rudder of this frail bark in hand and guide it through the reefs and dangers which her intelligent eyes saw so clearly. Wouldn't it be better to flee from such a cross? Where did her duty lie? Hadn't Father Desjardins' words outlined it for her?

For a moment nature spoke more loudly than grace, and the novice resolved to abandon everything and leave at once. Before carrying out her resolve, however, she wanted to go into the Chapel one last time. She knelt at the Blessed Virgin's feet and fervently prayed to be preserved from the great misfortune of misinterpreting God's will. Suddenly, she felt as if transformed and believed that she heard a voice speak to her interiorly about obedience and generosity. At that instant all of her fears disappeared; strong, confident, full of ardor and with full assent she repeated Mary's words: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Your word.*"

Grace had triumphed; and the future will tell that this was one of its most beautiful victories.

In the lives of the saints and of the founders of Religious Orders, how often do we find they rose renewed from those moments of decision where man's liberty was at play and God's plans, so to speak, hung in the balance. Souls who were chosen to work out the redemption of a great number of their brothers and sisters found there their own Gethsemane. Like Christ, their model, they tremble at the sight of the cross which was shown to them and they cry to heaven that they may be spared the chalice. However, the angel, who is sent to comfort them, brings something better than deliverance. He fills them with a supernatural strength which renders them capable of great things.

A clear view of eternity will give us the key to many of the problems which disconcert us; it will clarify the reasons for the sterility of so many projects which proclaimed their accomplishments before having achieved them and, at the same time, it will explain the marvelous development of the seeds which seemed so tiny and incapable of bearing fruit. The Lord spoke the word of creation for both of them; but those in charge of these diverse works did not all respond to the call of grace, that divine breath which *passes and often does not return*,²¹ and have carried the fruit producing seeds elsewhere.

Concerning the work of Bon Secours, it should likewise be said that the demon mobilized all of his forces in order to deprive it of the instrument which was judged by him to be so capable of making it flourish. Mustn't this Congregation be like Gideon's army in God's camp which is very small in the eyes of the world but powerful and formidable against hell? St. Teresa also experienced these assaults. On the day after the first monastery of Discalced Carmelites was founded in Avila, Satan, roaring like a lion, pounced on the foundress; and in her writings she vividly depicted the moral tortures and mortal anguish which she experienced. It was because she passed through this crucible that she became so clear-sighted and wise in the direction of souls. With all due proportion, can this not be said also of Mère Geay? In spite of the intelligence which he possessed, it seems that the spirit of darkness could only vary his tricks while his battle procedure was always the same.

In the peace of complete acquiescence Sister St. Antoine began and finished her retreat and on May 5, 1826 she pronounced her vows. Her profession was not the occasion of one of those solemnities which resemble a triumph whose splendor eases the sacrifice. Affliction presided at the marriage feast and there were only tears to celebrate Mère Geay's entrance into the army of consecrated women. Mother Potel was failing rapidly and, the next day, May 6, after offering her life for the work to which she had dedicated herself, she quietly gave her soul to God.

We have not been able to obtain the details of her last moments because the writings which concerned the first years of the Congregation dis-

appeared during the political upheavals which took place since then. In order to render homage to the memory of the first Superior General of Bon Secours we can only transcribe the words written to us not long ago by Mother Mary Joseph who presently holds the post: *"Good Mother Potel was like a victim placed at the base of the Institute and before it, in order to assure its existence by a premature sacrifice"* of her life.

The Sisters, who were present when she died, had both felt and understood the meaning of her last sigh. They were in tears and at a loss as how to worthily revere their first Mother, so they offered her this naive and touching homage. They dressed her in the religious habit and then placed her in a wicker armchair in the center of their simple oratory. This memory has remained alive in Bon Secours. When a Superior General is elected, she is seated in this little armchair and receives the homage of submission from her Sisters.

The mortal remains of Mother Potel were buried in the cemetery at Montparnasse on the 9th of May. The same day, Archbishop de Quelen delegated Fathers Desjardins and de Pierre to appoint, in his name, Sister Marie Angélique Geay as Superior General of the Sisters of Bon Secours. According to the Archbishop's desire, the Sisters' votes were not collected. At that time they numbered twenty-eight professed Sisters and ten novices. As explained in the statutes, Sister Geay took the name of Mother Mary Joseph, which name was thereafter taken by all of the Superiors General.

To give an idea of the consternation and confusion into which the small group was thrown by Mother Potel's sickness, we shall relate a story as it was told to us by one of those first Sisters, Mother St. Félicité, who was the superior at Rozoy.

On the night before Mother Potel's death, Sister St. Félicité returned to the convent where she found Father Desjardins, who urged her to begin her retreat in preparation for her vows; she was still a novice. "Father," she answered, "I have no intention of making vows in such a disturbed community. The Superior is going to die, several Sisters have left . . . What future can one hope for in a Congregation under such circumstances?" "And if I tell you," replied Father Desjardins, "that Sister St. Antoine is going to be named Superior General, will you change your mind?" "Oh, yes, Father," responded the novice, "because I know what a community can become under her government."

Sister St. Félicité had been able to appraise her companion during their novitiate. So, she went on retreat with the latter and pronounced her vows at the same time, and had the happiness of seeing her intuition realized; because she outlived Mère Geay and died in 1885 under the government of the fifth Superior General, after having assisted in the sequential development of the Congregation. Thus she was able to convince herself that she, who had seemed to her to be a choice soul, was truly one of God's

elect. In 1876 Mother St. Félicité celebrated her golden jubilee while surrounded by the venerable older Sisters who, like herself, had shared the trials and the joys of the first days.

Chapter V

Reverend Mother Geay

1826—1830

Alexis Angélique Geay was born at Harazée, in the township of Vienne-le-Chateau, in Champagne on October 2, 1792, in the middle of the Revolution. She was still quite young when her father died, leaving her widowed mother with six children. Angélique was the eldest of this numerous family; she was precocious and intelligent by nature, and became like a second mother for her brothers and sisters. Thus, at a time when other children thought only of play, she learned the difficult art of expending herself for others, and always forgetting herself. Her mother was a true Christian, full of faith and piety, in spite of the unbelief and difficulties which existed where they lived. When they were very young, she instilled in her children a great love for God and duty. Angélique was well disposed to those lessons in Christianity and became a model for her companions.

It has not been possible to ascertain when the parish Church in the village where the Geay family lived was re-opened. One thing we do know is that they had a parish priest and the Sacraments in 1802 because Angélique received her First Holy Communion the following year. She had been instructed so well that the school mistress openly declared that she had nothing more to teach her.

Mère Geay always professed an ardent love for Jesus in the Eucharist; she was often seen hurrying to the chapel whenever she had a free minute; and

the expression which lit up her face when she spoke of "*her bon Dieu*" (Good God) gives us some idea of what her First Communion must have been like and the place which Jesus-Host found in her pure and loving heart.

From this time onwards, the young girl devoted herself more than ever to the care of the family and became an intelligent helper for her mother in her brothers' and sisters' education. She already was having her apprenticeship for a life of self denial which consists in losing sight of self so as to look for joy only in the happiness of others. At what precise moment did she hear God's call? Did she, like so many other chosen souls, have a moment of temptation to stop and gather a few flowers from along life's pathways? Did she give herself to God from her youth or did Our Lord have to struggle with her? We do not know and this is to be regretted. The eminent virtues practiced by Mère Geay and the superior abilities of which she gave proof allow us to affirm that a very powerful grace had formed and instructed her from her earliest years. With the Prophet she could say: "*the Lord will lead me in the paths of justice because of His name.*"²²

However, duty kept her for a long time in her native village. She was thirty-three years old when she was free to leave her home because then her brothers and sisters were able to provide for themselves. Many other religious communities could have attracted her, but the fact that she came from so far to a newly established community which had no past or influence proves that she had preferred the care of the sick for a long time and also that she found special delight in that holy work.

We have said in the preceding chapter that, during her novitiate, Sister St. Antoine was deprived of that joy and spiritual consolation which often is found in the religious life. We also saw that her Profession Day coincided with a day of mourning. Thus by struggles and sacrifice God formed her for the difficult ministry which she had to carry out for thirty-four years.

After her death, one of her biographers wrote that the new Superior of Bon Secours was one of those women who, by means of their own spirit and love, exert an immense influence on all those with whom they come in contact. The secret of this power lay in two words: *suaviter and fortiter*. It was, indeed, by *kindness and firmness* that she triumphed over the oppositions from without, and the difficulties from within, and that she knew how to meet both the spiritual and material needs of a Congregation which was growing considerably under her government. It was also owing to this firmness, tempered by kindness, that she pervaded the Institute with that spirit of detachment, meekness, zeal and charity which make its glory, and that she trained the Sisters to the strength, dignity and reserve which are the essential qualities of a Bon Secours Sister.

More than once, the boat of which Mère Geay held the rudder, was shaken by tempest; but this woman, outwardly so frail and delicate, was

gifted with a rare energy; therefore, strength, fortitude and prudence never failed her.

She was, indeed, one of those whom God sometimes chooses to show the world what weakness can accomplish when it is supported by His almighty power. She was animated by a deep faith and saw God alone in everything. She sought Him through fervent and constant prayer which was the very breath of her life. This single-mindedness gave her unusual insight and amazing influence. Her "*bon Dieu*", as she said in her own charming way, gave her strength and support in all her difficulties and He alone could open her heart and make it capable of protecting the large family entrusted to her with maternal tenderness. Her position brought her into contact with many illustrious members of the Church and State but, she never lost that simplicity which is the mark of true virtue, nor was she ever known to take undue advantage of the marks of esteem everyone bestowed upon her. People of all classes came to ask her advice, and to confide their private troubles to her; for they knew that her great and noble heart was open to all their sufferings. However, she had a marked preference for the poor; and they knew it and never became disheartened. "It is necessary that I speak to the Superior herself," they answered those who received their requests with an alleged refusal. And, indeed, the good Mother preferred to let herself be mistaken rather than close her ear to the complaints of the unfortunate.

The new Superior General, whom God had just sent to the Bon Secours Sisters, was really the *valiant woman* described in Holy Scripture. *The heart of her Husband had trusted in her*, and how justly! She did not deceive His expectation, *and worked for His glory by the counsel of her hands*. She was called during the night of trial, and *she rose to give her spiritual children the bread of the soul and the bread of the body; for the winter she prepared them a double garment: fidelity to their Rule and an overflowing charity*. Therefore, *in the latter day* she could consider her work calmly, and *laugh*, while *her children*, in spite of their affliction, *rose up and called her blessed*.²³

Is it any wonder then that Mère Geay knew how to attract ardent and faithful supporters from the beginning of her term as Superior? Among those faithful friends who were always ready and available, besides Fathers de Pierre and Desjardins, we should place at the head of the list Doctor Recamier. He was an affluent man who had found in the Sisters of Bon Secours the helpers he had dreamed of, intelligent nurses who were capable of assisting him, and, like him, were consumed with the desire to cure not only bodies but souls as well. Doctor Recamier was the faithful friend described in scripture whose worth is immeasurable. He had taken care of Mother Potel and had shared the Sisters' grief as they watched her die. He also understood that Mère Geay's nomination was a blessing and a pledge of success for the Congregation. He worked hard to break down the prejudice

that was still held against the Sisters; and, by his influence, he made it possible for them to have entrance into the homes of the well-to-do families. He was most considerate and would never accept any fee for the services given to the Sisters. His signature was even found on a legal document of September 16, 1826 during the Revolution. In spite of his extremely busy schedule, Doctor was anxious to assist Father Chapellier by speaking in the Congregation's favor in a thorny legal affair which was one of the new superior's first crosses.

Doctor Recamier was then at the height of his brilliant career. In that same year he was named to a Chair in the French College which became vacant by the death of Laennec, and for several years he had already occupied a seat at the Academy of Medicine. In these conditions it is very interesting to note the endorsement which this eminent practitioner gave to a Congregation whose existing condition was so unassuming and whose future was so uncertain. As we have already said, Doctor Recamier was not only a great physician but a Christian in every sense of the word, and he understood that science had found a powerful aid in the charitable and supernatural ministry of the Nursing Sisters. Besides, he also saw that their delicate charity designated them as confidants, and, quite often, he gave them money for the poor which he had set aside from his own fees.

It is necessary to state what this trial was which came to crush Mère Geay. During the very short time of her government Mother Potel had, by a prodigious economy, and thanks to the generosity of some benefactors, succeeded in acquiring a house on Rue Cassette; and, to avoid difficulties in the future, she had, two months before her death, made a will written in her own hand, by which she appointed Angélique Geay and Jeanne Letellier²⁴ as her sole legatees.

Although she brought with her to the Community only her intelligence and her great virtues, after her death, her family believed themselves authorized to contest this will; and, in spite of their spirit of peace and charity, the Sisters found themselves obliged to defend their rights through legal channels.

They were greatly supported in these circumstances by Doctor Recamier and also by Mr. Desglageux, one of most distinguished members of the Paris Bar. Because of their enlightened counsel, Mère Geay succeeded in having justice done,²⁵ and, in the future, whenever it had to do with the affairs of the Institute, she found Mr. Desglageux always at her side.

One of Mère Geay's first important acts was the consolidation of the house at Lille. This foundation would prosper and it was desirable that it be sanctioned by the civil and religious authorities. The Superior General made the necessary arrangements; and on May 22, 1826, the Municipal Council of Lille issued a favorable vote for the maintenance of the Sisters

who then numbered nine. A week later, that is the 31st of May, it gave 2000 francs under the title of an added indemnity which was over and above the religious dwelling on Rue de l'Arc, on condition that nine new Sisters come to join the others and fulfill the same functions for the inhabitants. It stated in a few but eloquent words how much their services were appreciated.

On the 4th of August, the Bishop of Cambrai sent his sanction to the Sisters, and on the 28th of August a royal Decree recognized "the establishment at Lille of a community of Sisters called Bon Secours, under the name Our Lady Help of Christians, governed by a local superior, and subordinate to the Superior General of Paris."

During this period, as the religious became more numerous, they left Rue de l'Arc to settle in a house situated at Market Place in Verjus which was rented to Mr. Clamponain-Dupuis; there they kept a free school, and each day several Sisters went to teach class in the building on Rue de la Barre, while the others devoted themselves uniquely to the care of the sick. However, this establishment was also a temporary one, because in 1834 we see the Sisters put in charge of a work which would give a new extension to the Institute and oblige them to look for a larger house.

Among the religious sent to Lille in 1827 were two who were called to exert a great influence in that town: Sisters St. Henry and St. Claire. Both of them had very fruitful terms as superior, and were interested in permeating their sisters with the spirit of the Congregation; they created a center where, not only the religious, but many notable persons of the town came to seek light and counsel.

In the meantime, the Revolution began to make itself felt and the Royalty weakened its pledges; this aroused fear for the future of Religious Institutes. Because of this, Mère Geay was concerned with giving the Congregation all the proper legal guarantees which would assure its future. The steps taken by Father Desjardins toward this end were successfully continued; and, on January 17, 1827, the Institute of Bon Secours of Paris was recognized by the Government as: the "*First Association of Religious Nurses established in France.*"

In accordance with the wishes of her Ecclesiastical Superior, Mère Geay modified the Sisters' dress; it originally was gray. They adopted the black habit and veil and kept the fluted cap which they had worn since they had first come together in Rue Cassette. The little white cuffs (*les manchettes blanches*) were later recommended to them by Archbishop de Quelen, who, during his last illness, thought that this addition of white linen was more practical, and also more pleasant to those who were being nursed.

About this same time, Father Poiloux, director of Vaugirard College, which, after his death became the property of the Jesuit Fathers, requested some Sisters of Bon Secours for his infirmary. Sister St. Félicité, with two of her companions, was given charge of that mission and devoted herself to it

until 1865. Throughout her long stay at Vaugirard and at Auteuil—because later the college was transferred to this last place—she did good for the children whose sickness placed them under her influence, and, as she cared for the body she strengthened their souls.

After the Cholera Epidemic of 1832, Sister St. Cecile came to join her at Vaugirard and lived several years under her direction. Later when she became Superior General she retained a great appreciation and profound respect for her former superior, and one day when speaking about her she was heard to say: “I would kiss the traces of her footprints.”

It is easy to imagine what these women were capable of doing for God’s cause. They incited each other to good and joyously climbed the path that led to the summit of perfection.

Chapter VI

Foundation at Boulogne—The Cholera The Providence Orphanage

1830—1833

In an Institute which was entirely permeated with the Spirit of God, as Bon Secours was, it is not surprising that the Rule Book, developed by two holy priests at the bedside of the dying Mother, was the object of continuing and respectful study by the first Sisters. They were well aware that the faithful practice of their Rule gave great power to the life of the new Congregation. This completely supernatural concern was the providential occasion of an important foundation.

During the last months of the year 1828, Baron de Blaisel, a noteworthy resident of Boulogne, was in Paris to visit a sick friend who was being cared for by a Sister of Bon Secours. Momentarily the Sister put her Rule book on the mantelpiece in the bedroom, something that she rarely did. The Baron saw it and mechanically picked it up, but it was not long before he was keenly interested by what it contained. "Here is an admirable work," he said, "We must have these Sisters in Boulogne; absolutely, we must."

That same day, Baron de Blaisel took steps to accomplish his design; he worked with great constancy, wisdom and zeal. The numerous documents which we have been able to collect give testimony of this. He initiated all the necessary proceedings with the Municipal Council and the Archbishop, by

composing all the requests and overcoming all obstacles. He also found the house where the Sisters would begin their apostolate.

When we think of the innumerable benefits which the residents of Boulogne received over the years from the Sisters of Bon Secours, it makes us want to acknowledge that great Christian man who promoted the foundation. Once more we are forced to recognize that any good which lasts and multiplies in its consequences often depends on fidelity to a single inspiration of grace. If Baron de Blaisel's soul had not been open to thoughts of charity, without a doubt he would indifferently have put down the book which revealed to him that mission of a Sister of Bon Secours, and the Sisters would never have gone to Boulogne.

There still is a vast field of work for the Sisters in that deeply Christian city; it is a true "land of saints."²⁶ One day Bishop Parises called it *"a city full of charm and heart, rich in God's gifts and also in its own works; a privileged town which brings together in rare accord that delightful considerateness and fruitful activity of modern times with the powerful faith and hospitable virtues of earlier times."*²⁷

The residents of Boulogne can rightly say as they turn to the Virgin Mary: "all good things came to me in her company";²⁸ because their history draws all its glory from the Marian shrine which, for many centuries, had drawn numberless people and where many sovereigns felt it an honor to be able to come to kneel and pray.

It is well known how the Virgin chose a place on the hill of Boulogne, knowing the veneration with which that impetuous, simple and profoundly Christian people would surround her. "In the year 633, under the reign of King Dagobert," we quote Father Haignerai, "a ship arrived at the port of Boulogne. It contained neither sailors nor oars and the sea being extraordinarily calm seemed to wish to respect it. A light beaming from the ship attracted the attention of several persons who ran to see what it contained. They saw a statue of the Virgin holding the Infant Jesus in her left arm. It was made of wood and excellently sculptured. It was about three feet in height. This statue had about it something majestic and divine which seemed to push away the rudeness of the waves, on the one side, and, on the other, to call the people to surround it with their homage."

It is possible to suppose that this Madonna came from a town in the East invaded by the Saracens, and she was confided to the water so that the hand of God would direct it toward more hospitable shores in the West. Boulogne then had the great honor of being chosen as guardian for this priceless treasure.

Until the Revolution, the church, where the image was kept, was rightly considered as one of the most venerable Marian shrines; it pleased the Blessed Virgin to work great and numerous marvels there. But on September 29, 1893, the antique statue of Our Lady was burned publicly

by madmen, who committed many sacriligious outrages before destroying it. The chapel and the cathedral were sold as national goods and soon the precious souvenirs that it contained disappeared.

During this era, about 1830, a great work of reparation was started. Father Haffringeau, a zealous priest, had undertaken the rebuilding of the shrine and the ressurecting of the time honored pilgrimage of Our Lady. He dreamt of raising a statue to her *who destroys all heresies* on top of a gigantic dome and facing Protestant England, so that dominating the land and the sea she would draw misguided souls to her divine Son.

Towards this end he repurchased the enclosure of the ancient cathedral and began the work. The cornerstone of the Virgin's chapel was solemnly laid.

The whole of Christian France wanted to contribute to that colossal undertaking and Father Haffringeau received much assistance in his work. When speaking of the unforgettable date of the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of 1854, Father Haffringeau, who was the historian of Our Lady of Boulogne, was able to write: "The streets of Sion have ceased crying over their solitude; they come back to pray in the temple where their fathers knelt so piously. The imposing edifice proudly holds aloft its majestic youth; its dome soars to heaven to bring up the adoration and prayers of the pilgrim. It extends over the town and the country, dominating all the other buildings, to proclaim the superiority of the religious idea over all earthly interests."

Is it not possible to believe that the foundation of the Sisters of Bon Secours at Boulogne was, among many others, one of the graces by which the most holy Virgin responded to the evidence of filial love that her privileged people came to give her? All of those worthy religious went through the city of Mary doing good, and it would be difficult to say how much they gave of themselves—even to heroism—as was especially seen during the epidemics which ravaged and devastated this corner of France in the last century.

Baron de Blaisel seemed to have an intuition of the good that would be accomplished when he worked with so much zeal and ardor to make his dream, of giving his dear town of Boulogne a house of Nursing Sisters, become a reality.

It is interesting to quote here Mère Geay's response to the first overtures made by the Baron, and to admire her calm, humble, yet farseeing wisdom which knew how to weigh words, be at ease and put others at ease also.

January 12, 1829

Dear Sir,

I received your letters promptly but a rather serious illness prevented me from answering the questions you presented to me.

1—I am sending you a copy of the statutes of the Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours. This Order has been recognized and authorized by the government for two years.

2—*The Sisters go to the homes of the poor; they are poor themselves and strive to distribute the alms they receive.*

3—*They dress wounds and give the sick all the care they need.*

4—*They go to all persons who ask for them regardless of the religion to which they belong.*

5—*Since it is by charity and not by hope of gain that the Sisters work, the Superior asks only that her Sisters be able to live without constraint and without contracting debts; that they be suitably housed and that each one have a little furniture consisting of a bed and some chairs.*

6—*It is believed that the Ecclesiastical Superiors will not be opposed if, to begin with, the Superior General sends three Sisters. It would be appropriate to present your project to them through the channel of your Vicar-General when everything is prepared. We will recommend your request to the Bishop who, in turn, will present it to the Archbishop.*

I abide by the prudence of the Committee of which you spoke to see this through.

The town of Lille has the benefit of having twelve of these good Sisters and requests that the number be increased.

Will you be pleased, etc.

Signed: The Superior General of Our Lady of Bon Secours.

In order that the accomplishment of his project be well executed, Baron de Blaisel formed a Committee composed of notable residents of Boulogne. Their names are fittingly preserved because of the profound gratitude due to them from the Sisters of Bon Secours. They are: Mr. Fontaine, Mr. Wissocq, Mr. Gros, Mr. Gallien, Mr. Lefebvre, Mr. Dusommerard and Mr. Rouxel.

Knowing that Lille had a foundation similar to that which they wished to establish, they spoke to Count de Muysart, mayor of that city, in order to procure as much information as possible to guide them. The response that they received was so kind and precise that it only encouraged them the more to pursue the negotiations they had begun.

Mr. Fontaine, deputy of the North, was entrusted by the committee with the task of conferring with the Superior General of the Congregation of Bon Secours concerning the arrangements to be made and the financial settlement necessary for the maintenance of the Sisters on May 5, 1829.

At the same time Baron de Blaisel, in the name of his colleagues, addressed the following petition to the mayor of Boulogne:

"We, the undersigned, knowing your zeal for what will be useful to those under your jurisdiction, have the honor of placing before you the plan which we have conceived of making a charitable and beneficent foundation for nurses. This establishment will be advantageous for the rich and the poor and also for the many foreigners who visit our town. We have procured all possible information about the establishment of women called Bon Secours, who are already inaugurated in Paris and Lille. Like us, you will value the outstanding services that these Sisters render to suffering humanity. Their installation in our town will be a great benefit for the sick and the visitors. We beg you to decide to assist our efforts.

We can easily obtain three of these Ladies immediately. The Municipal Treasury will be able to take care of the expenses; it alone will be able to assure the permanence of this great benefit. We are persuaded, Mr. Mayor, that like us, you can estimate the unquestionable usefulness of such a foundation and that you will find the means of placing this expense, which will be universally approved, in your budget.

Will you be pleased, etc.

The Committee."

The mayor, indeed, highly approved the project and received the request with an extreme goodwill, but he feared that the town's budget would not be able to provide the necessary funds. He hesitated and put off going to the Archbishop of Paris as he had promised. Baron de Blaisel was greatly annoyed by this for he feared to lose the house and land that he had picked out. Mère Geay was surprised as she was not able to find an explanation for the delay.

The perseverance of Baron de Blaisel and the members of the committee overcame all difficulties, for we have before us the resolution of the Municipal Council of Boulogne on the 28th of July in that year, 1829, which accepted the foundation with the conditions proposed by the Superior General.

"After having taken cognizance of a petition signed by a great number of notable residents of the town of Boulogne and of the rules of the Congregation of Bon Secours . . . , the Council, considering that the town of Boulogne lacks nurses and that the Sisters of Bon Secours, instructed, enlightened, full of sweetness and patience, in possession of useful knowledge and caring for the sick without discrimination of nationality or creed, would be of the greatest usefulness for the town, above all for the destitute.

"According to the proposals in what concerns the town, consider that the expenditure is restricted: to the cost of a dwelling valued at 600 francs; to a salary of 200 francs for each of the three Sisters, which it is hoped will be obtained; and to the costs of the first foundation also estimated at 600 francs.

"Be it resolved that the Mother Superior of the Sisters of Bon Secours will be entreated to send three of her Sisters to Boulogne, to whom the Municipal Treasury will grant an allocation of 1800 francs during the year 1830; and that the Mayor will be asked to make the necessary arrangements with the Bishop of Arras as well as with his Grace the Archbishop of Paris in order to obtain these three Sisters."²⁹

Having obtained the administrative authorization, the Mayor of Boulogne appealed to Archbishop de Quelen who, as he had thought, was very happy to comply with his request.

These gentlemen then intended to collect money from a large number of people in the town for the cost of the first foundation. Everyone responded eagerly both with offerings of money and with their natural talents. Among the numerous donors it is surprising to see the name of an Anglican

minister. It is one more testimony of the happy influence exerted by these Religious of the Catholic Church.

The political events and unforeseen circumstances occasioned more delay in the Sister's arrival, and it was not until June 24, 1830 that Baron de Blaisel could write to Mère Geay:

Dear Madam,

I have the pleasure to announce to you that your house will be ready to receive you the next Thursday, July 1. Please reserve seats in the stagecoach; there are four in the Union de Boulogne's coach, Rue de la Jussienne, Victory Place.

Please receive, etc.

This devout Christian had thus brought the work he had undertaken to a good end. He also could sing a *Magnificat* of thanksgiving when, on July 2, feast of the Visitation, he and Mr. Gros installed the servants of the sick in their modest house on Rue St. Martin.

Right from the beginning the Sisters had the mission of visiting the destitute, and they also took care of the Welfare Bureau until the Sisters of Charity took charge of it.

The first Superior of this house was Sister St. Dominique. We speak of her as in a memory because she only remained at Boulogne until 1833 (not having persevered in her vocation). She was replaced by Mother St. Marianne, a model of the perfect religious. Sister Marie-des-Anges was her intelligent and devoted assistant; she was one of the future superiors of Boulogne.

And so Mère Geay saw the frail shrub-like tree which had been confided to her care break through the earth; it only asked for dew from heaven to live and grow. The tempest of 1830 that was so threatening to the religious institutions was not able to destroy them. In the midst of the grave events of that year the Sisters began to realize and experience the truth of the Psalmists' words: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."³⁰

During the Revolution of July, while the young Superior General heard the alarm bell ringing at St. Sulpice and the disturbance rumbling in the streets, she felt, along with her weakness, the strength which confidence and abandon give. God, "her *bon Dieu*," was there; and He only let happen what He had decreed in His designs. What God willed, she also willed.

Her confidence was even more meritorious in that her best supporters and protectors were struck. The *Ordonnances* (decrees) appeared on July 26; the Revolution overran Paris on the 28th, and on the 29th the crowds went to the Archbishop's residence. "The doors were opened with pistol shots and the closets with hatchet blows," one witness wrote.

Consider the sorrow of the Sisters of Bon Secours when they learned that he, who by right they called their father, was driven out of his house, stripped of everything, obliged to flee, to hide, exiled from his cathedral and

isolated from his clergy. Their anxiety about Father Desjardins was not any less. He shared all the misfortunes of this Archbishop and, a few months later, he even wished to go to prison so as to prevent it happening to his beloved pastor.

However, in the midst of all their misfortunes, neither the Archbishop nor his Vicar General deviated from the solicitude which they had sworn to Bon Secours. In spite of his growing infirmities and mental anguish, Father Desjardins presided at the meeting on May 24, 1831 when the election of the Superior General was to take place. It goes without saying that Mère Geay was re-elected by a great majority; during the past 5 years she had given too many proofs of her superior intelligence and great virtues for her Sisters to even think of putting the authority in other hands.

The outbreak of the Cholera epidemic which decimated Paris in the early months of 1832 put her maternal tenderness for the souls confided to her by God to a severe test; but her motherly heart was also able to rejoice, for in this way her Sisters gave living witness to those outside of the convent of all the virtues planted in their souls by their holy vocation.

The arrival of the terrible scourge could be foreseen, and several months earlier in a Pastoral Letter, Archbishop de Quelen had prepared his clergy for the duties that awaited them. "As priests and like Francis," he wrote, "we must foresee the time when we will be assailed by the calamity which step by step advances towards our country. The moment is perhaps not far off when one common virtue will no longer suffice, when the heroism of devotion will be required . . ."

The forecast became a reality; on the 27th of March the overwhelming news was circulated through Paris: Cholera was within the walls of the capital. Up to that time it had spread little by little, nearer and nearer, but it started in Paris unexpectedly without passing through the outlying provinces. "And this," *L'Ami de la Religion* stated, "was an occurrence which surprised and upset the calculations of all observers." Within fifteen days there were seven thousand victims of the plague. "The intensity of the disease, the rapid change in the patients' condition and the failure of the medications to help, gave the illness a dramatic and mysterious character which drove the populace crazy."³¹

Still another newspaper of that time wrote:³² "Thus began those days of mourning when the Indian plague surrounded Paris with an impure atmosphere, opening over the great city a hand filled with funerals and striking at a thousand places at a time without even threatening them beforehand. The art of medicine declared itself powerless, men wrung their hands in despair and the courageous became frightened. But then it was that Christianity arose . . ." Now was the time for Archbishop de Quelen to exercise the sublime reprisal of generous devotion against human suffering. Men had reduced him to life in exile; he came out when fear kept the most

valiant safe in their homes. April 2, 1832 he went to Hotel-Dieu where the epidemic raged with the greatest intensity. Baron Henrion, his historian wrote, "New Charles Borromeo, the prelate stopped at the bedside of the sick and dying to supply their needs, reanimate their hope and prepare them for their last journey. With the double sentiments of dismay and compassion he was seen carrying those affected with the plague in his arms."³³

An episode occurred during one of the Archbishop's visits to his frightened people; he kept it a secret during his lifetime, but it was revealed by some of his friends after his death. One day Archbishop de Quelen arrived at the bedside of a man who was in great agony. When the Prelate raised his hand to bless the man, he looked at him with an expression filled with hate and cried out: "Go away from me, I am one of those who destroyed your residence." At these words the holy prelate's face shone with tender pity and inexpressible pardon. Continuing the blessing he had begun, he said, "*My brother, it is another reason for me to be reconciled with you and for you to be reconciled with God.*"

Such examples stimulated the Nursing Sisters' courage and zeal. Their Archbishop's untiring heroism and unshakable serenity invigorated their energies. The services they rendered during the terrible epidemic were long remembered. They were seen as always being upright, courageous, gentle and infinitely good and kind in serving both the poor and rich. *L'Ami de la Religion* made the following statement concerning the Sisters of Bon Secours on April 19, 1832: "The Nursing Sisters of Rue Notre Dame des Champs are not able to respond to all the requests that come to them. During the last week they have been obliged to refuse many of those who are sick in the suburb of St. Germain. They are, however, taking care of the poor in their own neighborhood; they are the only ones not refused."

This short and simple testimony says much. Mère Geay buoyed up the intense activity of her Sisters and went with them to this battlefield where more than one died. It is indeed unfortunate that the names of these victims have not been preserved. Sister St. Cecile, who later replaced Mère Geay, had hardly made her Profession when cholera broke out, and she often had occasion to give herself fully with all the intensity of her devotion and the strength of her youth. Archbishop de Quelen saw her at work, and later it was she who had the great honor of taking care of the prelate in his last illness.³⁴

The preceding year the terrible scourge had already decimated the town of Boulogne and its havoc was especially felt in the poorer sections. There, as in Paris and Lille, the Nursing Sisters appeared as angels of charity at the bedside of the cholera victims.

When the Municipal Council, giving in to the contrary winds that were blowing then, stopped the Sisters' salary in October, 1831, a fund raising

drive was started and the people responded so favorably that their maintenance was assured for the two following years. At the same time a petition was sent to the mayor requesting the restoration of the funds allotted at the beginning of the foundation. The terms of this appeal tell us without further commentary what the life of these religious was like during the first year of the foundation.

"Mr. Mayor,

The three Nursing Sisters established in this city under the name of Dames du Bon Secours have been deprived for the year 1832 of the allotment of 1200 Francs which had been accorded by the Municipal Treasury. Because of this and in the interest of the poor, several notable persons have begun a fund raising campaign, in order to provide these Sisters with the means of existence which has been taken from them. Thanks to this fund, the possibility of keeping the Sisters in this city has been obtained from the Superior General of their Order, at least until March 15, 1833, which date coincides with the optional expiration of the lease of the house they occupy.

Foreseeing the many illnesses which usually occur during the last months of the year and especially the plague which has struck our town, it was also arranged with the Superior General to send a fourth Sister since last November.

One of these four Sisters spends her time in the service of those invalids who have the means to pay; another takes care of the house and prepares the broths and teas which will be given to the sick and convalescents, and after a day filled with these and many diverse occupations she will often spend part of the night at the bedside of the sick. The other two religious devote themselves totally to the service of the poor. Proof of their devotion towards the unfortunate was given when the cholera invaded the destitute families of the heavily populated neighborhoods.

Let those, who still wish to raise doubts in this respect, survey the diminution of misery where the plague had so many victims. They will hear the poor blessing those holy and charitable women who lavished care upon them and relieved their distress.

The whole town has only one desire, Mr. Mayor, to maintain in Boulogne an establishment that is so precious to humanity, and we hope that the Municipal Council will be eager to approve this desire.

With full esteem, Mr. Mayor, we are honored to be your humble servants."

The signatures of the Women of the Poor followed. They all proudly proclaimed the Sisters' untiring and often heroic devotion in the most eloquent terms.

The administrators of the Welfare Bureau, in session, drew up a testimonial worded thus:

"We, the undersigned, members of the Welfare Bureau of the City of Boulogne, certify that the Sisters of Bon Secours give the destitute who are sick the most diligent care and that the zeal, which they bring to them in procuring all the relief in their power, is above all praise. It is to be desired that the foundation be extended as far as possible so as to be able to bring the services which are needed to the unfortunate whom we must help."

*Signed: Haffreingue, G. Sauvage,
Dusommerard, Caxey.*

Seal of Bureau

Baron de Blaisel took it upon himself to present this petition to the Mayor of Boulogne, Mr. Alexandre Adam, who responded with the following letter:

"Dear Sir,

With your letter of the 22nd of this month, I received the petition in favor of the Sisters of Bon Secours which was signed by the members of the Welfare Bureau, in session, the Women for the Poor, several members of the Health Commissions and a large number of the notable residents.

I will submit this request to the Municipal Council when they are working on the next budget. In the meantime, I think that the only means of moving the Council to vote again for the salary will be to have six Sisters in Boulogne, four of whom will devote all their time to the free care of the destitute who are sick. Such a great advantage for the poor class will, without doubt, bring the administration to make these sacrifices.

I will thus be obligated if you will gather information on the possibility of realizing the project and transmit it to me with some indication of the costs that could result from it. Please accept, etc.

Alexandre Adam."

Astonishing thing! The Municipal Council did not wish to receive the Mayor's proposal. The revolutionary spirit which had penetrated almost everywhere began to produce its fruits: the ruin of the most noble and most fruitful institutions. By an inexplicable contradiction, however, the Council, while refusing to contribute to the maintenance of the Sisters felt the need "to pay a just tribute of praise to the zeal, courage and limitless devotion of which the Sisters of Bon Secours have ceaselessly given proof and which they brought to such a high degree during the cruel epidemic which took so many victims."³⁵

Baron de Blaisel was not discouraged by this set back. Once again he addressed the residents of Boulogne and in eloquent terms he brought back to their memories all of the services provided by the Sisters. He asked them, once again, to furnish the means to conserve this precious establishment.

Is it necessary to say that his appeal was heard? Among many others, we like to quote a letter from the Superior of the Ursulines of Boulogne:

December 31, 1832

"The Superior of the Ursulines of Boulogne has the honor of offering respectful courtesy to Baron de Blaisel and of thanking him for the prospectus which he sent. She and her community are very interested in the foundation of the Sisters of Bon Secours and consider it a privilege to contribute towards its continuation according to their means.

Baron de Blaisel, having the opportunity of meeting those Sisters, will doubtless wish to communicate directly with them concerning this matter.

The Ursuline Sisters, with all other clear-thinking persons, share in the recognition and praise which are due to Baron de Blaisel for having procured so precious a treasure for the city of Boulogne."

The disastrous year of 1832 had hardly drawn to a close when Archbishop de Quelen entrusted Mère Geay with a work which delighted and gladdened her great heart, and it is correct to believe that the self-forgetfulness which the Sisters displayed during the terrible epidemic drew this new blessing upon the Institute.

Not far from the Mother House, in one of the peaceful, lonely streets of the neighborhood of St. Sulpice, is located the Providence Orphanage (*Orphelinat de la Providence*). Some beautiful, old hotels, each stone of which holds memories, with their imposing dark exteriors are a contrast to the Modern Style buildings with their large white facades which brighten the streets. It is one of these homes of by-gone times with a large carriage door which houses the work which was confided to the Sisters of Bon Secours in 1833, and which continues to be a source of great joy to them as well as a particularly fruitful outlet for their zeal.

We will now return again to the early 19th Century and touch upon the origins of the Providence Orphanage.

Miss Buchere, a humble, Christian housekeeper of her times, felt keenly the misfortunes of the children whose fathers' deaths had reduced them to destitution, making them a heavy burden to their mothers and exposing them to every kind of deprivation. She was consumed with a burning charity and compassion for the miseries of humanity and conceived the idea of doing something about this distress by relieving some of the poor widows of the anxiety of providing for the needs of a large family.

From the idea to its reality as a home for the little orphans was but a single step; there they would be preserved from harm and prepared for the difficulties of living by a well ordered life of hard work and holiness. Divine Providence held out its hand to that generous Christian woman so that she could take that step.

The Lord was pleased with the foundress' intentions and bestowed His blessings abundantly on the undertaking. Many charitable persons became interested and were eager to contribute to its expansion. The benefactors were encouraged and consoled by what they saw: the children's good behaviour, the serenity seen on their features, the good work habits which they had. The children who earned some money or succeeded in a competitive examination were also pleased and excited. Several priests came to the Orphanage to give religious instruction and even devoted part of their free time to the children. Lay teachers, both men and women, offered to instruct them without any recompense, and a well known physician in the neighborhood, Doctor Fizeau, donated his services to the children. Finally, several students, who had completed their education, asked to remain as teacher's aides.

Each year from 1809 'til 1830, there was a general meeting of all of the benefactors in the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois; Mass was celebrated

for their intentions, a collection was taken up and the contributions were always generous. After the Restoration, Duchess d'Angoulême and Duchess de Berry agreed to take this work under their protection and would often assist at the annual meetings; even the King and Princes contributed to the collection. Duchess de Berry placed eight orphans at Miss Buchere's home, and, according to the rules that had been drawn up, she named her royal daughter, who was still in her cradle, as the Protectress of the Orphanage (*Protectrice de L'Orphelinat de la Providence*).

On another side, the fund raising drives increased and the children's work became more profitable. Through prudent and capable administration Miss Buchere knew how to increase the resources which Divine Providence put into her hands; when the moment was right and after much deliberation, she was able to propose the acquisition of a larger dwelling to house all her protégées. A place had already been rented in Suresnes because of the inadequacy of their actual dwelling, and each child in turn had the opportunity to enjoy clear, pure air.

After much searching, Miss Buchere purchased the house where the Providence Orphanage is today, 13 Rue du Regard, and she settled her fifty orphans there. The fact that it was possible to pay for the house in a very short time is attributable to the wise economies that were made and also to some generous gifts. Once that great weight was lifted, the directress thought of stabilizing the good that had been begun and increasing the children's means of sanctification. She set up a chapel where Mass was celebrated each day, and Archbishop de Quelen granted the privilege of reserving the Blessed Sacrament.

Miss Buchere, however, was over seventy years of age, and in spite of the growing prosperity of the foundation, the future filled her with anxiety. She rightly asked herself if this work would survive after her death and if her spirit would continue to guide and motivate her assistants . . . Then, too, times were bad and the troubles of 1830 gave reasons for her fears. Her foresight also made her want to take every possible means to assure the perpetuation of the institution to which she had dedicated the better part of her life. Several years passed; she made all sorts of calculations and envisioned many projects but was unable to come to any satisfactory solution.

Divine Providence finally came to her aid and, once again, Archbishop de Quelen was the instrument that was used. When he became aware of Miss Buchere's anxieties he quite naturally thought of his dear Sisters of Bon Secours, who were such a source of consolation to his heart. They had already given proof of their ability to teach the children in Lille; and who, better than he, was able to appreciate their devotion and charity? It was not difficult for him to persuade Miss Buchere that her work could not be in more

capable hands, and said laughingly: "We will place this matter before my dear Sisters of Bon Secours." We have not been able to obtain any details of the interviews which took place at this time between Mère Geay and Miss Buchere, but they must have been very touching. The Superior General, with her elevated and broad insight, appeared as a personification of Divine Providence to the aged directress; someone who would not only foresee but would also provide for all the needs of her dear children. As for Mère Geay, she received this new work, which was like a second motherhood, with true joy.

It as on February 2, 1833, feast of the Purification, that the Sisters of Bon Secours took possession of Providence Orphanage. The choice of this date was part of a Plan, for after that day, Miss Buchere was able to say like Simeon: "*Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace!*" Her labor was over, but she had seen to the preservation of her work."

Since the destruction of the Church of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, the annual meeting of the benefactors had been stopped, but in 1835 it was believed necessary to call a new meeting at St. Sulpice to make known what had been done, the progress of the work, and its needs. In spite of the frightful times there was a considerable crowd and the collection was very abundant. This made it clear that neither the interest nor zeal of the people had diminished. The Orphanage was, for the Bon Secours Sisters, like a little stream fed by a hidden source which enriches the soil, not only of the neighboring meadows, but of all the country around. The prayers of those fifty little children, the holy work accomplished in their souls, blessed the hard toil of the Sisters and made it fruitful. When there was a conversion to obtain, a patient's soul to save, a foundation to begin, the orphans were asked to pray and their pure and childlike offering worked many a miracle.

More and more this home became a center of fervor, and a nursery for chosen souls. The implanting of the love of God and virtue in these young children were greatly aided by the example and teaching of Father Tesson, the chaplain, who worked with the Sisters to accomplish this enormous task. This priest had spent ten years in India; he was recalled to Paris and named Director of the Missions (*Directeur de la Procure des Missions Etrangères*) on Rue du Bac.

He devoted most of his free time and energy to the sanctification of his dear orphans, working with a rare unselfishness and refusing any payment or even the smallest gift. One day, a rug was made for him, and without his knowledge it was nailed down in his room. He questioned his maid as to the source of the gift and when he found out he unnailed the rug and sent it back to the donors.

This, as well as many other similar examples, made it easier for the children to accept this priest's guidance which was somewhat severe but

very wise, and which tried to have them practice virtue purely for the love of God. Besides, his kindness and simplicity equaled his austerity and drew those young hearts to him. It is not surprising, then, that many rare plants were seen to flourish in this garden which had been so well cultivated by that enlightened priest and those devoted religious. Some were hardly born when they went to heaven, whereas many others carried their fervor to the cloisters or spread God's goodness around them in the world. Several of those who went to heaven from that house were admired by their companions for their piety, quiet resignation and the joy with which they died.

One of them, a thirteen year old child, was very near death; she fixed her gaze on a certain spot and cried: "*Oh! She is so beautiful! Look, I tell you, the Holy Virgin is coming to call for me.*"

Another gravely ill child, who was given up as hopeless by the doctors, bitterly regretted her past greediness and lack of mortification. One day she called one of the Sisters and said to her: "Mother, I have a favor to ask you: *I would very much like to have some codfish.*" "Codfish," exclaimed the Sister! How can you possibly want codfish now when you refused to eat it when you were well?" "That is precisely why I am asking for it so that God will pardon my lack of mortification." Throughout her illness this child accepted the great sufferings that she had to endure without the slightest complaint and in a spirit of penance.

The pious spirit and supernatural atmosphere which permeated the Orphanage aroused the interest of the priests who replaced Father de Pierre at St. Sulpice after his death. The memory of Father Hamon is preserved with much gratitude. He was a successful pastor whose priestly virtues shone with much brilliant magnificence;³⁶ and he loved to express his fatherly kindness to the children. He gave them many gifts for the chapel and several sets of vestments which he was no longer using.

As for his successor, Father Meritan, who directed St. Sulpice from 1875 to 1899, he loved to come to visit the children and speak to them about the good God. He called their First Communion day *His day* and arranged to preside at the ceremony. The teachers still remember the sermon which that venerable priest gave when he took part in that beautiful celebration for the last time. "Our Lord", he said, as tears filled his eyes and his voice became filled with feeling, "became bread to feed us. *He became bread*—Do you understand, my children, the love of this God wanting to become bread to be the food of your souls?"

Chapter VII

Purchase of Hotel de Pons Deaths of Fathers Desjardins and de Pierre Lille's free schools entrusted to the Sisters of Bon Secours

1833—1836

In the meantime, postulants abounded at the little house on Rue Cassette and it was necessary to think about looking for another place so as to establish the Mother House and the novitiate under more favorable conditions.

Aided by Father Desglageux's council, Mère Geay decided to buy Hotel de Pons for the Congregation; a building located on Rue Notre des Champs, across the street from the simple dwelling where the Sisters had stayed during the first year of their religious life.

Hotel de Pons belonged to the Marquess de Tourzel, née Augustine de Pons, daughter-in-law of the Duchess of Tourzel, who had been the governess of Louis XVII. He had given many attractive gifts to the Temple's prisoners and his name was involved in the tragic events which marked the last years of Louis XVI's reign.³⁷

The Marquess de Tourzel was profoundly Christian, as was the rest of her family, and she was happy to cede the house, which held so many family memories, to a religious community. The arrangements she had made with

the Superior General were so advantageous that the Sisters of Bon Secours count her among their most distinguished benefactors.

As the result of a particularly skillful administration during those first years of poverty and need, Mère Gay was able to propose such a significant purchase. This proved that she governed, from the point of view of both spiritual and material needs, like a strong woman with wise and industrious hands.³⁸ The zeal with which she stimulated others was often expressed through generous gifts from the many supporters whom she attracted and this helped to lighten the heavy burden that she had taken upon herself at that time. We said heavy, because the complete payment for the Hotel de Pons had to be made within a limited number of years which had been fixed. The building was vast and well situated but much in need of repair, and it took some time to renovate and restore it.

The Sisters were not to have the joy of seeing Father Desjardins bless their new house which was to be the warm and life-giving family home of the Institute. The purchase had hardly been made when he died; his support and sympathy had never been lacking; and once he had started Mère Gay along the road of governing, he helped her to walk it.

Father Desjardins died on October 21, 1833 burdened by age and work. Archbishop de Quelen lost a great friend, whose support and affection had been such a consolation throughout his episcopate.

When the Archbishop's residence was looted and destroyed, this holy old man lost everything: his books, his clothes, all his possessions. Many persons were eager to provide him with the necessities of life and Divine Providence arranged a home for him with the Sisters of St. Michel. In this Community he received the most compassionate care, and as his infirmities increased little by little so did their concern for him. Towards the end of his life his weakness became extreme but he did not lose his gaiety or finesse of mind.

Archbishop de Quelen did not wish to leave the bedside of this dying man, who, even when he could no longer speak, made signs to express the respectful, tender affection he had for his first pastor.

The Sisters of St. Michel were permitted to keep the mortal remains of this much loved priest; and in a Pastoral letter the Archbishop of Paris expressed the gratitude and regret that he deeply felt for this departed friend.

Father Olivier, pastor of St. Roch, preached the eulogy in St. Michel's Monastery Church; we quote in part: "I am not surprised that the numerous Communities entrusted to Father Desjardins' care (St. Michel, the Madeleine, the Misericorde, the Bernardines of Port-Royal and the Sisters of Bon Secours), made such rapid progress in fervor in their state of life. Who could resist the persuasiveness of his speech, the holiness of his example and the abundance of his works. You will not hesitate, I am sure, to place high on the

list of his accomplishments the inauguration of the Nursing Sisters which happily came about when he was the Archdeacon of St. Genevieve. It was perhaps the only work of charity which escaped St. Vincent de Paul. Their development and success, the esteem, gratitude and respect which the Sisters of Bon Secours have received and the incontestable services which they perform each day are all indications of the importance and necessity of such an Institute."

The death of this guide, who so providentially crossed her path, was very keenly felt by Mère Geay. This sorrow, added to the anxieties of the previous few years, had an effect on her already delicate health; and the good Mother became sick enough to frighten her sisters and numerous friends. Baron de Blaisel became more and more attached to Bon Secours, especially since Mother Marianne was named superior at Boulogne. He expressed this in a letter dated March 6, 1834: "How sorry we are to know that you are not feeling well. We really hope that you will take the time this summer to visit your little Community in Boulogne and remain there long enough to get some rest and regain your strength.

"How grateful we are to you, he added, for having given us Sister Marianne; she is loved and respected by the rich and adored by the poor. She is so good! Unfortunately her strength cannot keep up with her zeal and courage. With insistence I ask you to send an assistant who can help her and they can attain heaven together. It is very urgent that the Sisters have some relief as they cannot meet the requests that are made each day. I dare to ask you for two, at least do not refuse me one . . ."

Two years later Baron de Blaisel gave Bon Secours a new proof of his steadfast friendship. The house in which the Sisters lived was to be sold, and as it was very old and not adequate for their needs, it was not sensible to purchase it. So, the Baron went looking for another place and in his wife's name he bought them a property located on Rue St.-Martin in the upper part of the town of Boulogne. This building, later enlarged, is part of the present convent of the Sisters of Bon Secours. With extreme delicacy Baron de Blaisel and his friends advanced the necessary funds for this purchase and took upon himself all the expenses.

Father de Pierre, that other protector of those first days, was not at all indifferent to the progressive development of the Institute, but for several years he was able to follow only from afar those good women whom he had initiated to the religious life.

The Revolution of 1830, the assault on the Episcopal residence and the disasters which followed profoundly affected him; and an excessive fatigue, caused by his work at the time of the cholera of 1832, completed the deterioration of his already weakened body. From that time on, Father de Pierre remained sickly; and on January 20, 1836 he died at seventy-four

years of age. This venerable pastor went to heaven burdened by many years of hard work, and left a heritage of numerous and flourishing good works in his parish. His body was buried in the underground chapel of St. Sulpice, and it is still possible to see the monument which the people erected to that worthy priest, who was so aptly called the father of the poor and of souls. His bust in profile on a medallion is held by two angels and crowned by a cross; on a bronze plaque the following inscription testifies to the gratitude of the parishoners: "Here in the Lord rests Charles Louis Francois Marie de Pierre, pastor of St. Sulpice, Vicar General of the Diocese. He had governed the parish for thirty-four years and restored its ancient grandeur. Died, January 20, 1836. 74 years of age. *He refused the honors of the episcopacy so as not to be separated from his parishoners: they wish to keep him among them even after his death.*"³⁹

A few weeks after this loss, which was so painful to Mère Geay and her Sisters, the Superior General had to focus all her attention on the house at Lille. She had been approached and the foreseeable results of that action were to be an increase of the Sisters' area of involvement in that community.

The residents of that highly populated city, whose wealth was drawn from industry, understood that in order to reverse the disastrous results of the revolution and insulate the children against the insidious doctrines that had been propagated, a Christian education for the working class was necessary. What bulwark, other than the principles of faith, could stand fast against the yearnings of the people who were being subjected to hard labor and had heard the rights of man proclaimed? Since 1818 Father Noyer Desnoyers, pastor of St. Etienne's parish, and Miss Elizabeth Gruau de Réverseaux founded a free school for poor young girls. In fact they had acquired a house for 53,000 francs which had been given to the city of Lille through a Royal Decree dated July 23, 1823. The founders entrusted this school to third-order Carmelites who ran it until 1834, at which time they left the city. When the school was closed it had been flourishing and giving an education to between five and six hundred children. Miss Réverseaux and Father Desnoyers were quite upset that a work which already had done so much good should be stopped. So, they went to the Sisters of Bon Secours and asked them to take over the school which the Carmelites had left. They were in a very good position to judge the devotion, zeal and piety which those religious brought to their double mission since they were already teaching classes at Market Place in Verjus and on Rue de la Barre.

The Superior General could not refuse and made the arrangements necessary to send the number of Sisters requested to fulfill these new obligations. Also, property had to be found because the house being used for a school in 1818 belonged to the City. Soon a large building with a garden at 74 Rue de l'Hôpital Militaire was chosen; it had been a boarding school for

young girls. Mr. Duquesne, the owner, agreed to turn over the property to the Bon Secours Community for the sum of 41,571 francs. Father Lefebvre, pastor of St. Etienne, Mr. Charvet and Mr. Defontaine, notable residents of Lille who made up the Administrative Council of the charity school, formerly run by the Carmelites, loaned this amount of money to Mère Geay. It was agreed that the repayment of the sum would not be required as long as the Sisters directed these schools.

They took possession of their new residence on June 29, 1836 and soon students filled it. The following paragraph can be read in a report of Lille's Mayor dated 1838; it tells us how the Sisters fulfilled their new task: "The religious of Bon Secours have always been most zealous in the instruction of the young girls. They prepare their classes with great care and maintain good order. Since they transferred their establishment to Rue de l'Hôpital-Militaire, they have given over to the school a large part of the property which is very suitable for their purpose, and the number of students is increasing; they now have 600. A sum of 3500 francs has been allocated, in place of 3000 francs, which provides less than 6 francs per year for each student."

These figures are not without interest, especially today, when our governments burden the state's budget with considerable sums for the sole purpose of establishing public schools from which the name and notion of God have been banished.

Even without considering the religious order, one cannot but highly praise the unselfishness of these humble women, who, in the midst of their hard work are content to have only what is strictly necessary. At the same time the need was felt to remember, in some real but respectful way, that numerous host of persecuted people who are spread throughout the land of exile and whose only crime was to have worked in silence and self-forgetfulness to give God to souls.

Chapter VIII

Death of Archbishop de Quelen Building of the Mother House Chapel 1836—1845

As Bon Secours had become consolidated and its members multiplied, it pleased God, so it seemed, to take away one by one those supports which had been such a source of strength from the beginning. In 1839 the Sisters lost their father and friend who used to say repeatedly that he regarded the foundation of their Institute as one of the glories of his episcopate. Archbishop de Quelen, like the others, had a life full of work and suffering and went to receive the reward promised to the faithful servant. There is no doubt that God had accepted the sacrifice of his life made for the conversion of the former Bishop of Autun, Talleyrand.

As soon as the Archbishop felt that he was sick, he wished to claim for himself the good that he had procured for so many others; and he sent for his dear nurses, saying in his own charming way: "*My Sisters, give me your Bon Secours.*"

"The trial of a long and painful illness brought out clearly all the virtues of the Archbishop of Paris," are words found in the Decree of the capitular Vicars announcing the death of Archbishop de Quelen. A Sister of Bon Secours had the rare good fortune of being an intimate witness of those virtues and of being able to assist and care for the prelate during the months which preceded his death. Providentially, Sister St. Cecile, one of the

future pillars of the Institute, was chosen. Many edifying and wonderful things which happened near that bed of pain were revealed by her to friends and to the Archbishop's historians, particularly Baron Henrion. We will give some of the details which show how the saints suffer and die.

Archbishop de Quelen left Conflans and during the last months of his life he resided in Paris at a place which the Madams of the Sacred Heart had offered him on Rue de Varennes.

After the destruction of the episcopal residence, he lived as a poor man with the Dames of St. Michel not far from Luxembourg. One room served as his sitting room, office and bedroom and he had one servant, the faithful René. The staircase, which led to his modest apartment, was so steep and narrow that one day while going up the Archbishop said with a smile: "*This is the narrow way, but I hope it will be for me a Jacob's ladder.*" Grieved by the situation, Madame de Gramont, Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, offered him the part of Hotel de Biron which was called the Petit-Hotel. It was there that Archbishop de Quelen's strangely troubled life ended.

His successor at the Academy⁴⁰ has said: "Born in an era where the bishop's mitre, in Paris, became a crown of thorns and the cross the reed of the pretorium, he was not in want of sorrow. Personally and officially, he received as many outrages as were perpetrated against the martyrs. He saw his home destroyed, his church defiled, the symbols of his Episcopal See thrown into the waters of the Seine, and then he saw himself insulted, defamed and calumniated. He saw, knew and heard all that had been invented against him—and he forgave all—opposing hate with meekness that was generous, strong and so sublime."

His death was worthy of his life. His peace of mind and patience were admirable. When the pain allowed him to speak, he could be heard saying: "*O my God, all that You wish, as You wish, as long as You wish,*" or "*Our Lady of Bon Secours, be Bon Secours for me.*"

When he learned that several Bishops were seeking to give more honor to the Immaculate Conception because of his example, he was very happy and said: "*God be praised! And may I suffer more if only my Immaculate Mother be honored.*"

He was as humble as he was patient. One night, imagining that he had pained the good Sister, he begged pardon several times, telling her candidly that he had accused himself of his fault in confession. He would, on no account, in asking for help, be a trouble to anyone, and this was a real trial for the Sister, who was so glad to give him relief, even if it cost her the loss of sleep. Her nights of watching were ones of edification and holy learning. The invalid spoke incessantly of his Divine Master; he knew that he would never again celebrate holy Mass, and he expressed his grief in moving words. It was his ardent wish to receive Communion while fasting, and he

often pretended to be asleep when the Sister brought his medicine or something to drink; then, towards morning he would say, with a smile: "Ah, Sister, you thought I was asleep, I saw you quite well when you brought my beef tea, but I had other thoughts! Will you kindly ask Father Surat to say Mass, if it is not too early." It was *never* too early for Father Surat, when he could give Holy Communion to his beloved Archbishop, while the latter was exceedingly grieved that any trouble should be taken on his account.

When his state of health permitted it, he gave thanks aloud, and he then revealed the beauty of his soul and his ardent love for our Lord. Kneeling silently in the corner of the room, Sister St. Cecile held her breath, so as not to lose a single word of this divine colloquy.

The Archbishop could foresee that his end was near, and one day as Sister said that the good God did not require such a sacrifice of his diocese, that he was too necessary to his people, he quickly replied: "No one is necessary in this world. The Apostles were certainly more than I and yet God called them to himself and our religion has not suffered." The prelate could not understand why his thoughts should be diverted from his approaching death. "*It is so easy for a Christian to go to God!*" he said.

Paris, however, was much affected by the gravity of his condition—and in the last days of December, 1839, the cry "*the holy Archbishop is dying*" passed quickly among the people. "By one of those sudden about-faces where the hand of God could not be ignored, he, who had been persued by hate, put out of his home when unbelief triumphed and martyred by the press with lies and calumnies, increased in greatness on his bed of suffering to the heights of the Charity with which he forgave so many outrages".⁴¹

On December 30, he received the last sacraments with great solemnity and said goodbye to his family and friends; then he wished to rest a little and they left him. Only the Sister of Bon Secours, who had so assiduously cared for him for the past eight months, remained with him—says Baron Henrion. As she elevated him on his pillow, he turned toward her and said: "*I have given you much trouble, Sister. If I have the happiness of seeing St. Vincent De Paul, I will speak to him first of all about you.*" That night seemed calmer than the preceding one, so he tried to go to bed; but his breathlessness increased and he had to return to his armchair. Sister did her best to make him comfortable, he looked up to heaven and said: "What have I ever done to merit so much good care?"

Death became imminent and about three o'clock in the morning Sister called those persons who had remained in vigil in the next room. The Eucharistic Lord came for the last time to visit his faithful servant. His eyes glistened, his features were radiant with joy in the presence of God; he might have been a Seraph absorbed in the contemplation of eternal glory. After receiving Communion his eyes looked wistfully at all those who were

around him; he had a smile and a sweet word of thanks for everyone. Sister St. Cecile was not forgotten and the memory of the look he gave her remained with her like a ray of hope all through her long and toilsome life.

The Archbishop of Paris died on the 31st of December in the morning. His last words were: "I am going to appear before a Judge whom I have always loved and whom I still love."

As his voice died away he turned to Sister and, with an expression of happiness on his face, said to her; "Didn't I tell you that I would not return?"

Yes, death was there. His handsome features, which were accentuated by suffering, became like marble. He pronounced these words: *Jesus, Mary, Joseph* and with the last syllable his beautiful soul broke its bonds.

The mortal remains of the great prelate laid in state in Notre Dame Cathedral for nine days and many of the persons responsible for the outrages that were heaped upon him during his life were recognized in the sorrow-filled crowd that surged around his catafalque. The Sisters of Bon Secours looked at his peaceful face which he had so often turned towards them with a special fatherly kindness, and their tears expressed their great sorrow. Deep in their hearts, however, they were convinced that even from heaven he would continue to protect them, and, as we shall see later, they were not mistaken.

Their holy founder left them a precious souvenir. Archbishop de Quelen had been profoundly affected by the Blessed Virgin's apparitions to Sister Catherine Laboure and had had several statues of the Immaculate One cast in bronze according to the description given by Sister Catherine. He gave one of them to the Sisters; it was placed in the novitiate and was named *Virgo Fidelis*. The novices still gather around this statue when they pray.

In his relations with Bon Secours, Archbishop Affre, the new Archbishop, drew his inspiration from the feelings of his predecessor and showed a true fatherly concern for them in every circumstance. The occasion to publicly manifest his support of the Congregation came at the time of the construction of the chapel at Rue Notre Dame des Champs.

With her usual good management, Mère Geay had succeeded in paying the debt caused by the purchase of the new convent, and, without imprudence or presumption, she was able to think of realizing a wish she had cherished for a long time. She wanted to build a beautiful and splendid sanctuary to God's glory which would be an eloquent expression of her gratitude; and a lasting thanksgiving for the signal favors heaven had bestowed on the Congregation. This ardent desire revealed the Superior General's moral physiognomy in all its beauty. She was strict towards herself and concerned that the spirit of poverty of the early days be preserved among her Sisters, yet she wanted to make the Lord's house magnificent; she was often heard to say: "Let us be poor in everything, but let God be treated as God." (*Que vous soyons pauvres en tout, mais que Dieu*

soit traité en Dieu.) While the Mother House is still deprived of the modern comforts which alleviate some of life's difficulties, the Chapel, which overshadows it, ranks among some of the Capital's most beautiful religious monuments.

Here again, God arranged things in such a way that Mère Geay's hopes and desires were more than surpassed. The accomplishment of this undertaking was entrusted to Mr. Breton, a capable architect who was also a devout Catholic. He put his whole heart into the work and made its fulfillment a personal achievement; Father McCarthy, the community's chaplain, greatly helped him in carrying through the plan he had designed.

During the period of the Restoration, 1843, a few select men, who were fascinated by the beautiful—in the sense that the beautiful is the Christian ideal—started a campaign against the pagan tastes of the 18th Century, and it bore fruit. The first speech in defense of gothic art had appeared in 1824 in a work of Sulpice Boisserée about Cologne Cathedral, but it had little effect; and in 1830, commenting on the lack of appreciation of the beauty of gothic architecture, Rio said in his *Epilogue à L'Art Chrétien*: "At the time of which I speak, that is, between the Restoration and the Revolution of 1830, the provincial lawyers or judges who came to visit the Palais de Justice in Paris, forgot, or did not know, that the Sainte Chapelle, the most precious jewel of our gothic architecture, was so near by. But, in 1833, when Victor Hugo produced *Notre Dame de Paris*, Montalembert wrote a letter to the author about the architecture of the 13th Century and it has remained famous. It is an eloquent call to the small number of partisans whose good taste in antique religious matters had preserved, or rather was a raising of defenses in favor of Christian art. Montalembert and his friends endeavored, from that time on, to work for its restoration.

How was it possible that the designs of the Greeks and Romans were, for so long a time, preferred to the works of genius of the 13th Century structures like the Pantheon and the Madeleine, to our magnificent cathedrals? "This depreciation of French taste can only be explained," writes a distinguished archeologist, "by the introduction of pagan ideas in our society. Christian art, of which gothic architecture is the most pure expression, elevates and calls the soul to higher things; ancient art holds it in bondage and drags it down."

The distinctive characteristic of the cathedrals of the middle ages is their *exaltation of the heights* (*L'Exaltation des Hauteurs*). In these temples of stupendous eminence and mysterious shadow, the material world disappears and one feels absorbed, grasped by a sense of the infinite and the need to kneel in adoration.

Mr. Breton was happy at the opportunity to join the ranks for the cause of Christian art and he conceived a true masterpiece. He made the stones speak Mère Geay's thoughts and prayers, and thus inspired her Sisters to lift up

their souls and to live on the heights, and through this architectural poem her *MERCI* was truly expressed. And so, in the chapel of Bon Secours, as in Notre Dame and other ancient cathedrals, one is filled with an unexplainable feeling which expresses itself through prayer and adoration.

Much encouragement was given Mr. Breton from the very beginning of the work. The Archbishop wished to preside at the laying of the cornerstone. The *Ami de la Religion* on May 16, 1843 spoke of the ceremony: "It would be useless to speak of the great work done by the Nursing Sisters of Bon Secours for religion and society. Their praise is on all tongues, and nothing better proves how the sick appreciate their care than to see that they cannot fulfill all the requests received in spite of their surprising growth in only nineteen years of existence.

A better world is the only reward that the Sisters want from the hard work that accompanies their calling. Nevertheless, today, the entire Community is experiencing one of those rare moments of happiness which puts sacrifice into oblivion and leaves a most precious and lasting memory in all hearts.

The Archbishop of Paris took great interest in all the works of the diocese, but he seemed to favor the Congregation of Bon Secours with special kindness. Today, he was happy to have another opportunity to prove it by blessing the cornerstone of the chapel which is being constructed by the community at Rue Notre Dame des Champs.

The prelate arrived at eight o'clock and after celebrating the Eucharist he went to the site of the new edifice. He was assisted by the Bishop of Gap, the pastor of St. Sulpice and many priests.

An official report of this ceremony was signed by the two bishops, by all of the clergy who were present and by several of the influential persons who had been invited. Then, as was customary, it was sealed in a cedar box and placed under the cornerstone.

The Ceremony took place in great harmony and reverence and a moving sermon by the Archbishop followed it. He compared the Congregation of Bon Secours to a solid structure which was founded and preserved by God and to which ever greater growth would come because of the foundation of charity which he had given it.

The prelate left about noon, but not before he had shown his interest and concern to all. He even went through the work area to encourage the men. This pleased them and his kind words bore much fruit."

As Mère Geay saw the walls of this temple of stone, which was destined to glorify God, rise little by little, she felt impelled to erect and establish that temple of *living and chosen stones*⁴² formed by the members of the Institute on the most solid of foundations.

Towards the end of the year 1843, she began the work of compiling the *Custom Book* which contained all the pious customs which, for the most part, had been in use since the very beginning of the Congregation. This work

was to clarify the essential points of the Rule, and to determine many of the details which could not be spelled out in the Rule, but which, at the same time, could not be left to the arbitrary judgement of individual Sisters or Superiors.

Mère Geay was greatly concerned that the same unity of viewpoint and action be preserved in the Mother House as well as in all of the outlying communities. Her Council worked it out with her; then she examined it in her spare time and beside certain articles these words were found in her handwriting: "This is a point of Rule."

In some of the pages the Superior General allowed her heart to speak and revealed her inmost thoughts. Let us listen as she extolls the virtue of *Poverty* so loved by the Sisters of Bon Secours. It is a powerful protection against the dangers which religious meet in the world: "Holy poverty," she says, "is one of the glories of the religious life and also one of the strongest columns on which the future of the Congregation rests. The Sisters will love it dearly as they would a mother and be happy to wear its livery . . . A good religious will not only wish to be free of grave faults concerning poverty, but will also be careful to avoid even the least imperfection. The esteem and love of this virtue, which detaches one in the right way from the passing things of this world, will be eagerly sought.

She will frequently go through the things she has, and then, looking at her crucifix, she will ask herself if Jesus, who gave up everything for love of her, finds her wearing poverty's livery?" The fact that detachment is so necessary led Mère Geay to write very wise rules concerning clothing, food and travelling, etc.

The virtue of *Chastity* also inspired her. "*Happy are the pure of heart for they shall see God.* A religious should think, desire and keep her eyes only on Jesus Christ. The Chastity by which she vowed herself to Him makes her like the angels, and the Holy Spirit values it more than all of earth's treasures. Alas, the vessels in which we carry it are delicate and fragile, and the devil, who knows this so well, lays snares for these pure and innocent souls.

But take courage and be reassured, dear Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours! Remember, that when you undertake a task, you are doing God's work of saving souls and will struggle against the prince of darkness. Be faithful to your Rule and you will find strength from on high.

Yes, you will be attacked by the enemy because you try to take his victims away from him, but pray earnestly to the Blessed Mother, the Queen of Virgins, and ask her help. Of whom should you be afraid if Mary is fighting with you? . . . "

At the beginning of the chapter on *Obedience*, Mother was unaware that she described her own beautiful soul, which, though placed on a candlestick, remained as though buried and lost in her own nothingness before God.⁴³

"By the vow of Obedience the soul is established in a state of union and

complete dependence on God, and she becomes one with Him. Like Jesus Christ, to whom she has given herself, she is no longer here to do her own will but His. She is a faithful friend of whom God can ask anything, a devoted co-worker whom He can use as and when He wishes. He can keep her in solitude to pray or send her even to the ends of the earth to console and relieve the sick, bring back sinners or instruct the young. By her consecration, she has become a host, a victim for God. She dies to her own will which she places under the direction of the Rule and her superior . . .

"This humble and simple obedience is a special characteristic of a Sister of Bon Secours; she neither argues nor resists and is not stopped by difficulties; but she counts on Him who is her All and He cannot refuse His help."

Mère Geay, like St. Therese, believed that nothing is little or unimportant in the service of the King of kings. She dealt with every detail and regulated many things that may seem insignificant. Because of this the Divine Master could say to each of her Sisters: "*You have ravished my heart with one strand of your hair.*"⁴⁴ By penetrating even the most ordinary and lowly actions with a supernatural spirit, you will give great joy to my heart."

The *Custom Book* was carefully drawn up by Mère Geay and it became a sacred code for her Sisters. The future Superiors General, as we shall see, studied it in depth and implemented it faithfully.

In the meantime, the long desired goal was reached. It took Mr. Breton only eighteen months to complete his work. He succeeded so well that one of the then current newspapers⁴⁵ could print without fear of exaggerating: "This chapel, constructed in the ogival style, is, without doubt, the best of its type that has been built in the diocese of Paris for many centuries. The mark of true antique Christian architecture is to be found in this building and it is unfortunate that it is lacking in all modern structures.

It is desirable for the Minister of Cults and the Prefect of the Seine to visit this chapel on Rue Notre Dame des Champs. They will be easily convinced that it is possible, in our day, to build churches wherein the tastes inspired by the faith and piety of our fathers is reproduced."

Archbishop Affre wished to distinguish this edifice from ordinary chapels by a solemn consecration. He was not afraid of the additional fatigue which the length and multiplicity of ritual of such a ceremony would impose on him. "This honour," continues the same newspaper, "is certainly a precious recompense conferred on the Sisters for the many different sacrifices which the accomplishment of this important work must have imposed on this community, whose only resource is its own work and good management. It is truly a homage which recognizes the good taste and competency of those who directed this construction with so much care and intelligence."

The prelate's kind thoughtfulness was a source of great consolation to Mère Geay. And so, like pastors speaking of their temples, she could say:

*"The Lord has sanctified His tabernacle; this is the House of God in which His name will be invoked and of which it is written: and My name will be there!"*⁴⁶

Archbishop Affre's patron was St. Denis, and because of the great love he felt for the Sisters, he graciously chose his feast day, October 9, for this solemnity. The newspapers of that time gave the following account: "Today, on his patron's feast, the Archbishop has solemnly consecrated the magnificent chapel of the Sisters of Bon Secours. The ceremony is long and arduous for the consecrator because of the many blessings and anointings contained in the Ritual. It began at seven o'clock in the morning and didn't finish until almost noon. Except for those who had to remain with the sick and dying, almost all of the Sisters were present at the consecration of this veritable religious masterpiece. It comes as the fruit of their own privations as well as of the donations which the families, who are financially able, gave the community as recompense for day and night attendance with the sick. As is well known, the less fortunate are cared for gratuitously by these courageous Religious.

"Families from all levels of society, who have had recourse to the care of the Sisters of Bon Secours, were present at the ceremony. Everyone admires this chapel and its sacred ornaments which are in such perfect harmony with the architecture and which express the same taste and thoughts of faith.

"At about eleven o'clock, when the anointings and prayers prescribed for the consecration of a church had been completed, the Archbishop celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the new altar. Simultaneously, Father Eglée, the Vicar General, and another priest said Mass at the two side altars. Father Jacquement, the Archdeacon, and Father Surat, the Canon-Archdeacon of Notre Dame, were the Archbishop's assistants. Father James, who was the Ecclesiastical Superior of the Community for a long time, was in the sanctuary with Father McCarthy who was the convent's chaplain. Father Caron, director of the major seminary, was the Master of Ceremonies and was assisted by the students of St. Sulpice. The Sisters, accompanied by the organ, sang the prayers of the Church to the music of certain pieces that they borrowed for the occasion; they did this with much harmony and good taste.

"It can be said, that nothing has been more impressive than this dedication ceremony. Everyone worked together to enhance its splendor, and it has certainly been an unforgettable day for these holy, humble women and for the Superior who formed them in religious devotion and who alone seems unaware of her own merit.

"The chapel of Bon Secours must be seen to really gain a just idea of this architectural chef-d'oeuvre. All the same, it seems interesting to us to include a concise description of it here. The edifice is composed of a principal nave and two aisles forming galleries. The choir loft is above this, and it can be reached by climbing the two stone spiral stairways, the ramps of which are all cut out open work. These stairs are located inside the main

door and lead to the organ loft which joins the side galleries. The interruption of these galleries forms the transept. The great pointed arch rests on six pillars which are formed by a group of small columns and crowned by a cornice of leaves and branches. These cornices, which number one hundred and thirty, as well as the ornaments from which the pointed arches of the lateral parts arise, are all different in their detail.

"The triumphal arch, which forms the opening of the sanctuary, rests on two pillars like the others.

The sanctuary is composed of five sections; it receives light from a single stain glass window which depicts St. Genevieve and St. Clotilde. Pinnacles cut into the stone embellish the other four sections; they also serve as supports to the statues of the four Evangelists which are surmounted by bell-like turrets which form a canopy over their heads.

"The moldings of all of the arches come together at the summit of the great vault; and their juncture forms the keystone whose octangular design is also found in the sculpture and open work of each section.

"On either side under the first arch are the entrances to the sacristy. The Blessed Virgin's niche is placed at the back of the sanctuary; it rises above the main altar which is made of sculptured stone and decorated in gold.

"The sanctuary is separated from the nave by a communion rail. The steps leading up to it, as well as those of the main altar, are of white marble. The floor is a mosaic in colored marble. The entire surface of its walls are painted in the style of the edifice. The windows are stained glass and each represents two saints, and there is also a medallion depicting an episode from their lives. Each window is divided by a small stone column which supports a mullion done in open work and constructed from a single piece.

"A large rose window is found just above the organ loft. The nave is paved in marble which forms a cross and contains the hand carved oak pews to be used by the Sisters. The woodwork along the aisles is also of hand carved oak, as are the side doors; these latter are surmounted by an impost and stained glass windows.

"The points of construction that should be noted are the pendentives of the upper galleries, the stairways to the organ loft and the arches bold, daring style."⁴¹

As is known, Stanislas College is located just next door to the Bon Secours Mother House. On October 8, 1844, Bishop Thibaut of Montpellier presided at the solemn re-opening exercises for the students. As he left the school, he wanted to visit the new chapel and see its least detail even though it was still being prepared for the next day's ceremony. The prelate was so fascinated by the beauty of the edifice that he promised to come there and officiate the following Sunday. He kept his word, and, after celebrating the sacred mysteries, he spoke to the Sisters and in a few words eloquently expressed

his congratulations and encouragement. "The world will probably find fault with you, but let the world talk. It understands nothing about the things of God or the marvels that faith inspires. Speak to the world of luxury, self-beautification or the lavishness and splendor for the pleasures and festivals which so often corrupt souls and it will understand and will agree and approve you. But these false philosophers will disapprove of the beauty and magnificence used in a prayerful quiet house consecrated to the Lord, and then talk about relieving the poor. Oh, my dear Sisters, the world does not want to see that your friends, the poor, are always with you and are relieved by your care. And your great devotion also allows you to have a place worthy of the hidden God who, at each moment, inspires your courage and charity."

The new chapel quickly became a center of attraction to clergy and faithful alike. In its atmosphere of splendor and quiet peace, it was truly a place of prayer.

Numerous families requested that their children's marriages be blessed there. And several Bishops, whose affairs brought them to Paris, came frequently to the chapel to pray. Through these visits they came to know Mère Geay better, and, when leaving, more than one said: "I have seen a saint."

From the religious and artistic point of view it was agreed that this chapel was most suitable for very important and imposing ceremonies, and several new bishops wished to be consecrated there. The solemn ceremony of the Episcopal Consecration of Bishop Laurence from Tarbes took place on June 1, 1845; that of Bishop Alouvy was on Pentecost Sunday, 1846. One of the newspapers wrote: "The Bishop of Tarbes was very moved. This was most noticeable towards the end of the ceremony as he knelt down before the consecrating Bishop, who intoned the ancient hymn *Ad Multos Annos*, and also when, for the first time, he blessed the congregation with the fullness of the priesthood with which he had been invested." This prelate had to completely restore most of the Marian shrines in his diocese; they were in ruins. It seems that the Blessed Virgin rewarded his zeal by choosing him as the witness of her appearances to Bernadette Soubirous along the banks of the Gave River.

The day on which the Bishop of Pamiers was consecrated brought to mind the marvels accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the Cenacle, and this added a very special character to the occasion. Bishop Thibaut was the Consecrator and he was assisted by the Bishops of Evreux and Bida. The students from the major seminary also added their contribution to this very moving ceremony.

Some days earlier the election of the Superior General took place. It was the 24th of May, 1846. The Sisters had asked Archbishop Affre to preside at

this meeting and he readily agreed. He was happy to announce that Mère Geay had been re-elected and he showed it. He took this occasion to reaffirm that the Institute could not be in better hands; he also said that it was desirable that this beloved Mother keep the reins of government until the end of her life.

About this time, Father Dreux-Brézé, the future Bishop of Moulins, was named the Ecclesiastical Superior of the Congregation by the Archbishop. This distinguished priest's friendship, influence and counsels were precious helps to Mère Geay. He greatly appreciated the Sisters' ministry and regarded them as the priests' most valued helpers. More than once he called them to a sick person whom he was trying to bring back to God.

We cannot conclude this chapter without speaking of that religious who is mentioned in Alfred Musset's writings which have appeared since his death. Some historians have spoken of the influence exerted on the poet by the sweetness and patience of Sister Marceline, a Sister of Bon Secours. She nursed him through several illnesses between the years 1840 and 1845 and with discreet and delicate tact she led him to thoughts of faith. During one period of convalescence, she often read to him from the *Imitation*. One day, as she finished a particular chapter he asked her to read it again and said that he knew it since he was a child when Father Gerbet had given him the book.

Other influences counteracted and paralyzed God's voice. However, sickness was often a providential interlude in the poet's agitated life which permitted him to begin again. "I have just had pneumonia," he wrote to a friend, "I also had recourse to my good Sisters. Sister Marceline came back and with her another one who is good, sweet and devoted as they all are." It is sad that Alfred Musset did not accord his life with the sentiments which the Sisters had awakened in his greatly agitated heart. It is sadder still, that when his last hour came, no one thought to call them to help him make this final journey. His brother, Paul Musset, has said that on his deathbed the poet had remembered Sister Marceline and had also spoken of Father de Ravignan whom he had known. And yet he left this world without a prayer, without a single word of pardon for his soul.

The Father always waited for this prodigal. He had opened wide the door for His return and even sent His angels to smooth the way. Happy the wanderer, who, more faithful than this poet, let themselves be guided to the light.

Chapter IX

Foundation at Abbeville—Focus on Lille *1845—1848*

Mother St. Cecile should head the list of Sisters who, by their intelligence, helped Mère Geay in developing the work entrusted to her by Divine Providence. A Marist Father, who knew her very well, stated that she possessed all the qualities required for good government: discretion, prudence, generosity and great discernment. The strength of her mind was no less remarkable; and that valor gave her the courage to undertake the hardest works and to overcome the greatest obstacles for her Congregation. Her motto was: *"Duty before all else, in spite of the sacrifices it may demand."*

Sister St. Cecile had hardly left the novitiate when, as we have already noted, she had the opportunity to display her generous spirit during the Cholera epidemic in 1832.

At the same time, the Superior General knew that this religious would be one of the firmest pillars of the Institute. In 1839 she sent her to Archbishop de Quelen's bedside, and it is certain that, during the long illness of the prelate, many very valuable supporters were drawn to Bon Secours through the contact made by Sister St. Cecile with the many distinguished priests who visited him.

Now we are going to see her at the head of one of the Congregation's most important houses. However, before confiding this post to her, Mère Geay entrusted her with a very delicate mission.

At the beginning of 1845, the Superior General was requested to send one of her Sisters to Chartres to teach the religious of that town the art of caring for the sick. Sister St. Cecile was designated for this work.

She fulfilled this task with much tact, and gave such a lofty impression of her own Institute that, a few years later, the Community she had instructed wanted to merge with Bon Secours and accept their habit, Rule and customs. It was not possible for this dream to be realized because the civil government of 1850 did not authorize the projected fusion.

As soon as she returned from Chartres, Sister St. Cecile was chosen to establish the house in Abbeville. This foundation was requested by a very holy priest and was to become one of the joys of the Congregation. Two Superiors General came from this house in Abbeville, and, during the epidemic which devastated the city and surrounding areas, the Sisters of Bon Secours proved how tireless was their devotion. It was there, too, that Mère Geay ended her life and gave her last blessing to her daughters.

The residents of that place have not forgotten that they are indebted to Father Michel for the benefit which came to them from this foundation. He was the pastor-archpriest of St. Wulfran which is a celebrated gothic church and one of the glories of Abbeville. Father Michel was one of those outstanding priests who, because of their qualities of mind and heart, are the inspiration and unifying factor of their parishes. He was raised by profoundly Christian parents and received a choice education. Two of his fellow students were the future princes of the Church, the Cardinals Giraud and de Bonald. At a very young age he entered the Society of Jesus and, for twelve years, he worked for souls by using the gift of eloquence which God had given him. However, his parents lost their fortune and Father had to leave his dear Company to support them. He returned to the Amiens' diocese, and, in 1833, in spite of his reluctance, was obliged to accept the important pastorate at St. Wulfran's. Throughout his twenty seven years there, he was, in every sense of the word, a man of the Gospel and a man of prayer; and he exercised great influence and accomplished much good among the people. But his preferred work, the one his priestly soul cherished the most, was that of the Nursing Sisters.

Long before the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, he had a great devotion to Mary Immaculate, and it was on December 8th that the Sisters came to open the house in Abbeville. Mother St. Cecile was named superior and she brought with her Sister St. Mathieu, Sister St. Valentin and Sister St. Leocadie, all very special people. Father Michel met them at the stage coach and took them to the little temporary house prepared for them on Rue des Grandes-Écoles. He was very happy and this inner joy was shared by the Sisters in spite of the extreme poverty which they found in their poor lodgings.

This destitution has become legendary. Often a Sister would go to the bedside of the sick after having only a crust of bread and an apple to eat. And, even on feast days, it was hardly ever possible to have even a slice of sausage. In her old age, Mother St. Mathieu used to tell how, one day, a Council was held to decide the grave issue of whether or not the purchase of a clothes brush for 13 sous was not an exaggerated expenditure.

Even though the renouncement was made joyfully, there were moments of human weakness, and it was then that Mère Geay was there to support and uplift her Sisters. She understood all the sacrifices entailed in the founding of a new house and, also, that virtue and courage were necessary to enable the Sisters to accept them. She knew that Satan does everything he can to make souls falter precisely at the moment when God is asking the most of them. She wrote to one of the Sisters who founded Abbeville: "I can see, my dear Sister that God has sent you heavy crosses, but you know that this is the lot of privileged souls. So, thank Him, instead of being sad, because God, who is so good, keeps an account of all your sufferings so as to be sure that not even one of them will go unrewarded. The devil does all in his power to lead astray those souls predestined for God's service and to entangle them in his bonds. But the Lord guards them *as the apple of His eye* and brings them through the trial even more pure and pleasing in His eyes. He also permits us to be tempted to help us realize our needs and our nothingness so as to affirm us more and more in His service. If a well rooted tree is battered by a tempest, it remains standing and is even stronger after the storm. It is the same with us. If we have valiantly battled temptation, we come out of it more detached from ourselves and more confident in our good Master, for we know that without the help of His grace we can do nothing. Have courage, then; the good God has promised us that *we will never be tempted beyond our strength*, and He is with us to support and defend us in the battles."

When the 50th Anniversary of the foundation was celebrated on December 8, 1865, the homilist evoked memories of the first days and of the much loved Foundress. His discourse also showed what the apostolate of the Sisters was in Abbeville during the half century. "My dear Sisters," he said, "50 years ago today Father Michel, the much respected Archpriest of St. Wulfran, was very happy. His desire of establishing a small group of Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours in his parish was finally realized. He himself prepared and arranged their humble dwelling and he installed the community under the auspices of the Immaculate Conception. There were only four Sisters in the beginning but, under Our Lady's protection, how could their work, which is heaven's precious plant, not grow and prosper?

"There was a great joy here that day in everyone's heart. We can almost see Father Michel kneeling with them before the Queen of Angels and saying:

'Mary, I have seen my children, who are also yours, suffer and perish, but I have put my confidence in you. I have called your daughters, and, today here, at the foot of your altar, we begin this work under the auspices of your Immaculate Conception, just as, long ago, the Lord began the salvation of the world through your Immaculate Conception. O Mary Immaculate, we have recourse to you; we count on you alone and you will not disappoint our hope!'

"My dear Sisters, you know whether or not that hope has been misplaced.

"O daughters of Our Lady of Bon Secours, favorites of Mary Immaculate, what good you have done among us! What graces have you found for your own sanctification! How many families, both in heaven and on earth, bless your coming and the fecundity of your efforts! Your community has grown and prospered. Your numbers have increased. But can you count the numbers of victims you have relieved, consoled and snatched from death and even eternal perdition? That old sinner, for example, who for so long had lived far from God and His grace; he was broken down by sickness but still refused to think of his salvation. Then a Sister of Bon Secours came. She prayed and had others pray to Mary Immaculate. Her charity first softened the hardened heart; soon she placed a Miraculous Medal around the unbeliever's neck, and, then, very soon he was praying with her. Finally, one day, he surprised everyone by accepting and even requesting the saving Sacraments. This poor sinner died as one predestined. These marvels, and many others, too, are due to your protection, O Immaculate Virgin and to your humble religious of Bon Secours.

O daughters of Our Lady of Bon Secours, protégés of Mary Immaculate, how beautiful will the moment be when you appear before Jesus, the supreme judge. You will be accompanied by all the unfortunate people you have relieved, by all the poor souls that you have helped suffer and die, by all the sinners you will have converted and saved! *Lord, you will say to Him, I have fed You when You were hungry, given You to drink when You were thirsty; today, I come to remind You of Your promise and to ask for entry into Your joy.*⁴⁸ I have saved souls for You; today save mine. O Mary Immaculate, acknowledge your daughters and bring what you have begun in them to a happy fulfillment."

Pardon us for anticipating the future, but isn't this glance in retrospect the best resumé that can be made of the work accomplished by the Bon Secours at Abbeville?

A few months after their arrival in this city, the Sisters acquired a larger place and the Mother House was so certain of the development of this foundation that they advanced the necessary funds.

Now, let us go back to Lille where, in spite of the political troubles and the systematic opposition to religious institutions, the Bon Secours Community

had not ceased to develop. At that time the house was directed by Mother St. Eléonore, who was a living example of zeal and regularity. Because of poor health, she delegated the management of temporal affairs to her assistant, Mother St. Henry, but she guided and cultivated souls with a rare knowledge of the ways of God. The physiognomy of this worthy religious is summarized in these expressive words: *Her virtue grew with the years*. Her contemporaries affirm that she never lost the presence of God. At the end of her life, Mother St. Eléonore went to Rozoy. As a favor she asked to be permitted to take care of the poultry yard. She quietly went to the Lord in July, 1875.

From 1843 on, the classes held at Lille were centralized at Rue Hôpital-Militaire; this necessitated the renovation and enlargement of that house. At that time, the Sisters were giving free instruction to 700 poor children. The material situation was very precarious because all of the expenditures required for the upkeep of the Sisters and the schools were supposed to be covered by an allotment of 3,500 francs. However, the Sisters extended the field of their activities more and more and were not stopped by material difficulties because they considered the immense needs of the people. Thus it was that classes were provided between 6 and 8 o'clock in the evening for the children who worked all day in the factory, because at that time education was not compulsory. Sister St. Celestine was in charge of this work for a long time and her influence on the children, who, for the most part, were abandoned and exposed to many dangers, brought about much good. Her lively faith and the easy, familiar way in which she spoke about God made a very deep impression on their souls.

The noonday class which brought the young workers together was also a beneficial innovation and produced much good. A class in needlework was held for those girls who had left school. It also initiated them to house-keeping and other things that all wives and mothers should know.

Finally, in 1848, the Sunday Meetings were started at the suggestion of Mother St. Henry, who was the Assistant Superior at that time. The directress or, better still, the soul of this work was Sister St. Césaire. She was completely self-effacing and brought great warmth of heart, natural gaiety and good humour to these little soirees on Sunday. Those rare few who are still living recall that at the beginning these meetings were stamped with real gaiety which made up for what they lacked in comfort. Each member in turn furnished the tallow candle to brighten the attic where they played.

Father Lefebvre's and Mother St. Henry's creative charity succeeded, little by little, in transforming that attic into a big, beautiful recreation hall. They replaced the candles with oil lamps while awaiting the gas lights which are now used. Each year Sister St. Césaire was provided with the means to arrange a special treat for those young girls who came regularly to the

meetings. This was due to the generosity of certain persons who were interested in this work, and it took the form of a trip to the seashore, to Bon Secours or some other pleasure outing. This good management and organization did not end with Sister St. Césaire's death. The Sunday Meetings have flourished and today number more than 160 members.

It was again necessary to enlarge the establishment in order to make room for these excellent and diverse works. In August, 1847, the acquisition of two houses at the price of 120,000 francs was authorized by a Royal Decree. They were situated on Rue Hôpital-Militaire and bordered on the existing property of the community. This purchase was made in the name of Mr. de Brigode of Kemlandt. He and several of his friends advanced the greater part of the money required.

Long, costly repairs and renovations had to be done. It was often very difficult to pay the 40 men employed for this work and, at the same time, to provide for the 30 Sisters who made up the community. Fortunately there were numerous people in the city who continually showed their deep gratitude.

One of these was Mr. Emile Verstrate. He had already supported the Sunday Meetings most liberally because he really understood their importance. Now, he loaned a rather considerable sum of money to Mother St. Henry for the current renovations. When she expressed her fears about the reimbursement he said: "Don't be afraid, Mother. I do not want any receipt. Repay me when you can."

The Bidé family of Granville were equally devoted to Bon Secours and proved this more than once. Madame de Pas would share with no one the pleasure of furnishing the Community with fruits and potatoes for the whole winter. The magnitude of this gift can only be understood if you consider that the Sisters were thirty in number.

The Count de Guémelande kept the purse, which was set aside for the unfortunate, replenished. In return, Mother St. Mathilde took upon herself the care of his poor people whenever he was away.

The Bernard, Fremont, Huet and L'Hermite families, among many others, are all inscribed in the golden book of recognition and gratitude.

Later on we will complete this rough sketch of the good which the Sisters of Bon Secours were able to accomplish and will realize that it was due, in great part, to those generous persons who facilitated their mission.

On May 24, the patronal feast, a sermon was preached at the Mother House. In the course of it the speaker applied these words to the members of the Institute: "... All who see them shall acknowledge them as a race the Lord has blessed."⁴⁹ It is a reality that this Divine Blessing on the Congregation is manifested more and more through its progressive extension, the visible holiness of the Sisters and also through the great

influence which they exercise at the bedside of the sick and dying, where they were seen to be full of that wisdom and strength from on High which brings about so much good.

We do intend to devote a chapter to the conversions effected through the instrumentality of the Sisters of Bon Secours. However, here and there we will relate a few of them; there follow a few which took place during that epoch.

One of the Sisters relates: "When the retreat began, I was sent to replace one of my companions who had been nursing her gravely ill patient for six weeks. Until that time, the young man had firmly refused any suggestions of seeking spiritual help, even though he was in great distress. Like the prodigal son in the Gospel, he had left his family when he was only sixteen. He wanted to be out from under their control and do as he pleased, good or bad. He threw himself into a life of debauchery and folly like casting pearls before swine. Then sickness came and stopped him on this treacherous road. The illness had made appalling progress in those six weeks. He asked to return to his family on the night before I was sent to him. He was transported by stretcher. His poor parents had not seen him since his sad departure, but they received him with open arms. They were happy to be able to surround him with care and affection, even if for only a few days. It is true that they were primarily concerned with snatching him from bodily death. The state of his soul or his eternal salvation did not really interest them for they themselves were strangers to religion. Three specialists were consulted. They employed all the resources made available by medical science to save the young man's life, but it was in vain.

"My task was difficult in these circumstances. My work and fatigue were offered to God for this soul's salvation and I continually prayed to Mary, Refuge of sinners. The Blessed Virgin appears to have heard me because, five days later, the poor man began to look within himself and really regretted the disorders of his past life. I spoke to him about God's mercy and immense goodness and also of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ. Little by little, I could see grace at work in his soul. However, prudence was very necessary, and I knew that it was too soon to think about Confession. Three weeks passed. Then, one evening, after a particularly bad attack, the doctor told me that his death was imminent. First, I begged God's help and then approached the bed. As discreetly as possible I made him understand that his condition was growing worse. (I had previously asked the other Sister to go for the parish priest.) Then I said to the sick man: 'There is a priest in the next room who came to ask how you are. Would you care to see him?' — 'Yes, I would,' he replied. The priest was well received as he came into the room. He remained quite a long time and assured me as he left that the patient had made an excellent confession. He came back a few hours later to

give the blessing of Extreme Unction, and, the next morning, he brought Holy Viaticum to the dying man. He received his God with great joy and his disposition continued to be most edifying. He very warmly thanked me for being God's instrument for him and soon after that he died."

This same religious was sent to a very learned scholar who was dangerously ill. "I remained with him for six months," she said, "and I often tried to get him to think about God, but in vain. As an excuse for rejecting any help from religion, he constantly alluded to the fact that for over thirty years he had lived far from God and that the unique occupation of his life was with discoveries and human science. 'It is too late now to change my life,' he always replied when I broached the subject.

"All the same, the illness progressed and it was easily seen that the end was approaching very quickly. One more supreme effort had to be made, but would it as fruitless as the others had been? I placed all my confidence in God and begged Him to look on this soul with mercy. It was no surprise that he agreed to see the priest the next time I spoke to him. At last he had come to understand that his intelligence, influenced by truth, needed more than knowledge, which is always limited and had only matter for its object.

"This unexpected conversion produced extraordinary effects on his friends. Like him, they were all very learned in the human science but knew nothing of the Divine.

"He showed his faith and resignation 'til the very last moment. He died on the same day as his son made his First Communion. He was only fifty-two years old."

Now let us look at the death of a young girl who was a victim of this world's pleasures. A lung infection began one night after she returned from a soiree at which she had reveled in all kinds of success. She was going to die. Everyone knew it, even her mother. The danger could not be denied. Only the patient did not believe it.

One day, however, it was as if she saw the shadow of death hovering over her, and she became very sad and more agitated than usual. Her mother and friends came close to the bed. The Sister of Bon Secours, who was also there, watched her constantly. Suddenly, the young girl lifted up her hands as if afraid, looked about uncertainly and then let them drop again. She spread them out on the bed and looked at them in silent terror for some time. Finally she cried out: "Just look at my hands. Look at them." Her mother stiffened, her friends stood up and the Sister listened. "Just look at them," she repeated, "they are empty . . . empty. I have done nothing for God and I am going to die!" Despair filled her eyes and her voice. Then the Sister said: "Hold this, dear!" and she placed a *crucifix* in the girl's cold, trembling hands.

When she saw the cross, the poor girl began to hope again; her hands were no longer empty. She put the cross to her lips, kissed it and held it close

to her heart. A priest was called. He heard her confession and, as he raised his hand to absolve her, God's cleansing, life-giving pardon came down upon her. The dying girl received Holy Viaticum and the last rites. A few hours later she quietly died while looking at the cross which she still held in her hands.⁵⁰

What a beautiful mission it is to give the cross to those who suffer and to bring down on them the graces that flow from it.

Chapter X

The Field Hospital at Tuileries Foundation at Orléans Death of King Louis Philippe 1848—1850

As the Sisters' concerned and intelligent ministry became better known, the requests for new foundations multiplied. However, Mère Geay could not fill all of them in spite of her desire to see the Sisters' field of activity extended and her joy that their work was appreciated. She feared, and rightly so, that overextension of the Congregation would weaken the religious spirit. This was of primary importance to her. The spirit of the first days, deposited into her hands, must, at all costs, remain pure and unaltered in spite of the multiplicity of foundations and the necessity to accept doubtful vocations to fill the needs of each house.

Mère Geay's preoccupation with this matter is, in part, responsible for the creation of several similar Congregations about that time. They came into being through Bon Secours of Paris' inability to spread the benefit of their work to all the places where its utility had been recognized.

The Superior General was urged to open a house in Lyons. She preferred, however, to send one of her daughters there to teach the rules of nursing to aspirants who had contacted her, and let them form themselves into an independent Congregation.

The little seed planted by Archbishop de Quelen became a big tree. Afterwards it fertilized other lands and produced other vigorous plants.

Bishop Fayet of Orléans made a forceful appeal to Mère Geay to obtain some Nursing Sisters for his episcopal city. It was the autumn of 1847. The Superior General had no wish to refuse this request, but she believed it more prudent to wait until the following year to make this foundation.

A vague sense of anxiety filled all minds and, as Mr. de Tocqueville said, "the ground trembled anew in Europe." Indeed, under the false name of liberalism, while some tried to snatch away from souls the beliefs which elevated and enobled them, the demogogy appealed to popular passions. Disregarding and forgetting the rights of God, the "rights of man" were proclaimed and exalted anew. Also, at the beginning of 1848, the Revolution triumphed from one end of Europe to the other. Its first victim was that generous Pontiff who, to assure his people of that true liberty found only in submission to Divine law, had initiated liberal reforms and popular or common institutions. As representative on earth of Him who had said: "*I have pity on this people*,"⁵¹ he wished to relieve all distress. Like his Master, however, he, too, had to *drink the torrent's water*. The Sectarrians bestowed hypocritical ovations on him and then attacked him with all the bitterness of their hatred and ingratitude. From that time, Pius IX began to climb his Calvary which would climax in the breach of Porta Pia.

When faced with danger the French tried to go to sleep or divert their thoughts through pleasure. All the same, as early as January 27, 1848, one great thinker pronounced these prophetic words to Parliament: "It is said that there is no danger because there is no uprising; it is said that the Revolution is far from us because there are no apparent disorders or troubles in society. I believe that we are deceiving ourselves. The disorder does not lie in the deeds, but has penetrated deeply into minds."⁵²

Less than a month after this grave warning, a new Revolution exploded. Once again Paris' streets were bloodied by fratricidal battles. Tuileries Palace had housed three dynasties in less than half a century. It was invaded and overrun by the populace. King Louis Philippe fled in a hired carriage; and a delirious crowd shouted enthusiastically as they burned his throne at the foot of July's column.

A certain number of wounded men were found among the rioters who had invaded and occupied Tuileries. However, in the midst of the general confusion and disorder, they remained without care for several days. Finally, Doctor Leroy d'Etiolles, a distinguished surgeon, was able to get to them, and, thanks to his initiative, order was re-established in the palace. He proposed to the Ministers that Tuileries be placed at the disposition of the wounded and that later on it could be made into a home for the disabled. That was a solution which the provisional government could understand

and accept. It permitted the evacuation of the palace to be done peacefully and, also, it was eagerly received. That same day, the numerous rooms and large galleries were changed into hospital wards. The greater part of the wounded men, who had been crowded into Paris hospitals, were transferred there, and soon the inscription *Hôtel des Invalides Civils* could be read on the facade of the building.

This inscription was also Doctor d'Etoiles' idea and how fortunate, for, to it is due the palace's preservation. Rumor had been rife that the revolutionaries intended to destroy this splendid monument as a symbol of the defeat of royalty. The new activities taking place at Tuileries put an end to the projected vandalism.

One of the first things that preoccupied Doctor d'Etoiles was the need of dedicated physicians and intelligent assistants to care for the wounded men. He proposed that the services of the religious nurses of Rue Notre Dame des Champs be requested for this important task. The proposal was accepted, and Sister Marie de la Visitation, Sister St. Beatrix, Sister Marianne and Sister St. Aglaé came that very evening to begin a ministry which they would exercise for six months. We will soon see that Sister Marie de la Visitation attracted the esteem and admiration of all at Tuileries and that Sister Beatrix commenced a career which would be particularly fruitful.

Let us listen to an author of that era who saw the Sisters at work and has eloquently testified to their intelligent devotedness.

"Several members of the provisional government, as well as the military commander and doctors, who had come to receive and install the sisters, welcomed them with marks of respect and gratitude. The warmest greeting, however, came from the men they had come to serve. Under the deplorable circumstances which existed, an enormous courage and deep sense of love of God and man were necessary to devote themselves as these holy women did; and everyone understood this. Armed with that spirit of charity which was so characteristic of them and with that wealth of experience which only continual and extensive work with the sick can give, they started to work immediately after their arrival."

Early the next morning, the good Sisters began their double ministry of dressings wounds and caring for their bodies and, at the same time, working to cure their souls. Several of the wounded men appeared to be very sick and the Sisters boldly spoke to them about eternity and advised them to see a priest. They refused the help of several; and then, finally, they agreed to see Father Denys who was able to win the confidence of those poor unfortunate men who had been wounded in a battle between brothers.

This priest came regularly to Tuileries and, along with the Sisters, became an instrument of grace for many of the new guests of the *Hôtel des Invalides Civils*.

Sunday was coming. So, guided by that spirit of faith which overcame all timidity, the Sisters audaciously proposed that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass be celebrated for the needs of the sick men confided to their care. Contrary to what could have been expected, there was not a single protest against the proposal; they even welcomed it enthusiastically. Father Denys said that thus they hoped to be grateful to those dear Sisters who had won their hearts. Though they were misled and rebellious, they were not ungrateful.

The administrative difficulties which arose because of this project were easily settled, but another question presented itself. Where could the Mass be celebrated? The palace's chapel had been pillaged and was full of debris. The throne room was suggested; Father Denys hesitated, for he rightly feared to take responsibility for such an important decision. In spite of this, the idea was encouraged. Archbishop Affre appointed Father Morel, pastor of St. Roch, to bless the temporary chapel in which there remained only a few tattered shreds of the rich draperies. An altar was installed on the large fireplace which separated the throne room from Diane's gallery, and the Sisters took charge of the decorations.

At the time that Tuileries was invaded, Mr. de Pontelli, a young student of the Polytechnical School, respectfully transferred the crucifix from the palace's chapel to St. Roch's Church. He was escorted by a numerous crowd and, as he walked along, he said in a loud, assured voice: "*Make way, open a passage, it is our Master.*"

This crucifix had become famous because of the part its transfer had played. It was this same image of Christ which Father Denys had brought back and placed upon the altar; and it was before the crucifix that Mass was celebrated in the throne room.

A silent and respectful congregation crowded around the altar. What a strange spectacle! An unusual turn about from earthly things! At His minister's voice, the King of Heaven left His throne of glory to receive the homage of His most disinherited children in the exact place where powerful monarchs had received the homage of their courtiers.

How very strong would the kings of earth be, if they would recognize that their power is given, or rather loaned, to them for a purpose that is far superior to their own ambitions! How very happy would the people be, if they could recognize an image and reflection of Divine power in the authority of the ruler.

From that moment on, souls were conquered and grace was at work in that new type of hospital, and, in every sense of the word, it could truly be called a Hotel Dieu! (Hotel of God).

A second Mass was celebrated in the throne room on Wednesday, March 22, 1848; it was offered for the repose of the souls of the victims of the Revolution who had died in February.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered each day after that until the departure of the wounded. It was said in the chapel of Tuileries which was restored for that purpose.

In spite of the intelligent care that was lavished on these unfortunate men, some of them died. The first death became a pretext for one of those demonstrations which were so popular and characteristic of those revolutionary times. In the name of the Republic and at its expense, the friends of the victim resolved to give him those honors which would rebound on all of the French people. The popular will was such a menace that the government did not feel strong enough to resist it, and gave all the authorizations that were demanded. The worker's body lay in plain view in the throne room, and the crowds came to pay their respects until the time of the funeral. Its splendor equaled that of a prince or of the Marshal of France.

A few days after the burial, a second wounded man died at the Hotel des Invalides Civils. Logically, the republicans reclaimed the same honors and privileges for their comrade and friend. Once again, no one dared to refuse them. The government, however, fearing disorder and riots, took certain measures which displeased the people.

The courtyard at Tuileries was literally overflowing, and the time set for the ceremony had long since passed. Impatient at this delay, the crowd began to get agitated. Their exasperation climaxed when it was announced that the body was in such a state of decomposition that it would be impossible to expose it in a public place without compromising the health of all the citizens. Captain Saint-Amand, Commander of the National Guard, was assigned the task of communicating the decision. He tried in vain to explain the situation and restore some semblance of calm to the crowd. They only became more incensed. They crowded around him and even threatened to kill him.

Father Denys was an eye witness of the scene. Long afterwards he still spoke with admiration of that humble religious who prevented a great calamity by her courage and charity. Let us listen to his account.

"We witnessed the violent debate from the balcony of the clock tower and one moment we really feared for Captain Saint-Amand's life. Like us, Sister de la Visitation followed the discussion anxiously. She could not suppress her feelings, and, before a word could be spoken, she went down into the midst of that agitated group. She seized the Commander by the hand and tried to lead him away, but in vain. The workmen angrily demanded the dead man's body; they shouted: 'We want our brother's body, it belongs to us.' The religious responded: 'It is only just, my friends, but for that to be possible it is necessary that it not create a danger to the public's health. All the same, that danger does exist; the doctors themselves have said so. You said, besides, your brother's body belongs to you. I do not disagree, but it belongs to me, too; yes, to me who is speaking to you, because I took care of

him until the very end. I dressed his terrible wounds and I closed his eyes. Those sores were very infected and it spread until now, you can't even approach the corpse without exposing yourselves to great danger. Also, it is not reasonable for you to hold the Commander responsible for the delay which took place. He only carried out the orders which he had received. Don't you know about military regulations?"

That woman's bold, fearless words, so full of common sense and logic, and animated by God's spirit, produced their effect; the revolt was put down. After having snatched Commander Saint-Amand from certain death, she re-entered the palace. It seems as if I can still see her climbing the stairs followed by the brave soldier whom she had saved by her heroic charity.

Thanks to Sister Marie de la Visitation's energy and presence of mind, the viewing ceremony did not take place and, little by little, calm was restored. Even those whom she had opposed admired her courage and self confidence. It is impossible to express with what enthusiasm the wounded men and other people who had seen Sister hold her own in the midst of that irritable crowd, acclaimed her; nevertheless, she remained as simple and unaffected as ever."

The respect which Sister Marie de la Visitation's action had stimulated was extended to all of her companions, and, thanks to them, the chaplain's ministry was made much easier. When the time of Lent arrived, the Sisters took advantage of this increased acceptance by these men and reminded them of their duties as Christians. The chaplain's surprise and the Sisters' joy can be imagined when, after only the second week of Lent, a great number of the wounded men asked to go to confession. But where could this be done? The Confessionals in the chapel had been dismantled and the pieces of wood were now pressed into service as beds for the sick. The Council hall was the only unoccupied room. So the confessional was set up in a recessed window area. Queen Marie Amelie's prie-dieu was used by the penitents and King Louis-Philippe's armchair, from which he presided at Council meetings, was used by the chaplain. So, again, we see another reversal of human things.

Another unexpected result was in store for the Sisters, who were responsible for these conversions. Several of these men had been married, but only in a civil ceremony. Now they earnestly requested the Church's blessing on their union for they wished to assure their wives and children of the benefits of religion. More than happily this desire was satisfied. The pastor of St. Germaine Auxerrois celebrated the Sacrament of Matrimony for ten couples in the King's chapel on April 14, 1848; he spoke very movingly to those present.

Because of the exceptional circumstances of the situation, Mère Geay told the Sisters to take part in the families' celebration, which was the result of God's work through them.

In June, another uprising occurred in Paris. Control was retained but at what a price! It was a bloody battle. On the evening of the 24th of June, a great number of wounded men were sent to the *Hôtel des Invalides Civils*. The National Guard, in charge of defending the palace, were seized by panic during the night of the 26th and the consequences could have been very grave. As the soldiers were taking some prisoners to the fort, someone contemptuously fired upon the guards with a rifle. For the moment, it was believed that the palace was under attack. Now most of the guards were married men with families and, possessed by an irrational terror, they searched for ways of escaping or places to hide. Cold bloodedly and calmly, Sister Marie de la Visitation again succeeded in calming the people. In spite of the terrible things which happened that night, she dominated the situation, re-established order and restored confidence.

When it became evident that Tuileries was not in danger and that the slaughter had been an act of contempt, the wounded were carried into the palace. The Sisters hurried to help the poor men who were all bleeding. Most of them were men of rank, wealthy landowners, lawyers, doctors and noblemen who had come to Paris from the provinces in order to support the government and help re-establish order.

The victims of those days, like those wounded in February, were exposed to the sweet influence of the Sisters who watched at their bedsides; and not one of those who died refused to be reconciled with God. The Sisters could not have hoped for any better recompense than the certitude of having opened heaven for those poor men who had been blinded by passion or misguided by ambitious leaders.

This fruitful apostolate, however, was going to end. The date fixed for the patients' departure was August 15, 1848; the condition of most of them permitted immediate return to their own homes. These men did not wish to leave their nurses without giving them something to show their gratitude. They took up a collection in which even the National Guard participated. In only one day, they accumulated a sum that was sufficient for their purposes. So it was, that on the 15th of August they were able to offer a magnificent cross to Sister Marie de la Visitation. It has been described as one that would not have been out of place around the neck of an abbess of the middle ages. With great delicacy the men had asked the Archbishop to bless it and attach indulgences to it.

The other Sisters each received a medal that had, in their honor, been engraved with their full name.

Six months before this, the only things these men thought about were bloodshed and killing. Now they were giving proof of great feelings of generosity after only a few months of life in an atmosphere of truth and charity.

All the same, the horizon remained clouded. The Sisters would have trembled without that interior confidence which had sustained them in 1830.

Archbishop Affre, like a faithful shepherd, gave his life for his flock in an act of heroic generosity which will always be remembered in his honor. Although his blood was the last that was to be shed—according to his own vow, one could not help asking what the future would hold, and if the recent predictions of the Blessed Virgin at La Salette weren't going to be fulfilled at the present time.

Mère Geay had thought it wise and prudent to change the day of the profession ceremony to a later date. It was to have taken place on the 24th of May. The General Council did agree, however, to honor the request made by the Bishop of Orléans for they feared that new delays in that area would put a stop to God's work.

The five Sisters, so long awaited, arrived in Orléans on October 15, 1848, feast of St. Teresa, and they received the best of welcomes from Bishop Fayet and the residents. Their first convent was located very near to Carmel, and, they were able to assist at Mass and go to confession without leaving their place. This close proximity to St. Teresa's daughters also brought them an increase of light and interior strength.

Father Valgalier, the Vicar General, and a close relative of Bishop Fayet, was named the Ecclesiastical Superior of the community. He always showed the Sisters great fatherly kindness. Among the precious souvenirs which they have from him is a relic of the True Cross enclosed in a beautiful ebony reliquary.

From the moment of their arrival, several of the outstanding families of the city showed great interest in the Sisters and were very helpful to them. These first benefactors are gratefully remembered; some of them are: Mrs. de Gourville, Miss Paris de la Bergère, the Fougeron Family and Doctor Brou. This last named gave the nurses easy access to the families. He watched over the Sisters' health with great concern and made it his business to see that they were given the time necessary to rest and to sleep.

While visiting in Paris, Bishop Fayet died very suddenly of cholera; it was only a few months after the Sisters' arrived in Orléans. Father Dupanloup, who had been outstanding both for putting the Madelaine's Catechism together and for his vigorous support of liberal education, was called upon to fill the vacant see.

The Sisters of Bon Secours were not unknown to him. He had encountered them in the rooms of the sick and also on the scene of those recent battles. A few months before his promotion to the episcopacy his mother became gravely ill; immediately he called for one of Mère Geay's Sisters. Sister St Brigitte nursed Mrs. Dupanloup in her apartment on Rue Cassette.

Thus she was able to see the filial piety of the future Bishop of Orléans which was visible in his close relationship and through the love and concern expressed in his actions. His biographer speaks at length of the Bishop's deep pain at the loss of his mother who had lived only for him. He freely gave vent to his feelings in an eloquent apologia of Christian motherhood.

The first thing Father Dupanloup did after his mother's funeral was to go to Rue Notre Dame des Champs. He told Mère Geay and Sister St. Brigitte how grateful he was, and, then, he poured out his heart to them as he spoke of his dear mother.

The same affection and respect which had developed in his relations with the Sisters at the Mother house was also extended to the little community on Rue des Puits-de-Linières when he took possession of the See at Orléans some months later. Mother St. Camille became the superior there in 1850, and he trusted her implicitly and supported her in every way possible. Mother St. Marceline, who had been the first superior, was more than happy to return to her dear sick people. She had an ardent soul but little aptitude for governing. As we have already seen, it was she who greatly influenced Alfred de Musset.

Mother St. Camille directed the Orléans' convent for eighteen years, and then returned there for a second time in 1871 after having been the Assistant General. She was a religious woman with much common sense and remarkably good judgment. She knew how to gain everyone's confidence and many persons sought the benefits of her wisdom and advice. Her devotion to the Sisters knew no bounds and no sacrifice was too great for her if it would lead them on to the love and practice of solid virtue. She trusted them completely and, for the care and concern which she demonstrated, she asked only that in return they would trust her completely. Her moral physiognomy was described as follows by one of her contemporaries: "The whole of her life can be epitomized in the well known saying: *Le bien ne fait pas de bruit, et le bruit ne fait pas de bien.*" (*Good does not make any noise, and noise doesn't do any good.*)

Mention must be made of Father Desnoyers when speaking of the benefactors of Bon Secours in Orléans. He was an ardent champion of Joan of Arc's cause and also a distinguished archeologist. With a zeal that was as pious as it was enlightened, he gathered together and catalogued everything from near or far that had any connection with the Purcelle and Orléans' glorious past.

This beautiful old man "on whom life had smiled and his countrymen had heaped honors," was, according to Cardinal Coullié's testimony, truly a priest after the heart of God. His work of preference was the direction of souls, particularly communities. Announcing the venerable ninety-year old's death to his clergy, Bishop Touchet wrote of him: "He understood the

dignity of the religious life, had studied it in depth and knew its strengths and its progress; and, to maintain it in its integrity, nothing was too much for him. One community's superior told us recently that he had a most tender love for God, he knew how to express that love and earnestly encouraged those who confided in him."

Like the Carmelites, Dominicans and Benedictines, the Sisters of Bon Secours were also the recipients of Father Desnoyers' care and concern. He became their Ecclesiastical Superior after Father Valgalier's departure, and, for a long time, he celebrated the holy Sacrifice of the Mass in their chapel but would never take any stipend. His sensitivity to their needs made him delicately attentive. It is told that one day during Mass he very quietly replaced the small, simple silver ciborium that was in the tabernacle with one that was larger and more worthy of the Divine Master; it was made of vermeil. He also had the tabernacle doors decorated with precious stones at his own expense.

The Orléans' community developed rapidly in that atmosphere of warm, Christian support; they were surrounded with spiritual care and soon bore abundant fruit. We will also see that in 1870 the Sisters would be outstanding in that veritable spring of charity which was provoked by the misfortunes which followed the invasion.

Mère Geay became very ill in the summer of 1849, having been greatly affected by the recent events. The Sisters were very concerned about her condition and, as soon as she was able to be moved, the doctors sent her to Boulogne. They hoped the clean, fresh sea air would help her to regain her strength. For some time she was obliged to remain at complete rest and to refrain from any work. The care she received and, above all, the prayers with which heaven was besieged, gained a respite for the good Mother, and, as we shall see, she cared for and cultivated the vine which had been entrusted to her for ten more years.

During her stay at Boulogne, Mère Geay found the devotion of the Sisters to the sick a real reason for rejoicing. At the request of the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce they had hastened to care for the cholera victims in Montataire and Cyr-les-Mello, two towns in the Oise district where the plague ravaged violently.

As we come to the close of those troubled times, let us listen to the account of one more conversion of which a Sister of Bon Secours was the instrument. This took place while Paris was engaged in much rioting.

A poor young man was dying of lung disease and his family had requested a Sister to come to take care of him. Mère Geay assigned this mission to Sister St. Françoise. It was dangerous to travel about Paris—and even more so for a religious. When Sister reached the first barricade she was stopped; but at the cry: *Who goes there?*" she answered courageously: "Friend of the guard!" and explained her mission. Two of the National Guardsmen

stepped forward immediately and escorted her all the way to her destination. She found the patient in a pitiful state of both soul and body. She gave him all of the immediate care which his condition required and then very gently suggested a little prayer. "I will be glad to," said the young boy, "but on one condition; that you permit me to call you 'my little mother' and that you in turn call me 'your little boy.'" He could not separate the memory of his mother from the idea of religion. Sister willingly agreed to the condition so naively demanded.

So the patient applied himself to re-learning the prayers which he had forgotten for so long. One day Sister proposed the visit of a priest with the hope that his conversation would distract the patient. This priest soon gained his affection and his confidence by making himself available and sometimes playing cards with him. Little by little their conversation led him to think about eternity. The day arrived when he agreed to receive the Sacraments, but he was afraid that if his so-called friends got to him he would weaken in his resolve. Sister reassured him that she would stand guard if he would pretend to be asleep when he saw his former companions arriving, and to leave the rest to her. When the young men came, Sister refused to let them enter the sick room. When they would not accept the reasons which she had given, she added vehemently: "You will have to pass over my dead body before I'll let you disturb my patient."

The young "free thinkers" finally left after making much noise and many threats. They never came back. The young man had heard everything and said to Sister: "Oh how I suffered while you were doing verbal battle with my comrades. I certainly wouldn't want to pass another hour like that again. Do you know what I have just promised to the good God? I told him that if I get well I will become a priest."

The poor boy did not recover, but died a short time later.

King Louis Philippe had been in exile for two years when the hour of his death arrived. He had begun his seventy-seventh year and had become so thin that he seemed to be wasting away. It was feared that his death was not far off. A Sister of Bon Secours was called to give him the continual and intelligent care that his age and state of health required. The Queen had known these religious nurses for some time, as they were often called to nurse in the families who were received at court. She was delighted at the opportunity for this daily, intimate contact with a bride of Christ.

This post at the King's bedside was entrusted to Sister St. Alponse. Her tact, delicacy and devotion spoke loudly to the old man's heart and favorably disposed him toward religion from which his last and greatest consolation would come.

Queen Marie Amelie had no illusions about her husband's health, and, in a spirit of faith, she did not ask for prolongation of his life but rather for a more precious benefit. "She prayed, she cried, but above all she asked for

the salvation of him from whom she hoped to be separated in this world only to be reunited with in the next." These words come to us from Father Trognon, the sovereigns' faithful companion during their exile. Is there any need to speak of the fervour with which Sister St. Alphonse joined with the Queen in praying for this grace and of the many rosaries which were said in the old monarch's room?

The lessons of adversity and the tribulations of the exile bore their fruit as they prepared him to respond to the workings of grace. The King began to experience personally the emptiness of those fallacies which had been, up 'til that time, the source and inspiration of his proud life.

He had, moreover, been profoundly moved, in the spring of that year, by the first Communion of the Count of Paris, that child on whom so many hopes rested. At this last hour of his life, those seeds of grace, planted so long ago by his holy Mother and left untended for so many years, sprang to life.

The Queen had been immensely consoled as she watched these interior workings of grace, and she found that the thought of their approaching separation was less bitter to her. In spite of Doctor Guéneau de Mussy's devotion and enlightened care, the illness progressed rapidly; and, on the morning of the 25th of August, he felt it his duty to inform the Queen that the end was imminent. She received Holy Communion first and then went and knelt by the King's bed. She told him what the doctor had said and reminded him of his promise to die as a Christian. "The time has come to fulfill it," she told him.

The King was not at all disturbed by the Queen's words, but very simply asked to see his chaplain, Father Guelle, who came immediately and heard his confession. Then, in the presence of his family, the faithful companions of his exile and all the servants, he received Holy Communion and was anointed with the chrism of Extreme Unction. When the ceremony was completed, he said to the Queen: "*You are very content, are you not? Well, I am too.*" She answered: "*Yes, I am very content and I hope to join you soon.*" It just so happened that that particular day was the feast of Saint Louis, and so, under the aegis of his ancestor, this voltairian king was reconciled with God.

Doctor Guéneau de Mussy and Sister St. Alphonse remained with the King that night; he was visibly becoming weaker. At one point he turned toward Sister and said: "*My good Sister, I am so happy; I have fulfilled all my religious duties.*" The next morning, at about eight o'clock, his soul slept in the arms of God.

The Queen did not forget the devotion with which the Sister of Bon Secours had performed her tasks, and, a short time later when she herself became very sick, she would not have any nurse but Sister St. Alphonse.

Sister, who liked the Queen very much, suffered with her as she carried out the treatment ordered by the doctor. It was extremely painful and

exhausting but most effective. The Queen recovered, and when Sister was ready to leave, she said to her: "Sister, promise me that you will come to close my eyes as you closed those of the King."

It was not possible to fulfill that wish. In March, 1866, the venerable eighty-year-old had a bad weak spell. Doctor Guéneau de Mussy was alarmed and sent a telegram to the Sisters of Bon Secours. Sister St. Alphonse left at once, but, when she stepped down from the train in London, she was met by one of the Princes. "It is too late," were his words of greeting, making very clear that what they feared had already happened. The Queen had died as Sister put her foot on England's soil.

The Princes of the Royal House in Orléans remained deeply grateful towards this humble religious and, later, when she had retired to the house in Rozoy, the Duke of Nemours went to visit her there.

The many testimonies of esteem which Sister received from the great people whom she had nursed did not change her humility in any way. That was the virtue which she cherished the most and was the specific trait of her holiness. She was profoundly humble, but with a joyousness and forgetfulness of self which instinctively attracted all hearts. Sister St. Alphonse was able to continue nursing her beloved sick until she had attained quite an advanced age. However, when she understood that she was no longer able to do so, she joyfully accepted her apparent uselessness. It is told of her that once she was out nursing with a rather young Sister whom the patient seemed to prefer because she appeared more alert. Someone in the house told her about it and she replied: "*It is but just; she must increase and I must decrease.*"

Chapter XI

The last ten years of Mère Geay's Government *1850—1860*

Mère Geay was able to look back on the route which she traveled in her twenty-five years as Superior with sentiments of immeasurable gratitude. In spite of troubles without, political upheaval and the force of circumstances which seemed to raise difficulties for all new institutions, her work had progressed admirably during that time.

All the same, could she be without anxiety when faced with a future which was prophesied to be so black? A mysterious disintegration attacked everything which could be considered a base or foundation; in the midst of the instability which arose, social peace continued to be threatened and material prosperity to be compromised.

The Superior General of Bon Secours had within her soul strength enough to overcome even the most difficult situations; and, under her wise direction, her Sisters continued their humble and fruitful labors in the midst of the agitation which prevailed. No new foundation or important event marked the last ten years of Mère Geay's government, but, during that period of time, she continued the formation of her much admired Sisters, thanks to the powerful breath of the Spirit with which she knew how to permeate souls; they are still spoken of with great esteem at Bon Secours. The Sisters were forgetful of themselves and unaware of their heroic virtue; they existed only to relieve those living crucified who are the sick and to snatch souls from Satan's grasp. They were not content with spending

themselves day and night in their lives of abnegation and unseen devotion and, so, they added practices of penance to their sacrifice in order to gain power over God's heart. Recently Mother Mary Joseph wrote to us saying: "With great respect and deep feelings of awe, we preserve the hairshirts, chains and other instruments of discipline which our revered older Sisters used to conquer hell." In effect, the phrase, "I authorize the penances of which you spoke to me on condition that you will be prudent, because your health does not belong to you," is often found in the correspondence which she carried on with those who were absent.

The simplicity of these holy women is remarkable; they combined the austerity of the cloister with a life of complete devotedness outside of it, without having the consolation of contemplative religious. Yes, their gaze was simple, and, in the relief and sanctification of their neighbor, they sought only God.

Also, there was no personal preoccupation, no affectation in their spiritual lives or any of that turning in on self which would permit them to note where they were in their struggle for perfection. The Sister of Bon Secours did not have time for any of that and for her the Lord's words became a reality: "... whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it."⁵³ "But, for the one united to Jesus as spouse, who works through His virtue and does all things in unison with Him, blessings will flow abundantly on the work whatever it may be."⁵⁴

As we have already said, the Superior General greatly influenced her Sisters' spirit of abnegation. She knew how to make the practice of virtue so attractive! And when she spoke of *her good God* (son bon Dieu), they felt capable of any sacrifice. Her words and example, and the gentleness and wisdom of her guidance worked marvels in all hearts. After her death, one of the Sisters who was very close to her, wrote: "She charmed everyone! Everything about her drew you to love, respect and venerate her. Just a look could invite you to the virtue she practiced so perfectly. Her countenance was always serene and it inspired gentleness; her loving smile calmed the interior storms which the devil instigates sometimes in souls, and a single word from her lips sufficed to bring peace back to an upset spirit." Though she was severe on herself, Mère Geay was especially tender and understanding of the miseries, pains and weariness of her Sisters. She was always ready to forget herself, to make herself *all things to all men*.⁵⁵ She did not spare herself as long as there was someone to be lifted up or consoled. She understood human weakness so well and had that perfect tact which said the right word and poured balm on the wound which needed to be healed.

Mother's goodness was universal and when, in her letters of that time, she made allusion to the material difficulties provoked by the social crisis, she always added: "What shall we do with our poor?" or "I am anxious above all about our poor." Her concern extended even to the birds, and one venerable

older Sister remembered the pity which the Superior had felt one day for the little sparrows who did not yet have any feathers and had been pushed out of the nest by their mother. They were gathered up with great care. "I do not like harsh, unkind mothers (*marâtres*) even among the birds," she said to the Sisters. "We must feed these abandoned little ones."

The following lines vividly depict Mère Geay in all her exquisite charity. One day it was perceived that a young novice, who had a slight cough, had asthma. The Council, discussing the admission of postulants, wisely suggested that she be sent back to her family as she did not seem able for the hard work of a Sister of Bon Secours. Mère Geay hesitated a long time; the novice was so pious and upright, so courageous and obedient. All the same she had to recognize the evidence and acknowledge that her health was an obstacle to her vocation. With great remorse, the good Mother told her that she was to return to her parents that day on the next stage coach. The poor novice was overwhelmed and responded: "Mother, I was so happy with you, but, if it is God's will and yours, I will try to submit to it with all my heart. In the time that remains before my departure permit me to spend it near to the good God." It so happened that there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at that moment, and the poor Sister remained a long time in Jesus' presence. She tried with all her heart to will the hard sacrifice which it seemed He asked of her. After each prayer she said to the Lord: "All the same, I was so happy in your service." And as she thought of the happiness she was losing, the tears flowed from her eyes.

"Towards evening the Superior sent for her. "Without doubt, it is the coach," she thought as she trembled. Such was not the case. No, the good Mother took her in her arms and said: "My poor dear child, what a day we have made you pass! But God has changed our hearts; you are not leaving. I will send you to the country until your profession; there no one will hear you coughing. Afterwards, you will do your best to serve the sick as far as you are able."

Dear Sister St. Madeleine did serve them as true Sister of Bon Secours for forty years, without stopping. When she told her story, she cried again and touchingly held close to her the portrait of Mère Geay. "Good holy Mother!" she repeated. "May God give you now the happiness that you have given me. After Him, it is to you that I owe the possibility of dying in your dear Congregation."

Don't believe, however, that Mère Geay was lacking in firmness. On the contrary, when the virtues of religion appeared to be threatened or weakened, she knew how to be severe. A certain Sister had a very recalcitrant patient and recommended him to the prayers of the Associates of Our Lady of Victory. His conversion was obtained under such remarkable circumstances that the Sister believed it a duty to insert it in the Bulletin of

the Archconfraternity, as a source of edification. Naturally, it mentioned that a Sister of Bon Secours was the instrument of this favor. The Sister was so happy at the glory which was given to the Blessed Virgin and which also redounded on her own Institute. So she went to the Mother House to show the Superior the article in question. What was her stupefaction as she saw Mère Geay's discontent when she read it. "How could a Sister of Bon Secours even think of thus putting herself in the limelight?" she said. Then Mother spoke of the beauty of the hidden life and the necessity of doing good in silence and obscurity; her words were so beautiful and persuasive that they have never left the memory of the one to whom they were addressed.

She was defending her dear virtue of humility then; now we see her doing battle for obedience. A young Sister had just returned to the Mother House; it was the vigil of the Assumption. "Oh, there you are, my little one," said Mère Geay. — "Yes, Mother, and what a pleasure it is to be back for your feast and that of the Blessed Virgin; I have never been here for it before." — "Alas, my poor child, it will be necessary for you to make the sacrifice, because another patient is asking for you; he is very sick and you will help him to die in peace." "Oh, Mother, please don't ask this of me; another Sister could surely go in my place." "No, my child, it is to you that the good God entrusts this patient," Mother replied firmly. Then she added: "You must get into the habit of never refusing God anything and of knowing how to give up even the most legitimate pleasures." Sister understood that she must obey. She returned two days later. The patient had died in peace, but the feast day was over. "Well?" Mother asked with a smile. "It was hard, Mother, but I am glad all the same." — "How could it be otherwise, my dear? You have had two great joys: that of helping a man to die, which, in itself, is an inestimable grace, and the opportunity to deny yourself a perfectly legitimate pleasure." As she told this story, the Sister added: "I had difficulty understanding the extent of *my second joy*, but the memory of this has always remained with me and has often helped me in my religious life."

At another time, a young Sister was taking care of a paralyzed man who could only speak by signs. She came home one day in tears and threw herself at Mother's feet saying that this life of sacrifice seemed to be too hard and that she did not feel she had the strength to continue. "What are you saying, my child?" asked Mère Geay after listening to her. "Do you want to be a Sister of Bon Secours?" "Yes, Mother." — "Well then, you must expect to have difficult things to put up with, and you must courageously accept to dress wounds and to pass some nights without sleep. Here, no one is forced to do anything; all must be done joyously. We have some very devoted and holy Sisters, and they feel that they have never done enough. Nothing is too

much if it lessens their patient's sufferings or gains souls. Do as they do, my dear, and return to the work God has entrusted to you with renewed courage. Above all, pray. Prayer will make all things possible for you. Isn't our strength in the Lord, in *Him who has made heaven and earth*, and who knows the needs of His children?" These wise words brought peace back to the young Sister and from that time she understood the holiness of her mission.

All of the Mother General's correspondence is pervaded with this double spirit of firmness and gentleness. "Duty before everything" was frequently seen as well as the exhortation: "Be gentle and patient; they are the virtues of the saints."

To those who were discouraged, she would say over and over again: "My child, life is a struggle; let us get up and fight courageously. Jesus is with us; He sees our difficulties and our efforts, and records all our victories. When our lives will be over, the crosses we have lovingly endured will be a priceless treasure and the source of all our joys."

A Sister was nursing two elderly patients in a very isolated house in the country. Mother wrote to her: "I know that your present situation demands many sacrifices. There, as elsewhere, however, you do have God who should take the place of all else for you. What happiness it is to recognize and love Him and to be able to serve Him! In your solitude, you can converse with Him whenever it pleases you. Frequently cast your sadness and sorrows into His heart and you will be penetrated with a Divine strength. Don't you know, that the less well off we will have been on earth, the better off we will be in heaven? Oh, how nice it will be in our heavenly home! We will see God and will possess Him without fear of losing Him, and we will be united eternally in the enjoyment of the sovereign Good." There followed words that reveal the interior weariness which Mother felt for the things of this world: "Mrs. E's. daughter is dead and the poor mother grieves for her child. I assure you I am not crying for the little one, but I am glad to know that she is far from this sad world."

In reply to the greetings sent to her for the New Year, Mère Geay often expressed this thought: "No matter what happens or what we may have to endure, the year will be a good one if we serve God with our whole heart and with all our strength. My wishes for you are full of love, and I ask our good Master to keep you fervent in His service . . ." She also said: "Divine Providence watches over us and will never abandon us; let us cast our cares and worries into Its hands. It is only right that communities should have some crosses; this is a sign that they are agreeable to the Lord. God has His plans and we should revere them no matter how mysterious they may seem to us and we should not lose the fruit of all the sacrifices imposed on us. Like our dear Mother in heaven, let us: love the Lord's plans and believe that in

eternity we will regain what man's injustice will have deprived us of here below."

Mother was overwhelmed by cares and responsibilities, and, in words which recall the thoughts of the saints, she confided to one of the Sisters: "The cross never leaves me; it is always in my heart and on my shoulders; but I desire only one thing: to love and to sanctify the sufferings which it may please our Lord to send me. He saved us through the cross and we can neither expect to enjoy eternal happiness at any other price, nor attain heaven by any other means. If nature rebels, then our will must remain firm so as to *lovingly* accept all that our good Master may send us. If we do this, we will be the cherished children of His heart."

In 1852 she wrote: "I see, dear Sister, that at C... as in Paris, you have found the cross. It does not surprise me; that is the lot of all souls whom the Divine Master has chosen. Try to sanctify it by patience. That will not be easy for patience is a perfect work and whatever is perfect requires much effort . . . God is the Master; wherever we are, He asks sacrifices and thus gives us the opportunity to detach ourselves from created things . . . 'The ways of the cross are the surest,' says St. Bernard. Remember, too, that He who offers you the bitter chalice of suffering is also preparing another one for you which will be overflowing with inexpressible and eternal joys."

And again: "Detachment has its source in the love of Jesus Christ. The soul who loves her Divine Spouse has heaven within her, because she possesses Him who is the delight of all the saints. Let us serve Him, my child, this God who is so good. Let us be His in happy times and in suffering, in joy and in pain, in difficulties and in sickness. If we do this, we will know peace, *that peace which surpasses all understanding*. Blessed, a thousand times blessed are the souls who attach themselves to God alone."

Thoughts about detachment are frequently found in Mother's letters: "Everyday I offer you to the Lord that He may make you a fervent soul and a true religious. This will be a source of happiness for you and a great consolation for me. The only thing I desire in this world is to see my Sisters intimately united to Jesus and working for His glory with all their hearts. All the *rest is but vanity and vexation of spirit* . . . Oh, yes, my dear child, let us attach ourselves to God; it is the only means of finding peace of soul and *la joie de l'esprit* (gladness of soul). This happiness is known by few; let us try to be of that number."

She often extolled that virtue of which she was a living example: "Above all be simple. Look at your aunt, Sister St. Alphonse (the religious who had nursed King Louis Philippe); she has gone a long way and has had the confidence of the greatest people, yet she is as simple and joyful as the day she entered the community. Be like her and you will become a true Sister of Bon Secours."

The religious soul is inevitably apostolic. Mère Geay understood this better than most, and wanted her Sisters to draw souls to God by the silent but eloquent sermon of their example. She endeavored to make them understand this: "By your modesty, gentleness, piety and evenness of temper, be an example of all the Christian and religious virtues to that child whose mother you are replacing; she is so young and yet she has already felt pain's grasp. Make her understand that if she learns how to bend herself to God's will while she is young, later on it will be easier for her to bear the contradictions with which life is strewn."

At another time she wrote to a Sister, who suffered because she lived so far from the Mother House, extolling the virtue of Obedience: "Learn how to be docile; force yourself to practice the precious virtue of obedience and you will be in peace. It doesn't matter if you are here or there, provided that you serve the good God and that He is with you. You will find Him in every place where your Superiors may send you and He will certainly help you if you are in harmony with His Divine Providence and in the way marked out by obedience . . . The spirit of obedience will permit you to grow in gentle confidence towards Jesus and His Divine Mother and to always preserve an interior peace. Be generous then, my child, and, in your moments of discouragement, look up to heaven to where God is leading you by the same path as His Divine Son." A complete program of self denial is contained in another letter written to the same Sister: "How precious our vocation is by means of sacrifices which it imposes on us! How happy we will be to have suffered so much when our feast day, All Saints, will be celebrated! The Divine Master has called us to follow Him and we have told Him with both our heart and our lips that wherever He will go, we will follow. Well, my dear child, you follow Him in the person of your sick patient. Jesus is your model; try to imitate Him through your spirit of sacrifice. It is He who gives you the cross for a bed until He gives you rest in His eternal repose."

What wise guidance we find in these few words: "You tell me you had promised yourself that you would be very fervent during Lent, and now, you find that your inclinations are just the opposite. This doesn't surprise me. Feeling and understanding come and go; they are pure gifts of God. The important thing is to continue patiently and submissively to serve our good Master. Yes, true fervor is to keep on going in spite of our dryness and distaste, weakness and discouragement; and remaining faithful in spite of repugnance and weariness is a sign of a strong and courageous soul. God is *Master of His gifts*, and, whether they be sweet or bitter, they will inevitably help us to grow if we know how to regard them and accept them in the light of faith. So, let us follow this good, Divine Master who said: "*Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will it.*"

The Superior General anxiously desired to see all of the Sisters back together at the Mother House for the annual retreat where their souls could be strengthened and healed through the graces of that special time of spiritual renewal. In spite of the demands and entreaties of the families of the sick, Mother was inflexible on this point; unless, of course, it had to do with a very grave case, at which time she prudently and charitably left the decision to the doctor. She wrote to a Sister who was perplexed about this matter: "I really would like you to make your retreat, but, if your presence is necessary for the Marquis de M's. life, then surely God Himself will supply what you need from the retreat and we humbly accept His divine will." Another Sister was able to return to Paris for the retreat; she wrote to her: "God has given you the great grace of being able to be here and to profit by this time of quiet recollection and renewal. Now, in the midst of your surroundings preserve the presence of this God who has filled you with Himself and accompanies you wherever you go."

These letters have been preserved through respect and filial love; sentiments of exquisite delicacy concerning the families visited by sickness were often found in them and were expressed in fervent prayers and pledges of devotion. She wrote to a Sister who was exiled in Marseille: "I had to hold my heart with both hands in order to make the decision to send you so far away in this rigorous cold while we are obliged to refuse calls every day here in Paris. Then I said to myself: If I were in this family's cruel position, how happy I would be if a loving hand came to help me! So, let us do our best and try to let the gentle Jesus reign in our hearts so that He will be the principal of all our sacrifices and our actions. Let us lose nothing and may everything in our lives be worthy of the Master whom we serve."

We must limit ourselves; however, we cannot resist reproducing this letter written to a Sister who was suffering but perhaps was also wanting in generosity: "My dear Sister, It is necessary for you to calmly sacrifice the love of creatures and, then, you must also try to put out of your mind those actions of others which can trouble you. This is the only means to preserve peace of mind and soul. Interior peace is such a great good! It is the reward that is given to the desire to please God and have Him reign in and around us by our example and continual efforts. If, then, it is necessary to make the sacrifice of human consolations; like Job let us say: *may my greatest consolation be to have none*. When we will be able to say this in the depths of our heart, we will possess this peace that is so desired. An excellent means of preserving it and of advancing in virtue is never to let ourselves be disheartened by the crosses of each day. God sends them to us for our perfection and we will find the means of sanctifying ourselves and detaching ourselves from creatures in these sufferings. Do not forget, my dear child, *that much will be required of those to whom much has been given*. Remember, also, that trials are the salt which gives virtue the savor willed by God."

However, we will not give a true idea of Mère Geay or of Bon Secours if we do not underscore the harmony which existed between the Superior and the Sisters. Only the beautiful (now obsolete) word *Dilection* (pure and tender love) can express the union, understanding, true affection and shared confidence which made the Mother House into a real home, and towards which their hearts turned when they felt too isolated away from the other Sisters. St. Vincent de Paul says: "*Charity is the paradise of communities.*" So it is not surprising that Bon Secours was a true paradise because charity reigned there as its mistress; and the words of the Psalmist were certainly realized there: *Ecce quam bonum! Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell as one!*⁵⁶

In his *Retreat to Carmelites*, Father Lescoeur writes: "In order to live together and bear each other's burdens, the best of human beings require a large stock of patience." The Sisters of Bon Secours acquired this virtue at a good school. They practiced it day and night at the bedside of the sick, who were often difficult to please, exacting and overbearing; how could they not practice it towards those whom they called their Sisters?

Exclusive friendships are a danger to fraternal charity in the convent. St. Teresa calls them "the plague of communities." This danger was not to be feared in a house where the Sisters departed at the first call from a patient, and where obedience constantly sent them to answer new calls.

This detachment, which the Sisters were called upon to practice, by reason of their mission, made their hearts very free. Experience teaches that this interior freedom, because it is completely supernatural, confers a gentle and agreeable character on the affections. Oh, how they loved each other at Bon Secours! What a treat to return home for a few days and be able to open their hearts to Mother and share their struggles and victories with her.

Without doubt, it was a sacrifice to have to leave; but, as we have already said, Mère Geay knew how to make everything easy. Then, too, she also watched over her daughters with such great concern that they never felt like exiles. "I have many daughters," she wrote in 1842, "but I do not forget any of them. I think about those who are far away most of all and my heart quickly bridges the gap to reach them; I go from one to the other to visit, and then place them again in God's hands." Later on she wrote: "I see, my dear Sister, that you are suffering because of the separation from your community. I am not at all surprised, but do not be distressed; you are close to its heart and to mine, and your absence is not a separation. We often think and speak about you, we love you and, above all, we pray for you." The following touching words are frequently found in her letters: "*Je vous aime dans les entrailles de notre bon Sauveur.*" "I love you from within the very depths of our good Savior."

This true motherly love which Mère Geay had for her Sisters increased as she advanced in years. She knew solely how to love and described herself as

she wrote: "I may grow old but my heart does not; it is still very sensitive and easily moved and touched. Sometimes this is a source of much suffering but it is also one of great joy." It pained her to witness so much affliction around her. "I am very distressed to see people suffer and die," she wrote, "and yet, at the same time, I know the value of pain. When I see my daughters accept it patiently, I feel glad; but when I hear them complain, as if crucified souls can really be unhappy, I tell you that I feel real pain. I hope that the good God will take into account all this anguish which I have endured since I am in the community."

However, it was not only for her Sisters that Mère Geay was a wellspring of the spiritual life; her influence spread itself to other persons as well. People came to the Mother House not only to request help for the sick but also to seek light and consolation from the Superior General; they poured into her heart the sufferings which are often the lot of those persons who are envied because of their wealth or social position. Her vast experience and pure faith gave her a clarity of vision and wisdom which made her a very valuable counselor. She gave of herself simply and generously even though her own inclinations drew her to a life of silence and recollection. She wrote to one of her Sisters: "I do not leave the parlor, but all the same, how much I would like to have a few days of quiet recollection! So, as soon as I can, I run and hide so as to pray to the good God."

The chapel also attracted many people, especially on those feast days which were celebrated with great splendor by the Sisters. One of Mère Geay's letters relates the fact that she experienced much happiness when 600 persons received Holy Communion there on Christmas Eve, 1856. Also, the very thought of having been able to erect a temple to the Lord, which proclaims His glory, had been for her a source of profound gratitude to the end of her days.

Is there need to tell how immense her joy was when she was informed of the wonderful conversions which were due to her Sisters' intelligent zeal? During the period between 1850 and 1860, several remarkable facts have been recorded; they were the fruit of a special grace which sprang from the source of Divine Mercy at the instant prayers of these holy religious. You will be consoled as you read these accounts, for they prove once again that there is never any cause for despair with God.

In 1854, a Sister of Bon Secours was sent to the Marais Quarter to nurse an eighty-year old woman who was dying and whose soul was sicker than her body. When she arrived, the Sister looked about the room for a picture or symbol of God, but in vain. He was the source of her strength and love as she began that mission of charity. The poor patient's curt responses to her efforts to start a conversation quickly made Sister aware that this poor soul had no religious feeling at all. She did not insist but was content to offer her fatigue, her

vigils and her supplications to God for this soul's salvation. The Sister usually had recourse to Our Lady of Victories in desperate cases, so she went to the shrine several times to beg the Mother of Mercies to intercede for this poor hardened soul.

In the meantime, the disease progressed rapidly and several violent convulsions warned that the end was approaching. Sister's fervor also increased, and she augmented her care and attention in the hope of leading her back to the fold; but all her efforts seemed in vain. The patient's family, who shared her sentiments, watched Sister very closely in order to prevent her pious plans from succeeding. However, she did not become dismayed but she drew deeply from her love for God and zeal for souls that confidence which obtains all things. Her visits to Our Lady of Victories were more frequent; she redoubled her insistent pleas to that Mother of all grace and begged with tears for the conversion of the poor soul whom Divine Providence had confided to her care.

In spite of everything, the unfortunate woman continued to reject the help which religion offered and persisted in her refusal to see the priest. All the same, the hour of Mercy was approaching; and if God had waited so long to fulfill His servant's wishes, it was so that He could manifest the clemency of His Divine Heart all the more.

One night, the patient was in terrible agony and was exhausting herself with continual groans and cries of pain. In her compassion for the poor sufferer, Sister made one last supreme appeal to Mary, Refuge of sinners. Then she took her scapular and medal and placed them around the sick woman's neck; inspired by Heaven, she begged her to ask God for some relief from her sufferings and pardon of her faults. This time the woman remained silent and did not interrupt; encouraged by this, Sister spoke of God's infinite goodness and of His great desire to forgive the repentant soul.

Following this, she began to speak about the mercies of the Blessed Virgin. The poor woman was touched by grace and, full of emotion, she held out her arms to embrace the Sister; but first she promised to see the parish priest and she did so that same day.

The pastor was very surprised when Sister asked him to come as soon as possible to see this sick woman, for he had never been able to get near her. His joy was even greater when he pronounced over her the words of absolution which erased all the forgetfulness of God from her past life. This eighty year old woman was able to experience all the joys of returning to God as she accomplished this first act. Soon afterwards, she received the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and the Anointing of the Sick with deep sentiments of faith, hope and love. She did not know how to adequately express her gratitude to the all merciful God.

This woman continued to live for some time and her sufferings were very intense; but she endured them calmly and with great resignation. Prayer and the memory of our Lord's Passion helped to make them bearable; and the hope of seeing them soon changed into eternal joy helped her to accept them courageously. She was able to receive the Holy Eucharist one more time before she serenely went to sleep in the Lord.

The following account will prove that if Christian education doesn't always constitute a safeguard against the dangers of the world and the errors of youth, at least it is the lifeline that is thrown to the shipwrecked victims of error and passion.

In 1857, such was the case of a twenty-seven year old man who was a member of one of the better Parisian families. Like his brothers and sisters, he had been brought up in great piety and fear of God. Little by little he gave up his virtuous ways and abandoned himself to the seductions of vice and modern philosophy with all the impetuosity of his ardent and passionate nature.

At an age when the future appears to be full of hope and happiness, he found himself to be the architect of his own misfortune and at death's door; and he was stripped of man's two greatest possessions: innocence and faith.

He was the source of much suffering and shame to his family; but knowing that he was mortally ill, they tearfully implored him to think about his eternal salvation. He responded to their continued concern with blasphemous irony. The priest who had prepared him for his First Communion came to visit but the young man refused to see him. He had accepted the presence of a Sister of Bon Secours simply because he felt such an overwhelming need for nursing care. He would not permit her to kneel down or pray in his presence; and he became so enraged when he saw her make the sign of the cross that he demanded her immediate replacement. The Sister who came was told of the need for great prudence and of refraining from any mention of religion; she was also told to leave the matter of his conversion to the patient's cousin who was a Daughter of Charity. The Sister of Bon Secours desired only one thing: the conversion of this patient; she was extremely prudent and took great pains so as not to undo the arrangements made by the family through a zeal that was indiscreet. All the same, she watched and prayed and she also recommended him to the prayers of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories. Her days and nights, her fatigue and prayers, the rebuffs and brusqueness which she often had to endure were all directed to the same goal: to obtain this soul's salvation. The Daughter of Charity came to visit, and as she was leaving she said that she was sending over this very nice Capuchin, who was a very interesting conversationalist, to distract his thoughts and amuse him. The very next day the priest came to the door; the young man not only refused to receive him, but he flew into a rage and cursed him.

His condition grew worse each day and the unhappy skeptic became more and more hostile. He would no longer permit his aging father to approach him and he laughed at his mother's tears; even the tiniest allusion to religion could put him into a rage.

His cousin did try again; she sent the chaplain from the hospital which she directed. Great care was taken; he was admitted without being announced and he told the young man that he had only come to inquire about his condition. All the same, this visit was not any more successful than the preceding one. So the priest had to leave with the young man's insults as the only apparent fruit of his kindness.

The danger was imminent; what was to be done? The family were appalled and begged everyone for prayers so as to, so to speak, assault heaven violently.

Sister watched anxiously as the disease progressed; she begged for inspiration to find some means of stimulating the sensitivity of this hardened heart. Above all else, Sister prayed to the Immaculate Virgin who had shared those first elans of love of this young man's innocent heart with her divine Son. She begged and implored the Blessed Mother to turn Divine Justice away and obtain that supreme grace which could make a saint to this condemned man.

Death advanced with giant strides, but he was mentally alert and remained adamant in his hatred of religion; eternity was only hours away. Sister continued to hope against all hope and felt inspired by Christ, who had given His life for sinners, to send for Father Millerio, S. J. The zealous priest came at once; and, moved by that apostolic charity which characterized him, he gave the dying man no time to react but took him in his arms, embraced him, placed a medal around his neck and said with great fatherly concern: "What is this, my child, You were so sick and no one told me? We will begin a novena—and I am going to bring the good God to you."

Miracle! That spark of faith, which had been buried in the depths of the young man's soul under the ice of skepticism, came back to life, flared up suddenly; and in that moment, all those teachings received in his Christian education engulfed him and flowed over him. And so, in an instant, he was changed; from an incredulous blasphemer he became a fervent believer in Our Lord's real presence in the Holy Eucharist. Frightened by the prospect of receiving his God without being reconciled with Him, he marshalled his dwindling strength and cried out: "But Father, I haven't made my confession!" O power of Divine Grace, who is like you? O unspeakable mercy of Jesus' heart, who can worthily tell of your marvels? "Do not be troubled, my friend, I will hear your confession." This young man had been like the Prodigal son in his wanderings; and was also like him in his sorrow and the humble avowal of his faults. He received the last Sacraments with sentiments of lively fervor and deep compunction. All the members of his family were there with him and were very moved and filled with tender compassion. He tearfully asked their pardon for all the scandal he had caused and said, that if God gave him the time, he would work to repair the damage he had done.

Salvation's work was accomplished, however; and in less than three hours this re-born soul had left the earth. He died praying to Him who does not crush the broken reed or extinguish the smoking flax.⁵⁷

The Sisters of Bon Secours experienced these fruits of their zeal not only at the bedside of the dying but, on more than one occasion, the Orphanage on Rue du Regard was the source of great joy. In the year 1855 Mère Geay had the consolation of being in a position to accept a small abandoned child into the home. The February issue of *Semaine Religieuse de Paris* contained the story of a twelve year old girl who had been abandoned by her mother; she had been taken to a market place and then the woman just disappeared into the crowd without any apparent thought of what was to become of the child she had forsaken.

Maria Gory, as she was called, found herself homeless and she was taken to the police station as a vagrant. There were strict laws concerning this offense, but the Clerk of the Court, a good Christian, requested a two week delay in their execution so as to look for a foster home or orphanage which might accept her. He did not hope in vain, for the notice appeared in several newspapers and one of them was seen by Father Tesson, who was the chaplain of Providence Orphanage. He immediately brought the situation to the Superior General's notice, and, then, armed with her authorization, he wrote the following letter to the Clerk of the Court:

"Dear Sir:

I have just read the newspaper article concerning Maria Gory who was abandoned by her mother; and also of the two week delay that you requested in order to look for a home for the child.

If you wish, Sir, I would like to prepare a place for her in an orphan's home at 13 Rue du Regard which is under the direction of the Sisters of Bon Secours. This institution was founded forty years ago through an act of charity. She would receive a suitable education at the home and could learn all types of needlework; she may remain until she is twenty-one years old and the Sisters take the responsibility of finding a place and position for those who do not have parents.

I have the honor . . . etc.

*Signed: Tesson,
Director of the Foreign,
Missionary Seminary."*

The response was not delayed. Here is Mr. Bouquet's letter: (Clerk of the Court)

"Dear Sir:

When I asked the Court for the two week delay in young Gory's case, I had an inner conviction that Divine Providence would come to her aid; and that, if the mother had forgotten her most sacred duties when she abandoned her, God would certainly take her under His care. I can think of no better person to whom I would want to entrust this child than yourself; and the Court will be happy to see her under your protection and in a home where she will be preserved from all those miseries to which she could have been exposed when abandoned by her mother."

The magistrate's letter is worthy of note. It shows that the Christian spirit is the guarantee of social order; but it also shows us at a glance the steep downgrade of the slope on which we have been sliding since then. Alas! Is there a court today that would delay a ruling in such a case in the hope that God would intervene?

On the designated day a Sister of Bon Secours went to get little Maria Gory and the child was entrusted to her by Mr. Martel who presided over the court. The newspaper, *Le Droit*, said that the child had found a family which would never abandon her.

In the springtime of that same year, the imposing ceremony of a Bishop's consecration took place at Bon Secours. The chapel's gothic style and its arrangement made it particularly suitable for the occasion. The Bishop-elect of Quimper wanted to receive the Episcopal anointing from the hands of his Eminence Cardinal Morlot, the future Archbishop of Paris. Several Archbishops and Bishops, a numerous clergy and persons of eminence filled the sanctuary. The elite of this splendid group was invited to the banquet which followed the ceremony; during it they were able to see and appreciate the new prelate's simplicity and goodness.

Bishop Sergent did not want to leave Paris for his new diocese without having expressed his gratitude in some way to the Sisters; they had shown him such wonderful hospitality at the time of his consecration. It was the day before the 24th of May, which is the feast of Bon Secours' patroness. The prelate wished to preside at the Reception and Profession ceremonies which were to take place that day. "The presence of the newly consecrated Bishop added to the solemnity of this very moving ceremony, wrote the newspaper. It reminded the Sisters of the encouragement and blessings which their founder, Archbishop de Quelen, came to give to them each year on this day."

The quality of Mère Geay's piety was inspired and enhanced through the trust and respectful affection which she enjoyed in her contacts with the Princes of the Church and other members of the clergy. It could truly be said that *the zeal for God's house consumed her*.⁵⁸ The church's successes and failures also had a profound effect on her. The feelings she experienced on January 3, 1857, when the siege of Paris made the streets of the city flow once again with tears and blood, were inexpressible; and she wanted to take part in the expiatory ceremonies which took place at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont after the struggle was over.

Bishop Sibour was involved in many different projects and had not shown the Sisters of Bon Secours the same interest and concern as his predecessors had done. Nevertheless, Mère Geay saw only Jesus Christ, outraged and crucified anew, in this prelate who was the victim of a fanatic; she felt these sentiments very strongly and was filled with great sorrow.

The joys of the first days were re-born again for Bon Secours when Cardinal Morlot assumed the See of Paris. The Archbishop showed particular kindness to the Religious Communities on every occasion and he encouraged them to fervor and good works. Even his testament contained an expression of this sentiment. "It was due to his work schedule and the almost monastic life which he maintained, even in the midst of life's demands, that he found time to frequently visit the religious houses under his jurisdiction."⁵⁹ Bon Secours received one of his first visits. He had seen the Superior General at the time of the Bishop Sergent's consecration and she had appeared as one of those women of high caliber who are a source of life in

the church; and from that moment on he liked to converse with her. Cardinal Morlot wished to preside at the annual ceremony of the 24th of May; and the Sisters were very grateful for this mark of his delicate thoughtfulness. A short address, which expressed the community's sentiments, was read to the Cardinal: "It is not easy to describe our happiness as we see you give us such an outstanding expression of your kindness so soon after arriving in the diocese, in spite of the work and responsibilities which burden you.

"For many reasons, this day is very special and beautiful to us. It is the Institute's most important feast and, every year on this same day, Archbishop de Quelen, the founder, father and friend of the Sisters of Bon Secours until the end, came here to consecrate those who vowed themselves to God and the service of the sick, and who received Our Lord as their special portion.

"Your presence among us takes us back to those former days. We live again today because God has sent us Elisha; he is clothed in the cloak and double spirit of Elias, who was carried up into heaven in a fiery chariot and accompanied by the sound of the great trumpets. Yes, we live again, your Eminence, because we have found in you the gentleness and fatherly goodness which Archbishop de Quelen had for this community which was his creation."

Since that time, the Archbishop frequently visited the Mother House. He was most cordial and gracious toward the Sisters and treated them as if they were his own daughters. In 1859 he was called upon to bless a marriage. He himself came and requested to consecrate this union in the chapel which he loved so much. On that occasion Mère Geay wrote: "I do not like these ceremonies which bring us into such close contact with the world and disrupt the silence of the house. This time I cannot regret that the choice has been made, for it is our Cardinal's own decision. He himself came to ask for the use of the chapel, and, in a very fatherly way, he told me that he would eat breakfast at the convent. I cannot tell you how much his goodness to us delights me."

A few weeks later the Archbishop came to preside at the ceremonies on the 24th of May. There were five Sisters for Profession of Vows and eight Sisters for reception of the habit. This was one of Mère Geay's last joys here on earth, and she spoke of it in a letter to Sister St. Fulgence and expressed much feeling.

It was during the year 1858 that we first find some letters among the Superior General's correspondence which were addressed to this Sister; she was nursing the Marquise de Castellane at the time. Characteristically, Mère Geay had already seen and appreciated the many great abilities of this young Sister, who was to later govern the Institute for many long years.

In her letters you can almost experience the interest she felt in her and the very particular care she took of this special soul. Sister St. Fulgence was very talented and had a rare refinement of mind; but, like all generous and ardent natures, she was quick tempered and tense and, at times, her spiritual life felt the effects of the depth and strength of her impressions. So, Mère Geay trained her vigorously and never ceased urging her towards the heights. She wrote to her: "My dear daughter, I do not want to make you wait any longer for this letter which you desire so ardently. I know that, being separated from your community, you need to be fortified and encouraged so as to be able to sanctify all your daily actions. I will begin by telling you that the poor Sisters of Bon Secours, who are constantly being sent here and there, must, always and everywhere, show themselves to be women consecrated to the service of their Divine Spouse. They should resemble the missionaries who go to the end of the earth to save a single soul. It is true that you do not have any sick people to convert for you are with a very saintly soul; but, how many of your Sisters have to wage war for their patient's salvation? You can help them in their struggle by your prayers and spirit of sacrifice. The severity of your lenten fast is of little importance to me if your health makes it necessary for you to dispense with some details. But be steadfast in maintaining a rigorous interior fast that will help you to hold back those quick retorts and silence those uncontrolled desires of your heart. Give honor to God by your fidelity and self-denial in time of trial so as to become more and more united to Him. You asked me to discipline you; I only hope that I haven't been too harsh and that your blood isn't flowing."

On another occasion she wrote to the young Sister: "I see that you are very hasty and impetuous and you wish that you would not have these very natural feelings; but that is not possible. As long as you are in this world, my child, you will have to struggle with your faults. You must accept yourself as you are, and, to do this, you must ask God to fill you with His Spirit through your prayers and meditation. May it be this Divine Spirit who does battle within you and makes you victorious! Seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls in everything; *it is the only thing necessary*. As for your physical sufferings and all others, too, I will repeat St. Francis de Sales' words to you: "*Love your crosses; they are all made of gold and are the seeds of glory and unalloyed happiness!*" Grace was hard at work in Sister St. Fulgence's soul. After a time of intense fervor she would sometimes suffer from that great ardor which the saints knew. When she would complain, Mère Geay answered discretely: "You are being very sorry for yourself, my child, because you feel like ice; but you must not be upset by this. God gives us what he wishes. If he wishes to grant us sensible pleasure, then receive it with gratitude; but if he apparently leaves us cold and insensible, then serve Him anyway, and with even greater fidelity. God will not demand what he

has not given us. Consequently, we are very pleasing to Him when, in spite of distaste and dryness of heart, we still try to please him. We will thus serve God for Himself and not for the consolations we find in His service."

Mère Geay's health had always been delicate, but she had quietly carried this burden. From time to time, she would admit though that it was difficult for her to write because of the nervous trembling with which she was afflicted for so long. All the same, any Sister who wrote for help received a really long reply. At one time she wrote: "I am very tired, but so long as I can help and sustain my daughters in the work and sufferings which they meet in the exercise of their vocation, I have no room to pity myself."

During her last years she still continued to visit the houses in the provinces with that same spirit of courage. During her visit to Lille in August of 1859, however, Mother had to go to bed; but this was a warning. Throughout her prolonged stay at that house, the Superior General was greatly consoled as she witnessed the regularity and fervor which permeated the atmosphere of that community. Mother St. Henry had been made Superior in May of that same year; in fact, the direction of the institution's material matters had been in her hands for a long time. She was a very intelligent woman; and the vast experience she had already gained enabled her to manage affairs with which she was so well acquainted. Mother St. Henry had been the Assistant and Econome of the two preceding Superiors, Mother St. Eléanore and Mother St. Mathilde. When she succeeded them, Mother continued the works which she herself had helped to create. She was Mother St. Cecile's oldest sister and, like her, was a woman of deep insight, sound judgment and great kindness. She was untiring and looked after the least details of the house; but she did this in a way which did not in any way inhibit the personal initiative of the other Sisters. When someone said that she should take care of herself, she usually responded that eternity would be long enough to rest. Under her tutelage, the Sisters learned not to count the cost. They would come home from a case which had been very difficult and demanding, but, if Mother St. Henry showed them some good that could be done, well! they would set off again immediately without any rest.

She preferred the work of the Sunday Meetings above all other projects and there wasn't anything she wouldn't do to make them succeed. The existence of the Madeleine Garden, where the young girls met in the summertime, was due to her initiative. Mother St. Henry had really understood the urgent need of providing the young people with healthy distractions in order to turn them away from dangers which existed in an industrial city like Lille. The Sisters did all they could to make the Sunday Meetings as interesting and attractive as possible; and who knows how many souls had been preserved; and how many mistakes and disasters were

averted because they knew how to do this. In Lille, the Sisters did and still do carry out a work that is of real social value in every sense of the word.

Chapter XII

Mère Geay's last illness and death *Mother St. Cecile's election*

1860—1861

"The person, who habitually sits on her tombstone and gazes at all that passes by in the daily stream of life, is indeed strong against all of life's allurements. Nothing misleads or overwhelms her, because she lives on a noble plane and is rooted in supernatural realities."⁶⁰

This expression described Mère Geay very well; and the thought of her approaching deliverance gave her, not only joy, but consolation as well. It is certain that this venerable Mother never refused any kind of work; she was always ready to *bear the heat and burden of the day*,⁶¹ and to do it for as long as it pleased the Divine Master. Her aspirations and desires often carried her spirit to that moment when she would hear those sweet and solemn words: "*Behold the Bridegroom is coming*."⁶² Many expressions of peaceful detachment are found throughout Mother's correspondence from the very beginning to 1860. Although she did feel the weight of the burden of her years and admitted, at the same time, that she was not as strong as before, the Superior General did not seem to have any presentiment that her end was approaching.

We have not been able to learn whether Mère Geay had ever known about the predictions which the Curé of Ars had made concerning her, only a little while before that time; but it appears to us that a judgment coming

from such an authority seems to reveal God's thoughts about this holy religious.

A Sister of Bon Secours, Sister St. Monique, went to Ars a short time before Blessed John Mary Vianney's death. She asked his blessing for the Congregation and especially for the Superior General. *"She is saintly,"* replied the thaumaturge, *"Yes, she is a saint; you will not have her much longer because she is ripe for heaven."*

Nevertheless, nothing revealed the approach of the terrible blow which would strike the Congregation. As usual, Mère Geay made her preparations to visit the houses in the Provinces that year. "I think that I will leave for Boulogne on the Thursday after Easter," she wrote to Sister St. Fulgence, "and, if I have the strength, I will make the rounds and not return to Paris until the beginning of May. So, my dear Sister, you are going to receive fewer letters from me, but I know that you will generously offer this to God along with all the other sacrifices He may impose on you." Then she revealed to this open hearted Sister the great distress which the current events in Italy were causing her: "In these sad days in which we live, it is so necessary to know how to suffer. I am distressed and overwhelmed when I think of the Holy Father's situation; on Sunday I couldn't control my trembling. I fear the worst! Oh, let us pray, pray much; it is all we have!"

The Church was opposed by a formidable coalition and a spoliation was about to begin which would deprive the Holy See of the lands of Marches and Romagna. Pius IX's anguish was keenly felt by Mère Geay because she had experienced and understood the truth which Bishop Gay later expounded: *"You, the religious are the world's supplement; you must make amends to Holy Mother Church who is so odiously persecuted; you must draw closely together around this great abandoned One through your increased respect and redoubled tenderness. Above all, it is necessary that you will suffer when the Church suffers and from all who make Her suffer."*⁶³

As we have already seen, the Superior General nourished her apostolic spirit with these sentiments.

Mère Geay left Paris on April 16, 1860 and, as always, it was a moment of real sorrow for the Sisters at the Mother House. Only those who lived there and knew her could understand to what degree they depended on her and could know the strength, light and peace which she radiated around her. However, on that day a heavy presentiment seemed to weigh on all hearts; and the Novice Mistress asked: "Mother, aren't you going to say anything? Please, just a word before you leave us." Mother's response mirrored that of St. John the Apostle as he exhorted his disciples: *"Love one another."* Then, as she blessed and kissed each one present, she said: "I am going to embrace you all, for *when I return I will not be able to do so."*

"These prophetic words seemed strange coming from her lips because Mother did not appear to believe that her end was so near. Did she have some supernatural light concerning this at that moment? It is very easy to assume such a thing when thinking of this servant of God."⁶⁴

The trip to Boulogne was made without incident; and the few letters that Mother wrote from there were as full of loving concern and pleasant gaiety as ever. She arrived at Abbeville on Saturday the 21st, and it was only then that she complained of feeling cold and was obliged to go to bed.

We will borrow selected passages from Father Perdreau's work⁶⁵ which give some details of Mère Geay's last days here on earth. *"There are some souls who are prepared. They have forgotten themselves so completely, they have been so entirely at the service of others and have had such an intimate relationship with Our Lord that only two or three days of suffering are necessary to make them worthy to die. Mère Geay was one of these."*

Mother did not suspect the gravity of her condition until Friday, the 27th of April. The community's physician, Doctor Vésignié had known the Superior General a long time and he thought very highly of her. At first, he believed it was only a passing indisposition; but by the 24th, he knew that the pain of which she complained was pleurisy, and he increased his visits and his care. Mother St. Cecile believed that she should inform the Sisters in Paris and also ask Sister St. Ignace to come; she was the Infirmarian at the Mother House and knew Mère Geay's delicate condition better than anyone else.

That day and the next were pain-filled and the remedies gave no relief. Her fever was so high that Mother compared her body to a burning coal. Even in the midst of her greatest suffering, however, she did not complain, but manifest to all that she was happy to do God's will. She had given herself to Him completely and constantly remained in His presence. The care and remedies were accepted with great simplicity; she was ever grateful, courteous and gracious and always had some loving word for those who came near. Her spirit of mortification was very great and, when she found pleasure in the liquid refreshment which was given to relieve her thirst, she reproached herself as a glutton. Her nights were usually very bad but she vigorously forbade Sister to remain up.

Mother did not appear to be anxious and several times she even spoke of her return to Paris. On Friday, the 27th of April, her pain had disappeared and she believed that she was getting better. The Doctor, however, did not agree; on the contrary, he found her condition to be quite alarming. The Sisters had hovered between hope and fear, but now they knew it was the moment for their dear patient to receive the last Sacraments. Mother seemed so unaware of her condition that no one dared to broach the subject, even

though they anticipated no hesitancy on her part. Only that very morning she had said to Sister St. Valentine: *"To die . . . Oh! To die, it is happiness, my daughter . . . this world means so little to me!"*

St. Wulfran's dean, Father Michel had been notified that Mother's condition was quite serious. He himself was sick; even so, he immediately came to see her and urged her to take advantage of this opportunity for Confession. She replied with the ease of a soul who was ready to appear before her God: *"My confession will be quickly made."* Father suggested that she receive Holy Viaticum; but, she had such great respect for the Blessed Sacrament, and thinking she would have a tomorrow, she wanted to wait until the next day. All the same, she was irresistably drawn to receive the Eucharist for it was her life, and for many years she had sadly said: *"I am not able to do anything on the days when I have not received my good God (mon bon Dieu)."*

When Father had left, the Sisters let Mother have a little time to herself; but, then, because the disease was progressing so rapidly, they also suggested that she be anointed. *"Me? The last Sacraments? What are you thinking about? I only had a weak spell and in a few more days I will be well again; and you are saying that I am going to die? Did the Doctor tell you that?"* The poor Infirmarian's response was her sobs. Mère Geay became quiet for a few minutes, interiorly collecting herself and making the sacrifice of her life; then she said: *"May God's holy will be done! This has been the motto of my whole life. In living and in dying may the holy will of God be done! . . . Now, do as you wish!"*

As the Sisters prepared the altar, she murmured: *"Alas, my poor daughters in Paris do not know about my condition."* They assured her that the Mother House had been notified and that all of the Sisters were praying for her. She asked them to put on her veil and then she herself directed the preparations needed for the proper reception of the Divine Master.

The ceremony began. When the chaplain raised the question of her desire to die in the Catholic Church, Mère Geay raised herself up with astonishing strength, sat up in bed and answered slowly in a clear, distinct voice:

"Yes, Father, I do believe all that the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church believes and teaches . . . I love Her and have always loved Her with my whole soul . . . I have worked only for her . . . I have been happy to have lived and to die in her arms . . . I am confident that God will be merciful to me because I have always hoped in Him . . . I love Him, or, at least, I want to love Him with all of the love of which I am capable . . . I give Him my heart, my entire being; I am happy to abandon myself to His holy will . . . I renew my consecration with all my heart; I thank my Saviour for having given me the grace of a religious vocation; I have found only happiness in it . . . I renew my vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; if I were pronouncing them for the first time, I would make them joyfully."

Then she spoke to her Sisters in that same clear voice:

"If more good has not been accomplished in the congregation during the thirty-four years that I have been superior, I acknowledge that it is my fault... If I have given pain to any of my Sisters, or to anyone at all, I ask their pardon just as I pardon anyone who may have offended me from the bottom of my heart."

These thoughts and sentiments which crowded to the lips of the dying Mother were unprompted and flowed quite naturally from the treasures of her heart.

After Mother had received Holy Viaticum, the Chaplain asked her to bless the Congregation. *"With all my heart,"* she replied and her voice was as strong as ever; then she pronounced the blessing in Latin. As she glanced around the room her eyes seemed to be searching for those who were absent, and she added: *"I bless them all, for the present and for the future."* The chaplain was very moved, and he also knelt down. The pastor of St. Jacques, Father Paillard, was present, and he offered Mother the plenary indulgence for the dying, *In Articulo Mortis*, which she gladly accepted; and, when the poor Sister who was reciting the *Confiteor* became confused and tearful, Mother herself took up the prayer and recited it in a strong, distinct voice. After this, Mother poured out her gratitude to Father Paillard for this opportunity of grace which he had given her and held out her hand to him; then she expressed that great love which she always had for the Holy Church: *"Now tell me, how is the Holy Father?"*

A few hours later death was very near. The Sisters were very distressed; someone said: *"What will become of us without Mother?"* She answered: *"Do not be anxious: God's judgments are unfathomable and everything will go better than you can imagine . . . the good God needs no one."*

As she was dying, several of the Sisters from Paris arrived; they came near the bed and said: *"Mother, can you see us? Do you recognize us?"*—"What is that? she replied. Can I see you, do I recognize you? I can see you and I do recognize all of you." She glanced all around the bed and her eyes met those of each of her daughters; then her glance seemed far away as if in search for those who were not there.

It was the final farewell (*l'adieu de l'éternité*); by nine o'clock that evening she had left this world. The words of the Book of Wisdom became a reality: *"The soul of the just is in God's hand and will know no torment at the hour of death."*⁶⁶

During her lifetime, this religious humbled herself and sought to remain in oblivion, yet, in death, she was held aloft and exalted. God, *who exalts the humble*, permitted that her precious remains be surrounded with the glory which she had always shunned. Those who had had the happiness of knowing her, simultaneously *rose up to call her blessed* and to give her the homage which her outstanding virtues deserved.

The whole Congregation gratefully received and preserved those touching expressions of praise which were given in memory of their venerable Mother, who had governed them for so many years. It seems to us that these testimonies of esteem are embodied in the following words which were dedicated to her memory by Father Perdreau: "It was rare to encounter Christian charity which was so natural and charming and at the same time so gentle and reserved. It could be said that Mère Geay had taken as her motto these words spoken by one of the saintliest religious of our times: *become extraordinary by dint of being ordinary*. This virtue brought to light the goodness and freedom of a faith which did not falter. When she spoke of *her good God (son bon Dieu)* it was marvelous; only the Curé of Ars knew how to say those words in quite the same way. Moreover, she never deviated from the path marked out for her by the Divine Master: May your discourse be: "Yes when you mean yes and no when you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one."⁶⁷

Abbeville's inhabitants were outstanding in the honors which they gave to the deceased. Her body was placed in the infirmary and the people came respectfully, quietly in a constant stream to look upon the features of her whose charm and virtue had known how to win the hearts of all. The funeral services at Abbeville were but a prelude to those which would take place at the Mother House. The town officials and numerous priests deemed it a sacred duty to take part in the Mass and to follow her mortal remains as far as the train station.

Father Paillard was the pastor of St. Jacques and former vicar of St. Wulfran. His devotion to the Community was well known and he was delegated to accompany the body in place of the Dean who was extremely ill. All of the Superiors and some of the Sisters made up the funeral procession, and they replaced each other in turn at their dear Mother's casket. This sorrowful cortege arrived at the Mother House on the 30th of April.

It would be difficult to adequately describe the emotion and reaction which the Superior General's death caused and to tell of the numerous marks of touching sympathy received by the community; and this was not confined only to her Sisters but also to all who knew her. When notified of what was happening in Abbeville on the 27th of April, Father du Chesne, pastor of their parish church, Notre Dame des Champs, immediately went to Bon Secours with words of courage and hope for the Sisters; because at that moment, they were still hoping against hope. He found the Sisters together in the chapel at evening prayer; and, speaking directly from his heart, he urged them to submit to the Will of God; then he spoke of their Mother with words of great respect and deep veneration. He was not content with trying to dry their tears, but announced that he was leaving for Abbeville so as to

give his blessing one more time to the dear sick Mother. But he arrived too late; at the time when he had been praising that simple, humble soul, who had always abhorred and shunned anything that even resembled praise, she presented herself before God's throne laden with merits and virtue.

As early as the 28th of April, Cardinal Morlot also came to the Mother House, and his very presence brought consolation to the grieving Sisters. When he learned that Mother's body was to be brought back to Paris two days later, he promised to return and bless her one last time. His noble heart helped him to understand that nothing could assuage the pain of those poor Sisters as much as the delicate sensitivity of his charity.

Indeed, the Cardinal did return only a few hours after the body's arrival. He told the assembled community that he would celebrate the Requiem Mass on the following day as he had no wish to relinquish his rights of father and pastor to anyone else. Moreover, because of the great esteem which the Mother General had enjoyed, he and Father Morel mutually agreed that the usual burial of the poor, which was the established custom for the Sisters of Bon Secours, should be set aside and that she would have a most solemn funeral ceremony.

The next day, it seemed as if all the Religious Orders and State Dignitaries had agreed to meet in order to pay their last homage to that simple, virtuous woman. An immense number of people from every class of society overflowed that chapel which was the eloquent expression of Mère Geay's thoughts; and they mingled with her Sisters and the children from the Providence Orphanage. Mother had always lavished her gentle kindnesses on the poor and they, more than most, cried and regretted their benefactress' death. As a special favor, the Superior of the Minor Seminary of Notre Dame des Champs requested that his students be permitted to play the organ and sing for the Requiem Mass.

After completing the Absolution of the body, Cardinal Morlot spoke briefly to the community and to the people; his few words effectively gave voice to the pastor's sentiments. Emotion ran high and many a tear was shed as he extolled the humility, gentleness and many other abilities of her whom he called a woman of rare wisdom and prudence.

Cardinal Morlot expressed his fatherly affection for Mother and also for the Sisters; he thoughtfully waited at the Mother House for the return of those who had gone to the cemetery. Once more he wished to bless those Sisters for whom there now remained only the memory and example of that incomparable Mother.

Before leaving, the Cardinal made them understand the necessity of electing a new Superior as soon as it was possible. He ordered them to begin a novena to the Holy Spirit for this intention. It was to be completed on the 13th of May and he designated the elections to take place on the 15th.

How many tears flowed during those days of waiting! How many prayers were said to their dear Mother! Only then did they fully realize the place which she had occupied in their lives and how great her influence had been! In the writings of one of Mère Geay's most loved Sisters we have again found what seems to be an expression of the sentiments that filled the hearts of all: "My God, who, in your impenetrable designs, have taken her whom we cherished, pardon our tears and deep sorrow. We do not seek to understand the secrets of your Divine Providence: we fall at your feet overwhelmed . . . we adore and we pray.

"You endowed her with all the great qualities of mind and heart so that she would inspire all of us and lead us to you . . . Who will give us back the gentleness of her conversations, the liveliness of her spirit and the charm of her whole person?

" 'She is saintly,' said your blessed servant (the Curé of Ars) before his death. 'Yes, she is a saint; you will not have her much longer because she is ripe for heaven.' Sad prophecy! All the same, we do not wish to murmur, and, if it pleases You to shorten our dear Mother's exile, to establish her destiny and, in spite of our regrets and tears, to call her to enter your eternal tabernacle, then we adore Your Holy Will!

"May she be happy, this mother of the poor, consoler of the afflicted and soul of good works; may she be forever happy and blessed! But send us, her children, the Spirit who animated her to direct and sustain us!

O Mother, now you possess the God whom you have loved so very much. Do not abandon us, bless us from the heights of heaven; dry our tears and calm our deep sorrow. Ask God to give us that lively faith, firm hope, ardent charity and that profound humility which radiated from you. Then, be the bright beacon which will guide us through life's desert . . . We touch the tomb where we want to be buried with you and we promise to walk in your footsteps, to uphold your work and to imitate the virtues of which you have been the model . . .

"We accept in advance whoever your Divine Providence destines to be our Mother, and all that it may please the Lord to send us."

Father Morel presided at the election and, by a large majority, Mother St. Cecile, the superior from Abbeville (known in the world as Adele Davion) was named the Superior General. In placing her at the head of the Congregation, the Sisters responded to a wish which had been expressed by their dear Mother. Indeed, once, when Mother St. Cecile was sick, Mère Geay said to the Sisters who were taking care of her: "Make her swallow gold if it will save her; she is to replace me."

This Sister has already been mentioned several times. During her long career she had acquired much experience of people and things. She had a sound, discerning and sensitive mind and possessed all of those qualities which make a good superior: wisdom and firmness in her manner of

governing and broadmindedness and generosity in her relations with the Sisters and providing for their needs. Bishop Landriot's words seem to describe her very well: "When God destines certain souls to be like branches where the birds come to rest, He gives them the true sense and grace of their vocation. A demure reserve and quiet modesty as well as a noble assurance and a constant serenity can be seen in all their actions."

The same simplicity and spirit of charity that are found in Mère Geay's letters are also evident in Mother St. Cecile's correspondence, but with an accentuated tendency to preach on the spirit of interior mortification. "We must destroy *Self*" summarizes her teachings. (*Il faut tuer le Moi*.)

Mother St. Cecile's dispositions in accepting her burden are revealed in a letter that she wrote to one of the Sisters a few days after her election. "Oh, yes, my dear Sisters, I do understand your suffering and I would like to be able to share it. Our only consolation will be in talking to each other about our beloved Mother. We have all experienced an irreparable loss; it is her example and the knowledge that she is watching over me from heaven that sustains me. You did well to speak to me about the cross; I have no illusions but know that it will be my constant lot from now on. So, pray much for me that I will not draw back from the sacrifice and that I may carry this cross in all of its *dimensions* and according to God's will . . . The Sisters sympathize with my weakness, which is not physical but psychological. Since they know that I replace a Mother whom they loved so tenderly, they see the need to lighten my burden. I rely only on help from above; by myself I am absolutely incapable of replacing the dear one we have lost. Indeed, I know that I shall never replace her."

That same thought is expressed in all of the Superior General's letters and, from the very beginning, her humility made her influence very fruitful. In a few, but well chosen words of resolve, she knew how to sustain their courage. "My daughter," she writes, "try to belong wholly to God and, to do that, to belong to ourselves very little or not at all. How happy we will be when the *self* will be dead, or at least deadened. Then we will live only for God and His holy love." And to another Sister she said: "You are sorry for the time you have spent in not loving God. I do understand, but we are dealing with a kind Master who takes everything into account and our good will draws down on us the superabundance of His merciful heart. I bless God for having given you a Confessor who is guiding you to the death of self in which you will find life and peace."

All of Mother St. Cecile's correspondence reflects this same spirit of strength and generosity which she demanded of her Sisters while she sustained and encouraged them at the same time by her great kindness. Here are a few extracts from her letters. Those Sisters who knew Mother will read them with interest.

"My dear child, let us beg Our Lord to make you advance in that life of union to which He is calling you. Let us bless Him, let us hope and wait at the foot of the cross where it seems God wishes to leave us; everything is there. The cross will be a shield for us and will preserve us from attacks of discouragement and permit us to receive those graces which God wants to pour out on our souls through it. Let us often ask Our Lord to act within us, especially in our heart, and let us accept whatever He will send us at each moment of the day. From time to time, the thorns will wound us, but don't lose courage. Our merits will multiply according to the dimensions and violence of the battle. Each well-accepted thorn will become a flower which will embellish our crown. Let us often recall these thoughts; they will always give us joy, peace and happiness."

On another occasion: "I do understand your suffering, my dear child, and I sympathize with you very much. The good God has His designs and, in sending us the cross, He provides the grace which will let us profit by it. In eternity we will see that the cross, which is so difficult for our poor human nature, is sent by God uniquely to give us the opportunity to prove our love for Him. May our courage increase as we remember that this life is quite short and that a blessed, happy eternity awaits us. Then we will say: O good Cross! How much good you have brought me and I did not understand! If it be possible for regret to have any place in heaven, it would be for not having suffered enough. Virtue is not solid or real without mortification. Once again I say, have courage my child! You are on the right path because it is the one which Jesus Christ himself has traced out for us. You know that only after passing through many tribulations will we enter the kingdom of God."

"Well, my dear child," she wrote to another Sister, "how is your zeal for perfection? Let us unceasingly enkindle this sacred fire within us and work to conquer ourselves; to do this, it is imperative not to give up and to rely more on God's help than on our own efforts, because they may often be lacking. Let us attach ourselves to God now, more than ever before, because He alone is good; and let us whole-heartedly tell Him: 'Yes, my God, with the help of your grace I do want to conquer or to die.'"

"My child, there is nothing better than complete abandonment to the Holy Will of God; it is there that we will find strength and courage. Let us rely only on God and discuss our affairs with Him. He cannot deceive us, and will know how to reward this child-like trust. Above all, let us keep watch over our intentions so that all our actions may be done only to please Him. God sees the depths of all hearts, and so, there should not be a single fiber that does not belong to Him: that would be a theft of love. Let us love our Lord for Himself and without any thought of ourselves."

Here again she encourages a soul who was called to great perfection: "You have told me, my dear child, that God has made use of me to help you

through the battles which inevitably accompany any change in our lives. I bless this good God and, with the help of His grace, I hope that you will always find in me a mother's heart which is full of zeal for your soul. Yes, I do want your soul, so as to offer it pure and filled with generosity and love to the Divine Master. Perhaps He will still make you drink of His Chalice sometimes and, because He wants you to belong completely to Him and consequently to bear His divine resemblance, He may try you in heart and mind and body. Be honored by His extreme familiarity and be willing to be forgotten by all creatures. In heaven God alone will be enough; may He already be sufficient for us here below! Let our motto be: With God and my soul, I am rich enough. You will tell me that such complete detachment is a heavy burden for your frail shoulders, and I agree; but, when you gave yourself to Jesus through the holy vows, you promised to strive for this perfection. Pray! Pray much that grace will be given to you in abundance. A single elan of the heart has such power over the heart of God! Above all, do not be afraid; put aside all fear and apprehension because you know well that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof and the Lord gives His help to the faithful soul who wishes to belong entirely to Him."

This was the way in which the new Superior General supported and comforted her Sisters, thus continuing the healthy and strong traditions of her predecessor.

In order to fulfill a desire that had often been expressed by Mère Geay, one of Mother St. Cecile's first concerns was to erect an oratory in the infirmary, so that the sick Sisters would be able to assist at Holy Mass on Sunday. The Sisters' admirable fervor during the September retreat greatly consoled and encouraged the Superior. In fact, in spite of the state of suffering which an overload of new work had caused, she wrote to one of the Sisters: "You should not worry about my health. We must know how to suffer so as to comply with the graces showered on us by our Lord. Our retreats have been so consoling! Yes, I do believe I can say with assurance that God loves us and that He is glorified by His servants." This fervor continued and, during the days of adoration which took place some months later, all of the Sisters at the Mother House wanted to spend the three nights before the altar where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed.

We must not forget to mention an incident which happened shortly after Mère Geay's death; for the Congregation it served as a tangible proof of the glory enjoyed by her who had left the earth to enter into the glory of the Lord.

During the month of July, 1860, one of the Sisters was sent to nurse a woman who had had a great affection for Mère Geay; she suffered horribly from articular rheumatism. We will let Sister's own words speak to us: "The first night which I spent with the sick woman was terrible; her suffering was

intolerable and robbed her of all sleep. The next morning, about ten o'clock, I was prepared to leave for the Mother House to get a little rest; she said to me: 'I am suffering dreadfully, but I am convinced that I will be relieved if you will give me some object that was carried by, or at least, touched to, your revered Mother. I knew her for a long time. She is a saint, do not doubt it; and I have great confidence in her intercession.' I promised her that I would do everything in my power to comply with her request. When I returned that evening, I brought back a picture and a piece of flannel which had belonged to our dear Mother. Then, without saying anything to the sick woman, I placed them under her pillow. She was suffering as much as she had in the morning; her fever had not come down and all of her joints were swollen and inflamed. In spite of this, she went to sleep at about nine o'clock and did not awaken until five o'clock the next morning. When I told her what time it was, she exclaimed: 'What? Did I sleep all night? What did you do to me, Sister?' I showed her the picture and the piece of flannel which I had placed under her pillow. She was very moved and said: 'It seems to me that I am cured; I feel able to get up and even to go to Mass.' She spoke the truth, for, that same morning, she assisted at a Mass of thanksgiving; and from that time onward she again took up her ordinary occupations.

Six months had scarcely passed since Mère Geay had been struck down by sickness at the convent in Abbeville. The Community, already suffering from Mother St. Cecile's departure, was asked to make another sacrifice; it had been foreseen, but that did not make it less painful.

St. Wulfran's beloved Dean, who had founded the Sisters of Bon Secours at Abbeville, rendered his soul to God in October of that same year, 1860. This holy priest had been on fire in doing good and never counted upon his own strength. Indeed, even when his health was visibly seen to be declining, he remained in the breach; but, when he was deprived of the ability to give his parishoners that living Word whose secret he possessed, he preached to them by his example. His last sermon was given on Easter Sunday, 1859. While he was speaking he suddenly felt very weak; then, responding to an unexpected inspiration, he offered himself to God as a sacrifice for his flock. With an impressiveness and humility which brought tears to everyone's eyes, he said: "My God, if my sins have impeded good being done in this parish, accept my life in sacrifice for the salvation of my people."

No word of murmur or complaint came from his mouth during his long and painful illness. He continuously repeated: "*My God, may Your will be done.*"

A little while before his death, he eagerly desired to go to the church to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. While on the way, he intoned the Psalm, *Laetatus Sum*, which he joyfully recited in its entirety. He was so weak, however, that he had to be supported at the altar and then carried back to his home.

In June, on the feast of Corpus Christi, Father Michel made one last effort to drag himself as far as the Sisters of Bon Secours' Convent; they were his daughters by predilection and had the custom of erecting a magnificent Repository before which the procession stopped. When this saintly priest saw his God arrive at the improvised altar, he knelt down and joined his hands. Suddenly he took up the Ostensorium to bless the people while one of his vicars supported his weakening hands.

It was only natural that the Sisters of Bon Secours had the consolation of surrounding with their care and concerns this priest who had been their father in every sense of the word; and they jealously guarded the lessons learned at his bedside as a sacred legacy. During one of his last nights the air could no longer enter his lungs except in painful wheezings. Sister St. Mathieu was nursing him and she asked if he was suffering very much. "No Sister," he responded, "for me it is nothing, but it is more so for those who are around me." A little later, Sister said: "Father, you have prayed a great deal tonight; rest awhile."—"My child, I will never pray enough." Then he alluded to our Lord's words and added: "*And entering into His agony, He redoubled His prayer.*"

When this faithful servant had rendered his soul to God, his heart was removed from his body, as he had requested. This apostle's heart was temporarily placed on our Lady's altar which he had erected in the Bon Secours Convent; later it was transferred to the magnificent College of St. Wulfran whose past glories had been made resplendent by Father Michel.

The Nursing Sisters occupied a place of honor at this greatly loved priest's solemn funeral. Numerous priests from the various Communities and Confraternities preceded Father's mortal remains which were surrounded by his sorrowing daughters, who carried lighted candles; they were followed by an immense crowd of silent, disheartened and tearful people, who all testified to the virtue of this priest of God.

We have spent a long time before this beautiful, touching figure because it is consoling to acknowledge such a truly priestly soul in these times when the clergy is the object of the Sectarian's embittered hate. Also, it is salutary to consider the work which a humble pastor was able to accomplish in the midst of the people, simply by the power of his virtue and zeal. In their turn, haven't these considerations been beneficial in developing in the hearts of the faithful an ever deepening reverence for the clergy, an increased energy in upholding their rights, and procuring the means for them to continue their priestly activities?

We will not leave Abbeville without giving the name of the new superior who was placed as head of Bon Secours at the time. At first, Mother St. Cecile was replaced by Sister St. Edouard, but she did not have the necessary qualities to govern. So the Council entrusted this post to Sister St. Beatrix; we have already met her at Tuileries in 1848, and also know that she was one

of Mère Geay's most intelligent auxiliaries. At that time, Sister was nursing Miss Marquis, an outstanding benefactress of Bon Secours and a chosen soul whom the Divine Master had judged as worthy to be associated with His sufferings. When she was very young she was afflicted with paralysis which only added to many other difficulties; at Lourdes she received back the use of her limbs. But God knew her generosity and responded to her most intimate desire; leaving her the trial of a frail health and a great lack of strength. Thus, until her death, she was forced to seek the use of that *Bon Secours* which she appreciated so much. When they were with her, the Sisters found themselves in an ardent center of fervor and charity because, on account of her infirmities, Miss Marquis had obtained the great privilege of keeping the the Divine Host under her own roof. The sick woman spent many hours there at His feet, and the pleasant task of preparing and arranging the oratory fell to Sister.

Miss Marquis had developed a very tender, respectful and affectionate attachment to Sister St. Beatrix and her nomination as Superior at Abbeville had greatly saddened the patient. She confided her chagrin to a well intentioned but indiscrete person, who secretly went to Sister St. Beatrix; this person tried every possible argument to persuade Sister that it was her duty to leave the Congregation and dedicate herself entirely to Miss Marquis and her concerns. As was to be expected, Sister indignantly rejected these counsels and went where her duty called; and her action received only the highest approval from that great Christian woman she had left. Indeed, when she learned what had happened, Miss Marquis made this reflection: "I love and esteem our dear, good Sister St. Beatrix, but I would not have been able to give her my trust and confidence if she had again become Miss Delebecq."

The beginnings of the London foundation were very difficult. When we come to speak about it, there will be an opportunity to exhibit Mother St. Beatrix's eminent qualities and virtues; because, isn't it in the furnace of trial that souls are revealed? One of the older Sisters gives us the true physiognomy of the Abbeville Community and its superior. "What struck me most about Mother St. Beatrix was her immense, constant kindness which never varied; that, certainly, is not her only quality—she has others that are quite remarkable—but it seemed that all of her virtues converged to make the delicacy of her kindness stand out. This was not, however, a disposition which degenerated into weakness. No, Mother St. Beatrix knew how to be firm, above all when the Rule or duty was concerned. There was kindness in her firmness and firmness in her kindness. Her advice, and even her corrections, were stamped with a sensitivity which went straight to the heart. She knew how to discern, not only those things that would give pleasure but, above all, those things which could favorably influence her daughters' souls.

It is, perhaps, childish to relate this incident which I will never forget; but, even today, its remembrance still makes me experience a deep feeling of gratitude for Mother. I arrived at Abbeville at the end of April. I had just pronounced my vows and, consequently, had likewise only come out of retreat. A few months later, towards the end of August, the annual retreat at Abbeville was to take place. All of the Sisters told me that I certainly couldn't hope to make it with them. Even in advance that was a big sacrifice for me, but I accepted it without a word. The evening before the spiritual exercises were to begin, Mother St. Beatrix called me and said: (How she had the secret for saying those things!) 'My dear child, I do not want to deprive you of the retreat, because I recognize its value only too well, and especially for a religious who had just arrived. I wrote to Paris, and our dear Mother General is sending me a Sister to replace you. So, tomorrow, you will begin again; you will make your retreat with us and, after that, you will be completely accustomed to everything.'

She was right; and today, as I think of the consolation she obtained for me, I feel my heart overflow with gratitude, my eyes become moist with tears, though it has been thirty-eight years since it happened; and I rejoice at the thought that the Heart of Jesus has given back to that kind Mother a hundredfold for the good she had done for me. And I add that, thanks to her gentle influence, the Community at Abbeville was permeated with an atmosphere of piety and peace that expanded souls in a special way."

Chapter XIII

The Foundation at Dublin

1861—1863

If the growth and development of a religious society can be considered as an encouragement given by Heaven to its works, then the foundation of the Sisters of Bon Secours in Ireland was, without doubt, a very special manifestation of Divine Goodness. This was demonstrated as much by the foundations established by the Order as by the excellent fruits which these new branches would produce.

Was not—being *Bon Secours* to a heroically valiant people and bringing peace and consolation to the afflicted of a nation loved and cherished by the Church—was not this a choice and tempting mission for Mère Geay's Sisters?

Is it possible to speak about Ireland without being moved and thrilled by its past glories, and without wincing at its many misfortunes? What a history it has! Ireland's civilization arises from antiquity, and its development was so fruitful that, in the fifth century, during St. Patrick's lifetime, it was already a nursery for saints and proudly bore the title *School of the West*. Even nature seemed pleased to magnificently embellish it so that poets were able to name it the *Emerald of the Northern Seas*: and O'Connell called his country the *first flower of the globe* and the *first gem of the ocean*.

All the same, what are all these when compared to that glory which comes to Ireland from its fidelity to the ancient faith of its ancestors?

When you study history's account of Ireland's tremendous struggle for its religion, its liberty, its independence and possession of its property, you ask yourself how these people were able to survive such annihilating destruction for so long? Yes, the struggle between England and Ireland lasted seven centuries; beginning again the morning after each defeat. It went underground when it could not openly show itself, but it was incessant and implacable. Their resistance to conquest is an extraordinary historical fact; other peoples who had tried, failed and were wiped off the face of the earth. If, on the one side, it was the conquerers' sinfulness which provoked the struggle, then how was the Irish nation able to pass through so many storms, and endure all humanity's destructive plagues, without being completely annihilated?

"Today, as the Celtic race regains its full strength in America and Australia, and increases the Catholic element, we are able to recognize that Divine Providence kept it alive for its special mission.

"Yes, truthfully, God does seem to watch over this peoples' vitality; it is out of the enemy's reach and is inexhaustable and richly blessed because it springs from two roots which are deeply imbedded in faith: the holiness of its priests and the purity of its morals."⁶⁸

Look at the lofty sentiments of those Irish peasants burdened by the weight of adversity; so many of their qualities reveal the nobility of the race! "They boast a long line of ancestors, shed tears when they hear the national melodies and, with the mite deducted from their meager means, they embellish their churches and endow their priests."⁶⁹

Ireland's hereditary enemies are themselves compelled to acclaim that nation's courage. In a discourse at O'Connell's funeral, Doctor Miley cited Macaulay: "We have used the sword against the Irish Catholics for centuries. We tried famine, had recourse to Draconian laws and attempted extermination without any restraint. This was done, not to abase or conquer an abhorred race but, to remove every trace of that people from the land of their birth. What happened? Did we succeed? We have not been able to extirpate them or even to weaken them."

These same thoughts were also expressed by Father Haffreingue, that untiring champion of Notre Dame de Boulogne and its sanctuary's restorer. On the occasion of a young Irish postulant's entry into the Visitation Monastery in 1848, he said: "Ireland is, not only the land of confessors and martyrs for the faith but, also, the country with the greatest devotion to our holy religion. That land, it seems, is like a spring from which Catholicism gushes in such abundance that it cannot be contained. It overflows, so to speak, like fiery jets of love and faith, and inflames the other countries of the world.

Ireland peoples not only England and its immense manufacturing industries, innumerable ships and vast possessions with Bishops, priests

and faithful Catholics; but all the other countries of the world also owe their knowledge of the true religion to Ireland.

If, at this time, Ireland is undergoing such great trials that the faith of weaker Christians is wavering, it is, because having been found just, it must, in the designs of Divine Providence, undergo great tribulations in order to people heaven with saints, and obtain numerous protectors close to God's throne.

It was on this deeply Christian soil that the Sisters of Bon Secours were going to be called to carry out their mission of charity.

During the last years of her life, Mère Geay had already been urged, on several occasions, to make a foundation in Ireland. After obtaining the approval of Dublin's Archbishop, some outstanding persons sent two novices to Paris to prepare a nucleus of Irish Sisters. This proposal was particularly attractive, but the Superior General had never been able to come to any decision regarding it. As a concerned Mother, she became alarmed at the mere thought of seeing part of her flock established so far away from the fold.

Only a few months after Mère Geay's death, however, a committee of Irish women, dedicated to many good works, made new and insistent appeals to the new Superior. Mother St. Cecile was quite perturbed; she prayed and begged others to pray, too. Novenas were made and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered to obtain Divine Light. After weighing the matter, Mother St. Cecile believed it to be her duty to acquiesce to the Misses O'Ferrall's wishes as voiced by the Committee which had been sent to obtain the establishment of the Nursing sisters for the city of Dublin's benefit.

The Sisters of Bon Secours are wholeheartedly grateful to all of their benefactors and desire that special mention be made of those who are most outstanding. The O'Ferralls belonged to one of the oldest Irish families that always displayed their beliefs. During the epoch of which we are speaking the family's senior was the Honorable Richard More O'Ferrall, who was Governor of Malta for many years. He had married the daughter of Lord Southwell, well known in England for his attachment to Catholicism.⁷⁰

His brother, John O'Ferrall, who occupied an important post at Dublin Castle, was an enlightened advisor and faithful friend to the community. His sisters, Catherine, Mary Anne and Louisa, had vowed to remain unmarried, and were members of the Society called the Dames de Saisseval. Their time and resources were devoted to charitable works in workhouses and orphanages, as sponsors, and also in giving help to many who hid their misery.

Miss Hamill and her brother, two other special people, greatly helped them in their work and were closely united in their thoughts and views.

The honor of having implanted Bon Secours in Ireland falls on these thoroughly Christian persons. They can be called its founders because they paid all the expenses for the first two years; at their death each left a legacy to the Dublin community; and during their last illnesses they were all nursed by Sisters of the Congregation.

From an exchange of letters between Miss O'Ferrall and the Mother House in the spring of 1861, we have learned that the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul were aware of the new foundation. Indeed, Sister Josephine, the superior (in the world Miss de Virieu), had met Sister St. Alphonse in London when she visited Claremont. The impression she retained made her want to see the Sisters of Bon Secours doing the same work, within the homes of Dublin families, that the Daughters of Charity accomplished in the hospitals.

On the 4th of March, 1861, Miss Catherine O'Ferrall wrote: "Everyone here has taken a lively interest in this foundation. The good Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul are delighted; and their superior, Sister Josephine, has most obligingly offered to help us get everything organized . . ." A few weeks later she gave these touching details which reveal the sensitivity of souls who are accustomed to serving God without personal preoccupation: "We are quite busy getting everything prepared for you. Sister Josephine has already finished making all the bed linens from good Irish sheeting, and now she's putting the curtains together. Your guess was correct, Mother; the Daughters of Charity's superior is no other than Miss de Virieu. She is an admirable woman and here, she is loved and esteemed as much as she was in Paris. It is rare to find such beautiful intelligence combined with such a noble heart. The Lazarist Fathers also came to assure me that they will provide your little community with all possible services; and their Grand Vicar has promised me that he will say the Mass himself and will reserve the Blessed Sacrament for you."

Before this, on February 14, Miss O'Ferrall had responded to Mother St. Cecile's just and anxious inquiries. The written approbation of Cardinal Cullen, the Archbishop of Dublin had been obtained. Later, he reiterated it in his own words with the assurance that the Sisters would enjoy all the privileges that they had possessed in Paris, and were authorized to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in their oratory. The objection concerning the habit also dissolved into nothing. "I do not anticipate any difficulty concerning the habit," he wrote. "I know that your Sisters come and go between Boulogne and Claremont without any annoyance, and, in Dublin, the Daughters of Charity travel about without any inconvenience, as in Paris. Only the veil might cause some remarks, because, here, all of the ladies wear hats when on the street; but, as I have just said, the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul broke through that custom without difficulty."

It was hoped that the Sisters could have been received by mid-April, but difficulty in finding a suitable residence caused some delay. "The house which we have just chosen for you," wrote Miss O'Ferrall, "has nine rooms, as well as an entrance hall, a kitchen and the bathrooms and work areas; and Sister agrees with our choice."

Finally, on the 15th of April, Miss Mary Anne O'Ferrall announced that everything was ready. The Superior General immediately asked the Sisters, whom she had chosen to carry Charity's divine seed across the seas, to come to Paris. Mother St. Fabien (Victoire Courty), who had been Assistant to Mother St. Marguerite in Boulogne, was named the Superior. It would have been difficult to make a wiser choice. Through her open mindedness, engaging manner and even temperment she won all hearts; and the postulants, who later came, were captivated by her kind, motherly welcome from the very first day. She spent many years in her native town of Lille and acquired a reputation as a nurse who was as experienced as she was pious and devoted. Later on, we will see how she looked at her role as superior. Mother St. Hedwige was her Assistant, and, in all respects she was worthy and capable of that position. She was also one of the first Irish women who came spontaneously to offer their life and devotion to Bon Secours. Besides this, she had experienced the consolation of being at Abbeville during Mère Geay's last moments and helping to care for that holy, much loved Mother.

Mother St. Hedwige was the daughter of Captain Hegarty, one of the Officers assigned to escort Napoleon I to St. Helena. He was accompanied by his wife, and during the voyage Elisa was born; and so, she spent her early childhood on that lovely isle where the fallen genius pined away. Her family came back to England when she was seven years old. At a later date, the widowed Mrs. Hegarty returned to Dublin with her three daughters; but it was only after another visit to England that Elisa went to Paris to request admission to Bon Secours. There she was known by her outstanding religious virtues, and those who knew her intimately were unanimous in affirming that they had never seen her commit the least imperfection. Now, returning to her native country, Mother St. Hedwige was going to serve God and souls in her own true land. Her knowledge of the English language and customs naturally designated her to be Mother St. Fabien's right hand.

The other members of the group were Sister St. Luc from the house in Boulogne and Sister St. Vincent and Sister Marie Gonzague, who had just completed their novitiate. Sister St. Vincent was one of the Irish novices sent to Paris by Miss O'Ferrall.

After being re-saturated with the Spirit of the Institute, these five Sisters left the Mother House; they went to Boulogne and waited there 'til the day of their departure. The Superior of the Boulogne Convent and several of the Sisters accompanied the travelers to the ship; it was the 5th of May. When

the Sisters had gone aboard and were on deck, Mother St. Marguerite and the Sisters who had remained on the pier started singing the *Ave Maris Stella*, and Mother St. Fabien took it up immediately. Thus, the Sisters said farewell to France to the sound of the hymn which honored Mary as *Star of the Sea*, and sailed toward the Isle of the Saints where so many souls awaited their kind and comforting ministry.

They disembarked on the evening of the 6th of May at the small port of Kingstown at the entrance to Dublin. The three Misses O'Ferrall, Miss Hamill and her brother were there to meet the Sisters, and took them directly to the Convent on Grenville Street where everything had been thoughtfully prepared.

As Miss O'Ferrall had promised, Mass was celebrated in the little chapel by Bishop Yore, the Vicar General to Cardinal Cullen; and our Blessed Lord came to reside with them as a companion in their exile and a support in their sufferings.

Three postulants arrived before the end of the first week; their number increased rapidly and, on August 1, 1861, the first of these went to Paris for their novitiate.

We have been able to obtain some intimate details from one of the older religious concerning the life of the Sisters during the early days of the Dublin Foundation; the reader will find them both interesting and edifying. We will let Sister speak:

"The Dublin foundation had been in existence for six months when I arrived at that house. I made my postulancy there and, from the very beginning, I was greatly impressed by the spirit of simplicity, poverty and charity which prevailed among the Sisters. They had such great love and respect for each other that when they met in the corridors they would unaffectedly kiss the other's veil. I spent three years in Dublin after my profession and during that time I was scarcely ever able to see any imperfections in my companions.

"We were content with the bare necessities of life; the poverty of the house was extreme, and sometimes, it was even necessary to deprive oneself spiritually; there was no director for the annual retreat, but the Holy Spirit supplied the needs of all. Mother St. Hedwige made the lectures in the little sacristy; it was very crowded and airless, but not one even thought of complaining. When she had completed the reading, Mother would say: '*Now go before the Tabernacle and listen to Jesus' voice;*' and there our souls would overflow with peace and deep interior joy. We felt so happy!

"What wonderful examples we had before our eyes! In her practice of mortification, Mother St. Hedwige could compete with the Fathers of the desert. She frequently took her breakfast on her knees, and, when a Sister hesitated to perform a penance which was imposed, Mother would humbly

do it herself. When she encountered an annoying situation, she would joyfully say: "How wonderful, my God! Here is something to offer you!"

"One day, when this good Mother was preparing breakfast, she mistakenly used essence of *ketchup*⁷¹ in place of essence of coffee; these liquids look alike but are easily differentiated by their taste.

"Suspecting nothing, we went to our places; and, as I was the youngest, I was the last one. I took a spoonful of the supposed coffee, but the taste was so bitter and repugnant that it was almost impossible for me to swallow it. Nevertheless, as I thought of Jesus uncomplainingly drinking the gall mixed with vinegar which was offered to Him on the cross, it gave me courage to finish that unpalatable breakfast. Indeed, the example of the other Sisters was like a command to me; and the admiration which I felt for them on that day is so present to me that it seems like it happened only today. I looked from one to the other; not a sign or movement betrayed any repugnance or even surprise.

"I suppose that Mother St. Hedwige, accustomed by years of mortification to take whatever was served, had an excellent breakfast on the bite of dry bread which she never forgot to collect from the table after each meal."

The same Sister continues with an incident which will show how obedience was practiced in that little Cenacle. "One day we were all together in the Community room. Suddenly, Mother St. Fabien said to me: 'My child, please go and look for Sister X;' now the Sister in question was already there. So, thinking that Mother wanted to try my spirit of submission, I went downstairs and walked through all of the corridors; then, I went upstairs and told Mother that I had not met Sister X. She looked at me with a charming smile and asked me to return to my place and sit down."

The deep, spiritual happiness which the Sisters enjoyed from their practice of virtue was bought at a great price; for it should be known that their first two years in Ireland's Capital were marked by many crosses and all kinds of difficulties. It pleased God to prove His servants' fidelity, and hell multiplied its wiles and attacks in order to hinder their mission. Is it surprising then that souls closely united to their Master should benefit by those special graces which are never lacking to the just and to the works which they undertake?

It was such a new thing for the Irish people to see Sisters walking about the streets, staying at the bedside of the sick, and even traveling alone into the suburbs! Many priests and bishops found it difficult to understand this new, special vocation of the Sisters of Bon Secours, and to become accustomed to their ministry; this prejudice was the source of innumerable difficulties for the Sisters. However, let us quickly say that the sick were the first to fight against this attitude and to reclaim the Sisters' services. Several Doctors, and in particular Sir Francis Criuse, Doctor Baunon and Doctor

Lyons, intuitively foresaw the inestimable cooperation they could expect from the Sisters of Bon Secours; and from the very beginning they were the community's staunch supporters. The intelligent care which the Sisters gave, and the concern with which they surrounded the patients were soon appreciated by all who came to them, and, little by little, the prejudices disappeared.

The Sisters also were ready to do any charitable work which crossed their path, and many are known only to God. There is one, however, that is worth recording because it reveals Mother St. Fabien and Mother St. Hedwige in their true light and was most certainly a source of blessing for the community.

A very pious woman lived near the convent, and she had welcomed a Father Hamilton into her own home; he was aged, infirm and very poor. She cared for him with great devotion, but, when Father's disabilities made it impossible to leave him alone at night, she came to see Mother St. Fabien. She asked for a night nurse in the name of Christian charity, because she herself was burdened and could offer no remuneration. Mother St. Fabien could not refuse such a request. However, the Sisters were already very busy and she could not overload them; so the Superior and her Assistant accepted the task. They alternated nights for six months at the bedside of that holy man who was so happy to have them with him; and he often spoke of Archbishop de Quelen whom he had known very well.

Soon, some new Sisters arrived from Paris, and they helped the Mothers in this particular case which continued for nearly another year. When the dear old priest felt his end approaching, he solemnly blessed the Sisters of Bon Secours and promised to pray for the Congregation when he reached heaven.

Considering the interior dispositions of those Sisters, it is not surprising that their work has been fruitful. If the cross marked the first two years of their stay in Dublin, they were also given pleasant and significant consolations. "God be praised," they said among themselves. "Not one of us had the sorrow of assisting at the death of an unrepented sinner. Many of them for whom we dedicated our strength and time, had led long, blameworthy lives, but they all came back to God and died in His grace."

We will relate a few particularly moving conversions that were due to prayer and a zeal that was truly apostolic.

About six months after the foundation, a Sister was requested to nurse an aged Colonel. This veteran had been born into the Catholic Church and had received a Christian education. When he joined the Army, however, he soon lost the faith of his childhood, he first became an unbeliever, and then a free Mason. He spent many years forgetting God and despising His laws, and an old age that was happy and free from infirmities did nothing to bring him any closer

to the Author of all good. When sickness laid him low, he was even less inclined to hear mention of God. For a long time the Sister's suggestions and industrious charity seemed to be in vain; and it was only after six months that her prayers, united to those of the Community, were answered. One day, the patient agreed to see a Jesuit priest who, like him, had been an officer in the British Army. The patient was very interested in the conversation; he opened his heart to the priest and consented to make a general Confession. He lingered for several weeks after receiving the last Sacraments and was filled with sentiments of joy and gratitude which he did not know how to express; he died pronouncing the names of Jesus and Mary. Some of his last words were an eloquent "*merci*" to the Sister to whom, he declared, his happiness was due.

At about the same time, one of Mère Geay's Sisters was sent to the bedside of a young French artist who had typhoid fever. He was very ill and deprived of all those kind, little attentions that only affection knows how to give. The patient's only friend seemed to be a large dog who stayed near the bed and bared his teeth when he saw the Sister. That same morning he had attacked the Doctor and would let no stranger approach his master's bed. The young man reassured the Sister and advised her to become friends with his dog, because, he said, she would never be able to get him to leave the foot of the bed. Sister followed this advice and soon, by her kindness and a few treats, she had won the faithful animal's favor. Then she tried to gain the young man's confidence, because the physicians had told her that, if she wished to do anything for his soul, there was no time to lose. However, the first time she mentioned confession, the patient pointed to his head and said: "Sister, you hurt me here." So, she changed tactics and spoke of his family and France. Soon she learned that his mother was still living and that she was very pious and had given him a thorough Christian education. "My mother is always praying for me," he said with emotion. It had been through keeping bad company that he had lost his faith and become a free Mason. His filial piety, however, had remained intact and he said that one of his greatest joys was to send his mother a part of what he earned by his work as an artist.

When Sister had learned all this, she immediately sent for the Director of a young men's Association, a Jesuit priest who was well known for his work in conversions. Father came to see the patient and captured his interest by talking about his art, examining his paintings and especially by admiring his picture of the Blessed Virgin holding the Child Jesus in her arms. When he said that he would return again the next day, the young man seemed pleased. Indeed, the priest did come back and, when he broached the subject of receiving the Sacraments, the patient did not rebuff him. The dying man made his confession with deep sentiments of contrition, repudiated all attachment to free masonry and insisted on signing an act of renunciation of the sect. He begged that no member of any occult society be admitted to see him or be involved in any way with his funeral; and Father promised to see that his wishes were respected. He fervently received the last Sacraments, thanked God for being so merciful to him, gathered his ebbing strength to thank the Sisters and promised to remember them when God opened the gates of heaven for him; then he died resigned and even happy.

In Dublin's Catholic cemetery, a white marble cross was erected on the young Frenchman's grave. The priest's generous friends wished in that way to perpetuate the memory of a conversion brought about through his zeal.

The artist's poor mother was not forgotten either. A considerable sum, realized from the sale of her son's works, was sent to her by the kind priest who had brought the prodigal son back to the fold.

Thus our Lord rewarded His servants' self denial and zeal by giving them an influence which increased, so much the more, as their humility deepened. "God's grace," writes the same Sister, "went with us to our duty because, of ourselves, we were so weak and had so little experience! God's providential help, which had need of no one to accomplish its work, frequently obtained the conversion of even the most obdurate sinners." Here is another account which demonstrates the efficacy of that charming name: *Sister of Bon Secours*.

"At the beginning of my stay in Dublin, I was sent to a hotel to nurse a forty-year-old gentleman who was gravely ill. I arrived in the evening and immediately began to attend to him and carry out the treatments which had been prescribed. He was touched by my kindness and became communicative. I learned he had not been to confession for many years and did not want to hear it mentioned. I was terribly upset that whole night and, in my anguish, I offered the soul of this poor sinner to the Blessed Virgin—'Sister,' he said from time to time, 'there is a large black dog in the room that wants to attack me and his eyes are terrible; it is strange that he doesn't pay any attention to you.'

"As I could not leave the patient, I sent a note to the pastor of the parish early the next morning and begged him to come as soon as possible. Six o'clock struck and he hadn't yet arrived, so, I ran to the rectory and brought the priest back myself. I introduced him as a friend who had come to help and to relieve him, and he was well received. The Blessed Virgin was at work, because it was not long before grace touched his soul. The dying man made a general confession and was deeply contrite, shedding many tears.

"A few hours later this prodigal son returned to his most loving Father; as he was dying he said: 'Sister, I will bless you throughout eternity, and when I see God face to face, I will ask Him for a beautiful place in Heaven for you. Oh, thank you. Thank you.'

"A Carmelite Father came to enroll him under our Lady's livery and thus he had the privilege of dying clothed in the Blessed Virgin's scapular."

The Sister's residence on Grenville Street was only temporary. Their number had greatly increased and the house had become insufficient for them. There was need to look for a more spacious dwelling but, for a long time, they searched in vain.

Finally, due to Father Anderdon's intervention, (he was the community's confessor), a large building was found which could easily be remodeled as a convent. It was situated at 64 Lower Mount Street near Merrion Square and

is still the Sister's home today. Mass was celebrated in the new chapel for the first time on June 24, 1864, the feast of the Sacred Heart.

Postulants began to arrive in great numbers from that day onward and the Community soon totaled thirty members. Requests for the Sisters came from all parts of Ireland, and their ministry was appreciated as much by the doctors as by the clergy. Cardinal Cullen, the Archbishop of Dublin, held them in great esteem, not only for the services they rendered but also for their profoundly religious spirit. His entire family was nursed by them. The prelate gave them Canon Murphy as their Ecclesiastical Superior, and he remained a faithful and devoted advisor to the community until his death.⁷²

Bishop Walsh, the Vicar General, also gave constant support and understanding to the Sisters. At the time of the Dublin foundation, he was the pastor of St. Michael and St. John Church; this parish included one of the poorest, most miserable neighborhoods. So he had ample opportunity to judge the new Sisters in a situation which he later recalled with pleasure. A Sister had been sent into that area to nurse a man who had typhoid fever and, as the danger of death was imminent, a priest was called to give the last Sacraments. Father Walsh came immediately, and he was greatly impressed and moved when he found a Sister in that poor, humble cottage, whose only other inhabitant was an eighty-year-old woman. He said nothing but each evening he returned to visit the patient and often he remained until the following morning reciting his breviary. The priest's nightly visits were an enigma to the Sister, but when, contrary to all expectations, the patient recovered, she received an explanation. Father Walsh then told her of his fear that the patient might, in a bout of high fever, try to destroy himself or his nurse. In light of this apprehension he believed it his duty to come and try to protect both of them. When he became Vicar General, prelate to His Holiness Leo XIII and Dean of Dublin, Bishop Walsh was entrusted with the direction of the religious communities of women in the diocese. In his continued relations with Bon Secours, he never deviated from that paternal benevolence which he had displayed towards the Sisters from the beginning. When he became ill, he also reclaimed their care; and, by a strange coincidence, the same Sister, whom he had watched with such concern over thirty-eight years ago, was sent to nurse him. During his long convalescence, it gave him great pleasure to talk about the past and to say: "Poor child! How I pitied you! What a heavy task you accomplished there!"

Another protector and benefactor of the Dublin community, who should be mentioned, is Doctor Anderdon. He was the nephew of Bishop Manning, the future Archbishop of Westminster. A short time after their arrival, Father Anderdon came to visit the Sisters. He took to heart the interests of the convent and, as we have already said, it was due to him that they were able to purchase the house on Lower Mount Street. This worthy priest was the

Sisters' confessor until he entered the Jesuits. He was replaced by Father Leterrier, superior of the Marist Fathers in Dublin, who discretely and zealously guided the community for six years. We will meet him again in Baltimore.

Chapter XIV

*The Foundation at Rozoy
Cardinal Morlot's Death
Sister St. Fulgence is named
Assistant Mistress of Novices
The Foundation at Roubaix
1861—1863*

We have not forgotten that some of Mère Geay's last words to her Sisters were: "*I bless you for the present and for the future.*" Well a year had scarcely passed since that saintly Mother's death, and the signs of protection which she gave her Sisters from on high were already numerous. The Institute's establishment in Ireland was an evident proof that she always watched over her work; but at that time, there was another one which was no less eloquent.

In the spring of 1861, Madam Brochant de Villiers offered the Sisters of Bon Secours a property which she owned in Rozoy-en-Brie. It was about fifty-five miles from Paris, was comprised of a pretty country house on approximately fifteen acres, completely surrounded by a wall and was in excellent condition.

The government gave the authorization for the Congregation to accept this gift which caused no expense, as even the lawyers did not want any fee for their part in the transaction.

As he had no children, Mr. Brochant de Villiers, who was very Christian and a man of means, had decided a long time ago, that he would leave his estate to a religious congregation; but before he could execute his plans, death suddenly overtook him. The act of charity which possibly brought about his unexpected death is worth telling. It seems that one of his tenant farmers was mortally sick and obstinately refused to accept any help from religion. When Mr. Brochant learned this he immediately set out, despite the distance and inclemency of the weather, to try to persuade the poor wayward man to recognize his condition; and he had the happiness of bringing him back to God. When he arrived home, however, he had a sudden attack of great pain and died a few hours later.

In spite of her great sorrow, Madam de Villiers did not wish to defer execution of her dear one's project. "This house has been made sacred by my husband's death and by my own grief," she said, "and I would not wish it to belong to anyone but a religious community." However, she remained uncertain as to the Congregation to which she would give it. It seems that for some time a Sister of Bon Secours, Sister St. Germain, had been nursing Madam Brochant's brother, and this fact certainly influenced the decision she finally made in favor of Bon Secours.

Mother St. Cecile wrote to one of her Sisters: "It seems that Divine Providence is arranging the happy outcome of this affair, because Madam Brochant de Villiers' brother, who is her only heir, has taken the steps necessary to bring about a solution. If God wishes us to have this gift, He will know how to guide their decision in our favor; if not, then I want no part of it. All for His glory and according to His will."

Thanks to this unexpected generosity, the cherished dream which had long been germinating in the minds of the Superiors could become a reality, that of giving the Sisters, who were aged or infirm and those exhausted by fatigue and long night vigils, a home in the healthy fresh air and calm of the country. On previous occasions a house in the suburbs of Bellevue had been rented; in order to provide a place for rest and change of air, which especially made itself felt after a rigorous winter or long periods of epidemic. These temporary places did not really satisfy the needs of the Sisters, and the gift of Rozoy was considered providential, and was very gratefully received.

The General Chapter's recorded minutes call this residence *the vestibule to heaven*, but it was also a sanctuary of suffering and a powerhouse of prayer. Those poor infirm Sisters were so touching in their resignation, and so joyful at the thought of their approaching reward; they would continually raise their arms to heaven, like Moses, so as to help their Sisters who, through their ministry of charity, still battled the forces of impiety and irreligion. In fact, the Superiors never spoke without emotion about that blessed house over which hovered the peace of eventide, which Divine

Providence gives to faithful servants *who have worked all day in spite of the heat*,⁷³ and the storm.

All the same, the rest which the hand of God had so thoughtfully provided also ought to be fruitful; and the Sisters had the consolation of finding a vast field open to their zeal at Rozoy.

The populace, comprised in great part of the working class, was very hostile to religion, and quite displeased to see the Sisters settle in their midst. Nevertheless, these unpleasant dispositions would soon give way before the charity of the Sisters.

At Rozoy there were two large mills which employed a considerable number of workers, both men and women. Accidents were frequent; and it was not long before the victims found their way to the convent door, where the kind, soft-spoken Sisters knew the secret of dressing and curing their wounds.

Mother St. Marianne was named Superior of the new foundation. We already had a glimpse of her in that position at Boulogne, where she influenced all who approached her in those six years; and we also remember that moving testimonial of praise given her by Baron de Blaisel. She dedicated herself anew to her dear patients when recalled to Paris, and in 1848 she was sent to Tuileries with Sister Marie de la Visitation; but, as she began to vomit blood, she was obliged to leave there before the Palace was evacuated. We have been told that the wounded men, completely spell-bound by her charity, continually asked for news of her. "Be sure to take good care of her," they said, "and get her well quickly. She has been so good to us!"

Sister was particularly well suited for the new mission which was entrusted to her, because she felt a special attraction towards the poor and the working class; and her first concern was to arrange a room as a dispensary, where all who came would be indiscriminately received. Sister St. Germain was a nurse with remarkable skill, and she worked marvelous cures with treatments she had learned in her many years of experience. She had a widespread reputation and Doctor G_____ invariably told patients who came for dressings to "Go see the Sister of Bon Secours." Not only the poor, but even those in easier circumstances, were not afraid to make a long journey in order to be cared for by Sister St. Germain. One day a woman brought her son who had been so badly bitten by a large dog that most of the skin was gone. The wound was in a terrible state, and the poor mother was in tears of despair; but through Sister's persevering care the child was completely healed.

The townspeople's hostility and prejudices completely disappeared before the Sisters' kindly influence, and the great good accomplished; and a few pious persons who lived there, regarded them as sent from heaven and trusted them completely.

One of the Superior General's first concerns was to provide the Sisters, whose age or health prevented them from going to the parish church, with a chapel where they could peacefully be close to their Divine master. The building's first stone was laid in May of 1863. While the work was in progress, Bishop Allou of Meaux came to Rozoy and he appeared to be quite interested in the new construction. "I am very pleased to see all of you, my dear Sisters," he said pleasantly, "and I have also been happy to see and admire the 'cathedral' that you are building to God's honor in our diocese. I intend to bless the chapel myself, but I impose one condition to its erection; it is this: that you allow the laity to come there to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament."

The prelate's desire became a reality; and he presided at the chapel's solemn opening on the 1st of September, 1864. The entire population took part in the celebration, and the workmen, who had labored on the building's construction, came that day to offer flowers to the Superior General. These good, hardworking men expressed their sentiments of veneration and respect in a short speech which came straight from their hearts; and it was once more demonstrated that the great social question would be quickly resolved, if relations between the owners and the workmen were always regulated by faith and charity.

Bishop Allou's lively interest in his dear Sisters at Rozoy did not wane; he loved to come and see them, and even later, when he was afflicted with blindness, his visits did not cease. He recognized the Sisters by their voices and conversed with them with the simplicity of a father in the midst of his children.

Madam Brochant de Villiers had withdrawn from society and lived as a boarder in a monastery in Paris. She came back on different occasions to visit the convent, and she always spoke of the great joy she had experienced in having been able to provide the Institute's suffering members with this peaceful oasis.

While the Superior General was occupied with the establishment of the house at Rozoy, the prelate, who had inherited Archbishop de Quelen's love for Bon Secours, died; and Mother St. Cecile experienced a great sorrow at his passing. The Archbishop of Paris became sick towards the middle of December, a victim of the illness which would cause his death by the end of that same year.

This prelate had always expressed interest and concern for the religious communities. In fact the very last visit that he made was to see Mother Marie Thérèse Dubouché, foundress of the Congregation of *Perpetual Adoration*, who was being consumed like a holocaust on her bed of suffering. Bishop d'Hulst tells us that the Cardinal spoke with her for a long time and that the grace of his presence left her, and her Sisters, greatly comforted.

As soon as the Archbishop realized the gravity of his illness, and the physicians had told him there was nothing more science could do for him, he called a Sister of Bon Secours to his bedside.

Nevertheless, by one of those inconsistencies which remain unexplained or unexplainable, and notwithstanding his overflowing kindness, Cardinal Morlot retained a certain prejudice against the Nursing Sisters. He judged their vocation as rash and had expressed his feelings about this to Mère Geay on more than one occasion. However, when he himself had experienced their ministry, the Archbishop then understood what an integral part they could be in that stream of charity, which circulates throughout the Church; and he showed Sister St. Rose such confidence and gratitude that she was deeply touched. He liked to talk with her about that eternity which was going to begin for him, and after one blood letting treatment that did not relieve his symptoms, he said: "I must think seriously about it, Sister, because I am not getting any better."

Despite Doctors Cruveilhier's and Vignolo's vigilant care, the Cardinal's condition deteriorated rapidly, and it was impossible to hide the fact that death was very near. The prelate realized this and prepared for death with admirable serenity; and he quietly rejected the hopes that we tried to make him consider. He suffered intensely but during his exhausting spells of choking he was often heard repeating: "May I not be lacking in patience!"

On Christmas Eve he tried to persuade Sister to return to her community for the Mass at midnight; and to quiet her scruples, he added: "Moreover, we will have Midnight Mass also and I intend to go." Despite their remonstrances, the persons present had to take him, or rather carry him, to the chapel in his home; and there he found the strength to receive Holy Communion on his knees.

The change in his expression, when they brought him back to his room, clearly showed the extent of his sufferings. Sister returned soon after this and the prelate eagerly told her how happy he was to have been able to receive his God.

His condition worsened and the Cardinal's last days were marked by dreadful sufferings, which he bore with heroic resignation. During the more violent spells, he often took hold of Sister's crucifix and said: "Sister, say your little prayer to the Blessed Virgin—but softly, very softly and slowly." So Sister would say: "*We have recourse to your assistance, O Holy Mother of God; reject not the prayers we raise in our necessities, but come to our rescue at every moment; O glorious, Blessed Virgin, Our Queen and mediatrix, reconcile us with your Son.*" Then the Archbishop took up the prayer and completed it himself: "*Reconcile us and present us to your Son now and at the hour of our death.*"

On the morning of the 28th of December he said: "Sister, what did you ask for me in your prayers this morning?"—"I made my meditation on the *Our*

Father," she replied.—"Where did you stop?"—"At the beautiful words: '*Thy will be done!*'"—"Me, too; I always pause there. Yes, may the will of God be done!"

Later on, his strength exhausted, he said to his nurse: "Sister, speak to me about God; it is a great consolation for the sick, it is my life, . . . and you say nothing to me anymore."—"All right, your Eminence, let us say: '*Patience of my God, I unite myself to You! Resignation of my God, I unite myself to You!*'"—"Yes, Sister, yes, everything for eternity, all things for eternity!"

During the night of the 28th–29th the Cardinal expressed the wish and received Holy Communion one last time. The Holy Father's blessing had been sent to him several days earlier. Sister helped and comforted him through the terrible anguish of the night, and in the morning she told him that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was going to be celebrated for him that day at Bon Secours. He appeared to be greatly touched; and, in a voice that was but a whisper, he recited the prayers of the beginning of the Mass and the *Confiteor*. Shortly after this, Sister saw that he was dying and she suggested: "*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*" ("Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit"); and one of the priests, who was kneeling by the bed, responded: "*In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam.*" ("In real peace I will rest and sleep."). At that moment Cardinal Morlot bowed his head and gave his soul to God. The previous evening he had told Doctor Vignolo that he was going to rest in the peace of the Lord.

The accounts of these memories, and many others, too, survive as relics of a remarkably glorious and fruitful past. They are of inestimable value to those Sisters who are called upon to continue that mission for the bishops and priests of today, which the holy women of the early Church exercised towards the apostles and disciples of Jesus.

The expressions of affirmation which the Sisters received from those persons for whom they had been a Cyrenian were also very precious to them. Thus, two letters from the Marchessa de Castellane are found among the correspondence of 1862; they tell us how Sister St. Fulgence's fleeting presence had enlightened and deeply impressed that Christian milieu of Rochecotte where Bishop Dupanloup, Mr. de Falloux and many other distinguished men liked to come in order to rest and recuperate from the struggle of their daily lives.

Madam de Castellane's maiden name was Pauline de Perigord; she was the daughter of the Duchess of Dino and the grand niece of the Prince of Talleyrand whose conversion was, in part, her work. In 1791, in a discourse addressed to the Assembly which was legislating on the grave question of education, the Prince of Talleyrand said: "*The presence of a young girl refines the place she inhabits, and her innocence commands those who surround her to repentance or virtue.*"

Divine Mercy had arranged a similar influence for his benefit at the end of his career, by placing close to him his great niece, "whose piety made a charming and penetrating impression on him, which man has great difficulty resisting, especially at that moment when his mind is turned toward grave thoughts."⁷⁴ The Prince had witnessed her make her First Holy Communion in London, and he was so impressed that he could not prevent himself from saying: "How touching a thing is the piety of a young girl! And how contrary to nature incredulity is, especially in a woman!" Later, when speaking about his niece, he said: "Isn't it true that Pauline is an angel?"

In Paris, Miss de Perigord's confessor was Father Dupanloup. She spoke about him to her uncle in such terms that it gave him the desire to make the acquaintance of the future Bishop of Orléans.

Father Dupanloup has related details concerning the relationship he had with the Prince of Talleyrand, the work which was gradually accomplished in the old man's soul, Archbishop de Quelen's concern for this wayward soul; the anguish of those last days when the Prince, always the diplomat, delayed signing the retraction without which he could not be reconciled with God.

We can imagine that thrilling scene: it is six o'clock in the morning; Miss de Perigord, trembling but courageous, reminded the dying man of the promises he made the previous evening, and gave him the pen with which he was to sign his declaration and request to re-enter the bosom of the Church as her son. The letter which he wrote to Gregory XVI that same day began with these words: "Most Holy Father, the pious, young child, who surrounds my old age with the most tender and touching care, has told me of the expressions of beneficent kindness which Your Holiness has extended in my regard; etc . . . "

Some years later, Miss de Perigord, then the Marchessa de Castellane, was in Rome with her husband; and she obtained an audience with the Sovereign Pontiff. When the formalities had been completed, His Holiness picked up some papers from his desk and asked her if she recognized them. It was the retraction which the Prince of Talleyrand signed on the morning he died and the letter which accompanied it. "These papers never leave my table," Pope Gregory XVI said to her, "they have brought me the greatest consolation of my pontificate." The next morning, the Holy Father sent a magnificent rosary to Madam de Castellane in memory of the Christian death of her uncle, the Prince of Talleyrand.

It was that eminent woman whom Sister St. Fulgence had the happiness of knowing intimately and was honored by her friendship. Sister had lavished her care on the Marchessa's mother for almost four years; and all who approached her were edified by her religious spirit, her tact and the sensitivity of her devotedness.

As we have already seen, Mère Geay had cultivated this soul with the greatest of care and expected great things of her. Mother St. Cecile had the task of continuing that formative work. For her part, the young Sister had spontaneously—and with great abandon—put herself under the new Superior's direction. It is regrettable that Sister's letters have not been preserved, because from Mother St. Cecile's responses, we are able to judge the efforts that Sister exerted in order to attain perfection. "No, you will not be a burden to me," wrote the Superior General in June, 1860, "your letters, which describe your dispositions so well, console me very much. Concerning your failings, do not be alarmed; you will have them as long as you will be on this earth. God is giving you a great grace in showing you your faults so clearly, because, with His help and your good will, they will be a source of much merit for you. Yes, to know oneself is a great grace because it is thus that we build on the indestructable foundation of humility. Never let yourself become troubled, for it will stop you on your journey towards God, towards that God who is so good and has compassion on all our weaknesses."

A little later, Mother wrote again to Sister: "Your letters will never be too frequent; they console my poor heart, because I see in you an immense desire to belong completely to God and that is the goal of religious life. With God (at our side) we are strong against difficulties and temptations. Also, my child, understand well that a Spouse of Christ, who does not have sacrifices to carry out, will never make great progress in virtue. Also, mustn't we always keep in practice, so to speak, in order to be constantly forced to throw ourselves on our good Lord's heart? If you courageously follow Him as far as Calvary, you'll have no need to ask the way to Heaven; and all the saints will cry out: You are there! Go straight ahead and look neither to the right nor to the left. So, from the depths of our hearts let us say: *long live Jesus and His cross!* On the last day, with unalloyed joy, we will kiss that blest cross which has caused us to become like our Divine Spouse."

On another occasion, aware of the generosity of the soul whom she addressed, Mother did not fear to encourage her to battle against herself: "You tell me that you do not know what to do in order to subdue your temper. Dissolve it in the blood which our Lord shed to redeem us. Say to Him: O my Jesus, do not abandon your child, because she will perish if left alone. Also, think about the Blessed Virgin's patience at the foot of the cross; look again at what the saints have done, and understand that, to the eyes of faith, there is greatness only in the soul who works towards perfection. Be steadfast, then, in conquering your predominant fault and, to do that, examine its cause; by this means you will vanquish that giant which is so harmful to you."

The fault against which Sister St. Fulgence had to struggle was a certain haughtiness of manner which caused her to frequently experience coldness

from others. Mother St. Cecile waged continual war on this tendency. "Be humble, my child," she repeated over and over again. "God refuses nothing to a soul who turns to ask Him for that virtue which He calls His own: '*Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart.*' A grain of humility is more pleasing to His eyes than the most heroic acts performed without that virtue."

Later she wrote: "Keep yourself very humble and God will bend towards you; if, on the contrary, you wish to raise yourself up, then God will go still higher and you will never be able to reach Him. All the same, do not lose courage in this struggle against yourself; and always get up with great simplicity and say to our good Lord: Here I am again; once more You have to show me Your great mercy! No, do not be discouraged, *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent bear it away*; and in combatting your hastiness of temper you will acquire the merit of victory."

These forceful words produced fruit, and later on, when she herself was directing others, Mother St. Fulgence unstintingly gave her Sisters what she had received. In the autumn of 1862 Sister went to Paris for the annual retreat; the Superior General kept her there and appointed her as Assistant Mistress in the novitiate. Lady de Rochecotte was deeply affected when she received word of the change, but she accepted it with a generosity that was totally Christian.

"My dear Sister," she wrote, "God has manifested His will through your much loved Mother. We must say *Amen* to this unexpected turn of events, and do it in such a way that it does not have the effect of a *sacrifice*. Now more than ever, I beg the help of your good prayers for me and mine, and again, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for the many years that you have devoted to us. I embrace you with a heart that is deeply moved."

A little later, Sister St. Fulgence was permitted to spend a few days with her dear friend; and when she had definitively bade her a final farewell, Madam wrote these heartfelt words to her: "My dear good Sister, you have just left me and yet I already feel the need to repeat in writing my regrets, my gratitude and my emotions! All of these sentiments fill my heart, and the struggle which I have had to wage, so as not to give in to myself, has brought on a migraine headache which I fear you will somehow share on your way. You, however, as you once again see all of your Sisters, will not experience the sense of void which your departure has left me; a void which is over and beyond my ability to express.

"Come what may, let us be faithful to find each other in prayer; for that meeting place knows no distance as we await the consolation of seeing each other again . . .

"Thank you again, my dear, good Sister. Thank you. Please believe that in me you have a faithful friend. All of Rochecotte sends you greetings, and my daughter, my grandchildren and I embrace you with the whole of our hearts."

From that time on, Sister St. Fulgence became the right arm of Mother St. Cecile and her secretary; at the same time, she was working at the formation of those Sisters whose dynamic force and humility will later be seen as they carry out their blessed work.

Now, we must speak of a foundation which has not yet been mentioned, because it did not come about in ordinary circumstances. It is Roubaix.

For a long time, the Sisters in Lille had gone back and forth to nurse in that town; it was ten kilometers (about 8 miles) from their convent. However, the frequent need to do this created certain difficulties which were undermining the religious spirit. To obviate the problem, the Superior rented a small house at Roubaix on Rue Traversière in 1852; it is true that the building was old and the quarters were cramped but sufficient as a temporary lodging for the Nursing Sisters. It was not until 1863 that thought was given to making a definitive establishment.

At the time, Roubaix had not yet attained that development which has made it one of the richest industrial centers of France. All the same, this growth, which happened with unbelievable rapidity, also multiplied the needs of the working class; in 1842 Roubaix had numbered only 18,000 inhabitants.

It is remarkable that, for the most part, the owners, who had created those splendid establishments in the north, were men of faith; and they willingly cooperated with everything which could encourage a religious spirit among the people. They found powerful helpers for this work among the Sisters of Bon Secours, and especially in Sister St. Romain, who nursed, consoled and evangelized Roubaix's poor for over forty years.

The initiative for this foundation is due to Madam Jean Baptiste Scrépel, a fervent Christian whose name headed the lists of all the charitable works. She had often admired the Sisters as they went about their work in the neighboring families, and she understood the great good they were called to do. One day, she confided to her husband that she was ready to make any sacrifice in order to see the Sisters established in the city—she would even give up her jewels. Mr. Scrépel was touched by his wife's generous spirit and he also shared it. He obtained an estimate of the value of her jewels, and then gave an equivalent sum for the erection of a convent. The building was soon constructed on Rue du Square, and the Sisters settled there in 1863.

As benefactors of the community, the Vichon Family also merit particular mention. The factory, which Mr. Vichon directed, was located directly behind the poor little house on Rue Traversière; he had many opportunities to see and appreciate the Sisters' work, and on several occasions they had taken care of him. He had been able to render them numerous services because of the good relationship which existed and their frequent encounters. The entire Vichon family had inherited those same sentiments of

kindliness, and the Sisters never appealed in vain to their generosity for their poor.

From the very beginning, these good women strove to outdo one another in their zeal for the poor, while also caring for the needs of the sick of the upper classes. It happened, on more than one occasion, that there was no meal prepared when they arrived home in the evening, because everyone has been detained in one or other of those worker's families where sickness often brought such misery.

Among the many consoling facts recorded for us by the Sisters in the north, we have chosen a cure which was due to the intercession of Our Lady of LaSalette. It took place in 1865; we will relate it and let the Sister, who was the witness and providential instrument of that favor, speak:

"On the 27th of January, I was called to nurse a woman at Bousbecques who had erysipelas. Five physicians from Lille had been called in for consultation, and all of them considered the patient's condition to be desperate. All hope seemed lost, but the poor woman had deep faith and I had no difficulty in getting her to receive the Sacraments. I began by proposing that we make a novena to Our Lady of La Salette, who had already cured her grand nephew. 'Nine of us will begin it this evening, and we will all receive Holy Communion tomorrow morning. If you would like to join us and receive the good God today, perhaps the Blessed Virgin will obtain your cure for us!'—'I understand,' the patient replied; 'I am very sick and you want me to receive the last rites. I, too, want what you want; bring the priest and also have my husband come so that I may give him my last wishes.'

"The parish priest arrived at noon; he heard the poor woman's confession and gave her the last Sacraments. Then she bade farewell to all who were there: 'I know that only a miracle can cure me,' she added, 'but I also know that the Blessed Virgin is all powerful. If I am cured, I will have a chapel built for her as a testimony of my gratitude.'

"We did make the novena, but throughout its duration there was no change in the poor patient's condition. On the ninth day, we saw that she was as bad as ever and we began to lose hope. The novena prayers were said for the last time at eight o'clock in the evening. The sick woman went to sleep at nine o'clock and did not awaken until five o'clock the next morning; she said that she felt very well and was quite hungry. The poor soul was so happy that she couldn't stop talking and, for a moment, I thought she was delirious. It was not long, however, before I saw that the cure was real; and, over and above that, the persistent cough from which she had suffered for many years was also gone.

"The woman did not delay fulfilling the vow she had made; and today, at Bousbecques, you can see the charming, little chapel dedicated to Our Lady of La Salette where a lamp burns day and night, constantly repeating to Mary the thank-you of a grateful soul."

Chapter XV

Laudatory Brief

1864

Often and particularly towards the end of her life, Mère Geay had expressed the desire to ask the Holy See for the approbation of the Institute. The priests whom she consulted in this matter, however, counseled her to wait and to prolong their period of trial, because the vocation of the Sisters of Bon Secours was an exceptional one and demanded the proof of long experience.

In 1864, Mother St. Cecile believed that the moment had finally arrived to request the long desired favor. The Institute had been in existence for forty years, and during that time, the Sisters' manner of living had clearly demonstrated that the practice of religious life and the virtues of obedience, poverty and chastity were in no way incompatible with the care of the sick in their own homes.

Father Morel, the Congregation's Ecclesiastical Superior, greatly encouraged the Superior General's plans, and directed her along the steps to be taken in order to obtain a *Laudatory Brief*. "The slowness with which the Court of Rome proceeds, in the inquiries of the causes presented to it, is well known," says Bishop d'Hulst regarding this question. "Long experience has shown that, when there is question of distributing praise or blame, of encouraging or impeding, time plays an essential role in the counseling. In particular, concerning the case of a new form of religious life, the

Congregation of Bishops and Regulars make a preliminary inquiry into the goal, origin, spirit and practices of the new Society. Then, if this investigation furnishes a favorable report, the Congregation will obtain a Brief from the Sovereign Pontiff, which congratulates the authors of the undertaking and declares it praise-worthy and conformable to the interests of the Church and of souls. However, strictly speaking this Brief is not an approbation; and the Institute which receives it is not canonically established in the universal Church."

Because the Mother House was under the immediate jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris, it was necessary that Bishop Darboy be willing to go to Rome and support the Sisters' plea. He did this both willingly and eagerly. "Wherever these Sisters have settled," we read in his letter, "they have received, with the precious encouragement of the bishops, the pious gratitude of the families in whose midst they have lavished their care.

"Their devotion is particularly manifest and fruitful in Paris. We are happy to give this testimony, and we express the wish that Your Holiness will deign to answer the plea of the Religious of Bon Secours to approve their Institute; and thus accord Your most paternal blessing on all their works of zeal and charity."

When they learned of the course of action which was going to be undertaken at Rome, a certain number of Archbishops and Bishops wanted to support it by their own testimonies; thus we are able to see the esteem in which the French Episcopacy and Clergy held this hidden but fruitful Congregation which Our Lady of Bon Secours watched over with maternal care. Some of these Prelates had seen the Sisters at work, and some had even met them at the bedside of the sick; thus the enthusiasm of their words is explained by the thorough knowledge from which they were speaking. We will now quote from some of those episcopal letters which were attached to the Sisters' plea.

Archbishop Régnier of Cambrai had two Bon Secours foundations under his jurisdiction: Lille and Roubaix.

"These two communities," he wrote, "give much edification and render considerable service in both cities; and they rightly enjoy the esteem, respect and confidence of the inhabitants. Their contribution in the preparation of the dying and facilitation of the reception of the last Sacraments is extremely helpful to the clergy of the parishes. The Institute is indeed worthy of the favors which it seeks from the Holy See.

signed: R.F., Archbishop of Cambrai."

In his turn the Bishop of Amiens wrote:

"In my own diocese, where I have the advantage of possessing an important house of the Sisters of Bon Secours, I have been able to evaluate and appreciate how devoted they are to the spiritual and bodily relief of the sick; and how many rebel sinners, yielding to the influence of their piety and zeal, are converted at the moment of death.

I have also been able to verify the piety and regularity of their lives; because, in the midst of the world where they live exposed to many dangers, they conduct themselves in a manner which is as truly religious, interior and hidden as those Sisters living in the cloister.

It is interesting to recall that the Sisters of Bon Secours are the first to have been founded in France for the touching work to which they are devoted; and that this work, which has had forty years of existence, has already produced abundant fruits, etc., etc.

signed: Jacques, Bishop of Amiens."

Bishop Parisis of Arras was no less affirmative.

"I have known the Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours, whose Mother House is in Paris, for a long time; and I profess a profound esteem and holy gratitude for it, because of the precious and truly inestimable services which these Sisters render to the bodies and souls of the sick of all classes. We have evidence of this in Boulogne, our diocese's most important city, where they are the object of universal respect and confidence. Thus we believe this Institute is worthy of the Holy Apostolic See's greatest benevolence, etc.

signed: P.L. Parisis, Bishop of Arras."

Another highly prized testimony is that of Bishop Pie of Potiers, whose lucid intelligence grasped the strengths and weaknesses of men and things so well. This illustrious prelate wrote directly to Pius IX.

January 14, 1864

"Most Holy Father,

The pious Congregation of Christian women, called Sisters of Bon Secours, under the invocation of Our Lady Help of Christians, and whose Mother House is in Paris, has, for a long time rendered such numerous and outstanding services to religion that it makes me happy to obtain all possible advantages for it. Knowing then, that the Institute is entreating Your Holiness for the approbation of its Constitutions, I come with cordial eagerness to support it with my recommendations.

This religious family, the first among many which were established on its model and example, has adopted the care of the sick in their homes as the principle work of its vocation. For forty years already it has fulfilled this important function with such success that, by its zeal and charity, it has gained an almost incalculable number of souls for heaven, even in homes the farthest removed from God; and it has won the esteem of all—as many people of the world as pastors of the church.

Deign to benevolently accord the request of this Institute, Your Holiness, and to bestow Your most abundant blessings on it; I also implore them for myself.

Of Your Holiness . . . etc.

signed: Louis-Edouard, Bishop of Potiers."

Bishop de Dreux-Brézé's request also merits its entire quotation:

"Most Holy Father,

The pious family of religious, called Bon Secours, for nursing and watching with the sick in their homes, came into being forty years ago, under the auspices of the venerable Archbishop Hyacinthe de Quelen, through a vocation which was new and unprecedented

until then, following the counsels and measures taken by the respectable priest, Philippe Desjardins.

Today, this family presents itself at the feet of the Apostolic See. Deign to pardon me, Your Holiness, if I dare to support it with my recommendations or, rather, would You be so kind as to regard this entreaty as a testimony of my complete devotion.

The Archbishop of Paris, Denis Affre, of happy memory, entrusted to me the direction of the new Institute, the development of which is growing day by day. In all truth, I have been able to come to know its usefulness to both rich and poor, the edification it provides for the sick and even for persons in good health, the charity for the soul and body with which it is animated; and finally, the fidelity with which it is attached to its Rules and evangelical perfection.

It is with the greatest pleasure that I give this testimony, so that Peter's hand may place on the candlestick, the light hidden until now, so that it may shine, not only for the eyes of those within, but also for those who are outside, and lead them to the knowledge of the true light which never goes out.

I kiss Your Holiness' feet and beg you to give me your Apostolic Blessing.

Of Your Holiness . . . etc.

signed: Pierre, Bishop of Moulins."

Now let us listen to the words of His Eminence Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux:

"January 30, 1864

Most Holy Father,

In order to assert the rights of the Holy Catholic Church at the Senate meetings, I have been staying in Paris for the past several weeks; and I have learned that the pious Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours, under the invocation of Our Lady Help of Christians, is requesting the approbation of their Statutes from the Holy See. That is why I add my request to theirs with the most earnest entreaty, most Holy Father, because for a very long time, I have known that this Institute is worthy of great praise. The zeal and charity of these religious are proclaimed everywhere; they care for the body in order to remove the leprosy of sin from the soul, and they facilitate the priest's access to the sick. It was for this special end that this Institute was founded, before all others of this same type; and, for the last forty years with the help and blessing of Almighty God, a great number of sinners—recalled to better feelings through the care of these Sisters, like a harvest and recompense for their many labors—have gone to sleep in the peace and holiness of the Lord.

Moreover, the Sisters fulfill their vows faithfully and regularly; and, in the midst of the people, they keep themselves intensely fervent. Although poverty is strictly observed within the convent itself, God's house, which they also built, is maintained with such care, and even magnificence, that these religious may truthfully say: 'Lord, I love the beauty of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells.' That is what I myself admired, when consecrating a Bishop in that Chapel some time ago.

For thirty-four years this community was under the leadership of the same Superior General, who, when dying, left her daughters a legacy of an unlimited attachment and inviolable devotion to the Holy See and to religion.

This is why, Most Holy Father, I unite my prayers and supplications to those of these religious, who so well deserve to be favorably heard.

Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, I respectfully kiss them.

I remain, and will always remain, Most Holy Father,

From Your Holiness. . . etc.,

*signed: Ferdinand, Cardinal Donnet,
Archbishop of Bordeaux."*

To these eloquent testimonies were added those of the Archbishops of Aix: Cardinal Mathieu of Besançon, Archbishop de la Tour d'Auvergne of Bourges, Archbishop Desprez of Toulouse, and Bishop Serjent of Vannes, Bishop Allou of Meaux, Bishop Jacquemin of Nantes, Bishop Lavigerie of Nancy and Bishop de la Bouillerie of Carcassone.

Along with these entreaties, Archbishop Darboy also sent the Rules of the Bon Secours Institute, in order to submit them to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for approbation. Bishop Place, then auditor of the Roman Rota, undertook the negotiations.

A few months later, on July 1, 1864, a *Lauditory Brief* for the Congregation arrived; and its members were able to sing their *Magnificat* on the Feast of the Visitation. The Lord had regarded the humility of His servants, raising them up from that lowliness in which they had willingly kept themselves hidden for so long, and gave them a place of honor in the Holy Church.

The precious document, which was written in terms that were very commendatory, was accompanied by twenty-three remarks concerning the constitutions and indicated the changes which were necessary in order to be able to obtain their approbation from Rome.

Thus they had reached the first stage of the steps they were to take in order to attain their goal, that is, the definitive approbation of the Institute. According to the wise laws established by the sovereign Pontiffs, a period of ten years had to elapse before another petition could be presented.

During that space of time the Congregation was going to continue to grow and to become more and more like the tree spoken of in Holy Scripture, which is planted near the running waters, and shall bring forth its fruit in due season.⁷⁵

Chapter XVI

*Death of Mother St. Marianne
Mother St. Félicité is named Superior at Rozoy
The Conversions brought about by her
The Foundations at Quimper and Morlaix*

1865—1866

We left Mother St. Marianne at Rozoy exercising the beneficent influence of her charity on the poor and hard working people; but this good religious was not to enjoy that work for long. In January 1865 she got a cold which did not seem to be serious, but she was forced to go to bed. On the morning of third day, the Sister Infirmarian went to find out how she was feeling; she found Mother unconscious. She quickly alerted the Chaplain, who was just ready to begin Mass, and, followed by the entire community, he hurried to the sick room where he barely had time to anoint the dying woman. In the midst of much sobbing, he recited the *De Profundis*. (Out of the Depths). The sisters were amazed and dismayed, for nothing had even foreshadowed such an event; and their sorrow was keenly shared by the poor people of the neighborhood whom the good Mother had loved so much! When her mortal remains were carried to their last resting place, they formed a guard of honor along the way.

When the General Council met to find a replacement for the deceased, the choice was unanimous; it fell on Mother St. Félicité, who had been dedicated

to the care of the sick for forty years. We recall that she was one of Mère Geay's first companions and that a very deep affection existed between them.

Although she had reached the advanced age of sixty-eight years, Mother St. Félicité still possessed that moral vigor and supernatural youthfulness which is often shared by souls who have put all of their strength and vital force at the service of Divine Love. Having never deviated from the motto she had adopted on the day of her profession: "*The obedient man will speak the victory!*";⁷⁶ she possessed all the qualities required to govern; because experience has proven that in order to know how to command, it is necessary to have been an expert in the art of obeying.

Sister had often edified others by promptly submitting to the will of those around her. We are told that in the course of her long career, she had been sent with Mother St. Beatrix to nurse a Bishop who lived near Orléans. One morning, while Sister St. Félicité was making her meditation, the prelate saw her and said: "My child, if you would pray aloud, I too, would profit by it." She began immediately to obey, and, when Mother St. Beatrix arrived, the patient expressed admiration at Sister's prompt acquiescence to a simple desire; he even declared that he was edified beyond expression.

For fifteen years, Mother St. Félicité directed the house at Rozoy with as much wisdom as charity, and spread around her all the treasures of her heart, as she tried to give her Sisters the serene and peaceful end which they came to find in that blessed home.

During the time of recreation, it gave the Superior pleasure to speak with the older Sisters about the past. It evoked memories of the joys and austerities of those first days. They blessed God for the progress that had been accomplished since that time, and encouraged one another to pray and to suffer in order to prepare an even more fruitful future for the Congregation. Ah yes, that Congregation! How they loved it and still love it! How they prayed for it and the cradle of its infancy, that Mother House which meant so much to those dear, good, old souls!

A Sister, who had spent a few months at Rozoy about twenty-five years ago, wished to share her impressions of that place with us. "I was as surprised as I was edified," she wrote, "to see the animation of our dear older Sisters. They were as lively as children, as obedient as novices and as fervent as choirs of angels. You should have seen them arriving in the morning before the first sound of the bell; they had gotten up early in order to have extra time to dress because of their painful, stiff limbs. And what enthusiasm for prayer and the Office! The voices were more than discordant, but what ardor in their words! You could feel that their whole hearts were in it.

"The recreations, too; how edifying they were! When you are older, you love to relive the days of your youth; and at Rozoy they did relive the early

days of the Congregation. They recalled their privations with gladness! 'We were so happy!' those dear older Sisters said. Sister St. Hyacinthe was proud to be able to give an account of that first Profession ceremony at St. Sulpice; and what stories Sisters St. Alphonse, St. Rosalie and St. Melanie told us! I didn't know which to admire the more—the simplicity of those aging Sisters, who spoke of their heroic life as if it were quite a natural thing, or the spirit of faith and forgetfulness of self which had made them capable of those meritorious actions.

"How pleasing must their work be to God! How those older Sisters rejoiced to still have some little acts of obedience to do; to be able to use the last drop of their strength in the accomplishment of their little tasks!

"To me, Rozoy seemed to be like that superb monument, Les Invalides, which contains all the glories of the past and the hopes of the future. Yes, the hopes of the future, because the good examples from the past germinate in those newly arrived; for the echo of those fervent and ardent prayers reverberate in the generation which is rising in the shadow of Our Lady of Bon Secours."

On the occasion of the death of several of the Sisters, Father Ruat, chaplain at the Mother House, expressed similar thoughts in a letter he wrote to the Superior. "It is not my intention to offer you condolences on the loss which you have just experienced, because, for the Christian, death is a deliverance and a beginning of the true life; and the souls for whom you weep understood this. The Apostle, St. Paul, exhorts us not to abandon ourselves to sadness *like those who have no hope*. I repeat again, I have not come to console the community at Rozoy; but I would like to place before the eyes of its members the advantage of their life of retreat, both for the Congregation and for themselves. Yes, it is my conviction that the house at Rozoy can be an immense help for the Institute; and, as proof, I have the words of Holy Scripture which depicts Moses praying on the mountain while his brothers fought on the plains for the honor of the Most High. As long as Moses kept his arms raised up to Heaven, the Israelites were victorious; but when he stopped praying, the enemy again took the upperhand. Now at Rozoy, there are always hands raised up to Heaven, to bring down blessings on the Sisters scattered throughout the world in order to gain souls for Jesus Christ.

"What a consoling thought it is for those beloved older Sisters to know that they can do a great deal for the sick to whom they still wish to devote themselves, for the Congregation and for their own sanctification!"

We cannot leave Rozoy, however, without saying a few more words about the person who was the soul of that house for so long.

During the long winter evenings, Mother St. Félicité took pleasure in recalling the past and in entertaining her Sisters with stories of certain events from her own childhood.

She was born at Vendée during the Revolution, and was baptized in a cellar. The old priest, who had made her a child of God, took delight in recalling the circumstances later on; he said: "If I wasn't guillotined, it certainly wasn't your fault; because you did everything needed to have me taken prisoner. What piercing cries you let out when the holy water touched your forehead! We had to hurry!" The good Mother also told of the many times she had assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the cellars; and of a tragic event which happened during one of these clandestine services. Someone was always posted as a guard and one day, it was Mother's cousin who fulfilled this task. She saw some armed men approaching, and immediately slipped into the opening which led to the cellar; but her long hair became tangled in the bushes, and, when the Vendéens came out, they found their sentinel dead, hung by her hair.

The Superior also liked to tell of the sudden change of circumstances surrounding her entry into religion. In her youth, she had had a special attraction toward the care of the sick; but none of the religious houses which she knew had really enticed her. Some people who were leaving for Paris told her about Bon Secours, and she decided to accompany them to the novitiate. However, once she was in the stagecoach, she was seized with anxiety at the thought of leaving Vendée. "Where am I going?" she asked herself. When they stopped for a little rest, the travellers made a visit to the parish church. She met the Pastor and told him of her fears. "Go on," he responded; "do not stop, go forward." Not knowing what was to become of her, she knelt at the feet of the Blessed Virgin's statue, poured out her anguish to that tender Mother and asked for light. An interior voice made itself heard repeating the same words to her: "Do not be afraid, go on!" So the young woman went back to the coach and continued her journey, saying her rosary. Until she arrived in Paris, she heard the same voice several times saying: "Go on!" She was welcomed at the poor little house on rue Cassette, and there she found great privation; five nuts and dry bread made up the Sisters' supper; but she also found a school of virtue which was to make her life so fruitful.

Even late in life Mother St. Félicité did not remain idle; not content with creating an atmosphere of peace for the Sisters under her care, she busied herself in making some very beneficial renovations at Rozoy. The little cemetery, found on the property, was also due to her initiative; the bodies of the four Sisters who had died during the first years were brought there, too. The new Superior also transformed the porter's lodge into a chapel; and, to fulfill a promise made during the war of 1870, she placed a large statue of the Virgin Mary there for the veneration of her Sisters; it has been called Notre Dame de la Garde.

In her relations with the inhabitants of the town, and the workmen, she continued her predecessor's work; and numerous conversions were due to her zeal. We will relate one which seems to be most interesting.

There was a veterinarian at Rozoy who gloried in the fact that he didn't believe in God; his family did not share his sentiments and one of his daughters even wanted to enter Carmel. Seeing that he couldn't change her mind, he took her to the monastery; but, as he was leaving, he swore to burn down the Carmel and all of the nuns who lived there. Before he could accomplish his threat, however, his daughter died; and it is permissible to suppose that she offered herself as a victim for the ransom of her father's soul. In his turn, her father became gravely ill; and the fear of seeing him die without the last Sacraments was a cruel affliction for his wife and other daughters. One day, one of them dared to ask him if there was anyone whom he wished to see. "Yes," he responded, "I would like to see that good Sister of Bon Secours. Go and get her for me."

Mother St. Félicité, as may be imagined, quickly answered this request, and found the patient in an alarming state. Not daring to speak to him yet about religion, she slipped a medal under his mattress, went back to the convent and got an armchair for him.

The following day she came again to visit; on arriving she found the medal in the middle of the room. She took the risk of speaking about the good God, but the patient was exasperated and put her out of the room. The next day was the same scene, and many days passed in a struggle without results. From time to time, Sister brought some fresh vegetables or appetizing tidbits in order to try to win him over by kindness; but above all she prayed and had others pray for his salvation. Seeing that his condition was getting worse each day, she believed it a duty to speak about the priest. The first time it was mentioned, the patient became extremely angry and threw himself from the bed in an effort to beat her; only his weakness prevented it.

In spite of all this, Mother St. Félicité went close to the poor man; she approached him graciously and said: "I love your soul so much that if you chase me out the door, I will come back in through the window."

Such persevering zeal finally touched the poor rebellious man, and he himself asked for the priest. When the last Sacraments were brought to him, he wanted as many of his neighbors as possible to come into his room; for he desired to repair the scandal which he had given, and he wanted to publicly show that he deplored his past errors. He died a few days later in the most perfect sentiments of contrition.

When he thanked Mother St. Félicité for having opened heaven for him, she responded: "It is not me you should thank but the angel whom you took to Carmel. Yes, *you owe your conversion to your daughter.*"

Another consoling incident will show us that this good Mother knew how to gain victory over souls who had become hardened.

An old Voltarian became ill, but, in spite of many exhortations, he obstinately refused to listen to anything that even hinted of religion. Mother St. Félicité went to see him every day and always brought something she thought would please him: linens and sheets, etc. She cared for him with such untiring devotion, that one day the patient said: "Mother, I've been asking myself why you come to visit me every day, and why you treat me with such concern? Do you want something from me?"

"Yes, I certainly do," Mother answered. "I want your soul so as to save it from hell."

These words seemed to impress the man and he permitted the Superior to speak about religion from that moment on; but many months passed before all of his resistance was dissolved. All the same, he did finish by acceding to the persuasive voice which made him listen to the truth; and after making his confession he died like a Christian.

Among the conversions which have been recorded little by little, and have become the living annals of the apostolate of the Sisters of Bon Secours, we will choose one more. It is particularly moving and took place at Paris in February, 1865. You cannot read this account without being moved to gratitude towards Him who could not resist the prayers of the Marthas and Marys pleading for the Lazaruses of this world who are wrapped and buried in their sins.

The Countess of C_____ greatly desired that her husband die as a Christian. She came to seek the help of a Sister of Bon Secours in this mission, which would be particularly difficult due to the patient's aggravated state.

The Sister who nursed him speaks:

"Being assigned by obedience, I accompanied the woman; as we made our way, she had the kindness to alert me about the difficulties which I would encounter with her husband. She did not hide her own anxiety concerning his salvation. With a quavering voice she said that I would probably be received very badly and she begged me not to be discouraged. 'Several nursing Sisters from different Congregations have already been here,' she said, 'but none of them were able to put up with the irreligious language which my poor husband uses, and makes sensitive souls tremble. After one or two nights they leave. And I do understand,' she added; she squeezed my hand and tears rolled down her face.

Thus informed, I arrived at the patient's bedside; the room was in almost complete obscurity—though it was the middle of the day. In the light cast by a small night lamp, I saw a man who was still young; I admit I was afraid. The bed was in disorder, his eyes looked haggard, his face was very thin, his complexion livid and his hands emaciated; he gave the impression of a corpse coming out of its tomb. Instinctively I drew back a few steps; but the thought of that soul who was soon to appear before God helped me to overcome this painful impression. Raising my heart to heaven, I said this short prayer: 'O my God, give me the

courage and grace to cooperate with your merciful designs.' Then I spoke a few polite words to the patient, to which he did not respond. After looking at me very attentively for some time, he said in a hard tone of voice: 'Don't think that you can put on airs because you've come to nurse the Count de C____; be aware that if I engage a nurse it is in order to be cared for and not to have a woman companion. I demand that you take care of everything for me and that my servant have nothing further to do for me. If these conditions are acceptable, remain; you seem to suit me. If these conditions are not agreeable, you may depart.'—I answered: 'Count, I will do everything that is within my power to take good care of you; but I do ask you to allow me time each day to go to Mass.' He agreed to that request.

So, I remained. The first part of the night was calm. Towards midnight, the patient asked me to put out the night light. I hesitated and explained how difficult it would be to care for him in complete obscurity. 'Did you come here to give me orders?' He had prefaced his statement with a horrible oath, and it was but the prelude of the strange scene which I was to witness and will never forget. A half hour had hardly passed in the semi-darkness when, suddenly, the Count began to utter frightful blasphemies and horrible curses against Divine Providence, heaven, the angels and saints and, finally, against everything connected with God; then he invoked the devils, calling each one by a special name and speaking with them as if he saw them. Terrified, I turned to go; but, with a word, my patient stopped me and obliged me to stay. I took refuge in a corner of the room; taking my crucifix in one hand and my rosary in the other, I got down on my knees and prayed with all the fervor possible so as to make reparation for the offenses I had witnessed and implore the Divine Mercy for this unhappy man. These terrible scenes were repeated nightly for six weeks; and, if God had not given me His strength I would have fled a thousand times.

As soon as morning came I hurriedly left the room, and when the Countess saw me she begged me not to abandon her (her rooms were next to her husband's and she had heard everything). We agreed to begin a novena together and went to Our Lady of Victory's to involve the Immaculate Virgin in our cause; we also recommended it to the prayers of the Archconfraternity. That first novena brought no apparent results; we began a second one, during which the patient's physical condition became much worse and gave cause for serious concern. Yet, when the name of God was even pronounced it brought horrible blasphemies to his lips; so it was impossible to suggest that he seek any help along those lines.

I was perplexed and went to speak with the Pastor of the parish; he knew the Count's stance on religion and did not doubt that he was possessed. Father promised me he would come to exorcise the poor man. The zealous priest was faithful to his word and lost no time in coming. He went to offer a few words of consolation to the Countess when he arrived.

The patient, hearing a strange voice in the next room, wanted to know the visitor's name. When I answered: 'It is the Pastor who has come to see how you are,' he screamed horrible curses against God, the Church and the priests, which only confirmed our opinion that he was under Satan's domination.

The Pastor, however, insisted on being introduced, and I had to do it as the Countess was afraid; as soon as the Count saw the priest he became furious and forced him to leave. Father promised me that he would get the entire parish to storm heaven for his soul.

We began our third novena. The disease was making rapid progress and only a few days separated that poor sinner from his eternity. What anxiety! What anguish! Only persons who are concerned with the salvation of souls could understand it.

The Pastor, eager to save his parishioner, wished to try a second time; it was no more successful than the first. He was received with such an outburst of violent abuse that he had to leave; he was heart broken and tearfully implored Divine help to snatch this unfortunate man from Satan's grasp.

One Saturday, I returned to the convent; I was sad, discouraged and determined not to return to the patient, because I could no longer stand the thought of seeing him surrounded by demons in his last hours, and carried off by them to the depths of hell for all eternity. I laid bare my pain and anxieties to my Superior, and begged her to take this burden from me for it was beyond my strength. That good Mother, full of faith and confidence in God, encouraged me: instead of approving my resolve, she showed me that, far from abandoning that poor soul to the enemy's power, it was necessary to struggle energetically, to redouble the prayers, the care and attention, and to hope against hope. 'Courage, my poor child,' she added, 'and above all confidence! Take this medal and put it around your patient's neck; we will all pray for him this evening. I bless you with all my heart; now go and put yourself under the protection of Our Lady of Bon Secours.'

Fortified with those words, I returned to the Count. When he saw me, he held out his hand to me saying: 'I am happy to see you again, Sister; I suffered so much while you were gone! I did not feel my guardian angel near me. I beg you not to leave me any more.' I was greatly surprised and a tiny glimmer of hope came to life; but it did not last for long because the unhappy man continued in a bitter and ironic tone: 'When you leave me, I am alone with a servant because Madam does not wish to tie herself down by remaining with me; doubtless she prefers to go for a walk in the woods while I, the Count of C____ am here choking and thinking of my last day which will soon be here; seeing myself, a poor, miserable, emaciated, dried up being who can only look forward to a coffin and five feet of earth to cover me . . . Me—the handsome Count of C____, whom everyone envies . . . Me—rich, popular, entertained, lacking nothing that gives happiness in this world: horses, carriages, houses, a young and beautiful wife! And all of these enjoyments are now but a dream for me . . . Yes, soon, in a few days perhaps, I must leave it all, all! and at only forty years of age! . . . Curses! Curses! A rage of despair enveloped him and brought on a fit of anger. I trembled at hearing him speak in that way, but at the same time, I felt a great compassion for him. Poor victim of that pride of life whose only happiness is in the goods of this earth! 'And my twenty-nine year old wife,' he continued, 'she and her children who will have all of my fortune. Oh, those children, I detest them; do not allow them ever to come near me, because if I touch them, I will kill them.'

When the unfortunate man was a little more calm, I risked saying a few words and said pleasantly: 'Thank you, Sir, for the welcome you gave me, I am very touched. I am also happy to tell you of my good Superior's idea; she gave me a medal of Our Lady of Bon Secours for you to put around your neck—you can expect much from her, for we are her daughters. She will bless you, because, this evening the entire community will be praying especially for you.' And saying this, I took the medal and approached his bed. The Count looked at me and began to laugh in a way which hurt me. 'A good joke,' he said in a tone of irony, 'to see me with that around my neck!'

'You are making fun of me, Sister! Is it possible for you to really think that I am childish enough to accept such a foolish thing?' 'What does it matter?' I said, 'Let me do it, give me this little satisfaction; the medal is not heavy and no one will see it.' And so, doubtless to please me, he said no more and accepted it.

During the evening the sick man suffered a great deal, and having tried in vain to give him some relief, I told him how sorry I was not to be able to assuage his pain which I would be happy to do even if it meant sharing it. Then I asked him to allow me to say an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* aloud to obtain some relief from his pain. 'What will that do for me?,' he answered. 'Please, I beg you, allow me to do it.'

The next day, I repeated my request and, since he laughed to himself but said nothing, I knelt down and added a *Memorare* to the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*. When I got up, he looked at me and said slyly: 'You appear very pleased, your face is radiant; it seems that you have just done something great.'—'Indeed,' I replied with a smile, 'it is a great thing to prepare you to receive the good God in your room.' As he heard these words, his eyes flashed with anger, fury contorted his face, and shaking his fist at me menacingly he said: 'Oh! so that's what you're trying to do.'

Emboldened by Divine Grace, I was not intimidated, and continued with assurance: 'I agree, Sir, that God's patience is very great. How is he able to put up with your blasphemies and your curses? And what an example such sentiments are for all who surround you!'

Our third novena was coming to an end without any apparent results. Yet hope was alive within me, because it seemed to me that the few words of piety that I dared to say from time to time were better received by the poor sick man. But how necessary it was to be prudent! I could say so very little; to make up for this, how I prayed! I did everything possible, I offered all my sufferings for that soul's salvation.

In accord with the family's wishes, we began a fourth novena; I told the Count who responded sneeringly: 'My companions are the demons, and, in a few days it will be the worms.'—'Sir, why do you speak in this way about such serious things? Instead, why don't you raise your eyes to heaven? I plead with you, join your sufferings to our prayers to obtain the strength to do God's will.' Without waiting for an answer, I knelt and began the prayers; he remained silent. Each day I continued the novena prayers near his bed.

The fourth day, on returning from Mass, I found him so changed that my fears redoubled. There was no time on which to count; from one minute to another the unfortunate man could enter eternity. What was to be done? Seeing him in

such a state only increased my compassion for him. I sat down near his bed and spoke to him kindly—about his sad condition, his sufferings and the bad night that he had passed; then I added: ‘I prayed for you at Mass, and then I went to Holy Communion for the success of the novena.’ ‘What success?’ he retorted in a distracted way.—‘You know, to obtain the strength for you to do God’s will and accept the cross with patience. Like all good Christians you made your First Communion, you were married, absolved, etc.; and, like all Christians, you have to carry your cross. If you do not accept it, if you curse it, hell will be your lot.’

We were interrupted by the arrival of Doctor Guéneau de Mussy. Seeing how bad the patient was, he grasped his hand as if for the last time and said: ‘Come on, my good friend, be a man of conviction; receive the priest as your physician. You are the father of a family, you should give the example.’ The only response he received was a scornful, sneering look. The good doctor left and said to me sadly, ‘How unfortunate to see him die this way!’

The day passed in most cruel suffering for the Count, and in even greater anguish for those who surrounded him. The Pastor came again that evening, but in vain. About eleven o’clock, everyone went to their rooms and we remained alone; the Countess stayed in the next room. At midnight, the patient seemed very pre-occupied and absorbed, and I feared that his end was near. I was on my knees making the Way of the Cross, and tearfully imploring pardon and mercy for this poor, unfortunate man in the name of all the pains of the Divine Crucified One. Suddenly, I was interrupted by the most horrible blasphemies which he began to yell out in a satanic rage. O my God! what abominations against Your thrice holy Majesty! The face, above all, the eyes of that poor man held something diabolical which terrorized me; I dared not raise my eyes again for fear of seeing him carried off by the demon. The Countess’s sobs mingled with my own.

In the midst of that truly infernal scene, the patient, burning with fever, asked me for something to drink. I tremblingly approached the bed, pressing my crucifix against my heart; so as to be armed with the strength of God whom I never stopped invoking. When I saw his features up close, my anguish increased; I was sure he would not live through the night, and I implored the Divine Mercy to have pity on him and not abandon him to the demons.

I gave him a cool drink; on taking it, he stared at me. ‘You are crying, Sister,’ he said.—‘Yes, I am crying and not without reason.’—‘But what is it that has pained you?’—I answered, ‘I am crying as I think that Our Lord came to this earth for us, died on a cross, poured out all His blood even to the last drop to save us from hell, and yet you, Sir, already have one foot buried there; you are in a state where, in my position as a religious, it is my duty to warn you that before this day is over you will perhaps be buried there for all eternity. In the name of all that is dearest to you, think of your eternity. There is still time, but you haven’t a second to lose if you do not want Satan to carry you away! . . .’ He regarded me with a thunderous look; but at the same instant he was seized with a healthy fear, and called his wife who came at once: ‘Quickly, quickly, a priest! I am dying, I am damned, I am going to hell.’ I immediately put my crucifix in his hands, and—an infinite mercy of God, goodness without measure—he did not refuse it. A stream of tears flowed from his eyes and sobs escaped from him.

I was beside myself with joy and threw myself on my knees to thank Our Lord, and in that moment I savored the joy which overwhelmed me, that joy which the world does not know, only understood by those to whom it has been given to suffer and to work for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners.

In spite of the late hour, Father did not tarry and this time the sick man received him eagerly. They spoke together for a long time, and the remainder of the night was very calm. During each of the next three days, the devoted priest came to prepare his penitent for the reception of the last Sacraments; and it was a great consolation to see him so resigned to God's will. The transformation was complete. The demons had fled, and the only thing heard in the room were the murmur of prayers and sighs of the convert who continuously repeated: 'My God, have pity on me, pardon a sinner.'

Those touching expressions of profound repentance were heard by Him who knows how to pardon and console the prodigal. Heaven's inhabitants must have been very happy as they contemplated the sentiments of faith and contrition with which this poor sinner was united to his God. He wished to make reparation for everything; and in a solemn act he asked pardon of his family and his servants, who, according to his wishes, were gathered around his death bed. After he had received the last Sacraments, and until the end, he was very edifying. Three days after he had received the Bread of Life, he had another very bad spell and asked for the Pastor so as to receive a last absolution and the plenary indulgence for the dying. Towards midnight, his oppression became worse and his family assembled around his bed, reciting the prayers for the agonizing, and he joined them with all his heart. He hugged and blessed his little children, and it was as he kissed the crucifix while we invoked the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph that he quietly gave up his soul."

These conquests of grace, in which her Sisters were instrumental, filled Mother St. Cecile's heart with immense gratitude to God; how consoling it was that He continued to open up new fields of work! She was reassured, in July, 1865, when Miss Simonet of Quimper approached her concerning a foundation in that city. When talking with a priest about the needs of the diocese, she had suddenly been inspired to speak to him about the Sister of Bon Secours, whose presence in Quimper could be an element of great good for the people.

It just happened that an old, spacious hotel was for sale; it had a respectable air and could easily be transformed into a convent. It belonged to the family of Father Le Vicomte, a missionary; and they were quite happy to give it up for a work of this type.

Mother St. Cecile received that news with joy; the prospect of seeing the Institute take root and develop on the soil of Brittany pleased her very much. Miss Simonet had told her that Bishop Serjent was in Paris at that time; so the Superior General quickly made an appointment with the prelate. He had retained such an indelible memory of Mère Geay and the Sisters that he wished to come to the Mother House and speak with the Superior to tell her how pleased he was that the Sisters were planning to come into his diocese.

A few weeks later, Father Le Vicomte asked Bishop Serjent his opinion on the subject; this is what he heard: "I will be very pleased to see these women established at Quimper, because I esteem that religious family more than I can say." The choice of the house also received his approval. "It is perfect," he said, "they will be fine there."

Nothing had really been settled yet, because the purchase of furnishings would demand many great sacrifices and the General Council even wondered if it was a prudent thing to do. Up until that time, the foundations had been made under less difficult conditions; they wouldn't even think about purchasing a building until they were satisfied about the expediency of the foundation.

Mother St. Cecile believed it her duty to obtain some information at first hand; so she made the trip to Quimper accompanied by Mother St. Elizabeth, the Mistress of Novices. The two Sisters were most warmly received by Father Le Guen, who had been appointed to act as their guide and bring them up to date concerning the situation. They also had a long interview with the Bishop, who gave them a glimpse of the possibility of other foundations in his diocese. Mother St. Cecile alluded to one of those projects in a letter written to Bishop Serjent when she returned home. "I was greatly touched by the kind welcome which Your Grace had the goodness to show us, and I am not able to express my gratitude adequately . . . In my eagerness to have our Sisters under your Grace's jurisdiction, I will do everything in my power to forward their establishment at Quimper without prejudice to the idea of a foundation at Morlaix . . . I place everything in the hands of Divine Providence; the knowledge of your support and the hope of having some dedicated young Breton women join us gives me great encouragement."

The negotiations continued, but without results because the General Council could not make a decision concerning the acceptance of the proprietors' unreasonable demands. However, as Mother St. Cecile earnestly desired to see the situation resolved, she appealed to the generosity of the houses. They all declared that they would be most happy to help her plant this new branch of their dear Congregation in Brittany.

Thus the affair was concluded; and that very same day Bishop Serjent expressed his satisfaction to Mother St. Cecile:

Quimper, September 3, 1865.

"My dear Reverend Mother,

I was very pleased to learn that you have purchased the property. You will do much good here and will find vocations. I look upon the establishment of the Congregation in my diocese as a very happy event; because I already know and appreciate it very much, and many precious memories of my own life are bound up with it.

Be assured that I will view your Sisters' arrival with much pleasure and that they can count completely on my support.

Please accept my respectful sentiments with which I am,

*Your very devoted servant,
Rene, Bishop of Quimper."*

Father Le Guen also expressed these same sentiments and, with charming simplicity, put himself at the disposition of the Sisters: "I am happy to learn that everything has been settled," he said. "May God be praised! Here, I am at your disposition to do anything you may wish accomplished before the Sisters' arrival. Use me or abuse me! I will be happy to render you any type of service, reserving to let myself be cared for by you when I will be sick . . . and I will not be the only one devoted to you. Our principal Vicar, Father Jégou is ready to serve you as Chaplain as soon as you are settled."

This good priest's concern manifested itself in a touching way. In spite of the work and functions he fulfilled for Bishop Serjent, he undertook the management and direction of the most urgently needed repairs of the house. On the 21st of September he wrote: "His Grace has allowed me to take an old altar from the Cathedral; it needs a few repairs but the tabernacle is beautifully sculptured and bordered with heads of angels. I will take part of it . . . The other renovations are not advancing as I would wish, and your Sisters will have much to do, but they will also have the satisfaction of seeing their convent transformed little by little."

Sister St. Léocadie was chosen to govern the new house; for twenty years she had exemplified all the religious virtues at Abbeville. She was esteemed to such an extent that, when her nomination for Quimper became known, the greater part of the people begged the local Commissioner to prevent her departure; he went to the convent and employed every possible argument to induce Sister to remain in Abbeville. At that time, the government functionaries still understood the value and benefit of institutions of divine origin; and, instead of taking upon themselves the shameful business of expelling the religious, they were happy to show their esteem and benevolence.

Nevertheless, the local Commissioner's eloquence was futile because the General Council's decision was irrevocable, and, on November 8, 1865, Sister St. Léocadie arrived at Quimper with her companions. She had been preceded by two Sisters who were to put the house in order and prepare what was necessary; but, as soon as they had arrived, they were called out to the sick and, happy to begin their ministry, they had believed it alright to slight the material side of things. Imagine the new arrivals' surprise when they entered the house with their Superior and Father Le Guen who had gone to meet them.

In spite of all Father's efforts, the workmen had not finished anything; and the Sisters found the house in a state of dilapidation and squalor difficult to describe; there were no furnishings or even beds. Mother St. Léocadie, however, knew how to lift up their spirits and reminded the Sisters that they were still better off than some missionaries who often did not even have any shelter.

The first night was catastrophic. There was only one room that was fit to sleep in, and then, the window frame fell into the room and the shutters fell off into the garden. They tried the best they could to remedy that accident and finally, worn out with fatigue, the Sisters went to sleep. All of a sudden they were awakened by a frightful scream. Sister St. Lucie was lying in a large puddle of water; the window, which could not be closed completely, had some rather large open spaces which allowed gusts of wind and streams of rain into the room. Is it not permissible to believe that these and other trials were hell's vengeance in view of all the forseen good which the new foundation would accomplish?

The cross of sickness was added to these inconveniences; but the foundresses did not lose courage, and knew how to generously accept all that came to them. In the midst of these mishaps, however, they made efforts to prepare a small oratory which was to temporarily house the Divine Master; and, on the 8th of December, feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was celebrated there for the first time.

The Sisters soon received the reward for their patience and abnegation. Sister St. Léontine had the pleasure of becoming the instrument of a startling conversion. She had been called to nurse a poor woman who had cancer of the heel; she had been abandoned by everyone, as much because of her bad character as because of the repulsiveness of her disease. If for no other reason the people rejoiced at the arrival of the Sisters.

This patient had quite a history. At the time of the Revolution she was young and quite pretty. Her Father, a passionate Jacobin, was a member of the Public Health Committee. When there was a question of raising an altar to the god of Reason, he had no difficulty in having his daughter play the role of the goddess. But, this reign was of short duration; her revolutionary father died, the Terror passed and when order was re-established and religion began to flourish again, everyone turned away from the unfortunate girl in contempt, for she had deeply wounded public feeling. Thus she grew old, deprived of all affection, soured by contempt and isolation, hating everything and everyone. When Sister St. Léontine was called to nurse her, she was eighty years old; and for over six months the good Sister worked with infinite patience to reconcile the poor creature with mankind and, even better, with her Creator. Thanks to her unlimited devotion and many, many prayers, she succeeded. The patient died with

great sentiments of sorrow after having thanked God with all her heart for having sent her a Sister of Bon Secours.

That conversion, which caused quite a commotion, attracted much attention and sympathy to the Sisters, especially from the clergy and physicians. Doctor Chauvel, in particular, showed them great kindness and sought their care for his patients from that time on. He gave them the statue of the Sacred Heart which may be seen in the convent chapel.

The Superior General soon made plans to send some of her Sisters to Morlaix in response to the desire expressed by so many of the inhabitants of that town. Her maternal heart was concerned, but took delight in the fact that, though so far away from the Mother House, these two houses could help each other in time of need.

Sister St. Jean l'Evangeliste and two other Sisters went to live in Morlaix in the autumn of 1866; they settled in a house that was rented for that purpose. Ten months later, with help from the Mother House, a building was purchased. Nevertheless, the many hopes envisioned for that foundation were realized at a much later date. To begin with, the Sisters were up against a prejudice among the people, who had difficulty accepting the rules by which the nursing Sisters were bound when they stayed in their patient's homes; however, they were wise rules which placed a barrier between them and the world.

Besides that, and in spite of all that the Sisters had been able to do during the war, they suffered greatly from not being able to devote themselves as they would have liked to do. So, in 1873, Mother St. Cecile believed it her duty to inform the Bishop of Quimper that the General Council had decided to provisionally close the convent in Morlaix.

The nursing Sisters had hardly left the city when, in consequence of one of those unexplainable but frequent reversals of opinion, the people realized the benefit their presence had been. A Sister from Paris, who was called to nurse in that locality soon after this, was able to testify to the unanimous regret that their departure had caused. Their memory remained very much alive, and it was with eager insistence that they were asked to again take up the post they had left.

One detail that we must not omit is this: before leaving Morlaix the good Superior had placed the keys of the house at the feet of the Blessed Virgin and asked her to watch over them. Doubtless Mary had listened, because, when God's hour came, she did even more than that, she gave the Sisters the keys to the people's hearts.

Chapter XVII

Cholera Epidemic Providence Orphanage Foundation at Cork

1866—1867

As in the situation at Morlaix, the Sisters of Bon Secours sometimes encountered painful deceptions which were, however, fruitful in acts of virtue and merit. Their works were also quite prolific, and their untiring charity made them very dear to God and useful to the Church!

During the years 1865—1866, Cholera again plunged families in mourning. The city of Boulogne was especially hard hit, and once again the Nursing Sisters' heroic self sacrifice was admirable. One of them would even fall on the field of battle; it was Sister St. Suzanne. She had nursed the members of an entire family: grandparents, father, mother, and son who all died one after the other. After closing their eyes, she returned to the convent and, in her turn, felt the beginnings of the disease; she dragged herself to the chapel and, kneeling on the stone floor, she offered God the sacrifice of her life. It was noon. The holocaust was accepted, because at three o'clock the poor Sister breathed her last, in spite of the energetic remedies which were used to try to save her.

This edifying incident is told about Sister: the good religious, on returning to the community after having cared for a patient for twenty-five years, said

very simply to Mother St. Marguerite: "Mother, speak, act! Dispose of me as you would a postulant."

If, from one moment to another, they did not have other deaths to deplore, the Sisters certainly were many times taxed by hardships which far exceeded all human strength. A Sister of that same community, who died in Tralee in 1902, was called to nurse a working man's family; and, there also, the parents and children in succession were all afflicted and died, victims of the scourge. Sister St. Bridget had cared for and watched over them all. One night, only one member of the family was still surviving and he had just received the last Sacraments. The doctor was late in making his rounds that evening in the neighborhood. Realizing that the patient's end was very near, he advised Sister to leave the door open during the night, "because," he said, "the air in the house is very foul and is enough to poison you. You have nothing to fear with the door open; everyone is up and about since there are sick ones in almost every house."

Sister followed this wise advice, but, towards midnight, as she tried to find some way to relieve the poor sufferer, she suddenly heard footsteps behind her. She turned around quickly and found herself face to face with a huge goat. Sister tried in vain to chase the unwanted visitor; he resisted and responded by butting with his horns at each effort made to expell him. Poor Sister St. Bridget was no longer able to reach the patient's bed and the animal was attacking with great force and she had to seek refuge on a chair and then up on a table with the goat trying to follow her. Finally, she screamed: "Help, help!" and a neighbor ran in and succeeded in removing the animal. Sister had been so pale and exhausted that he soon returned to her with a cup of hot chocolate to fortify her.

The patient died before dawn and, after she had prepared his body for burial, Sister returned to the convent. She, too, was afflicted with the disease, however, it was possible to save her. After that experience, all the other trials and difficulties met within her religious life were easy and simple.

The Sisters at Roubaix were no less valiant. Their names are found on the list of those persons rewarded by the Emperor in 1866 for their outstanding dedication during the epidemic, particularly for nursing the sick poor.

At a moment in history when the flourishing life of religious congregations is completely paralyzed, it would be very interesting to re-read the official report written on that occasion by Mr. Behic, Minister of Commerce and Public Works; in it he pays real tribute to the heroism of the Sisters, which was blessed and praised by the entire population.

The Cholera did not spare Ireland either; and there, too, the Sisters were able to demonstrate the truth and efficacy of the name Bon Secours. At Kingstown, the port of Dublin (now Cobh), the epidemic raged with particular violence; and the terrified people even refused the help of the doctors, whom they feared were propagating the disease.

The Pastor at Kingstown was Canon M'Cabe, the future Archbishop of Dublin. He went to Mother St. Fabian and asked for three nursing Sisters to help him in his work. He lodged them in the rectory, and those valiant women were given the mission for making the rounds of all the contaminated areas, in order to distribute help and remedies to the sick and to assist the dying. Thanks to their vast experience, the Sisters had the consolation of saving many lives; and, among the two hundred patients who died as victims of the epidemic, not one was deprived of the last Sacraments. To relate all of the Sisters' works and sufferings would be impossible but they were sustained and impelled by the example of Canon M'Cabe, who remained with his suffering people day and night throughout the scourge, as did all his assistants.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours were also called to Wicklow, which was severely affected and they exercised a very fruitful ministry there. As at Kingstown, they were marvelously protected; not one of the Sisters contracted the disease; and, despite superhuman overwork and fatigue, they all carried on courageously to the very end.

At about this time, the Sisters of the Abbeville community were also given the opportunity to extend their borders by reaching out to spread that charity which Mother St. Beatrix strove to develop in them.

The region of the Somme was decimated by typhoid fever, and the members of the house in Abbeville were sent into the most afflicted areas. That is how it happened that Sister St. Philippe came to remain in Hupy for several weeks and she did everything possible to alleviate the poor sufferers. She exhausted herself with work and vigils, and became a victim of the terrible scourge. When this news was announced, the Superior hurried to Hupy to nurse her and try to snatch her from death's door. Her efforts were in vain; in three days time the disease finished its work and, because of the danger of contagion, Sister was buried in that little village which had been the scene of her devotedness.

A few months later, when all danger had passed, Mother St. Beatrix wanted to bring Sister St. Philippe's mortal remains back to Abbeville. She had no idea of the difficulties which awaited her or the storm which she was to unleash. Led by their Mayor, the people of Hupy declared that they would never consent to the exhumation, that Sister had nursed their sick, that she devoted herself to them until death as a victim, a martyr; and finally, having fallen in their midst, she belonged to them and at no price would they let her be taken away!

And so, for the moment, the project was abandoned; but, when it was believed that all was forgotten, Mother St. Beatrix again went to Hupy and, under cover of night, had the precious remains exhumed. The next day, when the inhabitants realized that their saint had disappeared, they prepared to march to Abbeville to retrieve their treasure. It was with great

pain and difficulty that they were made to understand that, first of all, Sister belonged to her community; and, beside that, Hupy was not very far from Abbeville, and there was nothing to prevent them from going to pray at Sister St. Philippe's tomb.

Before speaking about the foundation in Cork, which was already being prepared in 1866, let's take another brief glance at the Providence Orphanage. Sister St. Julienne, who had governed it since 1833, felt that her strength was declining and she asked to be relieved and be permitted to end her days at Rozoy. Her request was honored, and she left her dear orphanage secretly and without saying goodbye. "Thus," she said, "my heart will suffer less." But when her departure became known, it provoked unanimous regrets and caused many tears to flow; she had given herself so completely to her little ones. How could you not love her? During those forty years, she had preserved the austere but kindly spirit with which the foundress, Miss Buchère had permeated her work; and the children who felt themselves to be the object of her maternal care did not suffer from the austerity, but drew from it a love of duty and horror of evil which served them well in their futures. In the meantime the material prosperity was not sufficient to provide for the needs of the house, and it even became necessary to sell the store opened by Miss Buchère which had done so well during the first years. Nevertheless, the Mother House did not draw back before any sacrifice in order to maintain the Orphanage; it was like a garden for the Congregation, a flowering garden where the good God's plants received special cultivation.

In December of 1866, Mother St. Mechtilde, who was already head of the sewing department in the Orphanage, was named its superior. She was well educated and had an ardent soul, her complete moral physiognomy is summed up in these words about her written by a Marist Father: "*If I could cut up Mother St. Mechtilde's kindly heart and benevolent spirit into little pieces, I would plant them everywhere; but especially in all of our Houses of Bon Secours, assured that they would bring forth a treasure.*"

Sister was so united to the Divine Master that she seemed to be on a level of familiarity with Him which equaled that of the saint whose name she bore and for whom she had special devotion. "During an illness that obliged her to remain in her room, and through which I nursed her," wrote one of her daughters, "I read to her at lecture time. I can still remember the flame in her voice as she spoke to me afterwards about Our Lord's love. What delightful hours I spent by her bed! How well she prayed, accentuating each word! One day, as I read the points of meditation, I dared to ask her why she always stopped at the same point. She then confided to me that for the last three months she had continued to pray, and meditate on the *Our Father*, and that she was unable to break away from this subject which seemed inexhaustible."

She was so full of faith that sometimes, like Gertrude and Teresa, she obtained real miracles.

One day she entered the room where the children were working; she looked quite sad, and said to them: "Children, I have just received a very large bill and have been asked to pay it by tomorrow. I have very little money so you must work a miracle for us." She had them stop working and asked the teachers and the children to go to the Chapel and make the Way of the Cross for the intention of the soul in purgatory most ready to be released. When they had done this, Mother St. Mechtilde was called to the parlor. A woman was waiting there, who handed her a sealed envelope and said: "Mother, I have often heard about your orphanage, and as I had promised an alms in favor of the souls in purgatory, allow me to offer it to you for your work."

The Superior tried in vain to ascertain her benefactress' name. The only response she got was: "The souls in purgatory have heard your prayers." After the visitor had departed, Mother opened the envelope and found the exact sum needed for the next day's deadline. The children sang the *Magnificat* with an enthusiasm that is easy to imagine, and, afterwards, they all wanted to recite the indulgenced prayers for the relief of the departed souls.

In another circumstance, Mother St. Mechtilde's charity, which was extended to one and all and sometimes seemed imprudent, was again visibly rewarded. Mother had the habit of giving five francs every year to a particular work which she thought very useful. Well, one time, when they came for the offering, she found that she had only ten francs in her purse. In spite of this, Mother did not hesitate to make the usual gift. She said: "God will provide." Then she hurried to the chapel and knelt at the foot of the altar begging Our Lord to come to their aide. While she was still praying a Sister told her that she was wanted in the parlor. She went there and found two persons who demanded if she was really the Superior. When she responded affirmatively, the visitors handed her five hundred francs and explained that it was an anonymous gift made by a charitable person for a poor orphanage; Divine Providence had guided them to Rue du Regard. Thus it was that Mother St. Mechtilde received the hundredfold promised to those who understand that *to trust in God is not to tempt God and that, if there is an earthly and carnal prudence, there is also a heavenly one from which you should not deviate.*⁷⁷

Under the new Superior's direction the children blossomed, and their piety was not only solid but became ardent. Like her predecessor, Mother St. Mechtilde received much help in her work from Father Tesson, director of the Foreign Missions Seminary, who had been the Orphanage's chaplain, spiritual father, and benefactor for over thirty years. The Sisters who had known him, until his death in 1875, always talked about his virtue, holiness and kindness. Elsewhere, we have said that he never wished to accept any

position of honor, and yet he remained in charge of all religious services. In spite of his poverty, he never missed an opportunity to give pleasure to the poor children in the Orphanage—especially at Christmas time—by substantial gifts of money which he discretely hid in a box of chocolates.

He had a very unique ability to touch souls. A Sister, who had been one of the orphans, said of him: "He never gave what you would call a real sermon, but he seized every opportunity to talk about the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. You should have heard him when he came to see us on Thursdays and Sundays after benediction! He commented on St. Paul's epistles with so much feeling and expression! But, like John, the Apostle, he always came back to Our Lord's great love." We can see from this the esteem the Saints had for children's souls, and to what heights they could be raised.

Father Tesson understood very well that in order to make virtue attractive and loved, it is necessary to expand their hearts by healthy distractions and pleasures given with discretion. He was a highly intelligent man but he did not think it a waste of time to provide amusing and instructive recreations for the little orphans; he even organized and participated in them.

It is not at all surprising that, thus prepared and advised, those children could be ready to face life with the ardent desire of serving God against all odds. We will now relate an incident which will eloquently show us by its simplicity that at the orphanage they knew how to sanctify themselves and also how to die.

One of the young girls had a strong but independent character, and she found it very hard to submit to the restraint of regulated life. However, she also possessed enough spirit of faith to be frightened by the dangers she would have to face elsewhere, since she did not have a religious vocation and would soon be leaving the orphanage.

One day, she shared her fears with one of her older companions who also was worrying about not being able to follow her own vocation which was drawing her to Bon Secours. She said: "Let's make a novena to Our Lady of Lourdes to ask her help." Once said, it was done; and the very next day the two young girls began their short but fervent novena.

Heaven's Queen heard their prayers. The one who feared the dangers of the world became ill with a lung disease; and her life ended when she was twenty-one, the age set for her departure from the Orphanage. Her companion quickly overcame all the obstacles which she had feared and the convent door opened to her. Throughout the course of this history, we will have other occasions to speak about this interesting work which Mother St. Mechtilde would direct for twenty years.

During that same year, 1866, a providential circumstance opened the way for a foundation in Cork. One of the Sisters at Dublin was sent to Cork at Doctor O'Connor's request in order to nurse his brother, Father O'Connor. The patient and his physician were able to evaluate Sister St. Bertille's

knowledge and devotion at their true value, and both of them had the same idea of asking Bishop Delany for the establishment of the Nursing Sisters in Cork.

A foundation of this type could not fail to be welcomed with joy in that thoroughly Catholic city. The Doctor set before the Prelate the argument, that the sick and infirm priests would particularly appreciate being nursed and cared for by women consecrated to God.

The Bishop received that request very cordially, and, in October, 1866, he went to Dublin to talk with Mother St. Fabien about the proposed foundation. The prelate wanted results and on the 26th of November he wrote:

"My dear Reverend Mother,

I hope you have not forgotten the visit I had with you last month, nor the hope that you gave me of being able to establish a branch of your wonderful Congregation in Cork.

On returning here, I lost no time but spoke about this project; and I am certain that everyone will give a very warm welcome to the Sisters chosen to make the foundation in our city. The conditions you laid down have all been accepted and we have but one desire: to make everything easy and agreeable for your Sisters.

I am writing now to ask you to let me know if the Superior General will concur with our wishes, and be able to favor us with a house.

If the response is favorable, I will see to it that our good people in Cork provide all that the Sisters may need.

William Delany, Bishop of Cork."

The response from the Mother House was favorable, and by April, 1867 negotiations were completed and four Sisters from Dublin went to Cork. Sister St. Bertille was named Superior; she was accompanied by Sister St. Leon, Sister St. Marcelle and Sister St. Celine; and Sister St. Fortunat was sent by the Superior General from Paris as the Assistant.

Mother St. Cecile's correspondence allows us to judge the esteem she had for Mother St. Bertille; we will also see that, when the occasion demanded, she could use very vigorous and effective language with the Sisters. Here is how she announced her new functions to her: "In governing the universe, the good God distributes His cross from one end to the other; and, when one has embraced the religious life, He makes use of the voice of the superiors to manifest His will. So, my dear daughter, I come to congratulate you on the choice that the Lord Jesus has made of you to accompany Him to Calvary, there to learn that you are named Superior of the house in Cork. But be consoled: *God, Who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb*, will also match His graces to your weaknesses. You must correspond to them by faithfully fulfilling all of your duties. In order to do that, my dear, you must die every day; it is necessary to sacrifice: rest, inclinations, sympathies and antipathies; I would even say exercises of piety . . . , but that only in rare cases."

In another letter to Sister St. Bertille, we can see how she accepted the burden of superiorship: "My very dear daughter, I bless the good God for your dispositions. Yes, be entirely at the service of God and your Congregation, and the good Saviour will sweeten all the sacrifices He will demand of you. Peace and calm, the only good for which we can hope for on earth, are found in complete abandonment to the Divine good pleasure. The thought of consoling the heart of Jesus by your fidelity should greatly encourage you. Also, do not lose sight of the fact that the crown is worth the battle, and that the recompense infinitely surpasses the work accomplished and the pains endured."

This Sisters were welcomed in Cork by Bishop Delany with paternal benevolence, and also by Father Maguire, pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul's Church, who was chosen to be their Ecclesiastical Superior.

From the very beginning this holy priest considered the Sisters as his daughters, and was not content simply to guide their souls, but concerned himself with their temporal needs as well. The day of their arrival, he even prepared their dinner; and,—another little detail—each one found a hot water bottle in her bed.

The people of Cork are particularly pious, well intentioned and admirably simple. They received the nursing Sisters enthusiastically. When the religious were seen going about the streets, they were surrounded by marks of respect, some even ran after them to kiss their habits and rosaries; and among the people they were called the Good God's Maids of Honor. Even the Protestants were pleased by their arrival, and later on gave them proofs of their interest and sympathy.

At that time Bon Secours Convent was established at Dyke Parade; everything about the place was very poor, but one of the Sisters who had lived there tells us that, in spite of their many privations, they were very happy. She wrote: "We were in a very little house that was almost as poor as the Holy Family's in Nazareth; but the spirit of charity which prevailed there made everything easier. Regularity and silence were so strictly observed that it seemed like the novitiate. Our Superior, Mother St. Bertille faithfully observed the Rule and would not permit any part of it to be neglected. A breach of our holy Constitutions was always corrected; it was followed by a reprimand which was kindly but firmly given, and clearly demonstrated how precious the Rule was to her."

Mother Bertille, as she was called, received much support from Mother St. Cecile, who continued to follow that foundation with lively, affectionate interest. "I was quite touched," she wrote, "by the fatherly kindness with which His Grace received you; and I pray that God will give that esteemed prelate a hundredfold reward for what he is doing for your community.

I am completely confident that your dear little community will respond to all the care which Divine Providence has taken of it, and will be zealous in

working for the glory of God. Apply yourselves to the practice of the religious virtues, particularly humility, charity, and zeal for the salvation of souls; but remember that example is the best sermon, and the conduct which is full of kindness and self sacrifice touches more souls than is possible to say."

At the end of that letter we find a few words which reveal Mother Bertille's interior desires and her spirit of mortification: "I permit you to continue to take the discipline, but with discretion."

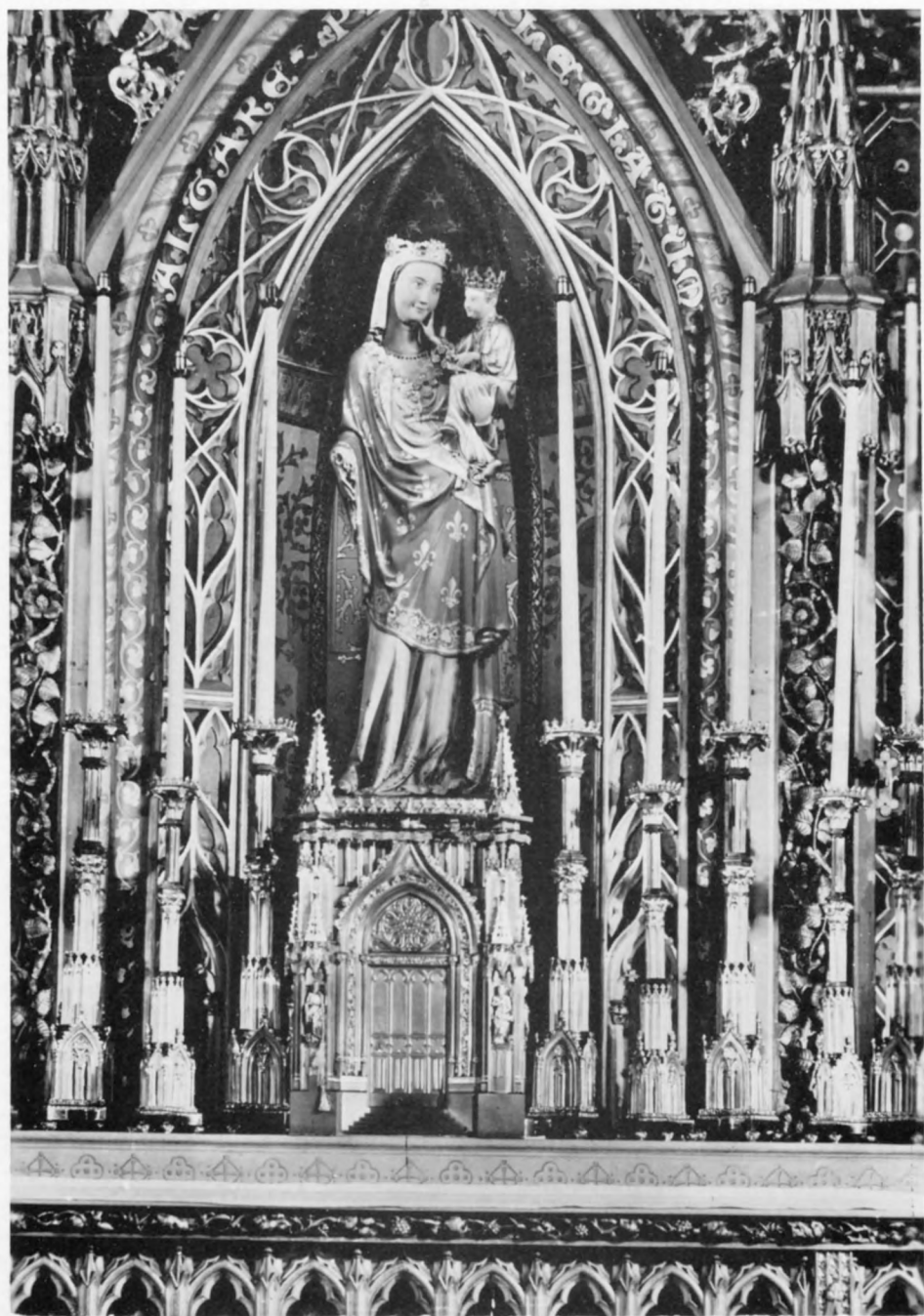
Mother St. Cecile wrote to her again a few months later: "I bless God, my dear daughter, for the good impression that our Sisters are making at Cork; but let us remain humble and not attribute the good that is accomplished to ourselves but to God alone. *Without Him, we can do nothing.* Yes, keep yourself very little, my dear, and recall that you are only a poor, sterile and useless branch, by yourself, but grafted through love *on the vine*, Jesus Christ, you will bring forth fruit that will last for all eternity.

"I am happy to send you the lamp that you need; I offer it to God first of all, and then to my dear Sisters in Cork, who will always be a consolation to me, I am sure. This will happen, if they seek only God and His good pleasure, if they make all sacrifices through love of Him, forgetting themselves by a life of abnegation, and fearing neither pain nor fatigue.

"Courage, confidence, humility, faith and charity! Behold your life; it will guide you to your heavenly resting place on the wings of holy obedience."

The first patient to be cared for by Mother Bertille's daughters was Archdeacon Murphy. After a long and painful illness, he loudly declared that the Sisters of Bon Secours had alleviated his trial in a very special way. His family also expressed their gratitude through many thoughtful gifts and benefits. M.J. Murphy, notebook and pen in hand, often rang the doorbell in the morning. "Good morning, Sister," he said, "quickly now, tell me what you need today." Without waiting for an answer he wrote down those things he thought the Community would need and left the Sister before she had time to thank him.

Thus it was that those happy beginnings at Cork would predict the fruit-filled future reserved for that community.



Statue of Our Lady of Bon Secours in the Mother House Chapel, Paris



Hyacinthe Louis de Quelen, Founder of the Congregation of Bon Secours, Archbishop of Paris, 1821–1839



Stained Glass Window, Profession Ceremony January 24, 1824



M. L'ABBÉ DESJARDINS .

VICAIRE GÉNÉRAL DE PARIS

mort en 1836



Father de Pierre, Pastor of St. Sulpice in Paris



A TRIBUTE
OF ESTEEM AND FILIAL LOVE TO
REVEREND MOTHER POTEL
FIRST SUPERIOR GENERAL
OF THE
CONGREGATION OF BON SECOURS
January 24, 1824 - May 6, 1826

"... GOOD MOTHER POTEL WAS LIKE A
VICTIM PLACED AT THE BASE OF THE
INSTITUTE AND BEFORE IT, IN ORDER
TO ASSURE ITS EXISTENCE BY A
PREMATURE SACRIFICE..." OF HER
LIFE.



Mère Geay, Second Superior General



Sanctuary of the Bon Secours Mother House Chapel, Paris



Mother St. Cecile, Third Superior General



Bishop Maguire, Prelate to His Holiness Leo XIII, Ecclesiastical Superior of the Sisters of Bon Secours in Cork



S. E. LE CARDINAL MANNING

ARCHEVÊQUE DE WESTMINSTER

de 1865 à 1892

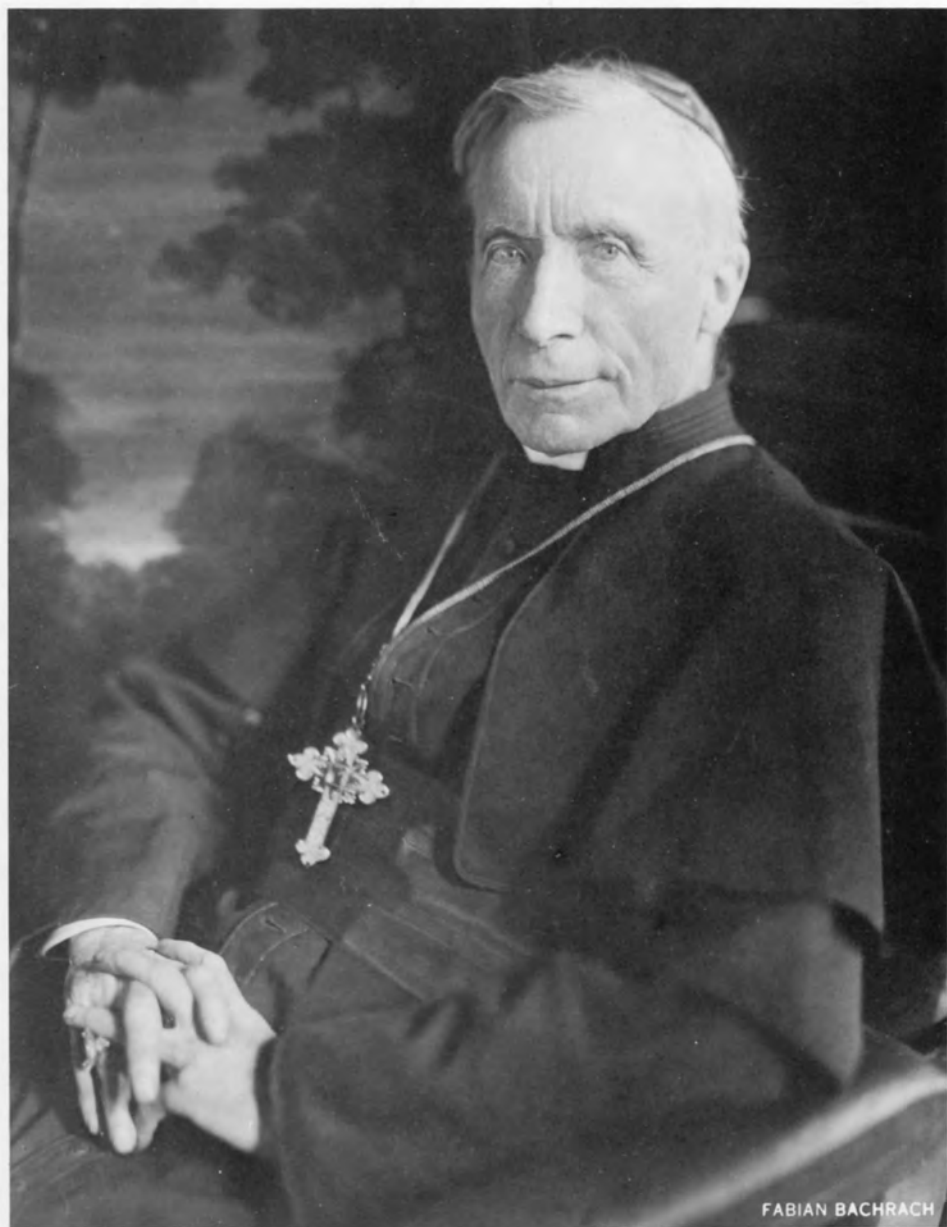
His Eminence Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster



Mother St. Beatrix, Fourth Superior General



Mother St. Fulgence, Fifth Superior General



His Eminence James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore



Father Magnien, S.S., Vicar General of Baltimore, Superior of St. Mary's Seminary,
Baltimore



LE R. P. GABRIEL GERMAIN

PRÊTRE DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DE MARIE

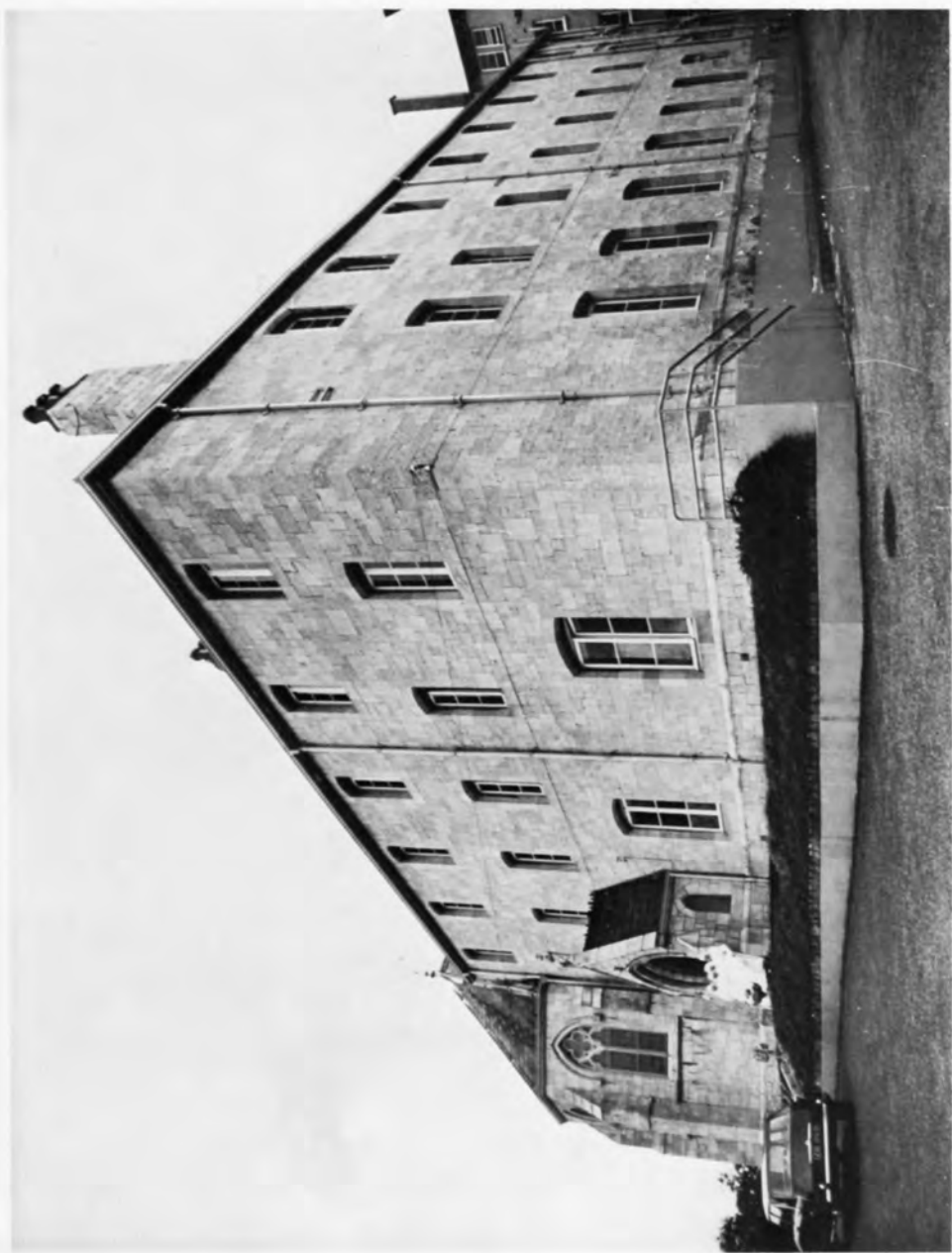
mort en 1880



Mother St. Ferdinand, First Superior in Baltimore



Mother House of the Sisters of Bon Secours, Paris, and a View of the Garden



Bon Secours Provincial House, Cork, Ireland



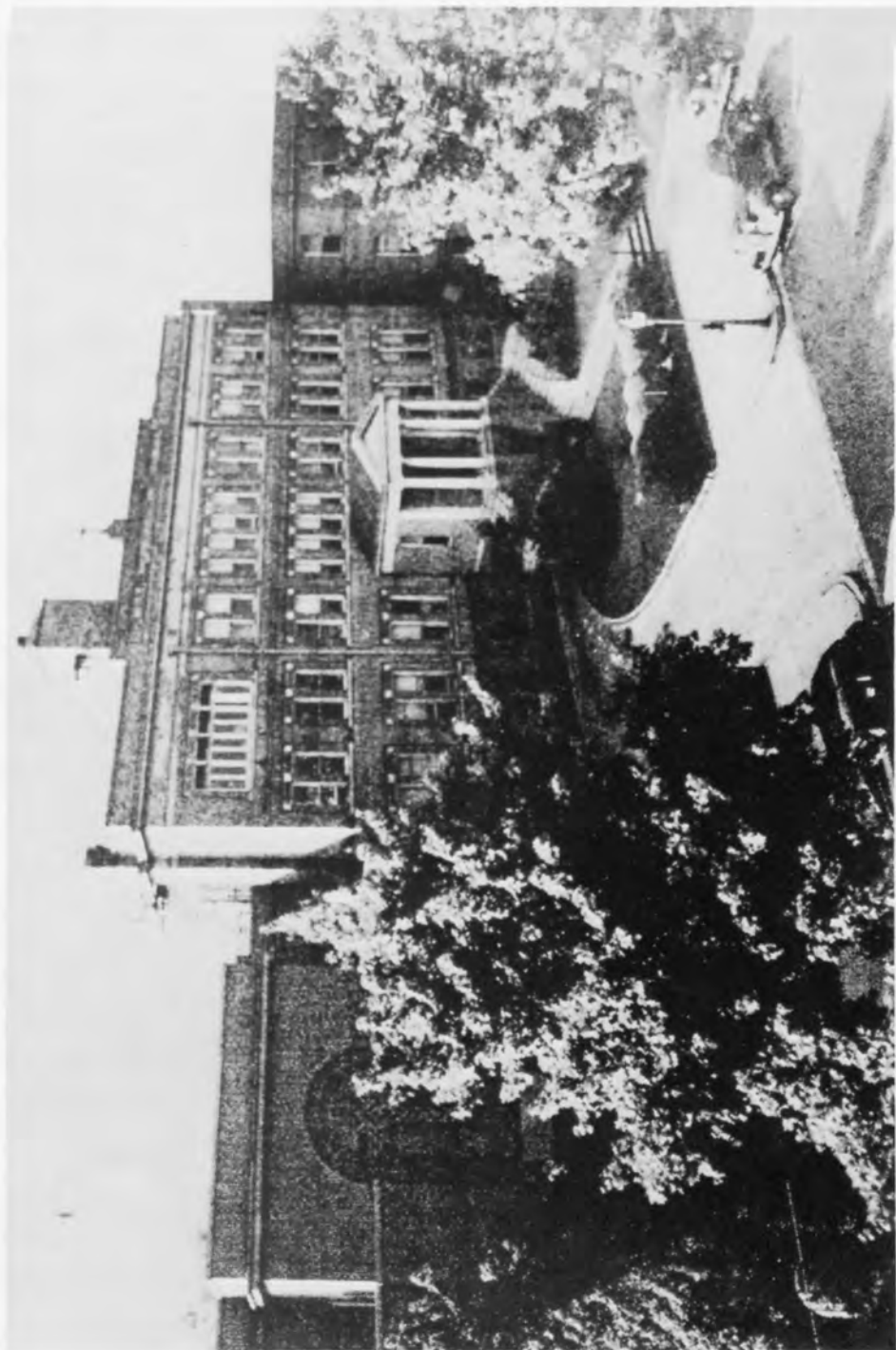
Bon Secours Provincial House, London, England



The Baltimore Convent and Novitiate



Bon Secours Hospital, Cork, Ireland



Original Bon Secours Hospital, Baltimore



Flag of Our Lady of Bon Secours

Chapter XVIII

A Glance at Boulogne, Lille and Orléans Father Morel's death General Elections—Foundation at Lorient 1869—1870

1869 was a year of numerous events most of which were matters of success but which, nevertheless, greatly preoccupied Mother St. Cecile. She considered the science of governing to consist in looking for light and strength from God alone, and so was able to work for the betterment of her dear Institute without being troubled.

First of all, the Superior General had the consolation of seeing the material situation of several of the houses become more solidly rooted. The Sisters at Boulogne were able to buy land on Rue St. Martin and Rue de l'Oratoire for the community; and soon a complex of buildings was constructed which formed a general effect of perfect harmony with the establishment's importance.

Land was also purchased at Lille in March, 1869, in an area called Madeleine-lez-Lille, in view of a new work which was being envisioned and should be a source of benefit and joy for the young people.

The following month, an important transaction was also concluded at Orléans; the Sisters left the quarters they had occupied since the foundation to take up residence on the property of the Benedictines of Calvary situated

on Rue du Cloître Saint Croix. Bishop Dupanloup applauded this change, which would permit them to increase the number of nursing Sisters.

These different affairs were hardly concluded when a painful event came to upset the Mother House. Father Morel, Ecclesiastical Superior of the Congregation, who had guided them with as much wisdom as concern for twenty years, died very suddenly. His death was felt even more keenly, since it was the evening before the 24th of May on which date important elections were to take place that year. Since 1849 Father Morel had presided at these assemblies and given his advice and support to the resolutions which were taken; so it was necessary to replace him as soon as possible. Bishop Darboy understood and, without delay, named Father de Cuttoli, one of his Vicars General, the Ecclesiastical Superior of Bon Secours. Since he had shown himself to be full of benevolence for the Congregation on many occasions, his nomination was welcomed with great joy.

And so, he presided at the meeting on the 24th of May. Mother St. Cecile, who had completed her third term, was re-elected according to the conditions prescribed in view of such an eventuality; she received 114 out of 135 votes.

The saintly religious, who had carried out her task so well for such a long time, again accepted to take up the burden with her usual courage; for her it was simply her duty. She profited by the occasion to read aloud from the *Custom Book* which their venerated Mère Geay had long and prayerfully prepared. Father de Cuttoli praised the work that so perfectly clarified and completed the Constitutions; and it was decided that it would be reprinted, and several copies would be sent to each house.

A few weeks later, Mother St. Cecile received a letter which greatly perplexed her. It reminded her of a promise made three years previously, a vague promise, but one which had been considered as a formal pledge. It was in the autumn of 1866 that Madam Deschiens⁷⁸ a pious lady from Lorient, had first spoken to the Superior General to obtain a foundation in her native city. Her letter should be quoted because she explained how one soul who is filled with the Spirit of Christ can release Him in herself and others and, consequently, influence all whom she meets.

"Reverend Mother, for a long time now, our town has greatly desired to have some nursing Sisters who, along with their care, are capable of giving the spiritual help that can only be expected from religious.

I got to know Sister St. Sebastien quite well at Tivoli, the private hospital in Paris. Her serenity and charming personality, her manner of nursing the patients, and the wholeheartedness with which she did it all made me like her most sincerely. When I returned to Lorient, I shared my impressions with our Pastor, Father Charil, who also intensely wanted to see a house of your Order established in our town. He implored me to write to you, Reverend Mother, to ask under what conditions you would think of making a foundation.

Everyone here would be very happy if you could give us some of your Sisters. We will do all we can to give them the happiness that they will bring to us. I know that they do not look for any reward in this world, but in Lorient they will find a people who are pious and informed, and who are most happy to have wholeheartedly, dedicated women to care for their sick; instead of their usual ones who are most unsatisfactory.

The Daughters of Wisdom are connected with the Welfare Board here in Lorient; they visit the poor and admirably fulfill their mission which is entirely different from what you zealously and devotedly do for the upper and middle class.

Therefore, Reverend Mother, please take into your consideration our great desire to see your Order established in our town, above all others.

Please accept my . . . etc."

Despite that eloquent appeal, the General Council did not believe it a duty to consider Madam Deschien's request. They informed her that, because of the lack of subjects, it would not be possible to even think of such an establishment for at least two or three years. As there was no response to that letter, Mother St. Cecile supposed that another congregation had been invited to Lorient. She was greatly surprised then, in June of 1869, when Madam Deschiens reminded her that the three years had elapsed and it was time to complete the promise made in 1866. All the required conditions had been fulfilled and the Bishop of Vannes, who had been consulted, was eager for the foundation. "Not only has the authorization been obtained," wrote Madam Deschiens, "but the Bishop supports our request. He will be very happy to have a house of Bon Secours of Paris in his diocese; like us, he sees it as a source of much good and many consolations. I hope that God will bless the Sisters you will have chosen to fulfill their holy and charitable mission among us, in exchange for all the benefits that they will bring us.

"... It is now three years since we asked for you, that we are waiting for you; haven't we merited the happiness of having you? The delightful Sister St. Sebastien opened up for me some of the treasures of Christian perfection. As I saw her work, I understood that your Sisters do good works for God, and it is because He guides your hands and lights up your hearts that your nursing care is so kind and your words so persuasive. Also, all who have known your Sisters love them, and all to whom we have spoken about them want them.

"Pardon my insistence, Reverend Mother, but I write with my heart still filled with gratitude for the countless kindnesses which your Sister St. Sebastien lavished on my little girl five years ago. Four years ago in June, God took her back to himself, and I have chosen this same month to renew my appeals to you, thinking that on this most painful anniversary the Heart of Jesus would second my plan.

"Several persons have offered to participate in the ground work, and I am gathering gifts from many persons of good will. Let us pray that God will

bless your work and make it prosper in our dear Morbihan, and, above all, that your Sisters will bring many wayward souls back to God."

While the Superior General was asking herself where God's will was in this situation, Father Charil, the Pastor at Lorient, came to the Mother House and succeeded in overcoming Mother St. Cecile's hesitation regarding the new foundation. He was also brought a letter from the Bishop of Vannes which follows:

"Reverend Mother,

The Pastor-Archpriest of Lorient is leaving for Paris with the intention of asking you for some nursing Sisters. I join him in beseeching you to send a few of your daughters to my diocese. They will do much good, and their nursing care is wanted and needed in the towns and in the families of our countryside. In advance, I bless their arrival among us. Please accept . . . etc.

J.M., Bishop of Vannes."

The cause had been won; the questions about small matters were able to be settled to everyone's satisfaction; and on the 15th of October, Mother St. Cecile brought the Sisters to Lorient. Mother St. Vincent was named Superior; her companions were the Sisters St. Honorine, St. Julia and St. Omer. Mother St. Leocadie, the Superior at Quimper, had come to Lorient to preside at the Sisters' installation. She was awaiting them, and the very next day Father Charil came to celebrate Mass in the new oratory.

At the end of eighteen months, the Community was transferred to a larger house situated on Rue Calé'Ory, and they remained there nine years. It was during that time that they suffered the loss of their Superior. Mother St. Vincent was loved by persons from all levels of society, and her affability attracted the hearts of all. She felt a very special pity for those poor who were ashamed to beg, and she knew how to sensitively fill their needs and do good to them. One of her Sisters wrote: "Hers was a soul of prayer and exact observance of the Rule which was extraordinary. She had a very great love for the Blessed Sacrament, and, as soon as she was able to have a few minutes to herself, she would hurry to kneel at the feet of Jesus." Such kindness was stamped on her features, that only to look at her did one good. An outstanding person from Lorient, whom she had nursed, had forgotten her name and from then on he called her *Spes Unica* (only hope). "When I meet a Sister of Bon Secours," he said, "I greet *Spes Unica* in her."

Mother painfully dragged herself about for a long time, but she courageously remained at her post. It was not until May 24, 1873 that strength deserted her and she had to go to bed. From that moment she became weaker as each day passed, but she maintained an unalterable serenity in the midst of very great sufferings, until she gave her soul back to God on the 15th of October.

The sad event brought the community many expressions of sympathy. A large crowd wished to accompany Mother St. Vincent's mortal remains to their last resting place, and almost two hundred young girls dressed in white followed the cortège. At that time, the Municipal Council expressed a very special testimony of esteem to the Sisters of Bon Secours, by gratuitously giving them a plot of land in the town's cemetery. This act, in itself, says how much their ministry had been appreciated in such a few years' time.

Mother St. Aldegonde took up the government of the house at Lorient, and for nine years she continued the work which had been so well begun; later she became the Assistant General.

A short time before that foundation, Mother St. Cecile found it necessary to impose a great sacrifice on the Dublin Community, where all lived happily under Mother St. Fabien. For reasons of major importance, Mother St. Elizabeth, the Novice Mistress, had been named Superior at Boulogne; and she had to be replaced by a religious who was both a mother and a saint; and the Council's choice was Mother St. Fabien. This decision was announced to her as follows when on November 8, 1868 the Superior General wrote: "My dear Daughter, Before you read what follows, I want you to go before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament for a moment; adore Him with deep sentiments of gratitude for His great love in coming to this earth in order to glorify His Father, and redeem us at the price of His blood. Then, ask our Lord to give you the grace, strength and courage to respond to the plans He has for you; say to our good Saviour: "Here I am, my God, to do Your will, whatever be the obedience which may be assigned to me! With Your grace, I want to follow You and to imitate You. *Amen!*"

"Now, here is what it is about. We were obliged to send Mother St. Elizabeth to Boulogne, and, so, it was our duty to look for someone capable of filling the important post of Mistress of Novices. I had the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered, and made a novena for this intention, and you came to my mind, my dear. However, I did not wish to act alone on such a serious matter; so, I assembled the Council which chose you almost unanimously; I also consulted our Ecclesiastical Superior; he strongly supports our decision. As you know, the novitiate is the most important responsibility of a Congregation; in a word, it is its future, and our greatest concern should be directed to the novitiate. You will render a great service to the Congregation by accepting this post for which you were made. Your knowledge of the English language will qualify you to prepare and develop our Irish Sisters, and they, feeling that they are understood, will have greater courage to affirm their vocation."

We have not found Mother St. Fabien's response, but it must have been edifying, because, a few days later, the Superior General wrote: "What can I say to you, my dear? I have only one cry: Blessed by God! . . . I do

understand the sacrifice you are making, but our Lord will bless your obedience, and give you the graces your heart is asking for the house you are leaving. He will also bless the assignment which He is giving you; its importance is quite different from the one you are relinquishing.

"Only Sisters St. Claire and St. Fulgence know of your prompt obedience, and when the latter heard your letter she exclaimed: 'Now there is the act of the true religious!' You have no self love because you have only done what you should have done. Be that as it may, thank you all the same, my dear. You comfort my poor heart, and, by the same token, you give great pleasure to the Heart of Christ in whose hands I have placed you."

Mother St. Cecile, in accepting to make foundations in Brittany and Ireland, was far from doubting the calamities which were to fall upon France. The terrible year was very near. Before speaking of the events which marked it like so many bleeding wounds, we will take a few moments to look at a priest who had been nursed by Sister St. Fulgence during her stay with the Marchessa de Castellane, and had extended the sympathy she had inspired to all Sisters of Bon Secours. Mère Geay had greatly esteemed him, and, one day as she was speaking of him, she wrote: "It is a saint whom I love, as one loves the saints here on earth."

For several years, Father Frédro was pastor at St. Philippe-du-Roule, and it was there that illness finally overtook his body which was weakened by incessant sufferings. A Sister of Bon Secours was with him during his long agony, and she heard these words repeated over and over again: "*Amen! Amen! Thank you, my God! Amen!*"

"Those who had occasion to enter that sanctuary of pain and agony and approach his bed, all confirmed the truth of this testimony, that the weaker and closer to dissolution his body became, the more lucid and active his intelligence grew, and the higher his mind climbed to reach the farthest horizons. One could believe that they saw a flame escape through the ruins of his body.

"As the moment of his deliverance approached, the life of his soul developed, increased, and flourished over and above everything else. His lively faith took on new dimensions; his love for Jesus Christ and for the Church was increased by all the sufferings he offered to the One and accepted for the other. Each day, as the imprint of death became more and more marked on his emaciated features, an indescribable reflection of Divine Charity was depicted in his eyes.

Father Frédro's death was not only a great loss for the parish where he had worked with so much zeal and devotion; it was a loss for the entire diocese."⁷⁹

Mother St. Fulgence felt this loss very deeply, because the most intimate bonds united her to the soul of that priest, who, like her, had given but one goal to his life: the love of God, His glory and the salvation of souls.

Chapter XIX

The War of 1870—Field Hospitals Providence Orphanage The Commune—Conversions 1870—1871

Mother St. Cecile and her Council were thoroughly absorbed with the preparations for the projected London foundation when France became engulfed in an upheaval that was to shake her to her very depths.

We will not repeat what others have related concerning those days of indescribable emotion which followed the declaration of war in the month July, 1870: the patriotic upsurge which seized everyone; the enthusiasm of the departing men—torn from homes which many would never see again; and then, the announcement of the first retreat; the catastrophe at Sedan; the siege of Paris and the whole cortège of tribulations which befell the country. Divine Justice was passed on the eldest daughter of the Church at the moment when, denying the secularity of her work, she made the Holy See's defenders evacuate Rome.

The violence of the storm, however, served as a stimulus and new strength of development to many forms of spontaneous self giving; and we cannot help admiring the generosity and bravery which came into focus on the battlefield and in the hospitals.

The Sisters of Bon Secours showed themselves as brave and devoted as they had been in 1832 and 1848; that is to say *de Bon Secours* in every sense of

the word. A twelve bed field hospital was set up in the Mother House on the 17th of August and, on the same date, the Sisters were called to serve in the field hospitals of the *Corps Legislatif*, *The College Stanislas* and of the *Deaf and Dumb Hospital*. We have no need to speak of their untiring charity, nor of the many and serious dangers to which they were continually exposed. It is sufficient to say that on July 2, 1871, when the war was ended, the Bronze Cross, awarded by the *Société française de secours aux blessés*,⁸⁰ was received by nine Sisters of Bon Secours.

In the midst of these events, Mother St. Cecile accomplished wonders of kindness and thoughtfulness to assure that her Sisters and the sick confided to their care should not lack what was of absolute necessity. It has been said that one day, in order to provide them with some more strengthening food, she paid six hundred francs for the half of a donkey. The daily privations were incalculable and, in spite of her efforts, the Superior General saw Sister St. Mathilde and Sister St. Euphemie die, as a consequence of the sufferings which they endured during that terrible winter. It was also at this time that Mother St. Fabien fell victim to the terrible disease of which she was to die a few months later.

The Mother General's anxiety was very great, and it was increased even more by the fact that many of the Sisters were away; a few were with their patients who had sought refuge abroad. The foundation in London, which took place under such painful circumstances, became an additional burden because all of the correspondence was intercepted. However, the letters she sent by air balloon to several of the Sisters expressed great calm and complete abandonment to Divine Providence: "Yet a little while and we will see each other again. Have courage. With God, always with God! (written the 28th of September, 1870—received the 4th of October)."

"We are unable to receive any news; how sad it is! but we must go on with resignation and courage! Now is the time to be generous! (written the 5th of October—received the 17th)."

"We are placing this letter in the hands of Divine Providence with the hope that it will reach you. There is nothing new in the community unless it is that we are praying more than ever. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed twice a week. We do understand how much you are suffering in being so far from us and all whom you hold most dear. My dear Sister, at this moment you are on the cross with your Divine Saviour, who is sharing the chalice of His Passion with you. May He give you the grace not to lose any of the merits which this great trial may make you able to acquire! (written the 29th of October—received the 5th of November)."

"... we are always being crushed as in the wine press, but submitting to the Will of God. May He be glorified! This must be our only desire. As far as we are concerned, our hopes should draw us only toward eternity. There, my dear child, all our troubles will come to an end. Let us love God, proving

our love through our works; He is a good Father, and, if He corrects us, it is only to make us go within ourselves again and turn all our thoughts towards Him."

This last letter was addressed to Sister St. Calixte who was at Cannes with Miss Marquis; it was dated the 27th of January, 1871, the day when the shooting reached its greatest violence. This correspondence clearly shows the bravery and supernatural spirit which animated the Superior General, because even as she wrote these letters to reassure her Sisters, shells were passing over the Mother House by the hundreds. An officer counted as many as three hundred in a single night, and a Sister counted as many as forty in three quarters of an hour.

Later on, the Sisters said that during those hours of terrible anguish, they had learned to pray the second part of the *Hail Mary* with particular fervor: "*Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.*" One Sister even said that Our Lord had used these painful circumstances to teach her detachment from herself and all she still clung to within her heart. It seems that when this novice entered the convent she did not have the courage to part with many of the little things which recalled happy memories, and gifts from loved ones. She kept them in a trunk in the attic. Well, a bomb went directly through the trunk and destroyed every one of them.

The left bank of the Seine River was a favorite target from the very beginning of the bombardments in January of 1871. A shower of shells fell on the Military Hospitals in Val de Grace, Rue d'Enfer, Rue Madame and Rue d'Assas, in fact, in the entire neighborhood surrounding the Mother House. Some persons walking through the Luxemburg Gardens were struck by the flying shrapnel; l'Odeon, transformed into a field hospital, had its roof torn off, and the vault of the Lady Chapel at St. Sulpice's Church was cracked harming Lemoine's masterpiece. Many of the shells weighed as much as two hundred pounds.

The imminence of the danger only served to increase the piety of that part of the capital which, perhaps less than some others, had merited the divine anger. "While the far off thunderings announced the next return to that sector which was a direct and determined object of attack,⁸¹ I followed the crowds going into St. Etienne's church. It was towards evening, and the many candles, which seemed to surround the altar, burned with great intensity. The church was overflowing; the harmony of the organ and choirs burst forth from the apse of the church at the same time as the waves of light and incense. Those hymns and waves of harmony, that great crowd who prayed in the very midst of the upheaval, that oasis of faith still standing steadfast over the miseries of our discords and before the fury of foreigners, gave my soul an unexpected peace and calm."

This peace and calm were also experienced by the Sisters of Bon Secours in the shadow of the tabernacle, where the Divine Master watched over His religious. When the bombardments filled them with terror, they ran to the

chapel where they seemed to hear the words: "*O souls of little faith, why are you afraid?*" At His feet they forgot their fatigue, their long vigils and even their hunger pains.

The Orphanage on Rue du Regard also received a certain number of the wounded. At the very beginning of the war it had been possible to send away some of the children who still had families, so that at that time there were only thirty five who remained. Mother St. Mechtilde showed great kindness and incomparable prudence in the apostolate she exercised among the wounded men.

When the bombings increased in violence, the superior had beds placed in the first level of the cellars, and then had the wounded men brought down there out of danger. In her charity she also made place for several families. There was a woman and four little ones who were the children of Mr. Mechet, a distinguished Professor who donated his teaching services to the orphans. The youngest was still quite small and they were all very frightened. Mother St. Mechtilde offered the use of one of the cellars, where they would be away from the flying shells. One of those children is now a missionary in Indo China and another is serving France in Senegal.

Mother St. Mechtilde had great devotion to St. Michael, and, in order to obtain his protection had put medals of this great archangel over every door and window of the orphanage. One day, as the children had completed the Way of the Cross and were passing through a room near the chapel, one of them was a little slower than the others. At the moment that she left, a shell exploded through the shutters, flew across the room and demolished the cupboard there. The child had been directly in the shell's path and, had it come but one moment sooner, she would have been struck.

On the 28th of January the armistice was finally concluded and gave the hope that the worst was now over. As soon as the news was learned, Mother St. Félicité, who, with all the Sisters, was so pained at the sufferings and privations of those at the Mother House, conceived a way to supply them with provisions.

First of all, it must be remembered that Rozoy, because of its topographical situation, had been invaded by both Prussian and Bavarian troops as soon as Sedan capitulated. Mother St. Cecile knew the Sisters were brave and courageous, so she did not tell them to leave the convent; but she sent Sister St. Bernardin to them, who, because she was of German origin, would be of great service.

As soon as she arrived, she took up a position between the invading parties and the terrified inhabitants, who neither understood or spoke any German, and did not know how or what to respond to their demands. She climbed the steps of a shrine of the Crucifixion which was situated in the middle of the main square. Sister spoke to the Prussian officers, explained

that they would not find the people to be inhospitable, and that their men would receive aide and assistance, on the condition that they, in turn, treated the inhabitants justly. Peace was thus restored and later, the Mayor could not find enough ways to express how much the Sisters' presence had benefited the little community. When the war was ended he offered them a handsome cow as an expression of his gratitude.

Sister St. Bernardin had been placed in charge of the field hospital where both French and German soldiers were indiscriminately cared for. A detachment of Prussian soldiers settled in the field near the house, and that little group experienced all the misfortunes and tribulations of the invasion. Each day the officers visited the hospital; they removed those convalescents who were able, and brought more newly wounded men to the Sisters, who often slept on the floor to give these poor men a bed.

In spite of a very natural antipathy toward the invaders, which she readily expressed when the occasion permitted, Mother St. Félicité showed only the greatest of kindness towards the victims of that terrible war. Each morning she arrived at the hospital with smoking tobacco for some and chewing tobacco for the others. The wounded men all called her "Mamma"—the French and German alike—and when they had returned to their own homes they all expressed their gratitude for the motherly care.

In the meantime, in spite of her seventy-four years, Mother St. Félicité had made up her mind that, cost what it would, she was going to Paris. She rented a large farm wagon and placed two chairs in it, one for herself and the other for Sister St. Bernardin. Then she filled it up with provisions: sides of beef and pork, potatoes, flour, milk, eggs, in fact everything that it was possible to procure at Rozoy. Mr. Fontaine, the Mayor of Rozoy attached an ambulance flag to the wagon; and so they departed at midnight under the protection of God and the Blessed Virgin. As they arrived at the town of Fontenay-Tresigny, the Prussian officer at the outpost asked them for their papers and permits. Through the intermediary of her companion, Mother St. Félicité admitted that she had neither one nor the other. Then she added: "But I have wholeheartedly cared for your comrades-at-arms, and made sure that their needs were met; I hope to find the same charity in you and the permission to take some nourishment to our Mothers and Sisters who are dying of hunger." The officer was quite moved to see this aged woman undertaking such a trip in the middle of the night, and under such dangerous conditions. After a moment's reflection, he replied: "Go on; you will be stopped again at the next outpost, but perhaps that officer, like myself, will let his heart do the talking." In fact that is exactly what happened.

However, when they reached the outskirts of the city, other dangers awaited them. The roaming crowds, crazed with hunger, saw the wagon covered with the ambulance flag, and they knew immediately that it

contained food. They ran after the wagon screaming: "Bread! Bread!" Once again Divine Providence came to their aid and permitted them to escape their pursuers, who were ready to surround and overturn the wagon. Finally, they arrived at Rue Notre Dame des Champs, and we can only imagine the surprise and excitement. Mother St. Cecile could not believe her eyes and, in spite of the sad times that existed, that day brought much joy to the Mother House; and God was blessed for the food brought by the Sisters in such an extraordinary and unexpected manner.

The next morning they had to say goodbye again. The travelers started on the road returning to Rozoy where they arrived quite late at night. They found all the Sisters praying before the statue of the Blessed Virgin and anxiously awaiting their return, and they all thanked Our Lady for not betraying their confidence.

Mother St. Félicité continued to exercise her difficult mission of peace and charity. Across from the convent there was a large farm house which the owners had locked and abandoned, leaving a poor peasant woman to act as caretaker. One day the German soldiers took over the house and demanded something to drink.

When the poor woman didn't give it to them, they made signs indicating that they were going to slit her throat. She was more than distressed and ran across the street to Mother St. Félicité, who immediately went to the farm with Sister St. Bernardin and brought the wine which had been demanded. When their thirst had been satisfied, they gathered wood and hay and lit a large fire; they then went to sleep near it; and during the night the chimney caught fire. Soon the whole house was in danger. Disaster was once again prevented by Mother St. Félicité; she ran about everywhere, and with the help of some of the neighbors was able to contain and put out the fire.

During those days of mourning and anguish, Mother St. Cecile often turned her glance toward Orléans and was greatly concerned. The strategic position of that town had designated it as a coveted prize by the invaders; and when the enemies pillaged the plains of Beauce, numerous regiments were concentrated within its walls. However, after three days of heroic fighting, the Germans entered the city of Joan of Arc on the 11th of October.

Since the beginning of that month, the Superior General had told the Sisters, that if any of them felt they didn't have the courage or stamina to face the calamities which were sure to come, they were free to move to another house further removed from the situation. Not one Sister took advantage of that permission, and they devoted themselves soul and body to the care of the wounded, and in particular to the field hospital established at the convent of the Dames du Calvaire. A door had been broken through in the monastery's wall to facilitate communications with Bon Secours. At first it was decided that only twelve wounded men would be accepted, but at times

the Sisters had as many as thirty-two to care for; they even gave up their beds and anything else that could be useful in helping those poor unfortunate men. Mother St. Catherine, Sister St. Aubin and Sister St. Thais worked day and night in the hospital, and several other Sisters directed the work in private homes. Sister St. Josephine had a twelve bed station in the home of Mr. Boucher de Molandon; Sister St. Therese had another with Mr de Pulley; and Sister St. Eulalie was decorated for the devoted and knowledgeable care which she gave. One fact, which we cannot pass over in silence, is the heroism of Sister St. Augustine, who was nursing a resident of Orléans who had diphtheria. She saw that he was choking to death and knew that he was not ready to appear before his Maker; so she used every means at her disposal to prolong his life. Lastly, she made her decisions and placed her lips over the patient's, and forced air into his lungs. This effort succeeded and the poor man had the opportunity to make his confession, and receive the Sacrament of the Sick before he died. Sister, however, fell victim of her charity and zeal; she had inhaled the contagion, became ill and also died of the same disease.

The immediate deliverance of Orléans, after the battle of Coulmiers on the 9th of November, allowed the people a short breathing space; but not a long one, for very soon Patay fell, and Chillon was defeated, thus re-opening Orléans' gates to the enemy. This time the vexations were accentuated and the conqueror's demands were much greater.

Bon Secours also had its share of these hardships, and, while the Sisters worked day and night in the field hospital, the Germans came to investigate them. Some one had denounced the community by saying that they had hidden some linens which could be used for the wounded men. This resulted in another "visit," but when they didn't find anything, the officers left. However, they took with them Sister St. Odile who was taking care of the convent. They led her to one of their own field hospitals, and ordered her to dress a leg which had just been amputated. When this was accomplished, they let her go.

On another day, when the Sisters were about to sit down to eat, eight Prussian officers entered. Naturally they had to give them their places and their meal; after which they installed themselves in the community room with a great fire blazing and passed the night on the beds which had been prepared for the nursing Sisters.

During this time of great distress, the charity of the inhabitants of Orléans was as great, or even greater, than their unfortunate circumstances. Over three hundred and fifty hospital stations had been voluntarily set up in the district; the seminary, the Bishop's home and even the churches were transformed into hospital wards where friend and enemy alike were cared for without distinction. Tempers flared, therefore, when, in blind hate, a

German newspaper dared to odiously accuse the people of Orléans of lacking in humanity towards the wounded. Bishop Dupanloup refuted the calumnies by means of an open letter addressed to that newspaper; after expressing his indignation, the Bishop added:

"The Truth is . . . that our city, placed by the terrible catastrophies of this war at the very center of twenty major battles, received untold numbers of wounded, both French and Prussian; and, as I have already said, showed all of them the most admirable charity and devotion . . .

"The Truth is . . . that in Orléans over three hundred and fifty hospital stations were spontaneously opened in private homes. The Prussian and French wounded received the most attentive, and, yes, fastidious care. I myself have seen it, I testify to it and I have heard your own doctors and your Field Hospitals' General Inspectors attest to this, as I have. Just yesterday, one of them said: 'Nowhere have our wounded been better treated than at Orléans . . .'

"The Truth is . . . that the inhabitants of our city, the magistrates, the priests, the professors and the Christian Brothers went day and night, through snow and the most rigorous cold to the battlefields, to find the wounded and bring them back to Orléans: Prussian as well as French.

"The Truth is . . . that four hundred religious have been, and are still, nursing your wounded as well as our own; I put them at the disposition of the Military Authorities for your own field hospitals . . .

"The Truth is . . . that the women of Orléans did not leave all of the work to the religious, and have been incomparable in the care which they themselves provided the wounded with their own hands, etc., etc.

"My God, Sir," the Bishop concluded, "hasn't enough blood been shed? Do you also have to have recourse to calumny?"

We will not leave Orléans without relating a conversion and a cure which happened under quite wonderful circumstances. This account is of two-fold importance; it makes those most painful moments come alive again and it shows the serenity and faith which were displayed in the midst of such tragic circumstances.

The Sister who was God's instrument for this grace related the story: "When the war erupted, I was in Orléans at the home of an elderly man who was paralyzed. In order not to be obliged to give lodging to the enemy, his daughter begged me to receive and care for some wounded in the house in which she lived. It was the 10th of October, and, unfortunately, it was not difficult to find them, the streets were overflowing; all you needed to do was open the door and they came in. We had as many as fourteen soldiers.

"On the 11th of October, the enemy took possession of the city and, at the same time as a Prussian officer was brought to us, a French Captain was also carried to the house. It is his conversion that I am relating, because it was due

completely to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin. Because he wouldn't give up until the battle was ended, he had been gravely wounded. We placed him in the nicest room; it was well ventilated and the best heated room in the house. However, the poor Captain was not well and subjected us to every excess of his bad moods. He had a very bad wound on one arm, and, as he had remained over forty-eight hours on the battlefield after it happened, gangrene had developed. The next morning the physician declared that the arm had to be amputated. In his most military tone the Captain said: 'Never will I give my consent to cut off my arm, Doctor; I would rather die.' In spite of this statement, the physician told us to alert the city's chief surgeon and made an appointment for five o'clock that evening.

"The unfortunate Captain appeared even more sullen than the previous evening and he swore and cursed everyone and everything. The new examination of the wound confirmed the first diagnosis and the doctors knew that an amputation was absolutely necessary; but the patient remained adamant and said he preferred to die.

"The next day his condition was so much worse that the physician wondered if he could even survive the amputation. Since conditions were such, I begged the doctors to delay the surgery and allow me to apply a simple dressing for that day. 'Do whatever you please, Sister; that man is as good as dead.'

"As I went back into the man's room, I found him in a more thoughtful frame of mind. 'What do you think, Sister?' he said. 'Must I let them cut off my arm?' 'How can I form an opinion' I answered 'when the chief surgeons of the city have already spoken? Let me give you one word of advice. Let us begin a novena to the Blessed Virgin together, and, please, accept this medal.' The sick man did not answer but he permitted me to act. I began the novena; he said not a word, not even making the sign of the cross.

"When the doctors examined him again, they declared that there was some slight improvement, but his condition remained critical and his fever was very high. I had introduced the Captain to one of the parish priests who visited him quite often, but found him so quiet and withdrawn that he did not even mention confession. The improvement continued, and, a few days later, the doctors were able to tell the patient that he would not lose his arm after all. What did concern them, however, was the persistent fever and total lack of sleep and appetite.

"On the fifteenth night, the Captain began vomiting blood; then he had three more attacks and each time the blood seemed brighter. Needless to say, I became quite anxious. I asked him, 'Were you by any chance also wounded in the chest?' 'Yes,' he said; 'before my arm was hurt, I was hit in the chest by a bullet; it landed against a piece of money in my pocket; I felt a bit dizzy for a moment, then I went back and joined my comrades.' 'God

must have something special in store for you,' I said, 'to have protected you that way.' He never answered me.

"The next day, in mid-morning the physicians were convinced that he had an abscess in his lung and judged his condition to be very critical. It was the end of November. The enemy had retreated from the city but were to return a month later. When the French retook Orléans, the poor Captain was very excited; this became even greater as the day progressed because of an event which greatly moved all of us. The soldiers, who had been under his command and had searched for him in so many field hospitals, had learned where their chief was; they came and pleaded with us to allow them to see him, assuring us that they wouldn't tire him, and would be content if they could walk past him in silence. I could not refuse them that consolation; so I allowed them into the room and witnessed a scene that was very moving. Those brave soldiers entered the sick room silently, removed their helmets in respect for their chief, saluted him and left in tears.

"Nevertheless, I was more and more concerned about his soul; so I began a second novena to the Blessed Virgin. It seemed as if our good Mother heard me, for, after four days of delirium and vomiting, a sudden improvement took place and continued until it appeared as if his cure was certain. In spite of this seemingly miraculous grace, I still received no response when I spoke about it.

"The Captain had been getting up for several days when the rumor began spreading that the enemy was coming back. I thought it my duty to tell him, but he didn't believe me. 'Impossible Sister!' he cried. 'You see yourself that we are making advances on every side. The French are in Paris.' The next day I had to destroy his illusions and tactfully tell him: 'Captain, we will certainly not put you out, but, as your arm is healed and your health more or less restored, if you remain here you could be taken as a prisoner to Prussia, and that would upset us very much.' He reflected for a few moments and then picked up the newspaper. 'Impossible!' he said again. In the midst of these events a commander came to visit and soon clarified the situation for him. When I went up to his room, the Captain was ready and overwhelmed with gratitude. He came downstairs for the first time in two months and left at a gallop by carriage, as the trains had already been seized by the enemy.

"While I was trying to settle him as comfortably as possible, I said, in the presence of those with him: 'Remember, Captain, that three times you have escaped certain death; twice in this house and once on the battlefield, and that it is to the Blessed Virgin that you owe your life. Do not forget this because God wants something from you.' 'I understand, Sister,' he answered, 'and I promise that I will not be ungrateful.' The chimes struck three, and by eight o'clock the enemies were at the gates of the city.

"Thus began another series of pain and anguish; many more wounded men were brought to us. They, at least, compensated us by their sincere

return to God. We prayed together morning and evening; we also talked about the beautiful feast of Christmas which was near, and was celebrated with such joy at home. A week before that great day, one of the men asked me if there was any possibility of receiving the Sacrament of Penance and being able to go to Communion at Christmas. When I answered affirmatively, many others expressed the same desire. Among them were several who had not been to confession for over twenty years; only two had remained faithful since the time of their first Communion.

"A priest from the parish came to visit the wounded men and spent eight days preparing them. Christmas finally arrived; at eight o'clock the priest entered the hospital and brought the Blessed Sacrament, having walked through many streets which were filled with enemy troops. An altar, a magnificently illuminated Creche and, above all, the well prepared hearts of the men were awaiting Him. When the priest got ready to speak, the sobs and cries of the men drowned out his voice and he had to wait because his own heart, too, was full. In the midst of such general desolation, it just seemed like too much happiness. God was spoiling us, as the soldiers said.

"In the midst of sadness mixed with consolations, the 15th of February, 1871 arrived. The armistice had been signed and the French soldiers were able to move about freely. One day, Captain X____ was announced. 'How are you?' I said, 'I thought you were far away from here.' 'Indeed,' he answered, 'I have come five hundred miles and have traveled all night to carry out the vow which I made to the Blessed Virgin. You see, I have not forgotten what you told me as I got into the carriage.' 'Captain,' I said, 'you are a man of your word. You know how to recognize God's goodness, and you lose nothing in doing it.' 'But, Sister,' he said, 'I want to do all that I promised, only I must tell you that I know very little about religious matters. What must I do to make a pilgrimage?' First he had to be in the state of grace, so I advised him to see the priest who had visited him so often while he was sick. He did this, and after making his confession, his peace and happiness were so great that he couldn't contain them.

"The next day the pilgrimage took place and a Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated. This example had a profound effect on our soldiers, and contributed a great deal in confirming them in the way of goodness and right.

"Before leaving, the Captain came to visit me again and said with the simplicity of a child: 'This is not all, Sister; after having begun well, it is necessary to continue well. I have much good will, but I foresee some big obstacles.' I gave him some advice which he said he would follow; and I prayed for him faithfully.

"A year later, the officer returned to this house where he was healed both in body and soul, and, with much openness, he told me how he had overcome all the difficulties. 'First of all,' he said, 'I put a statue of the Blessed Virgin in my room, and also a Crucifix and the Imitation from which I read

every day. That was not the most difficult; only my servant noticed changes in my life. One day, however, I was eating with fifty officers who had known my past life, and to whom I had to reveal the transformation which had been made in me. It was a terrible moment, but I felt that everything depended on this first minute. So I took up my courage and made the sign of the Cross. Four of my companions made it with me, but all the others exploded in peals of laughter. I controlled my anger and remained quiet. 'Laugh, my good men,' I said, 'when you have finished I will tell you the rest of the story.' Then in a few words I told them how Divine Providence had brought about my conversion. I added a few serious words and announced that I had resolved, that having returned to the Church, I was determined to remain faithful to God and my duties forever."

In the midst of those charitable and sympathetic actions which the misfortunes of war initiated in Brittany, the Sisters of Bon Secours also had many occasions to display all the resources of their bravery and kindness. In the town of Morlaix they were placed in charge of a field hospital which served four hundred wounded; the women from the town came to help them and shared their fatigue and the vigils.

Toward the end of the war, these women wanted to come together for a whole night to spend the time in prayer before God, and thus appease His just anger. They wondered how they would be able to do it; for the rigorous cold in the parish churches did not lend itself to encouraging this type of action.

The Superior at Bon Secours was present at this meeting, and offered them the use of the little convent chapel. Immediately they collected and sent everything possible to enhance their devotions; armed with the consent of the Pastor to whom they had submitted their program, a certain number of the women arrived about ten o'clock at night. Until morning, prayers and hymns were offered to Jesus in the Eucharist; and, at five o'clock, the Pastor of St. Martin's parish celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and distributed the Bread of Life to all who were present. Thus they each went their way, and the hearts that had been so heavily felt relieved at having been able to pour out their tears of supplication before the Lord throughout the night.

Before we move into the subject of the Commune, there are two facts in the writings of Father Ruat, Chaplain of the Mother House, which shed almost Divine light on that long and painful trial.

In the hospital station at the Mother House there was a young infantry man who had a very advanced case of lung disease. On the eve of All Saints day, he went to see the Chaplain, who had often noticed him and considered him loyal and intelligent. "Father," he said, "*I come like the others*" (the influence of the Sisters had been such that not one of the soldiers let the Feast of All Saints pass without having fulfilled their duties as Christians)

"to make my confession, but I really do not know what you will be able to do for me." "I know," said the good priest, "I know you; you have a good heart and are very frank and open." "That may be so," replied the boy, "but until these last weeks here, I would have killed you and all priests, and really believed that I was doing something good. I have never entered a church except out of curiosity and, until now, I never spoke of religion except to say something bad. With the exception of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul who are so good to the poor, I have always believed that priests and sisters were play-actors and fools. But since I have come here, I have watched you very closely, and you have knocked out my prejudices. Since I was mistaken, help me to find my way out of sin."

Father Ruat was very moved by the young man's words, and talked with him for a long time about his past life. The priest learned that the boy was quite young when his father died; his mother remarried. He had five brothers who were all free thinkers and communists. His name was Chassey and the unfortunate boy could neither read nor write; but his dealings with men had developed his intelligence, and, extraordinary as it is, he believed in God. "Common sense," he said, "proves to me that the world did not make itself, that there is an all powerful Being who is the first principle of all things and who created all things."

When grace had penetrated this boy's heart, marvelous things happened. Sister St. Bruno was assigned to teach him the Catechism, and at the end of eight days he knew more than all of his companions, and was ready to make his first Communion. On the evening before this great day, Sister St. Bruno wished to make him understand what a great honor the King of Heaven bestowed on us when He came into our hearts. So she began her little instruction with a comparison which resulted in an effect that was totally unexpected. She said, "If the Emperor Napoleon came into your workroom" (the young soldier's father and brothers were shoemakers), "he would have conferred an honor on you."

At these words the soldier bounded from his chair. "*Bandinguet!*" he yelled furiously, "If he came to our place I would throw him out the door." And making a gesture of how he would do it, he fled from the room.

Sister St. Bruno was very upset and hurried to tell the Chaplain who arrived at just that moment. Chassey arrived a few minutes later appearing very glum; he said to Father, "I cannot make my first Communion, I let myself become angry."

The good priest finally calmed the young man and asked him the reasons for his apparent hatred of the emperor. It seems that the young soldier had been a member of a Masonic group of which Napoleon was the leader; and being at such close proximity he was able to form a judgement concerning the emperor's hypocrisy, and he thought it was contemptible.

The Chaplain finally succeeded in making him understand that it was natural to feel some sentiment of hate toward certain persons, but that it was necessary to reject these feelings for the love of God. "Oh! then I can make my first Communion because that is what I said to the good God."

The next day's ceremony was very moving; and the piety of the first communicant brought tears to the eyes of all who were present.

A few days later, it was necessary for the doctors to send young Chassey home to his family, in order to make room for a new arrival. The lung disease from which he suffered could continue for a long period of time. The evening before his departure, he said to the Chaplain: "Father, the Sisters affirm that Holy Communion gives strength. I am going to need a large amount of it to struggle against my brothers, who are all communists. Please permit me to receive Communion one more time before I leave."

You can imagine Father Ruat's eagerness to comply with the request, and with what deep affection he hugged the brave young man the next day when he departed. So much care and concern had been given him at Bon Secours, that he left the house filled with deep emotion.

A month later—in the midst of the Commune—Father Ruat received a letter from him. It said: "Father, I am at St. Martin's Hospital. I am going to die. Please come to see me, do not refuse me this consolation.

At that time the wearing of the soutane was prohibited, so Father disguised himself as a workman with a large apron and a big red handkerchief tied around his neck; this completely changed his appearance. He took a bus to St. Martin's Hospital; he played the part indicated by his costume and asked for Citizen Chassey. When the young man saw through the disguise, he burst into tears. His fever had been very high and he was delighted and grateful for the oranges which Father had brought him. Then he talked about going to confession. "But," he said, "I have not found any sins, unless it is, that I have complained a lot about having to suffer. Though you don't know it, Father, I have performed a great miracle. My brothers and my brothers-in-law have decided to change their ideas; and they have all sworn to do as I have done and become good Christians."

The dying man had to make the sacrifice of not receiving Holy Communion because the communists kept guards in every door and passageway. He died the next day, talking to the very last of the priests and good Sisters who had given him the great happiness of knowing God and dying as a Christian.

One of the most beautiful victories of God's grace, during those sinister months of the siege and the Commune, was the conversion of Father Clabaud, after which he became a rival of Blessed Benedict Labre. He died a few years later at Amiens, having given his fellow citizens the example of

heroic charity. It was Mother St. Mechtilde who had the joy of leading that beautiful soul to God.

In 1870 the young Clabaud was a Master Sargent in the army at Somme. He was wounded at the time of the siege of Paris and admitted to the field hospital on the Rue du Regard. He appreciated both beauty and goodness and seemed to grow in the charitable atmosphere which the Sisters tried to create all around them. Though he was the son of a grain merchant, he had been educated and was a poet by nature. Mother St. Mechtilde soon won his trust and confidence, and had such a good influence on him that he went to see Father Ruat for Confession, and returned to a Christian way of life.

As soon as his health permitted, he participated in Mass each day in the little chapel in the Orphanage; and very often his deep voice could be heard with those of the children during the holy Sacrifice. He had his own special manner of singing this hymn which expressed his feeling so well:

*They are no more, those days of tears;
I have once again found peace of heart
Since I have tasted the goodness
Of the tabernacles of the Lord.*

He was already acting like an apostle, and worked with the Sisters among the other wounded men. One of them, in a bed near his own, used to swear almost all the time; and this behavior upset the nursing Sisters, who had tried in vain to break him of the habit. Young Clabaut helped them accomplish this, and then had the happiness of being instrumental in his companion's conversion. The war ended; young Clabaut returned to his father in Amiens where he helped him in his business, but he remained in close contact with both Mother St. Mechtilde and Father Ruat through frequent letters. One day that good priest received a letter from him which contained some very interesting things; in fact it was almost as good as a novel. It seems that one day he was on a train, and some of his fellow travellers were Royalists who were on their way to Anvers to greet the Count of Chambord. Suddenly, he felt very impressed by the exiled prince's cause and, then and there, he composed some verses in his honor. He decided to go with the other gentlemen to Anvers, was admitted to the audience room and even authorized to recite his verses. Count de Chambord was very touched; he applauded warmly and told Mr. de Conti, his secretary, to carefully preserve the poem. A few days later the Prince sent a gentleman from Amiens to congratulate the young man on his poem, and thus return the visit the latter had made to him.

These events soon became known and drew attention to the grain merchant's son. Two very advantageous marriages were also proposed, and

Clabaud, not knowing which decision to make, asked Father Ruat for his advice; he also asked the good Sisters for their prayers, especially Mother St. Mechtilde, whom he loved like a mother. A novena of Masses was begun and had not yet been completed when another letter arrived. "I am leaving the world and all it has to offer," wrote the young man, "God is calling me; I wish to be a Jesuit and a missionary."

In spite of his father's resistance and discontent, young Clabaut entered the novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers. His piety and ardor edified his companions so much that they called him saint Clabaut. Nevertheless, at the end of five years his superiors declared that he did not have a vocation to the religious life and that he would do more good out in the world.

The poor young man's soul was very sad and turned once again to the Chaplain at Bon Secours. He confided that he was determined to become a missionary. The wise old priest did his best to remind him that his religious superiors had examined his case thoroughly, and had not spoken without having sought light from heaven; and, also, that he could serve God's cause very efficaciously in the world.

Young Clabaut would not listen and, since his father refused to support him financially so he could do as he planned, he set out for Rome on foot, begging his food along the way. When he arrived in the Eternal City, he continued his life of privation in imitation of Blessed Labre. During the day he followed a course of philosophy and theology at the French seminary, and in his free time he visited and cared for the poorest among the sick and shared with them the bread he had begged. He was ordained a priest in Rome, and persevered in his life of abnegation. Mother St. Mechtilde continued to sustain him with encouragement, admiring the workings of God's grace. A few years later, he was called back to France at the death of his father. He settled in Amiens and converted his family home into a hospital. After this, he dedicated himself more than ever to the care of the sick poor. During an epidemic of typhoid fever which struck the city, he picked up a poor man lying in the street who was sick with the disease, and took him home. He became a victim of his heroic dedication and died a few days later of the same illness.

Mother St. Mechtilde was dead; she left this world in 1886. But Father Ruat, who was also instrumental in that marvelous conversion, learned . . . from the newspaper that the city of Amiens had provided him with a magnificent funeral, and that he had died performing his charitable work.

Please pardon this digression which, it is true, has taken us from the events which were taking place in the spring of 1871.

The threats announced by the followers of the Internationale and the Commune were fulfilled, and in the capital, which had already been through so many trials, brother killing brother took the place of the war with

foreigners. On the 18th of March, the power fell into the hands of a group of imposters and evil men who were not satisfied to see France humiliated and mutilated; they encouraged any and all activities which would overthrow the social institutions. Foreign newsmen⁸² could, without any exaggeration, compare Paris to the devil's crucible in which every sort of passion was boiling.

The conclusion, reached after profound study of those terrible days, was that above all else it was an attack on God and on religion. The Commune was scarcely established when they hurriedly decreed the separation of Church and state, which, according to their understanding, meant suppression and extermination of all Christian ideas. Their sentiments were clearly expressed by Raoul Rigault, when he brutally declared to a servant of Father Deguerry, pastor of the Church of the Madeleine: "There is no God; our revolution is made against your God, your religion and your priests. Nothing is to remain of all of that."

It is not surprising, then, that their first act was to seize the churches. Every day during the months of April and May, they made the rounds to sack, pillage and profane them. "More than thirty of our religious edifices were used to house clubs which vied with each other in violence and sacrilege. Every bloody action which the human mind could madly conceive was applauded there; it seemed as if being in a house of God provoked a devilish hatred," writes Mr. Lecanvet.

The Lord's temples became theaters of indescribable scenes, of scenes Father Perraud, the future Bishop of Autun, justly called "a mystery of horrible iniquity."⁸³ Bossuet said: "*It is truly the hour of darkness and the power of evil*, for everywhere blasphemy is part of the orgies, as if to dare the God who holds the punishing scourge suspended over our heads."

Far from wishing to recall those memories which all Christians and Frenchmen would rather wipe out with their blood, we prefer to recall these words of Father de Pontmartin because they are very applicable to our subject: "It is miraculous, and outside of all estimates and human probability, that a single religious edifice has remained standing. God has preserved His temples better than the most powerful on this earth have been able to preserve their palaces."

The Sisters of Bon Secours were also able to feel this touch of God's protection; and it seemed to be even more marvelous because they were situated in the center of most of the danger. In fact, during forty-eight hours the battle between the regular troops and the Confederates took place in the immediate vicinity of the Mother House: Rue de Rennes, Rue Notre Dame des Champs, and Boulevard Montparnasse. The house was surrounded by barricades and, as the Confederates lost ground, they left some rebels behind them to set fire to the houses against which the barricades stood. They used gasoline and several barrels of gun powder to increase the

damage. Stanislas College, which is next door to the Bon Secours Mother House, had been designated to be burned, and it was only by a miracle that it was saved.

One of the Sisters tells her companion about the sudden turn of events in the battle, and of the prayers of thanksgiving which were offered by everyone:

"Oh, yes! All Glory to God! All thanks to Our Lady of Bon Secours! Yes, give glory to God, dear Sister, because the day we have waited for so long has arrived. Yesterday, the 24th of May, patronal feast of the Congregation, the soldiers from Versailles took over this area and delivered us from the hands of our persecutors. For two days the battle has raged at our door; during the night of the 23rd—24th the men from Versailles were at the West train station and the Federal troops were in the Rue de Rennes near St-Germain-des-Pres. As you can see we were between two fires. The cannons and guns made so much noise, you would have thought we were on the battlefield; and the darkness was absolute. I am not able to tell you all that we felt or experienced, but I know that the impressions of it will never be erased from our memories. Finally, towards noon, the Versaillaises chased the Federal troops, who fled down the Rue de Vaugiard; but in their fury at being conquered, they intended to set fire to the barrels of explosives around the Luxembourg Palace. Fortunately a slight delay in the execution of that horrible act of vengeance saved our liberators. Nevertheless, the reverberations were so great that many of the windows in the house as well as in the Chapel were broken, but those in the sanctuary remained intact. At first view, this seemed like a terrible disaster; but when we considered how wonderfully God had protected us in comparison to so many other communities, we were able to express our gratitude from the very depths of our hearts . . . 'You are so good, Lord, and Your mercy is so great!'

Think of all that has happened, Sister. The Archbishop, the Vicar General, who was our Ecclesiastical Superior and the pastor of the Church of the Madeleine, along with sixty other priests and members of religious orders were executed as hostages; religious were under house arrest in their convents without Mass since Sunday; the Picpus Sisters were put in jail; the churches were profaned; Notre Dame des Victoires was odiously insulted, the tabernacles were ripped open, the sacred vessels were stolen, and did I tell you that the Blessed Virgin was smeared with filth? The Holy Eucharist was crushed under foot as if to annihilate God Himself . . . During that entire time, we, who certainly were not without sin, had our priests and altars, our Mass and Benediction, and God in our tabernacles; and we were able to have perpetual adoration since Holy Thursday *without interruption*. Why? God alone knows and His plans are unfathomable. Our entire lives will be too short for us to be grateful for such goodness.

This marvelous protection was also extended to the Orphanage in Rue du Regard. One day Mother St. Mechtilde was told that a band of communists was at the door and demanded to see her; they had come to hang a red flag on the facade of the house. The Superior brought them to the dining room and served them wine and refreshments. In the meantime, she explained calmly that their claims were mistaken as the Orphanage did not belong to the government. Contrary to all expectations, the delegation did not say a word but took their flag and left; in other similar situations the same arguments and explanations had not convinced them.

At the Mother House, as at the Orphanage, their courage rose to meet each new demand. It was learned that the Sisters of Bon Secours were on the list of hostages. Mother St. Cecile calmly considered the prospect of being chosen as a victim, but Mother St. Camille, the Assistant, had given this strict order to the Sister Portress: 'If they ask for the Superior General, call me; I would be only too happy to go and die in our Mother's place.'

During that long, sad winter, the Sisters had the great consolation of leading many souls back to God, from among the wounded men who died in the field hospitals. There were many reluctant ones but the miraculous medal fulfilled its task and all who passed through our hands received the last Sacraments and died good deaths. The priests from St. Jacques du Haut Pas helped us tremendously in the field hospital at the School for the Deaf and Dumb; especially Father Rataud, who was admirable in his work among our poor soldiers. He was later to become Pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires."

At the field hospital of the Corps Legislatif, which was opened in October, 1870, there were six Sisters of Bon Secours. Among others, there were Sister Marie de la Visitation and Sister St. Alphonsine; the former we met at Tuileries in 1848 and the latter we will meet again in 1886 as Mistress of Novices. The Sisters exerted such a good and lasting influence on the patients in that hospital that all the men, officers and soldiers alike were converted. Numerous events give proof that in those rooms of suffering the Sisters were truly angels of peace and charity. The following outline is one such proof:

A poor Zouave soldier, who was to have both of his legs amputated, was terrified at the very thought of the operation; and in his fear he cried out: "Sister," he said, "please, give me your scapular. I think it will help me not to scream during the operation." Sister complied with his request and, from then on he seemed full of courage. He died the next day begging Sister to write to his mother that he had died a good Christian.

An organist from Strasbourg also died in a most edifying manner in that same place. His last words were: "Thank you, Sister. Thank you for everything you have done for me. I am so happy; never have I been so happy. I have only one regret in leaving this world and that is not to be able to see my mother again."

One day, a broom merchant was carried into the hospital; he was one of the organizers of the Commune. He had been wounded and, as he was in great suffering, he cried out in spite of himself: "Sister, do something for me, isn't there anything you can do for me?" "Yes, I can do something for you," Sister answered softly; "I can find the Chaplain who will give you what you need more than anything else—peace." "Well, yes, I am willing," he said. When he had made his confession and received Holy Viaticum he was completely changed and acknowledged that he was at peace. His wife, a real demon, repeated incessantly: "Oh! those Versaillais, I would kill them all if I could." "Be quiet," he responded, "you do not know what you are saying. For myself, if I had it to do over again, I would not do what I have done." In spite of the shameful oaths and insults with which his wife taunted him, he remained calm and serene and died a holy death.

In this same hospital there was a young infantryman who had led a scandalous life before the war. The day he arrived, one of the Sisters, who thought that his condition was very poor, asked him if he wished to go to Confession. "I did go to Confession when I was a prisoner in Prussia," he said, "but I am willing to begin again." Then, with great simplicity he asked Sister to help him relearn his prayers. She will never forget the emotion felt as he took the book and learned again the holy words which his mother had taught him. He died praying the *Credo*.

One of the victories of grace which gave special joy to the Sisters was that of a little peasant boy brought to hospital whose legs had been crushed by a truck. The poor child had not been baptized and did not even know there was a God. The Chaplain baptized him and the grace of the Sacrament produced marvelous effects on him, and he asked to learn the Catechism. He was very intelligent, so the task was easy, and soon he was ready to make his first Communion.

When he had received Jesus within his heart, he was transformed. "Now," he said, "I do not want anything else. I wish to go to heaven to get to know the good God." His sufferings were tremendous and continued til his last moments. His legs fell off in pieces, and he offered up all his pain for the conversion of his family and for the Church. When his lips were dry, he even refused to take a drink so as to have something more to offer to God. When asked if he was suffering very much, he replied: "O yes, and sometimes I have a hard time not to cry, but when I think of heaven, that gives me courage." The Sisters were ingenious in trying to help him forget his pains and sometimes wanted to read him a story, but he would stop them saying: "Oh! I don't like that, talk to me about the good God." When the moment of death approached he did not know how to thank the Chaplain and the good Sisters: "I have nothing to give you," he said, "but since I will be able to pray in heaven, I will pray *tout plein* (very much) for you."

At the field hospital at Stanislas College the conversions were neither less numerous nor less consoling. That hospital was the principal annex of the Val-de-Grace; there were one hundred beds. The college personnel with the help of the Sisters of Bon Secours gave care to some five hundred and

seventy one wounded or sick military men. Father de Lagarde, the director of the college, was the soul and animating spirit of the place. "He had the opportunity," says his historian, "to make use of his many great qualities; a wisdom which anticipated everything, a care and concern for others which did not count the cost, and a patriotism which his religious sentiments raised to a heroic degree."

In letters which his family preserved, Father de Lagarde describes the physiognomy of that house of pain where Divine Grace made an atmosphere of peace descend. "Our hospital functioned under marvelous conditions; and before the siege it was cited as a model field hospital. Our Brothers vied with one another in zeal and devotion under the direction of the Sisters of Bon Secours; two of them went to each group of ten soldiers, and they cared for them day and night with real concern.

Those poor soldiers, for the most part, arrived with hands, feet and clothes in a pitiful condition. When you saw them a few hours later, a complete transformation had been made; they were already half cured as soon as they knew they were being well cared for. On Wednesday to Friday of last week, we prepared a three day retreat for them; they all went to confession and received Holy Communion on Sunday morning. That evening the solemn reception of the scapular took place. Saturday was one of the most consoling days of my priesthood . . . An example of the power of the Sacraments: A sailor, who had come from one of our strongholds, appeared to want his illness prolonged; it was evident that he was afraid to return to the front lines. It was announced that he was to depart before the end of our three days of prayer; he decided to go to confession the night before his departure. He received Holy Communion the next morning and came down from the chapel full of joy and courage. 'Now,' he said, 'I am no longer afraid of the Prussians, and I am ready to go to battle!' He threw his arm about me and left, with the promise that, if he came this way again, he would not miss coming to see me."

After the surrender of the capital, Captain Trestour, the officer in charge who had made his headquarters at Stanislas College, made his farewells to the administrative staff and to the personnel of the hospital. We will quote a few of his moving words: "There are certain moments in life which we cannot forget, can never forget. Of all of the catastrophes in my long military career, the one I have shared with you will always remain stamped in my memory, carved in my soul and living in my heart; in that we have all suffered with courage, without weakness and sustained by our Christian faith."

Captain Trestour was an excellent man, but throughout his long military career, especially during the twenty-five years stay in Africa, he had forgotten the practice of his religious duties. "When he saw the boundless

dedication of the Director, his aides and the Sisters of Bon Secours which only religion could inspire; when he witnessed the consoling religious ceremonies and heard Father de Lagarde's warmhearted words which eloquently touched the wounded and the sick and led them back to God, the Captian was deeply moved and more than once he was caught off guard with tears of compassion and pity running down his face. He took to himself Father de Lagarde's words and came back to the practice of the religion of his childhood years. Captain Trestour did not forget either Stanislas College or the friends he had left there when he departed; and, when the occasion permitted, he never missed an opportunity to visit Father de Lagarde."⁸⁴

Chapter XX

Foundation at London

1870—1871

During the summer of 1870, and shortly before the declaration of war, Mother St. Fabien had been designated to visit the houses of the Congregation in Ireland; but, before going to Dublin, she stopped in London to gather some information concerning a foundation that was proposed to be made in that city.

Father Anderdon, who resided there as the private secretary of his uncle, the Archbishop of Westminster, was of great help to her in these circumstances; and after Mother St. Fabien's departure, he continued the negotiations which had been begun. Everything seemed to go as planned and nothing could have even suggested the difficulties and mishaps which hell would stir up against that work.

A certain Mr. B____, whose sister had been nursed by one of the religious from Cork, had a great desire to contribute to the establishment of a community of Nursing Sisters in London. He had already accepted all of the required conditions, and had personally promised to undertake the expenses for their installation, the search for a suitable house and the payment of the rent for the first two years. Father Anderdon wrote to Mother St. Fabien: "Mr. B____ asks that the Superior General designate at least twelve Sisters for this foundation, and that they should be ready to leave at the first signal. The choice of a superior for a city like London is of

very great importance; as she cannot avoid meeting many difficulties and dealing with many very different types of people; she must also have a large supply of prudence, competence, charity and a sense of humor. Of course I will be close by to encourage and support her; this will be a glorious field for zeal and merit."

By the 30th of August, everything appeared to be prepared. Once more Mr. B_____ had guaranteed the required sum for the foundation. Father Anderdon had found a house near a church, which was a very necessary condition, because, due to the scarcity of priests it was not possible to have a chaplain. The neighborhood was good, the air healthy and the communication and transportation facilities quite adequate. Over and above all this, the Pastor of the parish was delighted at the thought of having a convent at his door step. He invited Father Anderdon to preach on the following Sunday on the good work of religious communities.

Father quickly sent the good news to Mother St. Fabien. "God be praised," he said, "you will have a temporary lodging! I have just come from seeing Mr. B_____ who again assured me that all of your expenses will be reimbursed and that in a few months—that is, towards the end of the year—he will give the funds needed for the purchase of a house. He expects to raise the money by means of a fund raising drive. Tomorrow, his agent will make arrangements for the furnishings . . ."

In effect, according to the agreement stipulated by him, Mr. B_____ was to furnish the new convent according to the instructions sent to his sister by the Mother House.

A few days later the French Army underwent the first of many setbacks. Father sent Mother word that, if the circumstances necessitated that the Sisters' departure for London be advanced, he would easily find them a place to stay. "And I am sure," he added, "that Miss B_____ will most certainly offer hospitality to several of you."

Mother St. Beatrix had completed nine years as Superior at Abbeville and had been designated for this new post. She went to Boulogne and waited there with Sisters St. Veronique and St. Colomban to board the ship. In light of the existing conditions, the General Council considered this foundation as providential, and desired to expedite its establishment. Relying on the instructions received from Paris, as well as on the assurances which had come from London, and seeing the events precipitating and panic spreading, Mother St. Beatrix believed that they should leave on the 7th of September. She wanted to arrive in England on the 8th, our Lady's birthday, so that the cradle of that new foundation would be under the protection of the Virgin at its inception.

Her filial confidence in Mary was not misplaced. That good Mother manifested her protection in conditions which were quite different from what Mother had expected.

The voyage was made in great sadness. They left the country a prey to the horrors of invasion, and their hearts contracted at the thought of the sufferings to which the Mother House would be exposed. To add to this, the crossing was very unpleasant as the sea was agitated; and the three religious felt depleted by fatigue when they disembarked at St. Catherine's Docks on the morning of the 8th of September. Father Anderdon had not received the notice of the Sisters' arrival, and there was no one to welcome them or guide them about the big city. Mother St. Beatrix was not disturbed; she arranged that they be taken to the Archbishop's residence at York Place, and she was happy to meet Father Anderdon there. Seeing her, he took a cross and presented it to her as he said: "Mother, my giving you this cross is not without significance." The pale, troubled faces of the travellers betrayed their fatigue and anguish; so, without another word, he lead them to the Archbishop's apartments. The prelate blessed them, and then gave Mother St. Beatrix the news that he had for her.

Three days before, Mr. B____, frightened by the disasters of the war and the unfortunate consequences which could affect his business, had withdrawn his support; thus failing to keep his given word. Because of this, the house had not been rented and the Sisters had no home.

The distress of that moment was very great, but a person so abandoned to God, as was Mother St. Beatrix, could not be alarmed. It was not possible to even think about returning to France because of the recent events there; so her only alternative was to continue the journey and join their Sisters in Ireland. When she voiced her idea to the Archbishop, however, he quickly responded: "No, no, Mother, you are in London, and in London you will remain." Mother St. Beatrix humbly replied: "Your Eminence, I am totally disposed to do the will of God. Send me wherever it pleases you." This response seemed to light up the prelate's austere features, and a ray of joy passed over his face as he replied: "Your vocation is truly God's work because the devil has tried in many ways to thwart your establishment here."

While this dialogue was taking place, Father Anderdon quickly went to Blandford Square, where the Irish Sisters of Mercy lived. He told the Superior of that convent the situation and distress of the Sisters of Bon Secours. Father returned full of joy; the little group was impatiently awaited and the most sisterly welcome was prepared for them.

In Mother St. Beatrix's *Souvenirs* can be read: "A pen of gold is needed to recount the reception we were given, and it was but the prelude to a hospitality which it is not possible to describe. At the thought of this one memory, my heart expands and tears of gratitude fill my eyes. The Mother Assistant came down the front steps, stood before us with open arms and hugged us affectionately as she welcomed us."

The generosity of the Irish soul was revealed in that blessed house. The Sisters of Mercy had welcomed the Benedictines, the Dominicans and the Daughters of the Cross in the same way. They had all come to London to prepare a refuge for their Mother Houses in case the situation and events made it necessary for them to leave France.

Mother St. Beatrix found herself to be the eldest of nineteen exiles and was surrounded with much respect and kind attention. She recited the *Benedicite* and the *Grace* and presided at meals. The first evening, the French religious were asked to take part in the community recreation; it was touching to see the Sisters gather around the new arrivals and try, even though in poor French, to express their happiness at being able to offer them hospitality, and how they felt about the unfortunate conditions in France.

One of Mother St. Beatrix's companions spoke with emotion of the delicate, sensitive charity of the Sisters of Mercy: "Throughout our whole lives we will preserve a very profound gratitude towards those most generous women who will certainly enjoy the reward promised by Jesus Christ to those who have put the beatitudes into practice; because we had no shelter and they housed us, we had nothing to eat or drink and they gave us everything that was necessary, etc; and they did that for five long weeks." Doubtless, those charitable Sisters had already experienced the sweetness of these words: "*He who gives others the wine of charity to drink will himself be filled with delight.*"

Seeing themselves so visibly helped, and strengthened by Archbishop Manning's encouragement, Mother St. Beatrix believed she was corresponding with the divine will by taking part in the search for a temporary dwelling. However, this task took several weeks; and it was not until the 15th of October, feast of St. Teresa, that the Sisters of Bon Secours were able to take possession of the place which they had found. It was a small, poor house, but God looked on it with love, because it was to shelter dedicated women who were humble and generous.

That dwelling was found at Kentish Town to the north of London and near to the church dedicated to Our Lady Help of Christians. This coincidence tore a cry of gratitude from the heart of Sister X____: "O providence of God, how marvelous you are, and how impenetrable are your ways! Who could believe that, in leaving France, distancing ourselves from our dear Mother House and that blessed chapel, consecrated to the Virgin of Bon Secours, we were going to find ourselves in our exile once more under the banner of the beloved Patronness? How we love the little church; it is so simple in appearance! We find it to be quite beautiful, especially the painting representing Our Lady with Jesus, the precious fruit of her womb!"

The Pastor of the parish, Father Connelly, who was of Irish descent, looked on the Sisters as sent from heaven. He had a continual, growing

interest and concern for them, and was very energetic since theirs was the first religious community in his parish. "The day we arrived," relates one of the Sisters, "he came to visit us in our little house. Yes, it was certainly poor; a few potatoes, two or three cups, and one or two old bowls made up our entire possessions. On the whitewashed, or better said yellow, walls there was absolutely nothing, nothing but the dust which was more or less thick. Father was struck by this, and when he went home he immediately began to carve us a wooden crucifix. As soon as he had completed the work, he brought it to us and hung it on the wall of our little community room. We still possess this precious crucifix; it remains as a testimony to our first works in London and helps us bear up under privations and fatigue. It is a relic and cherished souvenir of the foundresses of the community."

As news of the Nursing Sisters' arrival spread through the neighborhood, it was not long before their care was being sought. Even though several more Sisters came from France to join them, they were too few to answer all the calls; and Mother St. Beatrix was obliged to refuse a request to an English Lord. During her stay at Blandford Square, Mother had occasion to meet Lady Fullerton, the well known Catholic writer; and this great woman was filled with much admiration for their work, the full import of which she understood. She sent a flattering article to the *Tablet* concerning the Sisters of Bon Secours which certainly contributed to making them known and appreciated.

No matter what was done, the Sisters were overtaxed, and, after a full day's work, they often got up during the night to go to a dying person. "Even though we are very tired and harassed," writes the same Sister, "in reality we are very happy. Mother St. Beatrix often said that our convent was a little model community; the silence was rigorously kept, recreation was well understood and integrated, and charity was observed in all its many forms. Union and peace were the base and foundation of all of this. What an example the Sisters had right before their very eyes! Mother St. Beatrix was the gifted woman spoken of in Holy Scripture."

She was filled with peace and practiced the virtue of abandonment; these dispositions were revealed by means of her letters to the Superior General written during those difficult early days. "Do not torment yourself about us, Mother," she wrote on the 1st of February when communications were re-established. "We lack many things but we have all that is really necessary; we sleep on the kind pillow of Divine Providence. Each morning I say with the poet:

"He nourishes the little birds and extends
His goodness to all of creation."

"I will not speak about our tears and sufferings; that is understandable. This is not the time to complain, but to bow to God's will. In order to do this

and to preserve my energy and motivation, I call to mind, my good Mother, you and our Sisters who are suffering so many privations and are exposed to death so often . . . Have you enough to eat? The very thought that you might be hungry breaks my heart. How often I think of dear Mother St. Mechtilde and her little orphans! I can just see them trembling in the cellar . . . Oh! how I share in all of your sufferings! But once again, I mustn't let my heart run over!"

Mother St. Beatrix suffered from the climate in London and was exhausted by the anxiety and uneasiness which each day's distressing news revived and underscored. As a result of this, Mother had a recurrence of the cardiac difficulty which frequently had bothered her. She felt apprehensive and thought it prudent to ask the Superior from Dublin to come, so that she could entrust the care of the new community to her. She wrote to the Superior General: "Mother St. Hedwige came and spent several days with me; I had had a recurrence of heart palpitations which sometimes bother me. This is not surprising, because you cannot do violence to yourself with impunity. I judged it prudent that Mother St. Hedwige should know what she would have to do in case I should die, as long as communications with Paris were interrupted. Precautions do not shorten life, however, and I am better now."

The affection and expressions of charity which Mother St. Beatrix received from so many people greatly encouraged and stimulated her. The houses in Ireland, and those in Boulogne and Abbeville, generously vied with one another to supply the needs of the London community. "Unity and charity are so good for the soul!" wrote Mother St. Beatrix. "My tears flowed when I received the packing case containing an armchair for my old back . . . I would need a whole book in order to tell you of all the kindnesses which the Sisters of Mercy have shown us. They have been and still are God's Providence for us. We will never be able to show appreciation for all that they have done."

Finally those days of anguish came to an end; and joyfully it was learned that the Mother House had providentially been spared. The long, severe distress and painful apprehension was succeeded by unspeakable joy. It was difficult to know how to thank God for having brought those days of trial to an end. In the little oratory at London, and also at Dublin and Cork, a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving was sung for the visible protection bestowed on Bon Secours.

They became busy re-affirming the new foundation, and capable Sisters were sent to London. Mother St. Beatrix remained in that city until 1879 and edified all who came in contact with her. She knew very little English, but her serenity and affability were so great, that her glance itself was a sermon. In spite of the numerous concerns and responsibilities of his life and ministry, Cardinal Manning loved to come and talk with her, because,

though a man of government, he was also a man of prayer and an expert in the ways of interior life, as well as a much sought after Confessor, who was as attentive and capable of directing a single troubled soul, as to pursue the great plans of ecclesiastical politics.⁸⁵ At the very first interview which he had with Mother St. Beatrix, he was struck and edified by her perfect abandon and deep humility; and, from that time he was pleased to encourage her in the midst of the harsh beginnings of the London foundation. He visited her frequently, and his austere features lighted up with a pleasant smile when he asked Mother: "How are *My Keys*?" His Grace liked to call the Sisters by that name because, as he said, they open the souls of sinners to the priest.

According to his own words, the saintly Archbishop always thought about those millions of souls whom the Anglican schism had deprived of their heavenly heritage, and who wandered here and there like sheep without a shepherd. It is not surprising, then, that he felt a special sympathy towards those humble religious. In them he saw an element of the apostolate which he had dreamed of and also an instrument of salvation for the victims of the heresy.

The Sisters had free access to the prelate and could go to him to expose their difficulties and share the victories that they had won over hell. The following accounts, related by one of the Sisters, testify that they often found themselves in perplexing situations which could only be rescued by God's intervention.

An English officer, who had heard mention of the religious nurses, came to the convent to ask Mother St. Beatrix to send a Sister to nurse one of his cousins who was gravely ill. The patient was a thirty year old widow with an only son who was still quite young. "My cousin is a Protestant," he said, "or rather she is not even a Christian, for the poor woman has never been baptised. Her father, who is still living, brought her up in hatred of God and religion." "But you, Sir," said Mother St. Beatrix, "doubtless you are a Catholic?" "Yes, thank God! I am a convert, and unhappily, the only one in my whole family!" It goes without saying that the superior acquiesced to the officer's request and he took the Sister to the patient.

Sister said: "I found a woman there who, it appeared, had received an order to prevent me from mentioning religion to the sick woman. I did not become upset but began to give the patient the care she needed; her body was very deteriorated by sickness though she was in the prime of life. Her soul was in an even worse condition than her body, because she had never received Baptism's regenerating waters. When I had finished my duties, I withdrew to say my prayers, and tried not to pay attention to my patient or her companion. They amused themselves at my expense, by ridiculing my habit and my practices of piety: sign of the cross, etc., and calling me a papist. As soon as I was alone, I wrote a note to Mother St. Beatrix to expose the situation and ask for a

companion, as I did not want to leave the young women alone with her friend. She acceded to my request and sent a second Sister.

Every possible resource of human science was employed to prolong the poor woman's life. Six consultants were called in by the family, in the hope that their combined knowledge could overcome the disease. The doctors could do nothing. After eight days they decided to operate in order to try to obtain some relief for the poor patient, but no appreciable change resulted. At that moment, her companion, who was tired and disliked breathing the unhealthy air, abandoned her friend under the pretext that she needed rest. You can well understand my joy when I learned of this decision. I went to see Cardinal Manning and to speak to him of my fears and expose the sad state of the patient entrusted to my care. He wasn't at home, and I was received by his nephew, Father Anderdon, who was our Ecclesiastical Superior. I explained the case to him and asked for his advice. He listened to me attentively and, without responding, led me to the Archbishop's chapel. After praying for a few minutes before the tabernacle with his arms stretched out in the form of a cross, he came and blessed me; then laying his hand on my head, he said: *'Go, my child, she will be converted.'* I explained the difficulty I would have in getting a priest into the house. 'Baptize her yourself,' he told me; and with great kindness he explained how to administer the Sacrament of Baptism.

The next day, that is to say the ninth day of my stay, the patient's agony began at nine o'clock in the evening; she had shown no change of symptoms. At eleven o'clock two physicians declared that her respirations had become quite shallow, that the injections left her unconscious and that her pulse could no longer be felt. They left the room saying that there was nothing more they could do. About midnight, the dying woman suddenly opened her eyes, looked at me and said: 'You can save me if you will.' I asked her if she spoke of her body or her soul. 'My soul, my soul,' she answered, 'I have only a few moments to live!' But do you believe all that our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to believe? I quickly asked. 'Yes, I believe all that the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church teaches.'—'Have you ever been baptised,' I asked again, 'do you want to be baptised?'—'Oh! Yes.' She joined her hands and raised her eyes as if she saw a vision; she renounced her past and asked God's pardon and mercy for all the sins of her life. Then I took the baptismal cruet and poured on her head the salvific water which would open the gates of heaven for her. The dying woman fell back on her pillow and her features, which 'til then had been contorted, were transfigured with an expression of ineffable peace and serenity. Words of gratitude fell from her lips, and, after thanking God, she blessed the Sisters of Bon Secours. She still had strength enough to ask us to keep her secret because, she told us, her only son would be disinherited if it was known that his mother had died in the bosom of the Catholic Church. Then, after repeating a few short aspirations, her soul which was purified in the waters of holy baptism took flight for heaven.

My companion and I remained on our knees for some time at the foot of that bed where such a great miracle had been accomplished. The next morning, the officer who had come for me, entered the room. He remained as though nailed

in the doorway when he saw his cousin laid out with her hands joined and an expression of holiness illuminating her features. After he learned what had happened, he understood that there had been a miracle of God's grace and mercy."

Under quite different circumstances, the Sister who related this story, had the joy of again being chosen as the instrument of divine grace; but she paid dearly for one of these conversions which was accomplished during Mother St. Beatrix's stay in London. Let us allow Sister herself to speak:

"One day someone knocked at the door of our little convent to ask for a nurse for an old man who had suddenly become gravely ill. Holy Obedience sent me, and I found the sick man in his daughter's arms; his face and hands were cyanotic and there was no palpable pulse. He had suffered a severe attack of gout which had affected his heart.

I quickly put the old man into his bed and spent an hour and a half giving him steam inhalations in an effort to revive and warm his stiff, edematous extremities. Slowly, little by little, his circulation improved, the normal color returned to his face and he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes, stared at me and then asked if I was a Sister of Bon Secours. I responded in the affirmative and quickly invited him to say a short prayer with me to ask God for some relief. He consented and so, without further delay, I began to recite the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary* in a loud voice. Suddenly he stopped me, saying: 'I know that prayer well, because my dying mother made me promise to say it each day, and I have been faithful to that promise.' 'Well, Sir,' I dared to respond, 'the Blessed Virgin has been pleased with your prayer and now she wishes to reward you.'

Seeing the patient's excellent dispositions, and knowing that there was precious little time to lose, I suggested that the priest be called. 'I would like that,' he answered, 'but a French priest.'

I didn't waste an instant but sent for Father Tursell, chaplain at the French chapel on King's Street which is even now under the direction of Bishop Tursell, Father's nephew.

That good priest soon arrived at the dying man's bedside and he made a general confession of his life. While the sick man contritely disposed of the burden of his past life, his daughter, who was with me in the next room, threw words of insult and abuse at me and threatened to tear me to pieces. She wanted, at all costs, to enter her father's room, interrupt his confession and send the priest away; but I stood in front of the door and told her firmly that I would rather die than prevent her aged father from making his peace with God. I won the victory in that battle. The young women vehemently protested her father's goodness and affirmed uselessness of this kind of a confession. I responded: 'Miss, your father's natural goodness will not save his soul, and his negligence in approaching the Sacraments for some sixty years could deprive him of eternal happiness.'

After this long painful discussion, Father Tursell came out of the sickroom; he was beaming and told me that he was going for Holy Viaticum. 'Father,' I

answered, 'the poor man will be dead before you get back to the church.' 'Oh, well!' he said, 'the most essential thing has been done, for his soul has been bathed in our Lord's blood by the grace of absolution.'

I hurried back into the patient's room; his daughter was already there. 'My angel,' he said with great effort, 'I am so happy! Adieu! Farewell! . . . My good Sister, thank you. Farewell! . . .' At that moment he closed his eyes and saying: 'My Jesus! Mercy! . . . Mary, come to my aide! . . .' he gave up his soul.

After having prepared his body for burial, Sister spent the night in prayer near him in a room that was not heated. The fatigue of the long vigil, the cold and the emotion were disastrous for the poor Sister. The next day she was obliged to go to bed with a violent attack of rheumatic fever. Her sufferings were so intense that an hour seemed like a whole night. All the same, in the depths of her soul she was happy to be able to offer this for the grace which had been obtained. Day and night, dear Mother St. Beatrix took care of Sister with great devotion and was admirably helped by Doctor Connelly, Father Connelly's brother. "These two benefactors now enjoy their eternal reward," concludes the narrator, "but the dear little church, where our Lady Help of Christians smiles on her daughters' work, is still here to bring consolation to the afflicted and draw them to Christ."

To a certain degree, the Sisters of Bon Secours played a vital role in the splendid work of the 19th Century conversion of England which surprised the world while it delighted and thrilled the Catholic Church.

Fifty years ago in Parliament, some still dared to raise the old, hateful, anti-roman expression: "No popery!" And yet the souls who had been caught up by the mysterious blowing (of the Spirit) turned ardently towards Rome. What a marvelous scene! Certain Protestant ministers sacrificed enviable positions; great Lords and Ladies of nobility and weak young girls renounced their inheritance; officers, literary men, and magistrates abandoned everything that constituted peace and happiness here below in order to enter the Catholic Church, receive light from the Sun of the Holy Eucharist and be warmed by the love of God's Mother.

In a well known sermon,⁸⁶ Newman said: "It is a resurrection, and that resurrection is a marvel which belongs to the order of grace." Then, recalling the painful, appalling situation of Catholics in England between 1800 to 1830, he added: "Who would have ever been able to foresee such a miracle? Is it possible to recall anything similar in history?"

In turn, Cardinal Wiseman wrote to the French bishops:⁸⁷ "Neither by the activities of Catholics, nor by the preaching of our clergy, nor by the works of our writers, nor even by the zeal and piety of the faithful can it be known how to explain what is happening in England . . . A spontaneous impulsion of grace and providential succession of circumstances are the only two means to which the Master of men and things had recourse to produce the glorious results of which we are witnesses."

Indeed, it can be affirmed, without fear of being mistaken, that *Those Glorious results* are due to the prayers of pious souls. "Yes, it is the prayers of Catholics, and in particular the Catholics of France, which have given Newman, Manning, and a host of others after them to the holy Church of God. It is the prayers of Catholics, and in particular the Catholics of France, which provoked that abundant and truly extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit on the Anglican Church, the results of which surprise and delight us."⁸⁸

Father Haffreingue, whom we have already mentioned, was consumed with the desire of seeing the *Great Island* come back to the Roman Church. Guided by Father Ignace Spencer, he founded an *Association of Prayers* to obtain this marvelous grace. With apostolic zeal his desires and thoughts were breathed into all who approached him. Father Haffreingue had always been a friend and advisor of the Sisters of Bon Secours, and they had the honor of nursing him in his last moments. Without doubt then, the Sisters had taken his cause to heart and united their supplications to those of so many others for the conversion of England. Is it not possible to believe that, because of their prayers, God called them onto the stage of that struggle where the eternal future of a great people was being enacted? As Cardinal Manning said so well, these zealous religious were often the *Keys* which opened souls to grace and to its dispensers.

Chapter XXI

A painful trial overtakes the Institute The Foundation in Belfast Development of the Cork and London Communities

1871—1874

Is there any need to state that the Dublin and Cork communities had experienced the repercussions of the events which had unfolded in France?

First of all, we must acknowledge that the Irish had forgotten nothing, neither the generous cooperation which France gave them in 1798, nor the enthusiasm with which she applauded O'Connell in his just claims in favor of his country. Also, at the time of our disasters, that generous people bitterly deplored the misfortunes of a nation which had shown them so much sympathy.

During the winter of 1870—1871, this moving spectacle could be seen each Sunday throughout the Irish countryside: one of the men would take the weekly newspaper when it arrived; he would sit at the foot of a tree, put on his glasses and, in a loud voice, read the war news to the assembled villagers whose faces were wet with silent tears as they listened.

That was not sterile compassion; to be convinced of this, you have only to re-read a letter which Bishop Dupanloup wrote at that time, calling on the charity of all in favor of his starving, battered people. "I turn to every side,"

he said; "I have even written to foreigners, and above all to Ireland. It is my duty to loudly proclaim Catholic, magnanimous Ireland, who, since the very beginning of our troubles, has never ceased sending me the most generous offerings, and, whether it was gifts from her own poor children or the sympathy and support loudly expressed in her meetings, it has proved that no people in the world has shown its friendship as have the Irish people. 'They take bread from their own mouths,' one of their bishops wrote to me, 'in order to be able to give it to France.' "

Yes, nowhere else have our misfortunes provoked more regret or pity. Enlarging on that assertion, we will borrow a very suggestive line from the *Correspondant* of June, 1906. A long time after the war, a Frenchman on tour near the ruins of Murrisk Abbey spoke with one of the villagers. The Irishman began to talk about France, then of the 1870 war, and then, in a very moving tone, as if he spoke of a recent event or a family misfortune, he added: "We know all about it."

Besides their pain and sympathy for the country of France, the Sisters in Cork and Dublin, where the Irish element dominated, had other reasons for great anxiety. They trembled with fear for their communities, above all for the Mother House which had sheltered the early days of their religious life. The very thought that that haven was in the very center of the greatest danger, and that their Mothers and Sisters suffered from hunger and a million other privations, was a source of constant anguish for them. What supplications their troubled hearts sent up to heaven!

There was no news from Paris for ten long weeks! You can imagine then the emotion that was felt when a short message finally arrived by balloon at Dublin. The Sisters were going into the refectory when the note was given to them, but not one of them could even think of eating that day. They had guessed at the sufferings which were endured and they trembled at the thought of the perils which still existed.

When communications were re-established, Mother St. Hedwige quickly poured out her heart to the Superior General: "I thank the good God," she wrote, "that He gave you the strength to put up with so many sufferings and hardships. Oh! how we thought about you and prayed for you, dear Mother, and for all our dearly loved Sisters who are in Paris at this time! If I could have a few of them here, how we would care for them! . . . But, then, you know your daughters' hearts and you also know your duty. *Fiat* . . . Yesterday, I received a letter which came directly from Paris. We cried with joy. How good God is to have thus protected our Sisters and how grateful we are to Him!"

At the same time, Mother St. Hedwige told the Superior General about the death of Father Barry who had been the community's confessor for the

last five years. He was afflicted suddenly in the midst of his ministry and he asked to be cared for by those good Sisters whom he called his daughters; he told them as he was dying that only in heaven would they know how much he loved their Congregation. That holy priest had had a particular esteem for Mother St. Fabien, who was one of the victims of the siege of Paris. It will be remembered that she was recalled to France in 1868 and named Mistress of Novices. She was an outstanding religious and well suited for that ministry; but she was only able to fulfill it for a short time. The hardships of the winter of 1871, and the distressing situations exhausted her strength; and after languishing for several months, she died on the 24th of October in that same year. Her last prayers were for her dear Sisters in Dublin. On the day she died, she was heard to murmur: "Oh! how thirsty I am!" Mother St. Fulgence, who was with her, quickly offered her something to drink. "It is for God that I thirst!" she said.

Mother St. Hedwige, after having been Mother St. Fabien's Assistant and intelligent helper, succeeded her and bore the burden of being the Superior for six years. Divine Providence had reserved some great trials for this generous soul; and they assailed the community one after the other in 1871.

While the horrors of war were devastating France, the city of Dublin was heavily afflicted by a smallpox epidemic, which was of a particularly contagious and dangerous character. The victims often died within twenty-four hours of its onset, and the poor Sisters hadn't a minute's rest; as soon as they closed the eyes of one victim, they had to hurry to the bedside of another. Mother Assistant also went out on duty, and very often the Superior was alone in the convent. Once again, however, God protected His servants and not one of them was affected by the disease.

Another trial was added to the Sisters' burden of overwork and the anguish caused by the epidemic and terrible news from France; it was of a very intimate, delicate nature and made them resemble their Savior betrayed by His own. On that occasion, Mother St. Cecile could say with the prophet: "Sons (daughters) I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against me."⁸⁹

Indeed, without a doubt the devil was jealous of the graces which the Sisters of Bon Secours were instrumental in obtaining. He endeavored to undermine the basis of their community by sowing dissension among them. Up until that time, the Superiors had only praise for the spirit of union, concord and charity which existed in the Dublin house. Satan found an accomplice to further his evil designs in one of the Sisters, whose name we withhold. She had a character which, unfortunately, is sometimes found in convents; she was very whimsical and bizarre, susceptible to excesses, and was always wanting to try something new and different. She dreamed of the

changes and transformations which would remedy everything that her difficult and rebellious nature rejected; and the poor Sister confided to all who would listen her complaints against the Superior and the Rule.

When it was realized that she was unmanageable, she was quickly sent to one of the houses in France; but it was already too late. The evil seed had germinated and three other Sisters, influenced by that agitated, undocile spirit, continued to cause trouble in that peaceful house. Need we say that those last three had never been distinguished for their zeal, abnegation or religious spirit?

The Ecclesiastical Superior asked for some information on the situation, and Mother St. Hedwige described one of them thus: "Dear Father, you already know the concern which Sister St. S_____ caused us three years ago; and how little love she seemed to have for her vocation. She acknowledged, after serious reflection, that all of her difficulties were the product of an over excited imagination and the neglect of her spiritual duties. So, having resolved to be more generous in the future, she wrote to our Superior General to ask pardon for the past and to request that she be permitted to remain with us.

We tried to be charitable and hoped that she would succeed in overcoming herself; therefore, she was permitted to renew her vows for a year during the retreat of 1870. However the Superiors soon had cause to regret their indulgence, as much for the disdain which she quickly manifested toward the Rule as for her spirit of insubordination."

The discontent and demands of the dissidents stressed one principal point: the absence of lay-Sisters. The Rule, they said, obliged all the Sisters to be involved with many material occupations that take time which could be dedicated to spiritual exercises.

That objection was quickly refuted. In fact lay-Sisters have a *raison d'être* only in communities that are cloistered and living a completely monastic life, or in educational houses whose members are dedicated to teaching the young. There is no reason for having different classes of Sisters in congregations founded for the care of the sick and the poor. Bon Secours, the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul and many other religious congregations were based on the spirit and practice of charity. Therefore, there was no room for different degrees among its members; and, all the more so, because, in proportion to their work outside of the convent, the Nursing Sisters were exempt from charges within the house. Besides, in the interest of the persons whom she is nursing, isn't it necessary that the Sister be capable of doing all kinds of domestic work, even the lowliest?

Finally, this objection existed because of an incomplete knowledge and understanding of the Rule, and a background of egoism which could not submit to the life of perfect abnegation which reigned at Bon Secours.

Mother St. Hedwige gave proof of admirable patience and charity throughout that difficult situation. "I place everything in God's hands," she wrote to her director, after having told him of her interior grief and the methods used by the malcontents, "because, if this God-Savior was betrayed by his disciple, is it not just that we be persecuted in our turn? Furthermore, He alone sees the depths of the heart, and knows that we have His greater glory and the salvation of souls in view."

Instead of enlightening those involved, the Superior's forbearance only encouraged their spirit of revolt. They let no occasion pass, but spread abroad their arguments, spoke of separation from the Mother House and made great efforts to sow defiance and antipathy against the religious family which had received them, both within the community and outside.

It became necessary that something be done about removing that discordant element; so, the Superior explained the situation to Cardinal Cullen: "Things have gone too far," she wrote, "to hope for any return or true change. In fact your Eminence will understand that, in order to re-establish peace in the community, a lesson is needed. As these Sisters have made only temporary vows and the time for their renewal approaches, their removal can be accomplished without too much difficulty."

Their departure took place on October 7, 1871, during the retreat which was preached by a Franciscan Father. It was accomplished without noise or disturbance, thanks to the prudence and dignity of the Superior. We will let Mother St. Gonzague express her own sentiments and those of the whole community; she wrote to Mother General on October 11: "You already know what happened here at the end of our retreat. May God be blessed! . . . We can breathe now and feel at home, and with one heart we have thanked God and our dear Lady of Bon Secours for having brought an end to the suffering which disturbed our peace and happiness for so long. Doubtless, this cross will be our lot again; nothing is solid without trials; but that suffering, or rather that interior division was a continual martyrdom. Oh, yes, if the cross comes to visit us again, we will know how to suffer in a spirit of unity, because all of us wish to be of one heart and soul so as to love and serve God and to become more and more attached to our dear Congregation. What *Te Deums* we have said since Saturday morning, their departure day! It should be noted that the solution was reached only a short time after Mother St. Hedwige made the promise of burning a candle in perpetuity at the Blessed Virgin's altar. It is not necessary to tell you how happy good Father Leterrier is, too. He has desired this for a long time, and was happy to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving in our chapel at the end of the retreat. His interest and concern for us has been like that of a father. Nothing stops him when he can render some service."

With sentiments of love that are easily understood, all of the Sisters in

Dublin, even those who knew little French, wanted to send the Superior General their assurance of devotion and dedication. Their letters were filled with expressions of filial affection and loyalty to the Congregation; the influence of Mother St. Hedwige's example can be seen in this, and also in the unity which reigned among those simple and generous women.

Father Leterrier also thought it was his duty to reassure the Superior General concerning the Dublin house. He wrote to Mother St. Fabien on the 22nd of October but, when it arrived in Paris, the good Mother had gone to heaven:

"How I wished that the news about you from Mount Street had been better, if that had been the good Master's pleasure; but on the contrary, He seems to like to keep you on the cross with Himself, and you are far from angry with Him; is that not so? You know only too well that He tests and sanctifies those whom He loves by sufferings; I know that He has made you understand and taste that consoling truth. So I would add only what He has said more than once in the depths of your heart: Courage and confidence! The more prolonged the trial and bitter the chalice, the greater and sweeter the reward will be. Yes, in the cross is salvation and life . . . life that should never come to an end . . .

If I were nearer, I would be tempted to tell you how much I shared your sufferings and anguish during that year of sadness and mourning for France; but, now, I would like to speak to you about something else—the unity and joy which reign once again in your dear Dublin community. I am sure that even in your suffering you will rejoice to know that Our Lord has granted your wishes in that matter. I was more touched than I can say when I saw this demonstrated last Tuesday on the occasion of Mother St. Hedwige's feast day.

I am not speaking of the flowers and garlands, etc., etc., or of the amazing and wonderful gaiety of the occasion, but of what impressed me the most, which was to see the sincerity, warmth and rare happiness that marked everything that happened during the family feast.

I sincerely hope that, even though you regret their waywardness, you will be far from sad at their departure. Like a spoiled fruit or dried up branch which the first gust of wind will make fall, they detached themselves. May God be blessed! . . . May they be able to succeed in settling elsewhere.

I am happy to tell you that now there is but one heart and soul in your dear community, and that all is going well; even the last ones to come seem to be already quite at home!

This little chat is long enough; just let me tell you once again, dear Mother, how much I shared your sufferings, and ardently wish you the Lord's grace to profit by the rich harvest of merits and happiness which in His great love He puts at your disposition.

Please give my respects to your Reverend Mother Superior General, and my affectionate regards to Father Ruat.

Very humbly and devotedly yours in Our Lord,

J. Leterrier, S.M."

As we have already said, this letter arrived in Paris after Mother St. Fabien had died. It brought tears of joy to Mother St. Cecile and put an end to the cruel anxieties which had tormented her as she helplessly watched one of her most loved daughters endure her agony.

The storm had passed, and grace spread its serene light on those simple, upright souls who had seen this trial as another means of giving testimony of their fidelity to God and to their Congregation. Canon Maguire wanted to announce the news that the painful crisis had come to an end. Throughout the events which had happened in Dublin he had feared there would be some troublesome repercussions on his Sisters in Cork. After celebrating Mass in the convent chapel, he spoke to the Sisters. He recalled Lucifer's fall from grace and how, even in the apostolic college a traitor had been found. "In Bon Secours, also, there have been some to revolt and say: 'I will not obey.' If there are any among you who have the same thoughts," he added, "leave immediately and do not remain to disturb the peace and happiness of the Sisters . . ."

There were no other defections and Mother St. Bertille wrote to Mother St. Cecile: "Poor Mother! How often we think of you! What thorns for your motherly heart! But be consoled, because we will strive to be more faithful than ever to our Holy Rule and to our promises."

Since 1866, when it was founded, the Cork community had developed considerably and attracted much sympathy and support. An accident, which could easily have become a catastrophe, increased the interest of many persons in Bon Secours, because it multiplied the inconveniences and distress which were suffered in their house at Dyke Parade.

The city of Cork is situated at the mouth of the Lee River. It is on a low lying marshy island wedged between two branches of the river on which the city was built in the 9th Century by the Danes; and from that came Cork (Coreach) which means marsh in Gaelic. Little by little the town spread out on firm ground, but the atmosphere remained impregnated by the humidity, and the streets were muddy. It is true, that along the green banks of the river there can be found beautiful neighborhoods with white villas and flower gardens; but the Sisters were lodged in an area that was very unhealthy. One day, the River Lee overflowed and invaded the convent kitchen. Standing on stools the Sisters tried to save some of their poor utensils and provisions; but, as the water continued to rise, they had to hastily seek refuge on the next floor and abandon the potatoes which were carried off by the flood.

That accident had sad consequences. Sister St. Agnes, who had become soaked to the knees, came down with a very bad cold, and this degenerated into a lung condition; she died in a very short time.

When the waters receded, it left the house more humid than ever, and thus even more unhealthy. This situation had a distressing influence on the Sisters' health. Father Maguire, and other interested persons, were upset and understood that the convent was an unfit place in which to live. They said among themselves: "The Sisters of Bon Secours are so helpful to our

sick and dying; isn't it distressing that they are deprived of the essentials needed to preserve their own health? We must do something about it."

They had a meeting at Bishop Delany's residence, and after some discussion it was decided that they would look for another house. Thanks to the steps taken, and to Mr. M. H. Murphy's generosity, the choice soon was made and a beautiful dwelling called Shrubbery House was acquired; it is situated on the Mardyke. A road winding between the two canals of the river is a mardyke; it is planted with magnificent elms, and the branches join to form an arch. In his descriptions of Ireland, Thackeray depicts the picturesque beauty of the Mardyke; since then, modern buildings have taken away much of its charm.

The people of Cork considered it an honor to contribute to the purchase of a new residence for the Sisters. The local newspapers even took it upon themselves to make an eloquent appeal which spoke of the edifying works accomplished by the Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours in such a short span of years. Here is an excerpt:

"Our city has enjoyed having the Sisters of Bon Secours among us now for five years. We have become accustomed to seeing the development of various aspects of Christian charity. The Christian Brothers dedicate their lives to the education of children, thus developing good citizens who are reared in the love of God; there is no need to travel far to see this. Neither do we ignore the works of the Sisters of Mercy, who with much love raise up again those who have fallen; nor the gentle, kindly ministry of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, who dedicate themselves to the poor and are instruments of Divine Providence as well as tools of grace for them.

However, a void existed! When sickness struck, (and whom does it miss) those whom God had favored the most with the goods of this world, whose family lives were the happiest, who knew no material want were left destitute of the dedicated, gentle tireless care of which religious alone seemed to know the secret.

Who in our city has not had the sad experience of those incompetent nurses to whom we were forced to entrust our dear ones: a child whose very life is a source of happiness for his own; a father who is on the road to honor, success and fortune and is struck down by sickness; a mother who is the joy of the home?

The people of Cork were overjoyed when our Bishop told them that they would soon have those Sisters whose spirit of charity had accomplished so many marvels at the bedside of the sick in France.

There are very few families in Cork or the surrounding neighborhoods where a Sister of Bon Secours is not welcomed with inexpressible gratitude. A Christian woman's pleasing manner and sense of personal dignity are combined in her; she carries within her a calming, pacifying quality which often induces healing. You are no longer anxious when you see her there, near you and ever watchful. There isn't a mother who could care for her sick ones with

more kindness, tenderness and fidelity than these religious, who draw the secret of their devotion from the heart of Him *Who went about this world doing good*.⁹⁰

During our city's great tribulation which God allowed and which took a parent or friend from each of us, wasn't it the presence of the Sister of Bon Secours which rendered the evil less painful and even death less terrible?

When we see the Nursing Sisters contenting themselves with a house which is just about deplorable and prejudicial to their health, we feel disturbed and are convinced that we are guilty of ingratitude; is this not true? Over and above all other arguments, doesn't their type of life demand that after they have spent some time in taking care of the sick, they should be able to return to a *home* where there is more open space and pure air to restore their exhausted strength?

We sincerley hope then that the people of Cork will seize this opportunity to show their gratitude to the Sisters of Bon Secours and thus permit them to continue their work.

A gentelman, whose name and family are identified with all the good works done in Cork, has guaranteed us the residence known as Shrubbery House where the Sisters will have a suitable home and several acres of land. We have been authorized to say that this project has received his Grace's blessing, and we appeal to all for help to make this acquisition possible.

The values of our religion demand that we should see to the needs of those whose lives are consecrated to such holy missions; and we feel that a city like Cork, which owes so much to the Sisters of Bon Secours, has a duty to prove its gratitude and generosity on the present occasion."

This appeal was heard; and in 1872 Mother St. Bertille and the Sisters settled themselves at Shrubbery House. This change of residence was the occasion of a conversion, which merits being told. A Protestant, who lived next door to the new convent, was getting ready to go to a musical festival, when he was suddenly struck by a severe attack of congestion. It was death knocking at the door. His wife, crazed with fear and despair, came to ask the Sisters for help, and one of them was sent to the sick man's home. As soon as she arrived, Sister saw that there was no time to lose; and after praying silently, she said without hesitation: "Sir, it is my duty to tell you that you are about to appear before God; it is absolutely necessary that your minister come to help you prepare to die." His response was long in coming; Sister was worried and did not know how to interpret his silence. She was filled with much joy when the man finally replied: "Sister, I wish to see a Catholic priest because, if there is a true religion, it certainly is yours. I have often watched you over the garden wall and I have been struck by the air of contentment that I saw in all of you; you appear to be so good and kind!"

It is easy to understand Sister's feelings as she heard that surprising statement. She immediately sent for Canon Maguire who heard the sick man's confession, baptised him and received his abjuration. He came back to

visit the patient four times during that day; at eleven o'clock that night the new convert died the death of the just, wearing the scapular of Mount Carmel and recommending his wife and little child to God.

While the Cork community guaranteed its continuance in getting established in Shrubbery House, Bishop Dorrian of Down and Conor requested Sisters for Belfast. During the siege of Paris, he had already gone to Dublin and conferred with Mother St. Hedwige on the subject of a foundation in his diocese. The unhappy conditions of the times, however, did not permit them to have contact with the higher Superiors. It was not until February, 1872, that the prelate again broached the subject. He wrote to Mother St. Hedwige: "I had the honor of having had an interview with you at Mount Street, in view of establishing a branch of your Institute in Belfast, which is a large and populous city. I believe that your Sisters would do much good and contribute to the salvation of the sick and dying.

"I think that this project could be easily carried out at this time, if you are able to send us four Sisters to begin the foundation. Etc., etc."

When Mother St. Hedwige sent this letter to the Superior General, she added: "Everyone desires this foundation in Belfast, especially the Jesuit and Franciscan Fathers; because they count on the Sister to give them access to souls . . . this will once again be a source of many sacrifices for us, but the good which will result will more than compensate, I hope. In all of this I see only the glory of God, the interest of our dear Congregation and the salvation of souls. If the Dublin house must pay its tribute to this new foundation, I am ready to acquiesce to the Divine good pleasure, no matter what pain I will experience at losing my dear Sisters."

Mother St. Cecile hesitated in consenting to Bishop Dorrian's request. The lack of subjects on one side, and the recent events on the other, made her fear that it would not be prudent, at that time, to undertake a new foundation. Yet she feared to undermine God's work, so she overcame her scruples and promised the prelate he would have some Sisters the following June. This response made him happy because he counted on the Sisters to counterbalance a Protestant work which had been organized for the formation of nurses. Bishop Dorrian quickly accepted all of the conditions made by the Superior General. He went to look for a place that had enough space to permit the erection of an oratory, for he had completely understood that Our Lord's presence under their own roof was the principle support, consolation and life for the Sisters.

Thus the religious of Bon Secours were going to find themselves in an area that was completely new to them. Indeed, Belfast is the least Irish of all of the cities in Ireland. An author said: "It is the Protestant fortress wedged in Catholic Erin." Only one-third of the population belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and is almost exclusively composed of the working and middle classes. Though they were poor, the Catholics were not less

generous with regard to their clergy and good works. St. Peter's, the most beautiful church in that city, was erected in the center of a poor, populous area, through monies pledged by the people.

Belfast is Ireland's second largest city. Dublin includes numerous poor neighborhoods and does not offer a view that has the same affluent aspect as Belfast; this is true of its magnificent monuments, its six stone bridges and the splendid bay which surrounds it and resembles the Gulf of Naples. In Belfast the streets are wide and well aligned; rich dwellings and stately buildings abound, and many varied industries flourish there. Beggars, who are numerous in some parts of Great Britain, are rare in that city. Mother St. Cecile recommended her Sisters to the care of Bishop Dorrian who had wanted to have them in his diocese. "In a few days," she wrote to him, "several of our Sisters are going to your diocese as you kindly requested. I know that they will be able to count on Your Grace for assistance and help in their various needs of both soul and body. But a Mother cannot see her Sisters leave without feeling some pain, and without instinctively seeking every possible kindness for them. It is not without emotion that I write this to you, Your Grace, because, each time I must take leave of my Sisters, I need to say: God wills it! If it had been possible for me to bring them to you myself, I would certainly do so in order to recommend them to you personally. However, I know that they will find a father in you, to whom they will always be able to have recourse in the many trials which they will surely encounter. Since the cross is the foundation or basis of all things, it will not spare them. Nevertheless, supported, encouraged and helped by you, Your Grace, they will carry it with generosity and courage."

Mother St. Domitille was placed at the head of the new community; she had a noble, magnanimous heart and a humble and generous soul. Her career began in Belfast, where it was so fruitful that she stood out among the other Sisters of Bon Secours. She soon won Bishop Dorrian's confidence. Two years later, when she was named Superior in Dublin to succeed Mother St. Hedwige who went to London, the prelate had a hard time accepting her departure. He expressed his regrets to the Mother General in terms which made it easy to surmise the high esteem in which the clergy and people of Belfast held Mother St. Domitille.

"I hope," he wrote, "that you will not be so cruel as to take our dear Mother from us. She has been with us only two years and has had such a beneficial influence on our people. If she herself wishes to leave us, I have nothing to say, but, if she is only obeying, I hope that you will abandon this project which is so painful for me and for my clergy."

Mother St. Cecile explained to the bishop the major reason which obliged her to send Mother St. Domitille to Dublin. He understood, resigned himself and continued to show great interest in the community.

During the first years of their stay in Belfast the Sisters were little known and received few calls. It was the poor who first claimed their services, and the good which they accomplished among those needy people assuredly brought many graces down on that new community.

In the midst of the concerns created by the Belfast foundation, the Superior General felt her strength diminishing; she also sensed her need to have near her that Sister who had been one of Mère Geay's first companions and who possessed her spirit so completely. Of course we are speaking of Mother St. Beatrix. She was called back to Paris in the autumn of 1872. The little community in London, which she had guided and supported like a mother, felt great sorrow at losing her. When it was time to leave, Mother had a hard time holding back her tears as she saw how sad the Sisters were. She blessed them for the last time and repeated the words she had said so very often: "Courage and confidence in Jesus and Mary!"

Mother St. Fortunat, who replaced her, stayed in London only a short time, as the climate there was very unhealthy for her. All the same, during her stay she was able to bring about the changes necessitated by the circumstances. She settled the Sisters in their new residence at Bayswater, Norfolk Terrace, which was not far from the St. Charles Fathers. They soon showed a great interest and concern for the Sisters which has never lessened.

The Congregation of the Oblate Fathers of St. Charles was the work of Cardinal Manning, and had been an oft' repeated desire of his predecessor. In order to remedy the insufficient numbers of the English Clergy, Cardinal Wiseman had thought about creating a group of Missionary Priests, who would live as a Society and under a rule, but who would resemble the secular clergy and assist them in their work. Bishop Manning enthusiastically entered into these plans, and went to study at San Sepulcro near Milan at the St. Charles Borromeo Institute, which served as a model. In spite of the trials which he encountered from the very beginning of the foundation, and the violent attacks which it brought upon him, Cardinal Manning loved to say that the eight years he had spent with his Fathers were the happiest in his life. When speaking about the goal that had been accomplished by the Oblates, he always underscored Catholicism's comprehensiveness which is able to respond to all needs and satisfy all tastes.

The Fathers of St. Charles found useful and powerful auxiliaries in the Sisters of Bon Secours, and quite often those humble women prepared the way for them to save a soul from heresy. In 1874, their zeal and ardor received new impetus when Mother St. Marguerite came to replace Mother St. Fortunat but she too was only there for a short time; she was advanced in age and was afflicted with an incurable disease. During the two years that she governed, she endeavored to cultivate the virtues of sanctity in all of her

Sisters. The Sister who related the beginnings at Cork will also tell us what the London House was like under Mother St. Marguerite's direction. "The Sisters had been here for five years," she wrote. "In the convent everything is poor and simple, and charity reigns supreme. The kindness with which Mother Superior welcomed me, the friendliness of my companions, above all, Mother St. Alphonsine who charmed everyone by her virtues, softened the intense pain I experienced when making the sacrifice of leaving Cork for London. Another thing which called forth my admiration was the fidelity and punctuality which existed in that community. Mother St. Marguerite recommended holy poverty above all else, and yet, we were quite poor... In that large, densely populated city, the Sisters devoted themselves principally to the care of the poor whom they helped to come back to God and to die in peace."

Mother St. Alphonsine was the Assistant at that time; she was a chosen soul who exerted an irresistible influence on all who approached her. Her compassion, graciousness, gentleness and tireless dedication, which had been so admired by the wounded men at the 'Legislative Corps' in 1870, made her a model Sister of Bon Secours. Humility was her greatest quality and she had taken as a motto these words: "Love to be unknown." The Superiors appreciated her true value and, when Mother St. Fulgence was placed at the head of the Institute, she quickly recalled Mother St. Alphonsine to Paris to assist her. We will often meet her throughout this History, as she gives to the Congregation all the richness which grace had placed within her soul.

In the autumn of 1876, Mother St. Marguerite died at the Mother House; she had been afflicted with cancer of the stomach and her last days were marked by admirable patience. She was replaced by Mother St. Bertille whom we have already seen at Cork. Her extensive experience in government had greatly developed her many qualities. Mother St. Bertille was gifted with a strong and generous nature; she was very zealous for the observance of the Rule and was a perfect model of submission to her superiors. She stimulated the growth of virtue in her Sisters by her own example, and the community became a source of intense spiritual life.

We will not leave London without pointing out a few conversions witnessed by the Sisters and of which in part they were the instruments.

One of the Sisters tells this story. "A Protestant, who was a Free Mason, became very ill. The community said many fervent prayers for his conversion and an image of the Sacred Heart was pinned to his clothes. These small acts of faith brought results. The gentleman spent some time reflecting, and then he consented to see Bishop Daniel of the diocese of Southwark who had the joy of receiving him into the Church; and conferring on him the Sacrament of Confirmation. The sick man appeared to be very happy; little by little, his

strength returned, and soon he was able to go from room to room in his wheelchair. One day he asked me to take him to his workroom, and he showed me many oil paintings—portraits of the Masonic leaders. ‘Sister,’ he said, ‘please help my oldest daughter take all of these pictures, aprons and other emblems and decorations down to the courtyard. Burn them all; destroy them; make them disappear completely so that not even the smallest particle remains.’ What he had asked was done. The sick man’s sons watched me from the hotel window and asked me to save at least those things which were made of silver and to give the money to the poor. I did not wish to keep anything that had given honor to Lucifer, so everything disappeared in the flames.

The patient thanked me for having fulfilled his request so quickly. He lived for a few more months, continually thanking God for His mercy, and he died a holy death.”

The same Sister tells the following story also:

“I was sent to a woman who had a malignant fever. Mrs. G____ was a Protestant but, in reality, she did not belong to any sect and did not even know about religious practices. Nevertheless, the poor woman liked me to care for her and did not refuse to join with me in my prayers. The physicians wished to perform an operation; so according to their instructions her family took her to a private, Protestant hospital and thus I was no longer allowed to nurse her. They even refused to read a few psalms to her or say a prayer before she underwent that dangerous surgery.

The operation was successful and, little by little, she regained her strength. The sick woman demanded that they take her home and send for me. Though I was engaged with another patient at that time, arrangements were made to satisfy her request; so, after that I nursed her day and night. I slept in her room behind a small screen and I had hung my crucifix on the wall. One night, the light carried by the watchman shone into the room; the shadow of the crucifix fell on my bed and the sick woman saw it. At first she was very surprised but then she realized that it was the effect of the light playing on the wall. She begged me to give her my cross to kiss, which she did most respectfully and she appeared to meditate quite profoundly on the sign of our redemption.

I thought that the time had come to speak to her about seeing a priest, but I met a very firm refusal from her family who suggested calling an Anglican Minister whom they knew. The patient herself refused under pretext that he was too low church. So they brought her a High Church minister who arrived with a biretta on his head, a roman collar and a stole; he carried a chalice and presented a book to me, saying: ‘I wrote this book to be used as a preparation for communion. Read a few pages to the patient.’ I excused myself and explained to him that we were forbidden to read authors who were not of the Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church. He did not seem to be offended. ‘After all,’ he replied, ‘we are serving the same God; what church we belong to is of little importance. We will be saved, provided that we are good and charitable.’ The discussion continued for a while and then he concluded with these words from which a heretic could derive little consolation: ‘In the next world, Mrs. G____

will know which is the true religion.' He returned several more times to the patient's displeasure, for she had a great desire to die in the Catholic Church. Every effort to call a Catholic priest was made in vain. Nevertheless the end was approaching. In response to the dying woman's desire, I baptised her conditionally and suggested acts of faith, contrition and love of God as she held my crucifix in her hands. She raised it to her lips, then, fully conscious and in great peace, she died."

Here is another conversion found in the annals of the London Convent.

"During his military career, Mr. Alexander Knight of Auxland had completely abandoned all practice of religion and had lost his faith. When he returned to London he was excommunicated for having publically denied the infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Until that moment his health had been robust; but one day he was suddenly overwhelmed and paralyzed by an attack of apoplexy. This visible chastisement must have been an occasion of grace and salvation for him. The Pastor of the place, when notified of what had happened, sent immediately for a Sister of Bon Secours; and I was assigned to give this man the care he needed and requested. I saw at once that his condition was very serious and that he could be taken from this world at any moment. It was the end of November. So, I suggested that the family begin a novena with me to the Immaculate Virgin, then I asked Mr. Knight to join with us as we said the prayers; to everyone's surprise he agreed to do so. On the morning of the 8th of December, we went to Mass for his intention; several members of the family and I received Holy Communion. Then we returned to Mr. Knight's bedside to finish the novena. While we were praying he suddenly began to move his feet and his hands which, until then, had been completely lifeless and had seemed like lead weights. I was very moved and said: 'There is certainly someone here who is lacking in faith; could it be me?' The sobs of the unfortunate man answered me: 'Oh! no,' he cried through his tears, 'I am the one who is paralyzing God's goodness by my life that is so full of sin.' I comforted him as best I could and promised him that we would begin a second novena for his intention. It was to finish on the octave of the feast of the Immaculate Conception; and on that day grace triumphed over that rebellious heart. Mr. Knight asked to go to confession and to receive the last Sacraments. From that moment on a complete change in his way of thinking took place. In order to make reparation for the insults he had uttered against the Blessed Virgin, he wished to publicly wear her livery. He obtained a large rosary which he wore around his neck and he recited it each day until his death on Christmas day of the following year. Thus God gave him an entire year in which to expiate and regret his faults. A priest brought him Holy Communion each week, and from the Bread of the Life he drew new strength to suffer. His patience and the sentiments of which his life bore witness made a great impression on his wife. She had been a convert to Catholicism but practiced her religion very little; but from then on she became a fervent Christian.

Chapter XXII

*Revision of the Constitutions
Resignation of Mother St. Cecile
Election of Mother St. Beatrix
Definitive Approbation of the Institute
Death of the Superior General
Election of Mother St. Fulgence*

1874—1877

The Congregation of Bon Secours celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its institution on January 24, 1874. Fifty years had passed since the first twelve Nursing Sisters gave themselves to God through the instrumentality of Archbishop de Quelen, and it was with limitless thanksgiving that the Sisters reflected on the path they had walked since then.

The General Council thought that it was time to request the definitive approbation of the Institute. Since the Laudatory Brief had been obtained, the Congregation had grown and expanded, and some important foundations had been made. It was expedient then to give it some stability, and to secure the ties which already united it with Rome. In spite of her advanced age, Mother St. Cecile still faithfully and bravely held the reins of government; and before she transferred them to other hands, she wholeheartedly desired to obtain this final approbation for the Congregation.

First of all it was necessary to accomplish the work of revision necessitated by the observations formulated by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars concerning the Constitutions; this had been delayed because of the grave circumstances which had arisen in the last ten years.

The local superiors, who had been called to Paris for the annual retreat which preceded the patronal feast of the 24th of May, were invited to participate in the deliberations and to give their opinion. They had no difficulty incorporating the modifications required by Rome into the Rule; these pertained mainly to insufficient or obscure wording.

A written report of the work which resulted was submitted to His Eminence Cardinal Guibert, who gave it his highest approval and wished to support the request of the Sisters by writing a personal letter to the Holy See. Here is the text of his letter:

"Most Holy Father,

The pious congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours, whose mother house is in Paris and which already received a Laudatory Brief from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1864, earnestly requests to receive the supreme and definitive sanction of the Apostolic See.

We most willingly unite our request to the Superior General's petition, because we know how well these Sisters realize the goal of their institute by ministering to the needs of the sick and the dying. It is generally known that the Sisters of Bon Secours are very much esteemed and that, by their modesty, charity and patience, the sick, even the most obdurate, are led to receive the last sacraments. They greatly assist the priests in the ministry which they perform for the dying.

Therefore we praise the Lord, who, in His mercy and for the needs of our great city, has given us this help for the many people who so often look upon the priest with suspicion.

With earnest entreaty we recommend the Superior General's petition to you, Most Holy Father, and, by virtue of your supreme authority, we beseech Your Holiness to recognize, confirm and ratify the Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours definitively by approving and sanctioning its constitutions.

Hipp., Cardinal Archbishop of Paris"

Divine Providence gave Bon Secours a very visible expression of help at this momentous occasion in the persons of two Marist Fathers: Father Germain and Father Forestier.

It should be remembered that ties of esteem and reciprocal devotion had been established between the two Institutes for ten years. The spiritual direction, and later the annual retreats for the Mother House and the Novitiate, were entrusted to the Marist Fathers at the request of the Archbishop of Paris. Thus they were in a position to sincerely appraise the virtues and religious spirit of the Sisters; they in turn placed their confidence in the Fathers who put no limit to their interest or their prayers. This regular flow of spiritual support was quite logical. The mission of the Marist Fathers

was, according to the mind of Venerable Colin, their founder, to increase the spirit of Nazareth in the world; that spirit of meekness, simplicity and cordiality with which they themselves were to be permeated. Is this not the same spirit which Mère Geay's Sisters diffuse all around them?

Among the members of the Society of Mary who were outstanding in their devotion to Bon Secours, Father Gabriel Germain must be placed at the top of the list immediately after Father Ruat, the much loved and respected Chaplain of the Mother House since 1865. After having been Secretary General of the Society, then successively the Superior of St. Chamond College and Bar-le-Duc Colleges, he was named Procurator, first at Lyons and then at Paris. These functions allowed him ample time to dedicate to his "special works": the direction of souls and preaching in several religious communities. It was at that time that he came into closer contact with Mother St. Cecile and Mother St. Fulgence, who was the Mistress of Novices at the time. He found them completely devoted to Our Lord and determined to serve God as He wanted to be served; and, for a priest, this is a source of great consolation.

Father Germain led souls high and far! His friend and biographer in judging him as a director says, "He excelled in knowledge of the human soul through his keenness of mind, sureness of insight and uprightness of judgment, but most of all because he had much recourse to prayer and did not rely on himself. Like all masters of the spiritual life who formed souls to the interior life, the direction Father gave had its foundation in mortification as well as on prayer, but, when indicated, he preferred interior self denial as it gave less cause for pride. 'Beatings are but beatings,' he said, 'and self-love can find nourishment even in these practices. What can nature find in continual self renouncement, refusal of even permissible pleasures and satisfaction, bearing the faults of our neighbors and carrying the crosses with which life's path is strewn? What can self love find, if not death?'

"Indeed the holy director sought to increase grace through the death of self-love. When he was allowed to do so, he pursued the 'Self' into its inmost recesses, not missing the least attachment or self seeking, and cutting to the very source with the sureness of an accomplished surgeon. The more a soul interested him, the more he desired it to be supernatural; and, if she staggered under his hand, the good Father lifted her up again and strengthened her with words of healing love."

Father Germain was called to Lyons in 1873 to fulfill the important function of Procurator of the Missions. His overwhelming occupations did not in any way lessen his interest in Bon Secours. He wished to preside at the meetings where the revision work, which we mentioned earlier, was to be done and, afterwards, he prepared the dossier which was to be sent to Rome. "The Congregation of Bon Secours is too precious," he wrote, "for us not to

give it all possible proofs of our care and concern. I have deliberately used the word *us* because I know that these are our Father General's thoughts and sentiments."

Indeed, it was Reverend Father Favre who assigned Father Forestier, Procurator of the Society of Mary in Rome, to represent the Sisters of Bon Secours to the Holy See, and to take all the steps necessary to obtain the definitive approbation of that Institute.

Father Forestier left Lyons on the 5th of November carrying the precious documents which he was to submit to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and resolved to use all of his power for the cause which had been placed in his hands. The day he departed, he wrote to the Superior General of Bon Secours: "In spite of my lack of experience, I am confident that we shall succeed; first of all because you are going to pray, and then because I know that you desire only God's will and so do those with whom we will be meeting in Rome."

The correspondence of this period gives ample witness of the truly paternal interest which the Marist Fathers, and particularly Father Germain, showed in that great affair. His dedication never slackened, which is extraordinary when you consider the multiple preoccupations which were also his regarding the messages to Oceanica, the departure of the Missionaries whom he accompanied to Marseille, the visitation of the colleges; indeed, a vast number of things which wore him out before his time and hastened his death.

"I am here, always here," he reassured the Mother General, who apologized for her frequent requests, "always ready to help you until God Himself wishes to complete and perfect that which I have tried to do with His grace for His dear Congregation. The priest in Rome, involved in the business of the approval of our Constitutions, shared his own experiences and knowledge with Father Forestier, and indicated the necessary steps to take. It seems as if the Society of Mary has put itself completely at the service of our dear Sisters of Bon Secours. I see in this a pledge of great success which I desire even as much as your beloved Mother and the entire Congregation. The perusal of your Constitutions has been good for me; they are so exactly according to the mind of God. May the Lord be blessed!"

When Father Forestier told him that the necessary steps had been taken, Father Germain quickly informed Mother St. Cecile. At the same time, he earnestly urged the Sisters to arm themselves with patience, for he said: "in Rome things are done slowly because they are done wisely."

Indeed, the Sisters practiced patience for a long time during that period of waiting which preceded the happy solution. Nothing could be more justified than that ardent desire of seeing the work, to which they had consecrated their entire lives, blessed and approved by Rome. During the

winter of 1875, Father Germain wrote to them: "My dear Sisters, like you, I am longing for the day and the hour when we may sing the *Te Deum* and say our *Magnificat* with our Lady. That day will come, that hour will sound, and I hope that it will be soon; because Father Forestier has taken every possible care, and has given his whole heart and zeal to this cause which he loves and wishes to see brought to a happy and definitive conclusion."

However, the time for the General elections was rapidly approaching; and Mother St. Cecile was resolved to give up the responsibility, for the burden had become too heavy for her. She chose May 1, 1875 as the day to send her resignation to Bishop Caron, the Vicar General and Ecclesiastical Superior of the Institute. She humbly requested that in the next elections all the votes which might be given her be considered as lost votes. In view of the state of her health, which would no longer permit her either to visit the houses in France or Ireland or to maintain a correspondence with the Sisters who were away from the Mother House, no one could accuse her of any lack of dedication.

In support of her decision she added another reason that concerned her personally: "For thirty years I have, more or less faithfully, fulfilled the role of Martha. It would make me very happy to be allowed to dedicate my remaining years to the role of Mary, so as to prepare for the terrible judgment which, the Wise Man says, awaits those who have held the reins of authority and government."

Father Germain approved her course of action, and you can almost hear his priestly heart speaking the words which he addressed to Mother a few days before the elections; they are a most beautiful expression of the esteem with which she inspired him. "Today, reverend and dear Mother, I would like to go into retreat with you and your Sisters to begin this most important novena; by a happy coincidence it is taking place at the same time as the date of the anniversary of the Descent of the Holy Spirit at the Cenacle. Mary will be with you as she was with the apostles; and it is she who will preside at this great moment in the family of Bon Secours as she did formerly for the destiny of the Church.

"Have confidence, dear Mother, in your faith and in your love for God and for your Institute! What you have done will draw many special blessings on the elections which are to take place. It is with deep feeling that I see you leave the government of your Institute, but the example which you have given in this situation fills me with edification and hope. How can God not bless the holy dispositions which He Himself inspired?

"'Mother' you will always remain; Mother in heart and in dedication; and the Congregation, which you love with your whole heart, will, through its affection, respect and gratitude, try to repay you for all you have done in working for its prosperity for so many years.

"More than anyone else, Reverend Mother, I feel that grace is at work here; that it is God's work. You kindly associated me with the life and works of your Institute, and encouraged me to regard it as my own; this trust has honored me and deeply touched me.

"I will continue to be devoted to the interests of your Congregation, and I will pray that the great affair being conducted in Rome, which will remain as one of the most beautiful fruits of your time as superior, will soon come to that successful conclusion which we await with such lively and legitimate impatience."

The example given by the Superior General, with such simplicity and religious dignity, produced its fruits. She had the consolation of seeing all of her Sisters animated with a spiritual outlook and united in great charity.

The evening before the elections, Mother St. Fulgence, who knew how to appreciate things at their true value, expressed the sentiments of all when she wrote to Sister St. Alphonsine: "Our dear Reverend Mother, whom we soon will no longer address as such, but who will always remain thus in our hearts, has asked me to tell you that she sends you her blessing with all the affection of her heart. How painful it is to think that in four days someone else will occupy her place! Yes, the *Fiat* is sorrowful; nevertheless, we must say it courageously. The act made by our mother is worthy of her. If you could only see her serenity and her smiling face! It seems that in giving her resignation, she has done what is most natural to her. Father Germain was filled with admiration.

"Let us pray then, that the one who will be elected to lead us will have the same sense of judgment, prudence and serenity which gives so much strength to government."

Bishop Caron, the Archdeacon and Vicar General, presided at the Chapter. The majority of votes were given to Mother St. Beatrix who was so dignified and possessed so much goodness of heart. All of the Sisters loved her, and they appreciated her kindness and intelligence. She was one of the four Nursing Sisters who cared for the wounded at Tuileries in 1848 and received a commemorative medal in recognition of her work.

You may recall that in 1861 Mother St. Beatrix replaced Mother St. Cecile as superior at Abbeville; and that town unanimously expressed regret when she was sent to London at the beginning of the war. We have seen her at work in that mission; her wisdom, prudence and unlimited charity drew many blessings on the little house in Kentishtown as well as the interest of Cardinal Manning, his priests and even the Protestants.

Mother St. Beatrix had been the Assistant General since 1872. Her health was very fragile, and she had to call upon every source of her religious strength in order to accept the burden of office, for she thought that she had reached the end of her career. Here is how Father Germain greeted her election:

"Reverend Mother,

Good Father Ruat has just informed me of your election as Superior General. I am too interested in and concerned for the Congregation of Bon Secours not to tell you how satisfied and pleased I am with their choice of you.

You know, my dear Sister, how much wisdom, firmness, intelligence and zeal your predecessor expended to increase and enrich the heritage which she places in your hands, and which you are now called upon to improve still more. May her spirit of faith animate you and, being inspired by the same good traditions which she followed, may you also be able to contribute to the prosperity of the Institute which God appears to bless in a very special manner. Your Congregation has already done so much good and, in the future, it will be even more strongly fortified and accomplish much more.

My dear Sister, when the approbation you desire so much does arrive from Rome, it will be a source of great joy and encouragement for you. Let us continue our prayers so as to hasten the happy moment when you may rejoice over that favor.

Yesterday, I wrote to Father Forestier, who is so involved in this affair, and I pleaded with him to tell me at what stage they were in the proceedings. Today, I will tell him about your election and, being certain of your sentiments, I will also tell him that although the Superior had been changed, for him nothing had been changed.

Germain, S.M."

Less than a month had passed since the elections had modified the government of the Institute, when the precious Brief arrived, containing the definitive approbation of the Holy See and all the privileges attached to it. The Congregation of Bon Secours was thus united to Rome more than ever, and had its own special place in the Church; henceforth it could be said that it was protected, supported and more immediately and specifically under the direction of the Holy See.

When he heard the good news, Father Germain said: "What an honor and what great good fortune! At the same time, what a security it is for your dear Congregation to have been the first to open the way in the Church, and to ask the Apostolic blessing on a kind of dedication which had startled many in the beginning; but which, inspired by the Heart of the Divine Master and by Mary, Health of the Sick and Refuge of Sinners, is called to do such great good."

It is easy to imagine how joyously the *Te Deum* was sung in all of the houses of Bon Secours, and with what filial gratitude the Sisters called down blessings on the much loved Pontiff, Pius IX who had granted them this special favor.

The details of the canonical approbation of the Constitutions were still awaited. The Rule, as a whole, had been implicitly approved by the very fact of having received the Brief. Father Forestier applied himself with the same generous zeal as before to obtain this last favor for the Congregation, which was so dear to him; and his efforts were again crowned with success. March 9, 1877, the Constitutions of the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris received the

first approval which, after a certain lapse of time, would permit them to seek definitive approbation.

This happy outcome acted as a catalyst which caused all the members of the Institute to endeavor to outdo one another in the practice of all the virtues which this Holy Rule endeavored to safeguard.

"What rich themes the Constitutions will furnish for our conferences!" wrote Father Germain as the monthly retreat approached. "Your Sisters will greatly desire to put their whole lives in harmony with the holiness demanded of them by this approved Rule. They will receive it reverently and lovingly as coming from the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff; and the Blessed Virgin will bless her daughters' fervent dispositions."

However, it seemed as if this great favor must be dearly bought. During the spring of 1877, several promising young Sisters died, and several others became ill. God's ways seem strange sometimes, but that is nothing new. The Lord has a habit of trying the just and, often, when He blesses them with one hand, He seems to wish to crush them with the other one.

Father Germain shared this great trial: "I suffer with you," he wrote to the Superior General. "As I read your last two letters, I was carried back to an old but never-to-be-forgotten time when I saw some of my young neophytes dying each day. It continued for a year. It is well and good to say that they went to God, but I could find no comfort in their loss or, above all, in seeing the Mission apparently die with them. You have not reached that state, but I'm sure you have experienced some of those same feelings."

Mother St. Fulgence, the Novice Mistress, was especially afflicted by the deaths of those young souls whom she had cultivated with such care and love; and yet, she was able to rejoice that they had gone so joyfully to the eternal banquet. Writing to Sister St. Alphonsine in London, she said: "Sister St. Emilienne's most edifying death moved me greatly, and filled me with its sweetness. We could say that an angel has left the earth. Not a single complaint was heard throughout her long suffering; and she always had a smile for anyone who came to her. She expressed one desire—to die as a religious. When the doctor spoke of sending her back to her family, she asked to die; not in order to avoid work or suffering, but so as not to have to leave the novitiate. Her prayer was answered; because six months later Heaven opened its gates to her. I say Heaven without any hesitation, since that dear young woman wished only the will of God, and the very thought of soon rejoicing in His presence filled her with joy. May we be able to leave this earth with such holy dispositions!"

A second trial came to sadden the Institute—the sudden and unexpected death of Mother St. Beatrix. For many years that holy Mother had been ready, and she had worked tirelessly in the Lord's vineyard. We previously met her during the winter of 1870 when she had serenely prepared to leave

London without being upset that she was unable to finish her work there. Like a faithful servant, she went to receive the reward of her labors, and her letters at that time clearly show how great were her detachment, serenity and spirit of sacrifice.

At the beginning of that same year, she wrote to the Superior in Dublin: "The years pass, dear Sister, and no two are alike. What will this one be like? God alone knows; yet, even without being prophets, we can say that, like the year that is ending, it will bring each one of us some sufferings and some crosses. Let us accept them in advance and know how to make them meritorious by our submission to God's will. I wish you, Mother, and all of your Sisters in Dublin what a mother can desire for her spiritual family: progress in perfection through self denial, humility and charity; in short, all of the religious virtues. It makes demands on our nature to strive for perfection, but the abundant graces which we receive and the thought of heaven which will be our recompense make all things easier. So, have courage! Here below fatigue and humiliations; in heaven, rest and glory!"

We have already seen Mother St. Beatrix's sensitivity and responsiveness to others. She disliked causing suffering to the Sisters; however, she often was forced to impose sacrifices on them which made their hearts bleed. That is what happened at the time of the General Chapter in 1877 when certain difficult changes had to be made. The sadness of separation was added to her other interior sufferings. It was the 31st of May; Mother had just taken leave of the Superiors who were returning to Ireland and England, and she made a great effort to hold back her tears as she returned to her room. Suddenly she lost consciousness and fell. Mother St. Beatrix lingered for five days but, in spite of all that was done to save her, she remained unconscious until her death.

The Superiors had stopped at Abbeville before boarding the ship; and it was there that they received the news of the tragedy. Immediately they returned to Paris and were with Mother when she drew her last breath.

Mother St. Cecile, who had survived so many Sisters, again took up the reins of government temporarily and, under the authorization of the Archbishop of Paris, she made arrangements for another General Chapter which took place on the first of July.

All of the Sisters fervently prayed that God would place at the head of their Institute someone who would lead it to full and perfect development.

Their prayers were heard; the great majority of the Chapter delegates, very evidently guided by the Holy Spirit, gave their votes to Mother St. Fulgence. We will see her in action and her works will be her praise. Mother St. Cecile was very happy about the election and wanted the pleasure of bringing the new superior to the community room where the community was eagerly waiting. This action caused Archbishop Caron to say: "It is the Old Testament which introduces the New."

We already know that the new Superior possessed wisdom, prudence and great strength of mind. Yet, though she was most generous by nature, Mother St. Fulgence appeared to have a cold exterior, which sometimes hindered the outpourings of intimate confidences. However, her Sisters always found her advice to be wise and experienced, her affection to be motherly and her example to be holy; outwardly she was so quiet and dignified. Her presence alone inspired respect; a few words from her were worth more than many long speeches, and a look was enough to restore order.

She excelled in the difficult art of governing. She knew how to wait, to be patient and to abstain when necessary; above all she knew how to pray and to place God in all her undertakings.

The new Superior professed an absolute worship for the Rule. She was singleminded in all things and pursued one goal: the observance of the Rule. She proved to be not only its living image, but also its faithful guardian. *"Let us keep our Rule and God will watch over us,"* she loved to repeat, and: *"God proportions His blessings to our fidelity."*

In sum, Mother St. Fulgence was "great in heart, mind and soul; she lived only for God and His glory." The Lord could not have given Bon Secours a more tangible proof of His love than in leaving them under the direction of that chosen soul for twenty-five years. Let us listen to Father Germain as he expresses his joy at the news of the election:

"My very dear child,

Lyons, July 3, 1877

Allow me to still call you by this name while waiting to give you that of Reverend Mother, and you will more easily recognize the source of the congratulations which I send you and the encouragement which I want to accompany it. The congratulations are for the Institute; the encouragement is for you.

Poor child! It is a heavy burden that God has come to place on your shoulders; but He will know how to lighten it by His grace, and He will give your shoulders the strength to support it generously. Have courage then and confidence! You love your Congregation so much; you keenly desire that it prosper and that the Constitutions be understood and above all be well lived, so that God, who first put this devotion in your heart, has chosen you Himself to put it into action. Oh, Yes, it is He who wishes it; it is certainly by His will that you are there, and also why I am not afraid for you. As a humble instrument which is pliable and responsive in His hand, you will do only what He wishes you to do. It is He who will inspire, direct and strengthen you; and it is also He who will preserve the good spirit which animates your religious family, and which, I am sure, will continue to grow under your kindly influence.

Yes, I am happy with the result of your election, very happy indeed. You are surrounded by very good helpers, and, if the tasks and functions do not quite respond to your desires, God will surely know how to make up for what is lacking.

Experience is a great teacher. Allow her to arrange all things, and be patient so as to improve them, even if at first you are unable to correct or change them.

I am writing to you, my child, through my messenger from Oceanica, but I want to be one of the first to reach you with my compliments and to express my satisfaction at the news. Our Reverend Father General wishes me to tell you how pleased he is, too.

And now, my dear child, allow me to close this letter by expressing my best wishes for your Congregation, which seems to have become even more precious to me; and always believe in the devotion which I had for the child, and which I will never cease to have for the Reverend Mother.

Germain, S.M."

These hope-filled words which greeted the debut of a long and fruitful government would be fully realized. Mother St. Fulgence was indeed "a humble, docile instrument in God's hands; she allowed herself to be inspired and directed by His Spirit;" that is why she knew how to do great things and form great souls.

Chapter XXIII

The Constitutions

As an artery carries life from the heart to its members, so all Institutes founded within the Church possess an Ark of the Covenant which contains their vital force: the Constitutions.

This precious deposit was prepared for the Sisters of Bon Secours through the zealous, careful work of two holy priests: Father Desjardins and Father Debrosse, and was placed in trust into the hands of Mère Geay. It is easy to see how faithful and courageous she was in preserving it intact; because it was certainly owing to the deep respect for the Rule which she had inspired in her Sisters, and the scrupulous care with which it had been observed, that the prompt and magnificent development of the Institute is due.

These Constitutions were drawn up at the bedside of the dying foundress and in the midst of innumerable trials. Thus they were doubly sacred in the eyes of the holy women who, recalling their humble beginnings, were overwhelmed with wonder and gratitude as they realized that from a tiny seed God had brought forth a tree which was producing such excellent fruit.

We have witnessed this providential growth. Now that the Constitutions had been sifted by the highest Authority, perfected in their smallest details and invested with canonical sanction, it will be useful to study them. Such a survey will show us what a Bon Secours Sister really is, as she walks through life with a crucifix in one hand and the Rule Book in the other.

The initial words of this work were written by Archbishop de Quelen: *supernaturalize the mission of the nursing Sister so as to save souls by taking care of*

the bodies of the sick. The Institute's main thrust was focused on the attainment of that goal.

The Constitutions are divided into two parts: the first treats of the spirit and virtues which are characteristic of the Sisters of Bon Secours; the second regulates the functions and duties of the Congregation.

The conditions required for the admission of candidates are full of wisdom and charity. Some of the requisite qualities are: socially—a family in good standing, a normal education, good health and no physical deformity or disease; personally—a willing, peaceful, generous spirit, an even tempered manner, a genuinely kind and compassionate heart and a serene mind. Persons predisposed to singularity, haughtiness, sarcasm, scoffing or irascibility are to be carefully excluded. Persons with such inclinations may perhaps be admitted to other communities whose style of life would meet their needs. As the main focus in Bon Secours is on the sick, the holiness demanded of the Sisters lies in their ability to give of themselves joyfully for the love of God to the afflicted, the infirm and the dying without any restrictions.

The real sign of the vocation will be the love and practice of the virtues special to the Institute which the novitiate aims to develop.

Through a deep, sincere and interior *Piety* the nursing Sister will supernaturalize her work, attributing it to God alone, and endeavoring to maintain a singleness of purpose which does not become distracted by creatures.

Modesty will be a safeguard for her vow of Chastity. "In the care of the sick especially, the attentive and modest Sister will dutifully seek to combine with her ministry the precautions of chastity and the most scrupulous propriety."*

The Sister will affirm her spirit of *Faith*, her intention to work for God alone, to constantly see Jesus in her patients and to be most careful to begin her attendance upon the sick with prayer.

But the essential virtue in which she should excell is *Patience*. The Rule says: "To live constantly amidst groanings, complaints, cries of suffering, fits of delirium; to have to bear all moods, whims, reproaches, ingratitude, and even the anger of persons for whom she sacrifices herself, not to mention the fatigue and the most repugnant duties, such is the lot of the Sisters of Bon Secours. She will consider herself placed as at a post *at the bedside of the sick*,** chosen by Jesus Christ Himself; and, to struggle against weariness, she will recall some circumstances of the Passion of Christ in which He showed a patience nothing could dismay."

*All quotes of the Rule have been copied from the 1933 Constitutions or an undated handwritten copy of an earlier version.

**Translator's note: the words *at the bedside of the sick* appear in the *History* as written but, do not appear in the handwritten Rule or the 1933 printed Rule at our disposal. Significant in light of today's apostolic evolution?

However, what would patience be without *Charity*, if not a body without a soul. It should not only be said of the members of the Congregation: "See how they love one another!"; but their untiring devotion to the sick must force them to cry: "See how they love them!"

As servants of *Jesus infirme* (the afflicted Jesus) they will have a compassionate love for the sick, will anticipate their needs, relieve them with their own hands and support them in their arms. In a word, they will be an eye to the blind and a foot to the lame,⁹¹ the smile to the sorrowful, and, without respect for persons, they will bestow a lively and unremitting charity on all. The Sister of Bon Secours will also be attentive to the spiritual needs of her patients; and charity will inspire her prayers for the salvation of the souls confided to her care. This virtue will make her creative and ingenious in finding means to satisfy, clarify and persuade, so as to tell the dying patient the truth about their condition, when the members of the family are trying to lull them into a false security.

The Church calls Mary the *Prudent Virgin*. As her daughters, the Sisters will practice the virtue of *Prudence* which is so necessary for them as they work in the midst of the world. "It consists in studying and using all the wisest expedients for doing good and avoiding evil. Assuredly it is the Sisters of Bon Secours who must unite *the prudence of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove*.⁹² Besides the precautions to be observed with the sick, the Sisters must be on their guard in their dealings with the people who surround them."

The above may be summed up in that all embracing *Self denial* which "includes humility, complete renunciation and perfect disinterestedness which will bring them to accept and regard all of the humiliations, fatigues, vigils and rebuffs as a precious reward."

Inspired by St. Bernard's maxim: "*Pauvreté toujours, malpropreté jamais*," (Poverty always, slovenliness never), the Constitutions require *cleanliness* in the outward appearance of the Sisters as a sacred duty. "This virtue must become one of the most cherished habits for the Sisters in everything that concerns herself and her patient."

Like a river coming from its source so all the virtues, required of the members of the Institute, flow from fidelity to the three vows which bind the religious to Jesus Christ and constitute the greatness of their vocation.

The Sisters of Bon Secours will place the lily of the *angelic virtue* under the protection of Mary Immaculate. "If our heavenly Mother, says the Rule,* "was disturbed at the sight of the angel who greeted her as full of grace, should not we, such frail and fragile reeds, who live in the world and are

*Translator's note: The Rules at my disposal do not contain this sentence.

exposed to so many temptations, be even more fearful?" These words express the reserve and watchful prudence which are prescribed for the Nursing Sisters.

The virtue of *Poverty*, which is the bulwark of the Religious life, must be practiced in all its perfection; and here, too, the dangers of contact with the world have been anticipated. No Sister may have the use of money or of anything superfluous; nor may any of them accept gifts from anyone outside the community or dispose of anything whatsoever without the permission of the Superior. The serene and often admirable patience, with which the Sisters bear the privations inherent to foundations, is sufficient proof that they have fully embodied the spirit of the Institute, and that the impetus of the early days, when the foundresses themselves were in actual want in the poor little house in rue Cassette, has not weakened.

The practice of *Obedience* will be easy for a religious who lives by faith: "Regarding the Superior as holding the place of Jesus Christ, she will have for her a profound respect and a sincere love; and she shall consider it a duty to obey her completely, promptly, courageously and humbly in whatever she may order and at the least sign from her. The Sister will allow the superior complete liberty to do what she wants with her and with anything that affects her." In order to stimulate herself to practice obedience in all its perfection, the Sister of Bon Secours will take her inspiration from the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who made Himself obedient unto death, even to the death on the cross.*⁹³

We will not enter into the details of the regulations which concern the nursing Sister. The words: entire renunciation and freedom of spirit, are imprinted there in letters of fire.

By reason of the special vocation of the Sisters, to which everything is subordinated, they will not be burdened with any practice of piety or special prayers. Their devotion will be interior and will have "above all as its object," says the Rule, "the Sacred Heart of Jesus which is the source and center of charity and zeal, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and St. Joseph whom they will regard as the guardian of their Institute."

The Sisters will practice no extraordinary mortifications without permission; but at every opportunity they should practice interior mortification with regard to food and clothing. We have already seen how this point of the Rule was understood and practiced.

The greatest prudence has been exercised in regulating the probation of candidates, and this with reason, because as stated in the Rule: "the Sisters of Bon Secours being, by the very nature of their functions exposed to great dangers, prudence requires that, before being admitted to the religious profession, they should undergo lengthy trials and give unequivocal proof of solid virtue.

"For this purpose, therefore, there will be three degrees of probation; that of the postulants which shall be for six months; that of the novices for two years; and that of probationers for five years." The probationers renew their vows each year, with the permission of the Superior until their perpetual profession, by which they engage themselves forever to the Congregation; this engagement is reciprocal.*

The outward life of the Institute, its routine, hierarchy and government had yet to be regulated. In order to assure unity of spirit and remove all vacillation, the helm was placed in the hands of a Superior General from the very beginning; her authority extended over the local Superiors as well as over the other members of the religious family.

To conclude, the Rule says: "The Superior General must have at heart the care and solicitude of the whole Congregation, be ever watchful for its preservation and increase, and effectively guide and direct it towards the diverse ends for which it strives for the glory of God and the good of souls." It rests with her to assign the duties and offices, to allocate the Sisters to one or other of the houses, and to appoint the local Superiors; she also assumes the responsibility for new foundations and for their organization; she admits the postulants and receives their profession; she is likewise responsible to convoke the Chapter after having conferred with the Bishop and to administer the temporal possessions of the Institute.

This exposé gives us some idea of what a heavy burden Mère Geay had undertaken at the beginning when submitting to the wishes of Father Desjardins.

The portrait of that holy religious and of those who have succeeded her are, it seems to us, traced out in Article number 4, which says: "The Superior General must very singularly distinguish herself by her piety and her spirit of prayer, in order to obtain the necessary graces and blessings of heaven for the Congregation which she has been called to govern. It is important that she be free from a spirit of ambition and excessive trust in self, relying upon assistance from above and being a model of humility, poverty, charity and of all the virtues to her daughters. Keeping always before her eyes the important concerns that had been confided to her, she will walk steadfastly in the footsteps of Jesus and Mary, and will desire only the good of the Institute."

Father Desjardins and Father Debrosse had decided that, during the first twenty years, the Superior would be elected only every five years. But since 1880 and according to the directives received from Rome, the elections have taken place only every six years. Up until that time the local Superiors went

*Translator's note: This quote is a free translation as the source could not be found in the versions of the Rule at my disposal.

to the Mother House every year on the 24th of May, the patronal feast of the Institute, and assembled in Council to deal with any pending matters, to ascertain the progress made and to discuss proposed improvements. The General Chapter now meets every three years according to the conditions required by the Sacred Congregation of Regulars.

Everything is foreseen to relieve the Superior General and to help her bear her burden. She has five Assistants who have no duties which oblige them to remain far from her; they, with the Treasurer (Econome) and the Secretary General form her Council which meets once a week or as often as it is deemed necessary. Nevertheless, her responsibility is quite heavy and, so as to remain equal to her task, she must keep continually before her eyes this maxim of St. Thérèse: *"The shepherd, in order to fulfill his office well, must always remain on the highest ground, so as to be able, from there, to see all his flock, and to keep watch for the wild beasts who might come to attack it. Now this high ground is PRAYER."* From these heights, and deeply penetrated by divine Light, she will judge and act in all circumstances with wisdom, clear-sightedness, prudence and charity.

Chapter XXIV

Focus on Lille and the Providence Orphanage 1877—1879

A few days before the meeting of the General Chapter, the adjournment of which was saddened by the sudden death of Mother St. Beatrix, the Congregation experienced another loss, which touched particularly the community in Lille and awakened many memories there.

Mother St. Henry, the former Superior at Lille, died peacefully at seventy-one years of age. Since 1869 she had fulfilled the duty of General Treasurer, and even there she found hundreds of occasions to give of herself and to sacrifice herself for the Institute. When her health began to fail, she isolated herself completely from the outside world and spent her days in retreat and prayer. This much loved Mother died as she had lived, holily; she was assisted by her own sister, Mother St. Cecile, who would not herself tarry long in joining her in their heavenly homeland.

Bishop Lefebvre gave this moving homage in her memory when he wrote to the Superior General after having learned of her death: "I have always had a great respect and affection for this good Mother because of her deep spirit of faith, her admirable kindness to all, and her forgetfulness of self; she was a true religious of Bon Secours.

"I do believe that our good God called her to Himself during the octave of the Ascension through the special design of His Will. How many times during her pain and difficulties she was heard to exclaim: 'All of this is

nothing provided we are able to merit heaven.' Now that this pious desire is going to be fulfilled, let us pray with all our hearts so as to hasten her reward.

"As I bring this letter to an end my eyes are wet with tears as I think of the irrevocable separation brought about by death. Mother St. Henry was one of those trustworthy souls in whom you could have complete confidence, and I would be most ungrateful if I ever forget her."

At that same period in our history, the dear and much loved senior Sisters at Lille disappeared one by one; they had assured the success of the good works by their tireless devotion over many years. Two of the twelve first Sisters, who had made their profession into the hands of Archbishop de Quelen in 1824, were among them; Sister St. Jean and Sister St. Thérèse. The former Sister died in 1874 after having given many examples of virtue, which were often heroic. She remained useful and active both in community and outside until her very last day. When her age no longer permitted her to nurse the sick, she begged the Superior to send her to pray with the dying; and she died at eighty-one years of age, bent in two with her wicker basket and her prayer books.

Sister St. Jean was distinguished by a charity which nothing was able to diminish or disturb; she was ingenious in finding an excuse for every wrong or fault, and was never heard blaming her neighbor in spite of the snares which the young professed Sisters sometimes mischievously set for her, in order to try her. Her faith was so alive that it seemed she could see God in the sacred host. When she was doing hand work, she liked to recite the psalms; and in her last years she was often heard repeating: "*My God, when will I see You face to face?*"

The life of Sister St. Thérèse was no less simple or devoted; she died in 1880. The most humble tasks had an irresistible attraction for her, and her concern for the sick was remarkable; nevertheless, she preferred the poor above all others; and her memory is still very much alive in the St. Sauveur quarter where she was the humble servant of the needy during so many years.

All of these dear older Sisters were models of respect for authority, and they always knelt to ask even the least permission. One day they were deeply pained by the conduct of one of the young Sisters who had answered the Superior in a manner that showed very little respect. In the midst of this upsetting situation Father Lefebvre arrived. When he learned what had taken place, he declared that a religious who committed such a fault was not worthy to take part in the exercises of the community, or even to sit at table with them; as a penance, he made her retire to her room and remain there for the entire day. The Sister who had carried meals to this young Sister has related this incident.

But those darker shadows were rare! A thousand edifying examples illumine the history of the community at Lille, and clearly show how alive

the religious spirit was. Even today the humility of Sister St. Antoine, who started the free school in Lille with Sister St. Thérèse, is often mentioned. During the retreat she would go to the refectory, beg her food from her companions, and would eat it on her knees. When the time came for her to leave Lille, it was a great sacrifice for her; nevertheless, she made it generously. One of the Sisters, who was present at her departure, recalls having overheard Sister praying aloud, when she thought herself alone, and asking God for the grace to hold back her tears so as not to diminish the merit of her obedience.

One of the most beautiful persons in the community at Lille was Sister St. Eugene who replaced Sister St. Antoine in directing the classes. Sister was gifted with sound judgment and unlimited dedication in the cause of good; she exercised a lasting influence on the students and formed strong, convinced and sincere Christians by her profound yet clear-sighted piety. Many young women were preserved from evil and brought back to virtue's way by her efforts! Her influence was a recognized fact, and almost everyone was eager to help when she explained the needs of her poor people; it was rare that she was refused. Sister St. Eugene was very hard on herself and admirable in her practice of poverty. She was guided by that same spirit when, towards the end of her life, she went to the Mayor, Mr. Beghin, to ask for a simple plot in the cemetery in her capacity as a public school mistress. Not only was her request heard, but she was assured of a place of honor in gratitude for all the good she had done for the children of that city. Even as this is written more than thirty years since her death, *her grave is still visited by her former pupils and is often decorated with fresh flowers.*

Her funeral was a real tribute to Sister. Afterwards, the president of the Children of Mary addressed a request to Mother St. Cecile; it was an eloquent expression of the gratitude which Sister St. Eugene aroused among her students. In spite of the length of the letter, we will quote it in its entirety because it is an overwhelming testimony against the crime committed by the Sectarians in depriving the people of those admirable educators of the young people.

Lille, March 27, 1874

"Mother Superior,

I have not had the honor of making your acquaintance, but I do know that you are called 'Good Mother' (Bonne Mère) and that your kindness and benevolence always justify that title. It is for this reason that I feel encouraged to address you confidently under the present circumstances.

As former students of our late Sister St. Eugene, we desire to erect a small monument over her resting place in grateful memory of all the good she did for us. In the name of all my companions, I am asking you to give us your authorization to do this.

It is some twenty years since several of us have left the school, but, whether we are near or far, the memory of Sister St. Eugene remains engraven in our hearts.

We will never be able to forget the care and concern with which she surrounded our childhood, or the fatigue she endured in order to give us the necessary instruction. Our parents remember, too, and were greatly touched at the many efforts Sister made to form our hearts and judgments. The religious instructions which Sister and her companions planted and nourished in our souls have grown and developed, and now help us to bear the pains and difficulties of life.

In a word, the many proofs of affection and concern with which our dear Sister never ceased surrounding us, even after we had left the school, are and always will remain in our thoughts. After following her body to its last resting place, the idea arose spontaneously to collect the money which would be necessary to erect a small monument, something simple and unpretentious which would in no way detract anything from the vow of poverty which Sister professed and practiced so well during her life.

If you permit us to do what we consider as a duty of gratitude, Mother Superior, it will be a great consolation to us and we will be very grateful.

I am daring to hope for a favorable reply, and I beg you, Mother, in my own name and in that of all my companions to accept our most sincere gratitude and the assurance of our profound respect.

Louise Devau

Shall we leave Lille without speaking about Sisters St. Hippolyte and St. André, who followed dear Mother St. Henry so closely into their true homeland?

Sister St. Hippolyte was a humble and hidden soul who was attached to her duty to the point of complete forgetfulness of self. Her whole life was spent in the education and instruction of the little children who loved her tenderly. When her Golden Jubilee was celebrated, the humble Sister could not hold back her tears at seeing herself honored in such a way. One of the little children thought she had done something to hurt her; she began to sob and, in spite of the number of people, she ran and threw herself in Sister's arms to console her.

Sister St. André, one of the foundresses at Lille, was a model of fervent prayer: night and day her lips moved in prayer, and during the long moments of sleeplessness she continually recited the rosary. This good Sister also had a tender devotion to the Passion of our Lord; her companions recall that she never made the Way of the Cross without shedding many tears. Her zeal was very great and it was her ambition, when nursing the sick, to do good, not only to her patients but to all of the members of the family in the house where she was on duty. She usually succeeded!

Another of Sister St. André's desires was to have a niece become a Sister of Bon Secours. She loved her Congregation deeply and did all in her power for its continued growth. God heard her prayer and, on the day of her Golden Jubilee, she had the joy of having two of her nieces with her as they made their perpetual profession.

This most exemplary religious ended her days at Rozoy, and even there she knew how to make herself useful. When her fingers refused to hold the

needle, she would go out into the park and gather twigs to light the fire, or she would pick up the stones which were in the kitchen garden. She also liked to go from place to place in the house where the Sisters were working and recite the rosary for them; this permitted them to pray even as they continued their tasks. She was deeply penetrated with a spirit of mortification and was not afraid of overburdening her body which she considered as a beast of burden.

Is it surprising that the members of that blessed house in Lille were chosen by God as His instruments? The Lord loved those Marthas who combined incessant prayer with their activities, and He blessed their work. We must also add that while the nursing Sisters implored heaven at the bedside of the dying, the Sisters in the classrooms and their students shared their apostolate by praying for hardened sinners and those poor souls wandering on the road to sin and hell; and our Lord was not able to resist that united, double appeal. Just as during His life on earth, His heart trembled with love and obliged Him to speak those words of raising, of renewal: *Lazarus, come forth! Live again, poor sinner!*"

Those conversions obtained through such lively zeal were both numerous and very consoling. The Sisters at Lille, through humility, did not preserve any records of them; however, there are a few which were recalled, such as:

Sister St. Celestine, who, as we have already said, was the apostle of the needy par excellence, had the consolation of helping the mother of one of her students, who was afflicted with cancer. It was thanks to the good Sister that she had a happy death in spite of the disturbing influence of her husband, a hardened unbeliever who laughed at and ridiculed Sister every time she spoke about God and eternity. A few years later, he himself was struck down. Sister St. Celestine, terrified at the state of his soul, had all of the children pray for him, and she went determinedly to his home. When she entered, he deliberately turned himself toward the wall. Sister pretended not to notice his action, and, as she left, she promised to return. Exasperated by what he considered to be her audacity, he furiously reproached his children for having allowed Sister to enter his room, and directed that she be put out if she should return. He even obtained a large club to throw at her in case she should somehow by-pass his orders.

Sister was warned, but took no account of the threats. At her second visit, as she approached him, the unhappy man picked up his club and threatened to beat her to death. Sister, however, without any semblance of fear, spoke softly as she continued to come nearer to his bed. "O poor soul, what a fever you have today! I have never seen you like this, and I would like to give you some relief. Let me at least take your pulse." The club was slowly lowered to the bed and the astonished, sick man felt incapable of resisting; after a few moments of hesitation he allowed her to place a medal on his bed.

From that moment victory was assured. A few days later he even kissed the medal and said a short prayer. Little by little grace accomplished its work, and the poor man, who felt worse each day, begged Sister not to leave him. Thus she had the joy of seeing him die as a Christian.

This same Sister was instrumental in another remarkable conversion of an individual from Lille, who was known by the nickname of the *blue man*, and who had no religious principals. Sister learned that he was gravely ill and did everything in her power to save his soul. As usual she asked the children to act as advocates in this difficult case and she took advantage of one of his fancies in order to gain his affection. She began by procuring a small statue of the Blessed Virgin dressed in blue; bringing it to the sick man, she said: "I know, Sir, that you like the color blue, and you are right. It is the Blessed Virgin's color. So, I hope to give you pleasure by offering you this little statue." He appeared to be touched and accepted it with gratitude.

The next day when Sister arrived, she placed the Blessed Virgin on the mantelpiece and, after surrounding it with candles, she recited a *Memorare*; then she promised to come back each day and suggested that she make a novena with him for his recovery. The *blue man* knew the time when Sister would come; and, if someone was with him, he would say: "It is time for you to leave because the good Sister is coming to give a blessing."

That novena was most certainly the source of the poor sinner's salvation. He allowed Sister to instruct him, and ended his life as a Christian and under the gaze of the Blessed Virgin with the blue mantle.

In all cases that were "desperate," appeal was made to Sister St. Celestine. Another work that was close to her heart was to help the poor get their marriages regularized and to do all she could to facilitate those steps that were necessary, but so hard to take. In the course of her visits, if she learned that those under her care had not been married, she would say: "My good friends, put things in order, because if you should die you could never enter Paradise; and, after having been so unfortunate here on earth, you will be so forever in hell." When she achieved her goals, she took it upon herself to pay for a simple marriage dinner and brought the meat and a bottle of wine, obtained from the community, hidden under her cloak.

How many times hell was overcome by these holy women who appeared to be so simple and so weak!

Here is another account which reveals the secret of their power:

One day a Sister of Bon Secours was sent to a patient of the parish of Madeleine-lez-Lille who was afflicted with an inflammation of the lungs and for whom there was little hope for recovery.

As was her custom since novitiate days, Sister suggested to the sick man that she say a short prayer to the Blessed Virgin for him. He did not object but appeared indifferent. The next day when the doctor (who was far from being a

practicing Christian) came again, he said to Sister: "His condition is very serious, if not hopeless."

Alas, Sister saw this very plainly, but her concern focused on the soul of this poor man who was soon to appear before his God. She felt an urgent need to tell her superior about her anxiety, and to beg for the prayers of the children and their teachers. When evening came she repeated the little prayer but obtained even less attention than before. Sister was quite anxious for she feared that the poor man would not live through the night. As she prayed her Office near his bed, her eyes were filled with tears. The patient noticed this and said: "You are crying, Sister." At first she tried to hide her tears, but when he insisted, she responded: "Yes, I am crying, and it is about the loss of your soul, because the physician is not satisfied with your condition, and perhaps very soon you are going to appear before God."

The unfortunate man appeared to be touched but not convinced, and when Sister discretely spoke about a priest, he interrupted her quite brusquely. "I cannot return to God; I am a Free Mason. I am not able to explain to you what a Free Mason is, for you would be shocked and disgusted with me."

This admission made Sister realize that God's grace was at work. Without allowing herself to be stopped, she spoke of God's mercy, of the merits of Jesus Christ by which all crimes, whatever they might be, could be redeemed. Then, seeing that he was listening, Sister suggested suddenly that she go for the old pastor of the parish. It was the middle of the night, but the patient did not realize this and consented. He made his confession and received the last Sacraments in excellent dispositions. As a sign of his conversion, he gave the priest all of his masonic symbols. After this act of reconciliation with God he did not know how to express his gratitude and his joy. The next day, contrary to all expectations and to the stupefaction of the doctor, a change began to take place; the new convert's condition increasingly improved and he was soon completely cured.

Somè years later a man came up to Sister as she walked down the street. At first she did not recognize him. "Come now, Sister, don't you recognize your *rascal* from X Street who gave you so much trouble?" How happy Sister was to learn that he, who had been the object of God's lavish mercy, had never abused it and continued to fulfill all his duties as a Christian.

The care of the sick and the instruction of poor children were two works which were very dear to the Church, and the Sisters at Lille carried out both of them very well indeed. That community was soon to be afflicted by a great trial, and we find some indication of it in a letter written from Lille by Mother St. Fulgence to her Council in October, 1878. "There is a very strong possibility that our Sisters will be required to keep the children only until they are twelve to thirteen years of age; any who have already attained it are to go to what is called the upper class where they will be trained without any form of religious principles at that time in their lives when good and wise direction is so necessary. The young women of the diocese must all conform to the municipal regulations or discontinue their education. The thought of that type of education is the cause of much distress to the Archbishop and to

all of the Clergy. It is also contrary to the wishes of the families; and our poor Sisters painfully see that the students for whom they have devoted themselves for five or six years are to be forcefully exposed to being lost."

In view of this sad forecast, the Superior General sounded out her Council regarding the feasibility of opening free classes which would not be hindered by municipal controls, and where the students would be admitted by means of a very small remuneration.

Mother St. Fulgence's fears were well grounded; and the resolution which threatened all the schools in Lille would not delay its implementation very long.

Mother St. Cecile, however, did not have the sorrow of experiencing the partial destruction of the work which Mère Geay had created with such apostolic joy, because she also went to God in the year 1878. Ever since she had laid down the burdens of office, she was seen to be as humble and submissive as the least of the Sisters, desiring no distinction and finding it painful to receive the respect and veneration with which they surrounded her. She was essentially an energetic soul, and had accomplished many great works and made *the talents* put into her hands by the Lord *to bear fruit a hundredfold*; and so she was able to go peacefully to Him whose glory she had always sought.

During one of the Superior General's absences, Father Ruat sent her an account of how things were at the Mother House. He added: "Yesterday I saw the good Mother St. Cecile. In spite of her numerous pains and aches, she is content, she told me, because she knows that a spouse of Jesus Crucified should not be without sufferings. I am sure she is amassing a fortune in heaven. When I sympathized with her about her condition, she responded that she did not think she was overburdened. Thus I have concluded that she is very generous in her patience and resignation."

The Sisters, who lived and worked with Mother St. Cecile, were greatly edified by her filial submission to the Divine Will, and were ingenious in providing her with moments of spiritual consolation. During those last days of her life, the Fathers Belmont, Germain and Ruat went to her room each evening to give her their priestly blessing.

The Providence Orphanage was also visited by death. She was a young religious on whom the Congregation had placed great hopes as she had received wise and maternal direction from Mother St. Methilde; and this was easily seen and judged by the fruits it produced. Sister St. Frederic was a former pupil of the Orphanage. She had a strong and fiery nature, and as a child had often caused her teachers much anxiety. During the year of preparation for her First Communion however, she made so many efforts to conquer herself that, little by little, she became quite docile; and Our Lord had blessed her perseverance by calling her to a religious vocation. Her

entrance into the novitiate was to be on the 19th of March, the feast of St. Joseph for whom she had a special devotion.

A short time after her profession, she was sent back to the Orphanage in the position of teacher, and there she was soon to end her days after giving the children much good example through the virtues she practiced.

Mother St. Mecthilde saw that the lung condition with which the young Sister was afflicted was progressing rapidly; she ordered her to pray to St. Genevieve for a cure and also had the children pray for that intention. It was solely through obedience that she did as she was asked, for she had a great desire to leave this world. The Divine Will soon manifested itself; for it was easily seen that the disease progressed daily. Mother St. Fulgence was preparing to leave for Ireland and wanted the young Sister to be anointed; she accepted this joyfully. All of the orphans were present at the sad but touching ceremony.

Thereafter, Sister spoke only about her departure for heaven. The 19th of March was very near, and she hoped to die on that day which would be the fifth anniversary of her entry into the novitiate. However, the evening of St. Joseph's feast arrived and the young Sister was still alive. Mother St. Mecthilde said: "I really believe, my child, that St. Joseph has forgotten you."—"Oh, no, Mother, vespers has not finished yet."

Her agony began at about four thirty in the afternoon, and after having answered the prayers for the dying in a loud voice, she said: "Mother, would you permit me to die leaning against your heart? The devil will not dare to approach me there, and then I will be judged in your arms." As the Superior raised her up tenderly, Sister seized her Rule Book, her vows and her Crucifix; and thus she breathed her last as she murmured: "Oh, how sweet it is to die." One of those present has told us that her features, which were neither distinctive nor attractive, became delightfully beautiful, almost like a waxen figure representing one of the virgin martyrs.

Here follow the words of Father Ruat as he related this death scene to the Superior General: "You will be happy to know that dear Sister St. Frederic had the most beautiful, peaceful death that could possibly be desired. Ever since she knew that her condition was fatal, she thought only of God, constantly reiterating the sacrifice of her life and making acts of love. And, as it is an act of love of God to pray for those who have been good to you, she prayed much for you. She did not experience the anguish of death and no sign of agony appeared on her face. It is true to say that she went to sleep in Mother St. Mecthilde's arms. She wanted me to be present and I was there. I simultaneously laughed and cried with happiness at the sight of such a beautiful death. In brief, I have never seen a death that was so peaceful and I have never seen one so edifying. So, Blessed be God! since the first goal of a religious society is to make saints.

Chapter XXV

Development of the Houses at Cork and Belfast Foundation at Tralee

1878—1880

One of the Superior General's first pre-occupations was to procure the support and help needed by the houses in Cork and Belfast for the continuing development of those two communities.

In 1876 Mother St. Dominique replaced Mother St. Bertille when she was called to govern the house in London. During the first years of office, she was able to bring to fruition a project which both of them had fostered for a long time, and the accomplishment of it would be of great benefit for the community. The Sisters' residence at Mardyke, though in better condition than their former house, still left much to be desired. The proximity of the Lee River made the neighborhood unhealthy, and the religious whose work kept them there all contracted painful infirmities. Because of the increased demands for their services, it had been necessary to bring in more Sisters and, with this growth in numbers, the house became inadequate.

A change became necessary; once again the Sisters found themselves facing a trial which most of the foundresses in France and Ireland had experienced, namely: the obligation to find without delay a dwelling which would respond to the demands of the health and growth of the community.

Nevertheless, for a time, the obstacles seemed unsurmountable and there was even question of abandoning the foundation and dispersing the Sisters.

Some notable inhabitants of Cork asked the Superior General to reconsider her decision. One of the daily newspapers at that time wrote: "This community has become like a part of ourselves, and it would be impossible for us to be deprived of them."

These entreaties were not made in vain, and Mother St. Fulgence consented to make a rather great sacrifice in order to maintain the foundation.

As it was most difficult, if not impossible, to buy a house that fulfilled the desired conditions, they thought of constructing one. The Mother House made them a loan of 100,000 francs to purchase the property; and, not unreasonably, the generosity of the inhabitants was counted upon in order to obtain the necessary funds for the construction of the buildings.

Mother St. Dominique had those special abilities needed to carry out that difficult project. Without realizing it, she described herself when she wrote to the Superior General: "I am imitating *the strong woman*; *I have gone out . . . to look at a field*." The field, situated on a height and called the hill of Notre Dame, was found to be a pleasant, healthy and refreshing site and was particularly appropriate for the new building. All the same, it was not obtained without difficulty since the owner, who was a fanatical Protestant, had a real disinclination to part with the property in favor of a religious community. Before he would decide, it was necessary to show him the plans for the future convent, for he knew that he would never be able to resign himself to see towers, spires, steeples and other signs of "popery" erected on land that had belonged to him.

The simplicity of the project quieted all his fears and the negotiations were concluded. Mother St. Dominique wrote: "It is really a miracle that the owner has finally consented. He wouldn't even listen to any talk about selling the field, but we prayed so much to the Blessed Virgin that she changed his attitude; and it is thanks to *Her* that the field is finally ours."

Canon Maguire aided the Sisters with advice, for he understood the difficulties which accompany such a project. Father Rossiter of the Order of St. Francis, another devoted friend, also helped them.

The Superior was well aware of her responsibilities in the matter, but prayer lightened her burden. She wrote to Mother St. Fulgence for her feast day saying: "I pray God to help you bear your cross for I feel, from the little piece I bear, how heavy your part must be. Also, pray much for me so that I know how to say *Fiat* to everything."

Bishop Delaney, who wholeheartedly approved of the undertaking, wished to bless the cornerstone of the new convent. The ceremony took place on July 18, 1879 in the presence of many noted Catholics of Cork. With other members of the clergy, the Bishop went to the area set apart for the chapel. As Psalm 85 was sung, he sprinkled Holy Water on the place where

the altar was to be raised and which had been marked the previous evening with a white cross.

The Bishop said the customary prayers in which mention is made of the name of the patron of the new sanctuary; this one being dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

Then he blessed the cornerstone⁹⁴ and sprinkled Holy Water to the four corners marked by the white cross as he invoked the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was then lowered into the foundation by means of a pulley. The Bishop blessed the cement and threw it on the cornerstone; during this time the choir was singing Psalm 126.

After the usual concluding prayers and hymns, the Bishop blessed those present and expressed the fatherly interest he had always felt for the Sisters, and the esteem which they inspired in him. The members of the Congregation of Bon Secours will be happy to have his words here:

“As a conclusion to the beautiful ceremony at which we have assisted, I know of nothing better to offer those present than the verses of the Psalm with which the ceremony had been begun:

*‘How lovely is Your dwelling place,
O Lord of Hosts!
My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest in which she puts her young—
Your altars, O Lord of hosts,
My King and my God!
Happy are they who dwell in Your house!
Continually they praise You.’*

“These words of the Psalmist used in the sacred rites, tell us, as they speak of the delights of God’s house, that the most magnificent temple on earth is open to the poorest of the poor, and that all of God’s creatures have access to it and find refuge, help, and even a home there.

“It seems to me that these words are not only very appropriate as part of the ritual in these circumstances, but also express in a striking way the condition of those for whom this new home was being built.

“The Sisters of Bon Secours ask nothing for themselves, theirs is a wonderful life. Mankind in general feels a natural dread of suffering and fears even the very sight of it. Yet these Sisters spend a great part of their days and their nights assisting those who are tried by suffering. Their Congregation has spread far and wide, and it is partly owing to its generosity that the residence is being constructed. It will be of more use to our country than benefit to the Sisters, who seldom remain at home on account of their distinctly extraordinary life.

"Yes, extraordinary perhaps, for those who do not belong to the Church, but for us, depositories of the faith of our ancestors, it is neither strange nor surprising.

Their life is wonderful because not only do they look for all those who suffer but they also devote themselves to them unreservedly; and I do not believe that self-love could, of itself, ever induce the sick to do as much to alleviate their own sufferings as the Sister of Bon Secours does for them.

"These holy women have no home; they watch at the bedside of strangers; they exhaust themselves in the homes of strangers and there they are considered to be strangers. They have but one goal: to procure God's glory and the relief of Jesus' suffering members. . . . They are on duty day and night and thus sacrifice the most legitimate necessities of life.

"If I consider their duties and the sublime manner in which they accomplish them, the essentially Christian spirit which motivates them, and the services which they render to all peoples I acknowledge that they truly actualize the parable of the Good Samaritan in the fullest extent of its meaning. They are ever ready to come to the assistance of all suffering men and women whom pain has laid low along life's way. It is of little importance to the Sisters whether or not they belong to the Father's fold or whether or not they are baptized. They are seen as beings who are suffering, and they are God's children; these titles more than suffice to give them the right to the Sisters' most tender care. Therefore, I am proud that the Sisters are esteemed according to their merit—because we should all be proud of the good that exists in human nature.

"All of us, I am sure, will be happy to show the Sisters of Bon Secours our gratitude, and we have no doubts that they will also receive generous help from those of our brethren who are separated from us by faith.

"I will conclude, therefore, as I borrow the words of the Psalmist and wish for all who are cooperating in this work which has brought us together, the blessings of good health for both mind and body."

After the ceremony and in response to this appeal, the Mayor of Cork proposed that a subscription be opened for the funding of the new building. Bishop Delany heartily approved the idea and inscribed his name for a generous offering. His example was followed by all of those present, and more than two hundred francs were collected in a single day.

Two of the outstanding benefactors whom we would like to mention are the Duly family and the Murphy family.

One of the documents which we would like to quote is from a Protestant man of one of Cork's most wealthy families who wrote to Father Maguire on the 22nd of July:

Shanakiel House, Cork.

"Dear Canon,

I was absent from Cork because of business obligations and regret that I was not able to be present at the laying of the cornerstone for Bon Secours Convent. Would you be so kind as to put me down on the subscription list for 100 pounds?

If everyone had been able to appraise the intelligent and devoted care given by the Sisters in times of suffering as I have, then the sum which they need would not be difficult to collect.

D. F. Lahy."

Another offering, similar in its generosity, also came from a Protestant family. In relating this fact a daily newspaper stated: "... That was a splendid testimony of the esteem in which the dear, good Sisters are held by peoples of all religious persuasions."

The buildings rose rapidly, and at the end of October, 1880, the Sisters were able to settle in their new home. The chapel was finished at a later date, again with the help of the inhabitants of Cork. Bishop Delany also consecrated it.

The very evident blessings bestowed on the community in Cork were not without some sacrifice; very often, the Lord, while blessing with the one hand, wounds with the other. Several Sisters, who had given great promise, died in the prime of life, without having been able to spend their strength for God and their beloved Congregation. On the occasion of the foundation in Tralee, Mother St. Fulgence passed through Cork in October, 1879. There she found one of those victim souls whose holiness permeated the community and drew down heaven's approval upon it. "The blows of hammer and chisel are necessary to sculpture an edifice," wrote the good Mother, "but God Himself accomplishes His work little by little; He is still doing it here, choosing a holocaust; for very soon little Sister St. Aure will go back to Him."

This young religious had only two years of profession and died a few days after the Superior's departure. In spite of her delicate health, she had hoped for a long life of work but, when Mother St. Dominique was forced to tell her the truth, she prepared cheerfully for the end. On the very morning of her death, she warmly thanked the Sister who had cared for her and said: "In less than six hours I shall be dead. May God reward my Sisters for all they have done for me!" And indeed, a few hours later she peacefully passed away.

When Mother St. Fulgence visited the convents in Ireland during the winter of 1878, she found the community in Belfast experiencing difficulties which were very similar to those endured by the Sisters in Cork. The house was too small, unhealthy, had poor ventilation and was harmful to the health

of the Sisters. Besides this, they were too few in number to respond to the needs of the people and to do God's work.

Mother was upset by the state of affairs; she explained the situation to Bishop Dorrian and asked him if it wouldn't be wiser to withdraw her Sisters who, because of the housing, were frequently visited by sickness. The Bishop was deeply disturbed by the thought of the possible departure of the Sisters, whom he had requested and received with such joy; he expressed regret that the Superior had not made known the difficulties and needs of the community to him. Mother St. Elizabeth had acted through a sense of great delicacy rather than a lack of confidence.

Bishop Dorrian understood and accepted this, and begged Mother St. Fulgence not to make a decision immediately; and he promptly began a search for a more suitable home for the Sisters. That same year, in the month of May, he bought a house on Falls Road in the industrial section. Father MacAuley was given charge of seeing that the needed repairs in the building were accomplished, and he did this with great interest and concern. The General Council in Paris sent Mother St. Bertille to convey their gratitude to Bishop Dorrian, and also to bring the Sisters the financial help which the Mother House had sent to them. They took possession of their new home in the autumn of 1878.

The following spring, Mother St. Elizabeth resigned; the state of her health and her need for complete rest fully justified her action. She was replaced by Mother St. Thérèse who had edified the community at Cork for many years by her amiable disposition and by her kindness. Mother St. Domitille took her to Belfast, and Bishop Dorrian expressed the desire to preside at the installation of the new superior, which took place on the 15th of June, 1879. Afterwards he spoke to the Sisters; he said: "From what I have heard about Mother St. Thérèse, I have no doubts that she will be a very devoted Mother, whose kindness will ease the burden of your fatigues and duty; and I am sure that you, for your part, will be filially submissive to her and make her happy. There is nothing that lessens the weight of burdens like the union of hearts and that charity which makes a community like a vestibule of heaven. I am happy to add," he continued, "and I am not the only one to say it, that you have never caused me the least anxiety, and that all of us have always remarked on the good spirit which animates your community and the virtues that reign there."

The Bishop blessed the new superior and her Sisters; then he left. After his departure, Mother St. Domitille read a letter from the Superior General to the Sisters at Belfast in which she expressed her desires and her hopes; we find in it the forceful thoughts of a soul who lives solely by faith.

" . . . I know your outstanding religious spirit and I am confident that, though you justly regret losing the one who has left, you will receive the one

sent by the Lord with a spirit of faith and keep in mind that she is the representative of God and the channel of His holy will for you. Do not stop at her humanness; raise yourself above this and see in her the personification of the Master whom you serve. I will repeat: may faith always animate your obedience, then you will be happy and you will make rapid progress in virtue.

"You will welcome your new mother with great charity, my dear Sisters, you will lighten her painful burden of guiding souls by your filial submission. She, for her part, will be a mother for you. She will watch over your needs both spiritual and temporal and, as much as is possible, she will ease your fatiguing work and the duties of your holy vocation.

"Living together, then, in unity and peace under the gaze of God, you will draw down blessings from heaven on your Congregation, your house, your works and yourselves; you will be a consolation to the Heart of Jesus and to your Mother who, though far from you, loves and blesses you from the depths of her heart, asking for you, my dear Sisters, the virtues which make holy religious and true Sisters of Bon Secours."

In spite of her great repugnance for the task, Mother St. Thérèse displayed rare qualities in her government of the house of Belfast. During the ten years she was there, she gave proof of the most absolute and generous devotion, and by her great kindness knew how to interest herself, not only in her Sisters, but in all the people. The community developed under her direction but, even though they became more numerous, the Sisters still had difficulty responding to the demands made on them.

Like many other members of the Institute, Mother St. Thérèse had a special predilection for the poor; and her memory remains blessed in Belfast because of the delicate ingenuity of her charity.

Divine providence was again calling the Sisters of Bon Secours towards the unwanted peoples of this world by disposing everything for the foundation in Tralee.

"*The poor you will always have with you*"⁹⁵, said Our Lord; but sometimes we forget that in this inequality of social conditions are hidden a multitude of graces, both for those who are deprived of the goods of this world and also for those who possess them. The disorder comes from the fact that most of the time neither one nor the other understand God's designs upon them. The rich lose the focus that God has made them purveyors of the poor and put into their hands the holy and gentle power to relieve their misfortunes. This reproach could never be addressed to Lady Donovan, foundress of the convent of Tralee, because the poor were the whole object of her care and, by right, she could be called the providence of that dry and desolate country.

Tralee is found in Kerry, that is, in the mountainous country that forms the West of Ireland. In the *Correspondant* of June, 1906, we have found a page by

a tourist⁹⁶ who seems to give an exact idea of the country to which Mother St. Fulgence was leading her Sisters: "Killarney and its lakes; there, it is Kenmore and its river! Who has not heard of the enchantment of such places so many have described: a green oasis which it pleased nature to capriciously reserve for that ultimate Thule of Ireland? They are a world apart, a land of dreams, a transplanted, semi-tropical section of the earth under the pale heavens of the north. But is that truly the West of Ireland? Tourists are shown these things. Why do we not show them the rugged Highlands which are Ireland's fortification against the Atlantic, the mountainous desert of Connaught or of Kerry, bordering the ocean? Besides the Ireland that is seen, it is necessary to also look at the Ireland that is not seen; to have walked its pathways and roads, and visited its people in order to understand the efforts they were forced to make so as to extract from the land the little it could produce."

The Sisters at Cork had already been called to Killarney several times to the Bishop's residence and even to Tralee, by the wealthier families. In one of the preceding years a French Sister was in Tralee at Christmas time and the people there felt sorry for her because she was so far from the convent and in the midst of strangers on that great feast. On Christmas Eve as she came out of the Church, Sister found herself surrounded by a crowd of people who all shook hands with her and wished her "Happy Christmas"; and the tone of their voices showed that the greeting came from their hearts. This was but a prelude to the welcome that was to be given to the new community a few years later.

A short time later, another Sister was requested from Cork to care for Sir Nicholas Donovan, an outstanding man whose lordly mansion was not far from Tralee. Sister remained with him until he died and had soon won the admiration of Lady Donovan. She knew of no better way of expressing her gratitude to the Sisters of Bon Secours, and to honor her husband's memory, than to found a small community of nursing Sisters at Tralee.

This noble lady told Mother St. Dominique of her wishes during the winter of 1878. She had a great spirit of faith and expressed her joy at being able to create an establishment which would be a beneficial work. At the same time it will be an act of expiation for the repose of her husband's soul, as well as a source of blessings for Tralee and the surrounding towns. Until something better could be found, she offered them a house which she owned in the city and assured an annuity for the Sisters so that, being free of material worries, they could dedicate themselves more particularly to the sick who were poor.

During her stay in Ireland throughout that winter of 1878, Mother St. Fulgence went to Tralee accompanied by Mother St. Dominique and spoke with Lady Donovan about the proposed project.

Lady Donovan, who did not have any children, assembled her brother-in-law and her nephews to receive the Superior General with dignity; and those worthy Christian men gave her a welcome by which she was deeply touched. The foundation was decided upon and Mother St. Fulgence accepted the house on Dennystreet offered by Lady Donovan as a temporary measure. The building was small and did not have a garden, but was quite sufficient for the beginning of this work.

The Superior General knew very little English, and this fact was the occasion of an amusing incident which she liked to relate later on during recreation, because it was always a source of gaiety for the young Sisters. When Mother went to see Lady Donovan, she was in the same carriage as Father Marve, the Dean at Tralee, who was also involved in the proposed foundation. The good Father knew no French and so carried on a conversation with Mother St. Dominique; but he was somewhat embarrassed at not being able to speak with the Superior General. So he tried to recall a few words of French which he had learned in high school. Finally he remembered something, and turning to Mother he said most graciously: "*Mon ame glorifie le Seigneur.*" (My soul glorifies the Lord.). He repeated it several times; however, as the journey was a long one, he made a new effort so as to make the conversation less monotonous, and found this other phrase: "*Telemaque said to Ulysses. . .*" As she related this amusing event, Mother St. Fulgence also liked to tell how much she had been touched by the good priest's valiant efforts to show her some marks of politeness.

Lady Donovan was never to see this work accomplished; she died one month before the date that had been fixed for the arrival of the Sisters. This was a cause of sadness for Bon Secours but especially for Mother St. Dominique, who had been able to appreciate that noble woman of high ideals and generous heart.

This sad event did not cause any problems for the foundation, because Sir Henry Donovan, her brother-in-law, was delegated to carry out her plans; and Bishop MacCarthy of Killarney had supported the idea of the foundation and assured the nursing Sisters of his friendship and interest.

The Sisters took possession of their home on September 8, 1879 on the feast of the Nativity of Mary. Sister St. Marine, who had come from London, was named Superior; her companions were: Sister St. Ferdinand, whom we will soon see at the convent in Baltimore, and Sisters St. Hilaire and St. Catherine.

During those first years of their stay in Tralee, the daughters of Our Lady Help of Christians experienced the truth that *being rich in God and poor in everything else* is the basis of true happiness. The small size of the house was the continual cause of great difficulties; and over and above this, the poor patients' numerous miseries which required their help, obliged them to

share their own means of subsistence with the poorest among them. Their self denial was very great and they accepted all of these privations joyfully. These religious souls had learned that the spirit of poverty in a community is a source of spiritual riches. They also knew that *"God is the most faithful Treasurer for souls who are truly abandoned, and He gives to them according to the measure of their necessities."*⁹⁷

Chapter XXVI

Mother St. Mathieu at Abbeville
Death of Father Germain
General Chapter of 1880
Laicization of the schools at Lille
1880—1881

In 1880 when Mother St. Adelaide had reached the end of her term of office at Abbeville, all of the Sisters insistently, but humbly, asked that Mother St. Mathieu return and be placed at the head of the community. During the thirty-two years of her religious life, this Sister had remained unnoticed, you could say, though she exerted a vast influence all around her; and it was only when she was sent to Rozoy as the Assistant that it was possible to measure the void that her departure had left.

The Council acquiesced to the desires which had been expressed; and could only congratulate themselves on this decision, because the nine years of Mother St. Mathieu's superiorship at Abbeville was a period of prosperity, happiness and, above all, a continued growth toward perfection for the community.

A number of recollections concerning this good Mother have been brought forward; so we will spend a little time considering this model of a Sister of Bon Secours whom Mère Geay had dreamed of and formed.

Mother St. Mathieu was a sincere soul, who saw only God, and in God her duty. She was always ready to forget herself, to impose bodily mortifications and was as austere with herself as she was ingenious of finding ways of relieving her Sisters and lightening their burdens. Nothing charmed her more than to see them happy and cheerful, and she used to say that their joyous recreations honored the Master they served.

Her spirit of faith was so great that she never sent a Sister on duty without consulting God. She would go to the chapel, spend some time in fervent prayer and then, strengthened by Divine help, she would go to tell the Sister whom she had chosen.

And when they returned home, she greeted them with real affection. Her joy in having them with her can be imagined; however, the religious in her soon resumed its rights over the Mother, and she would quickly ask them for some service or impose a sacrifice upon them.

Mother St. Mathieu was as humble as she was good, and she used to add these or similar words to her advice: "My good Sister, do as I have told you, but above all do not do what I do." The virtue of poverty was cherished by all of the Superiors of the Institute. Mother showed herself to be most generous and without pettiness towards the Sisters, but she would keep only what was strictly necessary for herself, sometimes refusing things that were almost indispensable. How she loved to recall those first days of the foundation at Abbeville!; those "good times," she would say, "when we lacked almost everything except confidence in Divine Providence, the courage to suffer and zeal for souls!"

She also had the gift of saying the right word at the right time, and these words were often filled with light. A Sister had been several months with a patient for whom there was no hope of recovery, though the progress of the disease was very slow. The sick man had forgotten all his religious practices and remained firm in his reluctance to respond to all advances made in that direction. He appeared to be as callous as he was indifferent. The young Sister earnestly wanted to see him converted and showed herself to be very solicitous in her care of him, offering him a few words of consolation and of hope. However, though the sick man was grateful for the care he received, the words about religion found no echo in his heart. Sister was very upset, for she could see the progress the disease was making, and was unable to soften his heart. She was discouraged and went to see Mother St. Mathieu; she told her about the situation and asked to be replaced by another Sister who would be more capable of touching this rebellious soul and leading him back to God.

Mother listened in silence as Sister spoke; then she said: "But, my child, when the sower throws the grain of wheat into the earth, he does not expect a harvest before many months have passed. Now you are sowing; later you

will reap. God is counting your sufferings and prayers; He will make them germinate when He wills it. Your pains and hardships are the money with which you will buy this soul."

Fortified by the Superior's words and animated with renewed courage, Sister followed through on the work she had begun, and a few weeks later she received the fruit of her painful work. Indeed, she had the consolation of seeing the sick man become reconciled with God and of renewing his first Communion after sixty years. From that moment, the happy prodigal edified his family by his fervor and his admirable patience. He continually offered his sufferings in expiation for his sins and praised the Lord's goodness and mercy toward him.

Mother St. Mathieu, like all faith-filled souls, had limitless confidence in Divine Providence. When her Sisters gently reproached her for giving away all she possessed, she responded: "Let me be; the more I give, the more the good God sends me." The following incident shows how it pleased Our Lord to reward her generosity. One day, the Superior asked the Sister in charge of the sacristy for a Mass vestment for a poor priest who had none. The Sister respectfully mentioned that the house did not have many vestments in the color she had requested. "It does not matter," replied Mother; "you have at least two, so we can give one away. The good God can only bless such sharing with a poor parish." Sister Sacristan brought the vestment which made the good priest very happy.

A few days later, Mother St. Mathieu was called to the parlor, and the Sisters saw her returning with a package. They were greatly surprised when she said: "Sisters, look at what one of our benefactors has brought. It is a cross for a Chasuable with all the accessories and the money necessary to have one made in the color we need. This is how the good God has given back the vestment which we had sacrificed."

It would be difficult to enumerate all of the admirable acts of charity which Mother St. Mathieu accomplished. She had a profound compassion for the poor who struggled against so much misery and are so often beaten down by it when struck by sickness or lack of work. How many persons had she relieved with that sensitivity and delicacy which were so characteristic of her. She always said: "The left hand need not know what the right hand gives."

Towards the end of her term of office, one of her Sisters was the instrument of a truly remarkable conversion. Sister was called to nurse a woman who lived in a small village not far from Abbeville; she found herself in a milieu as uncouth as it was irreligious. The husband and the maid showed their hatred of religion on every occasion. How then did they come to call for a Sister of Bon Secours? No doubt God wished to save the poor woman's soul and so instigated the parish priest or some other pious person

to suggest that a Sister be called to take care of the patient's material needs. First of all, the sick woman was astonished at her nurse's extreme kindness and devotion, and then she came to admire her. As the woman saw Sister's mildness which nothing seemed to upset, her selflessness and unfailing amiability at all times, in spite of her husband's disagreeable words and ungracious attitude and actions, the poor woman ended by being touched very deeply; and from there to a return to God was but a step.

The few words about the happiness of heaven and eternity which Sister voiced from time to time, decided her into taking that last step; and one day to Sister's great joy, she asked to go to Confession. When her husband heard her express this desire, he became so angry that it is difficult to describe it. "If a priest ever enters my house," he said to Sister, "listen well to what I am saying, I am going to kill you!!"

What was to be done? To bring a priest without the husband's knowledge was impossible, because he never left the house. In this perplexing situation, Sister redoubled her prayers and her fervor for she saw the end approaching; and the thought of the woman dying without the Sacraments under her own eyes made her desperate.

One night the unhappy woman again begged for a priest; you could almost feel God's grace at work in her soul, and it was to be feared that she would not live 'til morning. Once again, what was to be done? "I cannot go out the door without being heard, and if that man wakes up, what will he say?" Suddenly, an idea: "The window! I will go out by the window." Then, explaining to the sick woman and reminding her not to move around and to be patient, Sister left, jumping to the ground as lightly as she was able (the window wasn't too high). With only a small lantern she ran across the field in the darkness of night to the priest's house which was quite a distance. She arrived breathless, explained the situation to the priest, who hurriedly gathered everything necessary for the administration of the Sacraments and then ran to the church for the Blessed Eucharist. Then, the two of them hurried as fast as possible to the dying woman.

The door was closed to the Divine Savior but He entered by the window. How can the poor sick woman's joy be described? She had almost despaired of receiving this help and then it arrived, Confession, Communion, and Extreme Unction. She received all of these benefits with very great fervor because her desire for them had been so great.

When everything was finished the priest departed, leaving the dying woman in great happiness. A half hour later the door of the room was opened, and the husband came in to assure himself that no one was trying to outwit his watchfulness and permit a priest to enter. He found his wife resting quietly (she was actually deep in an ecstacy of interior prayer) and Sister at her post (she was lost in a prayer of deep thanksgiving), and he

never even had a suspicion of the marvelous things that had taken place under his roof that night. The next morning the happy convert gave up her soul to her God.

The priest, who had had the happiness of bringing her God's saving grace, entered a religious community a short time after this incident. One day he met a Sister of Bon Secours and, after relating the above incident, he added: "You can be very proud of your Congregation because it is made up of true apostles."

Indeed, it was apostolic souls which Mother St. Fulgence wished to form; and she was also very busy, carefully making the preparations necessary for the General Chapter which was to assemble in October, 1880. It was the first one at which she would preside, and it was also a very important one in view of the fact that it was the first time this was to take place according to the rules established by Rome for approved Congregations. Until that time only the local Superiors used to come together every year to make their retreat and to deal with those questions concerning the Institute which has arisen.

While Mother St. Fulgence quietly studied the subject matter which was to be elaborated at the Chapter, she was greatly saddened by the announcement of the unexpected death of the good Father Germain, who for many years had sustained her by his counsel and great experience in directing souls.

Towards the end of the year 1879, the saintly priest's health was declining visibly, but he refused to allow himself any extra rest, and continued to fulfill the duties of his many works.

In December the consecration of Bishop Lamaze took place. He had been named to replace the late Bishop Eloy, and this ceremony and its attendant obligations greatly increased the work of Father Germain, the Procurator, and he only accomplished it by means of many efforts because of his great sufferings. The exceptionally rigorous winter of 1880 completed the ruin of his health and, when he finally admitted it and went to the Midi to regain some strength, it was already too late.

Father Germain died at Montbel on Holy Thursday after having assured his fellow religious several times that he would go to heaven on the feast of Easter.

His biographer said: "His death was that of a Marist; that is, it was holy and precious in God's sight. After he had received the last Sacraments, he renewed his vows in a voice which trembled with emotion and joy, then he spoke these words: *'Mary, Mother most admirable, I am all thine. Assure my eternal salvation by your all powerful mediation.'* "

The Father General of the Society of Mary acquiesced to the earnest entreaties of the deceased's family and permitted that his mortal remains be interred at Beaucaire. Before a very numerous congregation, the pastor of

Our Lady's Church eulogised the dead priest. As he ended, he said: "Yes, O admirable Father Germain, you have served you Master well. From the beginning to the last hour of almost forty years you have worked and preached the Gospel; you have ploughed deeply in your Father's field, you sowed good grain there and it has produced a hundredfold. As you appear before your God with the abundant sheaves of your harvest, you can cry out like the great Aspostle: '*I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. For the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will give to me in that day.*' The crown you have merited so well shines brilliantly; and we have the firm hope that it glistens on your glorified head, and already we like to invoke you as our protector."

This loss was a great trial to Mother St. Fulgence and her Sisters for, as we have already mentioned, very close ties existed between the Society of Mary and Bon Secours; and the Sisters wholeheartedly lived out the spirit and the letter of the motto which appears in the Constitutions of the Marist Fathers: "*Noiselessly do much good in the world. Quasi ignoti et occulti, in mundo esse videantur.*"

Another deep, personal trial was added to that pain caused by Father Germain's death, but the Mother General's moral strength and zeal were able to support it. The vocation of one of her Sisters was in danger. Mother St. Fulgence did not hesitate, but alone and with great haste she made a journey to Ireland in order to do what she could to enlighten and reclaim her Sister.

Everyone at the Motherhouse was in the dark, so to speak, about the goal of this trip and the reason for this mysterious absence; it intrigued them even more because Bishop Mermillod's visit had been announced, and this would be the cause of much joy to the Superior General who had known him for a long time.

Mother St. Alphonsine, who was the General Secretary and Econome, was the only one who knew the painful secret. She expressed her compassion to the Superior in these words: "Even though you left only yesterday, I want to tell you that I understand your anguish and suffering, and that from afar, as when near, I share your sadness and follow you with my love and my thoughts. How many times already have I called down heaven's blessing's on you and on the goal of your trip. Poor Mother—it is certainly a road to Calvary, but have courage. After the Crucifixion there will come, I firmly hope, the joys of the Resurrection, when you will see new life in the afflicted soul who will allow herself to be touched by your devotion.

"Trying to be faithful to my mission, I wish, not to distract you, which would be impossible anyway, but, at least to make a little diversion in your saddened thoughts by telling you about Bishop Mermillod, who came today at two o'clock. He showed himself to be a true successor of St. Francis de

Sales by his affability; and his simplicity and cordiality are beyond my ability to express them. He told us many good things; one of them was that by our vocation we were precursors of our Lord and *the smile of God* on our patients. 'But you must watch over yourselves,' he added, 'so as to remain perfect religious. A great purity of heart is necessary for you because it is so easy to become attached to those for whom we do good; that is why, with St. Francis de Sales, I say to you: If I know that a single fiber of my soul does not belong to God, I would tear it out immediately. Then you will have an inexhaustible fund of meekness, gentleness and patience which will enable you to respond to the demands of the sick with great kindness. Oh! yes, patience is most necessary; when it escapes, capture it again quickly.' Mother Assistant had taken advantage of a lull in the conversation to speak with Bishop de M. Littre. He approached that Sister who was nursing him, gave her his blessing and charged her to tell her *patient** that she had seen the Bishop of Geneva, that he was residing in Voltaire's house and, that if his visit would please the savant, he would gladly come to talk with him about literature. Before leaving us, the Bishop wished to give us a blessing. He said: 'It will be a blessing of an exiled Bishop, chased out of his church, separated from his priests and denounced to the police; but all of that is good, it is suffering, and to suffer for God is the only true happiness. Suffering is the kiss from the Crucifix. Imagine that the magnificent crucifix, which I just now saw in your chapel, should detach itself from the wall, and leaning down gently towards you, He should present His sacred wounds for you to kiss! Well, when you suffer, that is what it is! Yes, I am going to bless you and ask you to pray for my poor, very sick patient.* Oh! how I wish that I could be a Sister of Bon Secours for her.'

"It is impossible to really convey the charm of his kindness and the pleasantness of his conversation, because grace and affability are reflections from the heart which cannot be given." (They must be experienced).

Mother St. Alphonsine ended that letter by a few words which contain her whole self: "Goodbye, dear Mother; have courage, be confident! Jesus is your light, Mary your star and the Eucharist your strength. Armed in this way you will triumph over hell and the devil."

In effect, hell was vanquished and Mother St. Fulgence returned to Paris with the strong conviction that God had directed and helped her.

An analysis of that valiant woman's interior sentiments at that time would be interesting. It is certain that her courage remained equal to her task, but what battles she had to wage against her own impressionable nature, and also against the weariness which enveloped her sometimes! Nevertheless, in the midst of her interior struggles, as well as in the perplexities which

*Translator's note. He is speaking about Geneva.

were an inherent part of her duties, she found powerful help in the wise counsels and precious encouragement from that saintly Father Ruat, the Marist priest whom Divine Providence had placed as the chaplain at the Mother House. He knew Mother and all of the Sisters quite well and had the "grace of state" to discern their needs and distribute the necessary spiritual nourishment to each one. From her voluminous correspondence and with the help of some of the Sisters of Bon Secours, we have chosen a few extracts from the letters which he wrote to Mother St. Fulgence during his long absence in 1880; they express the high esteem which he had for the Superior General but also the snares to which the devil and her own ardent character could give rise: "You wish to pray better and be more abandoned to Divine Providence, my dear child. I wholeheartedly approve, but on condition that you strive for the realization of your desire with a gentle confidence, and that you will be the implacable enemy of all sadness: I extend it to all which discourages and disgusts you. I look on the state of aversion, in which you find yourself, to be a grace from God and a very precious grace, because in that disposition you continually practice renouncement and penance. However, you feel the need of prayers; certainly that support is given to you, for there are those souls so loved by God who pray for their Mother every day. I will also add, to give you some more joy, that I faithfully pronounce your name at the *Memento of the living*. Also, to encourage you, my child, read Chapter V of the third book of the *Imitation*. There you will see that the true lover of Jesus finds nothing beyond her strength because she wants what her Beloved wills. When you are very tired, tell yourself that Jesus wills it and you will have peace; and also when you are unable to pray, when you are assailed by aversion and disgust, repeat again: God wills it! May this thought contain strength, consolation and light. Once again, have courage and believe that all of the progress which you make in union with the Divine Master will rebound on the Congregation of which you are the head."

On the occasion of the Superior General's feast day, the good Father wrote: "Happy Feast, my dear child in Our Lord! It is my intention that this single word be full of many excellent wishes for you and for your religious family. What would I not give to see them fulfilled! How everything would go so well then! How the Congregation would prosper! Everyone would be rich in virtues! A little while ago I was thinking of what a happy inspiration it was to have chosen the Assumption as the feast of the Superior General. For Mary, the Assumption is the triumph and recompense after the struggles, the sufferings and the trials. You will also triumph one day, my child, and you will rest from your labors and the passing sufferings of this life; and in that blessed retreat which is without end, you will be followed by your Sisters of Bon Secours and all of those who have wished and truly willed to love and serve God by at least striving to accomplish the obligations of the religious life.

"This patronal feast should be a source of hope, courage and joy for you and for your Sisters. On this beautiful day as you already catch a glimpse of the crown which will encircle your shining heads, you will, at the same time, perceive the route which will lead you surely to victory. This path, which is clearly indicated in the Gospel of the feast, is the exercise of charity united to the spirit of prayer, and of prayer itself. It is necessary to be both Martha and Mary. Martha and Mary is charity and the spirit of prayer giving each other their hand and never separating from one another. Well that is what the good Sisters of Bon Secours do. And that is why I have no fear in affirming that their place in heaven will be among the first ranks."

Finally, on the eve of All Saints, he sent these comforting words to the Superior General: "You want me to encourage you; I want to do so and will by showing you the heavens open and in the midst of a great feast. I will do so even better by quoting the words of today's Gospel:

'Blessed are those who cry!

Blessed are those who suffer persecution for Justice!

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for Justice!'

that is to say for the love of God. You will agree without argument that the first two beatitudes apply well to you. As for the third, I apply it to you by reason of knowing your soul so well. Doubtless your hunger and thirst are not as great as I would wish, but *I am pleased as they are*. Thus you are blessed.

However, my child, there are two beatitudes which you do not possess completely enough, and for you they are the most important ones. They are:

'Blessed are the meek!

Blessed are the peaceful!'

The *meek* who *suffer All* from others and are ingenious in avoiding making others suffer; the *peaceful* who, not content with being calm with others, also strive to be calm with themselves through complete and continual abandonment to Divine Providence. Thus I ask God to give you, along with the enlightenment you need, meekness, amiability, tenderness and refinement; all of these suit you very well and will open the hearts of your Sisters to you more and more." This strong and completely supernatural advice bore fruit; and it is not possible to say at what point it contributed to the full blossoming of those wonderful qualities which made Mother St. Fulgence so capable of governing. Also, towards the end of her life, by the perfect domination of herself, she had acquired a great refinement in rapport with her love of duty.

Let us, however, return to Lille. It was time to think about replacing Mother St. Claire whose advanced age and infirmities demanded some rest. "I have only one thing to do," she wrote in the Spring of 1880, "and that is to think about dying well." Her glance always had a gentle and sympathetic

expression. She had been with the community at Lille since 1827, and her serenity and lovable simplicity made her loved and esteemed by all who approached her. The remark was often made that when she met someone she seemed to greet their guardian angel. She very delicately did all in her power to soften the distress of her Sisters when Mother St. Henry left. However, when there was a question of acting to maintain the spirit of the Congregation and respect for the Rule, she was inflexible and wanted the customs in use at the Mother House to be followed to the last detail. Mother often made the recommendation to her Assistant that everything was to be done as at Paris, and Sister St. Jerome answered her in filial gest: "Be at peace, Mother, all will be done *in imitation of Paris*."

The Council deliberated and then placed Mother St. Valère in charge of the convent at Lille and Mother St. Fulgence presided at her installation. We have learned from the Secretary General's correspondence that the new superior was given a very warm reception. "We are not at all surprised at the welcome which Mother St. Valère received," she wrote, "because the truly religious spirit and harmony which pervade that dear house are well known and will only enhance the qualities of the one God has sent there. All of the Sisters in Paris are praying for her and for her new Sisters who will be easily convinced that we love them very much since we have sent them such a good Mother."

At that time, the responsibilities of her office weighed heavily on the Superior General's shoulders, because in the summer of 1880 a law was imposed which was a sad prelude of the persecution which was to be unleashed on the Church of France. The religious priests were violently evicted from their monasteries and the pathway to exile was seen opened for those faithful servants of Christ and has not closed. The cloisters became deserts and desolation reigned in those sanctuaries which had day and night resounded with divine praise.

Mother St. Fulgence begged everywhere for prayers for the Marist Fathers whose dispersion had saddened her deeply. "The hearts of all turn to those oppressed at the moment," she wrote to her Sisters in Dublin. "Until now we are peaceful; the Master is in the boat, there is nothing to fear. It is true that He appears to be sleeping, but He wants to be awakened by the ardor of our faith. So may our confidence be redoubled and inspire us with those calls and cries which will reach the ear of Our Lord. One word, one sign from Him and the surge of anger will subside. We here at the Mother House have made a triduum of prayer for this intention before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar."

Their confidence was not unfounded. Bon Secours was not disturbed: Our Lady Help of Christians covered her children with the mantle of her protection.

In spite of the storm and the legitimate anxieties which arose from it, Mother St. Fulgence nevertheless had the great consolation of seeing the community at Lorient established on durable foundations. A large dwelling had finally been found; it had a nice garden which would definitely make the material conditions of life better for the Sisters. A pretty chapel was to be erected next to the new residence. The Bishop of Vannes met a Sister of Bon Secours at the bedside of one of his penitents; he asked about the construction and expressed his desire to bless the new sanctuary. It is not difficult to imagine the Sister's gratitude.

The ceremony took place on the 20th of October and many of the clergy were present. The people of Lorient expressed their great support of the Sisters at that time and wished to help them with the purchase of the property; and thanks to everyone's generosity, they were free of all debts in less than three years.

The time set for the General Chapter was approaching and prayers for this intention were redoubled. A novena was made in all of the houses of the Institute from the 7th to 15th of October to draw down the light of the Holy Spirit on this meeting.

The Chapter was opened on the 21st of October. On the evening of the first day, the Delegates were gladdened and strengthened by the Holy Father's Blessing which Father Forestier had requested for them. The Superior General praised and thanked God as she ascertained the zeal for the salvation of souls with which all the members of the Institute were animated. She then broached the other matters which troubled her; first of all the Sisters with temporary vows. It was unanimously decided that henceforth the Sisters in Temporary Profession would be recalled to the Mother House three months before their Perpetual Profession, and once again be subjected to the proving ground of the Novitiate. It was an excellent decision. What is more necessary, before a soul gives herself to Jesus by an irrevocable decision, than to immerse herself once again in the spirit of the Institute and the virtues of her vocation.

The second day, there was a long discussion about religious discipline, which is such a complex question for persons who are consecrated to God and obliged to live in the world. It was again resolved that, except for very exceptional circumstances, the Nursing Sisters were to take their meals *alone*. The families will easily accept the imposition of this rule, which could otherwise be a constraint, when they consider how necessary it is for a religious to safeguard her spirit of recollection, and detachment, and also by reason of the faithful accomplishment of her ministry.

It could be added that a sentiment of delicacy and sensitivity toward the family itself also dictated this regulation. Experience had proved that often the presence of a stranger at meals can diminish the spirit which creates the enchantment of those intimate moments.

Discretion and prudence in the Sisters' relations with families, physicians and priests was also the object of wise reflection, and several articles concerning this were inserted in the Custom Book.

In an effort to strengthen and draw more closely the bonds which unite the Sisters, it was decided that each month the Sisters would offer two Communions for all of the members of the Institute, and that a Mass was to be celebrated for this intention on the first Saturday of each month in every house.

This work and reflection produced their fruits. The *Custom Book* was reprinted a few months later and became, more than ever, the code of life for the Sister of Bon Secours. In it she could find the rules to guide her and the answers to her difficulties when she felt alone, and found herself hindered in the practice of religious life.

The delegates had hardly left the Mother House when the threats to the schools in Lille, which had been hovering overhead for so long, became a reality. The Municipal Council withdrew the subsidy which for a number of years had been allocated to the Sisters of Bon Secours for the administration of the free schools.

So the Sectarrians triumphed, and the school *without God* was going to be the lot of those workmen's children, and was of increased concern because of the laborious and difficult existence which awaited them. Poor little souls! condemned to ignorance of all that constitutes man's greatness, enlightens his life, enables his work and sustains his courage. This was but the debut of a satanic endeavor which, little by little, would envelop all of France in its deadly nets, and thus prepare generations of weakened, debased persons deprived of all restraint and of all hope.

The people in Lille were deeply saddened by the disappearance of this charitable work which had borne such excellent fruit in that industrial milieu. The newspaper, *Vraie France* echoed the general sentiments, and inserted a protest in its editorial column, which highlighted the features of the Sisters in Lille from a new aspect: it summarized the good they had accomplished there. The following lines appeared on the 9th of November, 1880: "Our Municipal Councilors, great admirers of decrees, unfortunately do not have any monks to dispel but, as they have need of a persecution, they have gone to war against the Sisters.

"Last month, they laicized the schools and homes on Rue de Tournai and Rue Roland. Today, not being able to expel the Sistes of Bon Secours from the building which they possess on Rue de l'Hopital Militaire, they have withdrawn the subsidy accorded them until now, as of the 1st of January next.

"This school which serves 280 students is one of the oldest and best managed in our city. It was founded in 1826 when there were no public

schools in Lille, and since that time has been under the direction of the Sisters of Bon Secours, who have raised and, in part, nourished three generations of children from every corner of the city.

"The Municipality Council allocated a sum of 5,000 francs a year for rent, maintenance and the distribution of prizes for scholarship. The city has, besides this, taken responsibility for the supplies of the poor children for four years now.

"The Sisters have gratuitously taught what is called the '*Noonday*' classes for the mill workers for forty-nine years.

"Sister St. Antoine directed the school from 1826 to 1847; she was the instrument of Divine Providence for the children of the poor.

"As many of you townspeople may recall, Sister St. Eugene succeeded her as Directress. Subsequently she obtained all of the rewards that a Minister of Public Instruction could be given. Her students carried off numerous medals in the competitions that were held for all the schools. In one contest of the year 1868, they won the gold, silver and bronze medals. When Sister St. Eugene died in 1874 the town was still grateful. A memorial plot was given, and the town and teacher's corps were well represented at the funeral.

"Among the Sisters whose services are refused today, there is one with forty-nine years of service and another with thirty-three. The present Directress, Sister St. Romaine, has also proved her worth. Each year she has successfully presented students for the teacher's diploma. In 1878 she had 3 out of 3 who passed; in 1879 there were 7 out of 8; and this year, 4 out of 5, one of which was for a higher degree.

"She had no less success with the regular school students: in 1878, 12 of 12 received a silver medal; in 1879, 12 of 13 received a silver medal and in 1889, 9 of 10 received the gold medal.

"Though it would be contrary to Sister St. Romaine's sense of modesty, we will nevertheless add that last year in an optional competition, that was held among all the school teachers, she ranked the highest.

"When Mr. Rigaut, the acting Mayor, discharged the Sisters, he told them that he thanked them most sincerely for the 'unquestionable services' which they had given, and that he hoped with all his heart that they would obtain as favorable results in their new situation as they had in the past.

"We would like to believe that Mr. Rigaut was sincere in making that speech; but we are very tempted to ask him what he thinks of his colleagues in the Municipal Council, who gave him the task of getting rid of the teachers whose capabilities it is impossible not to recognize, and which will not be replaced except with very great difficulty.

"The dedication of which the Sisters of Bon Secours have given proof for sixty years will not remain unproductive; and we are certain that the

parishioners of St. Etienne's Church will come forth powerfully to help support the establishment of a free school." A few days later, a certain number of former Bon Secours' students, who remembered what they had received, also registered their protests.

They wrote to the editor of the *Vraie France*: "We have read the article in your worthy newspaper concerning the Communal school directed by the Sisters of Bon Secours. You have only too truly highlighted the successes carried out by those religious, and we will not elaborate further. What we would like to attest to is that we, their former students, who have ourselves appreciated their zeal and devotion, energetically protest against the shocking injustice with which these Sisters have been stricken. This completely spontaneous protest has been inspired by the most consistent, generous care which we received from our teachers. Besides a love of duty, we have imbibed an instruction and an education which has assured us of an honorable and lucrative position. How many details we could enumerate about those priceless favors received by all of us which are known only to God and the recipient! And today the services of those good Sisters are refused; their religious habit makes the talents and services which they have given to be completely forgotten. Well, we, who have profited from their presence want to make it known that such conduct revolts us. It is not that we are grieving over the pittance of a salary which our former teachers received for their work. They do not appear to be grieving over it; and no doubt that is because, like us, they are persuaded that all of the students who have any spirit will remain with them. We are also convinced that the success that Mr. Rigaut wished them is certain. But dismissing them from the number of teachers, shows both a lack of gratitude and of justice; because they merit only praise and encouragement, whereas they have received only contempt and deception.

"That is why we are protesting. Gratitude took root in our hearts in those happy days which we spent on the school benches. Those among us who remember Sister St. Eugene have recalled so many different occasions when her students expressed their gratitude; and alas, when she died, the tears we shed, the mourning clothes with which we covered ourselves to accompany her to her last resting place, the wreaths we placed on her tomb and the stone which stands over her mortal remains; they are so beautiful, but so often misunderstood or ignored. Today, we wish to prove that all of these things are not like those tokens of gratitude which leave only confused memories. The memory of this very dear deceased religious is very much alive; she is always at our side. This can be seen in the devotion of the one who, after assisting her for several years, has succeeded her in order to perpetuate her virtues and good works. As some of the others who knew

them less well than we have missed them, we believe that we are speaking for all of their students, both past and present, in giving them this expression of our respect, affection and concern.

Some former students of the Sisters of Bon Secours"

The "free" classes were soon established, and the good Sisters were able to continue their task which was made much easier by the loyalty demonstrated during those difficult times. The students who followed them to the new school also wished to give public witness of fidelity to their dear teachers. They inserted some very moving words in the *Vraie France*. They said: "We share completely and unreservedly all of the sentiments expressed in the letter from the former students of Bon Secours.

"We, no less than they, do not wish to miss this occasion of manifesting our deep gratitude to our good teachers, whose dedication and talents we appreciate so much.

"How could we not be proud of being the students of such teachers, who continually surround us with such motherly care?

"We are also very happy about the successes which we have achieved in the diverse examinations because they are a most worthy and commanding response to the shocking injustices that have been imposed on them so recently. If the pittance of a salary, which had been given to our teachers, was taken away in order to alienate us from that class, it was a great mistake; because it is futile to try to suppress our cries of gratitude and recognition. On the contrary, all such efforts serve only to increase them because, like those who preceded us, we will remain the faithful students of the Sisters of Bon Secours, because our greatest desire is to keep them always as our guides and counselors.

The present students of the Sisters of Bon Secours"

To support these above quoted expressions, we are going to quote from His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons, whom we will soon come to know as the protector of Bon Secours in the United States.

In 1896,⁹⁸ the eminent Archbishop wrote about the necessity of a religious education in order to establish society on a solid foundation. We quote:

"My predecessor, Bishop Kenrick, was well known for his impartiality. One day he made a remark which struck me and which I have never forgotten: 'My personal experience,' he said, 'and my observation has led me to conclude that today some millions of souls have lost the precious heritage of faith. Their misfortune had been not to have received an education that was carefully overseen. Many had attended schools where religion was misunderstood, passed over in silence and sometimes attacked. They had neither sufficient knowledge to refute their adversary's errors, nor the courage to resist the jeers and arguments which sovereign power has on a

sensitive and impressionable youth. Eventually, they totally abandoned their faith or allowed themselves to be dragged to those predominant religious sects close at hand.'

"Is the child, who has been instructed in every branch of earthly learning with the exception of knowledge of his Creator and Master and left in ignorance of his eternal destiny, the only one responsible when he transgresses the Divine and human laws? Can we hope that these generations who have been raised without religion, without even the primary ideas about God and the soul, will be sufficiently prepared to fulfill an honorable and useful role in society in the future? The questions are terrible; the response is even worse. A celebrated lawyer was deeply moved. In the face of the death sentence with which his young client was threatened, he addressed the judge and jury in thundering terms and did not fear to commit them to the court of Divine Justice; he said: 'You chased God and His commandments out of our schools, you left the young to grow up as they wished without any effective restraints, without any convictions, without principles of faith; and when, as an inevitable consequence of such a senseless education, they violate the laws of the country, you find them culpable and you condemn them! Do you have that right? Is that justice?'— And raising his hands toward heaven, he cried: 'Just God, I adjure you by the blood of Jesus Christ to pass judgment on the injustice of these men, who outrage reason and are culpable of the greater crime!' If such sentiments could be found on the lips of a lawyer, should they not also be met in the hearts of all enlightened Christians, and even more so in the soul of a priest? Yes, schools should be religious if they wish to be moral. Now it is not difficult to understand the importance and necessity of free schools."

How well such reflections were justly applicable to an industrial center like Lille, where the souls of the people were worked upon by so many diverse passions! And how necessary it is to congratulate and honor the French Christians who have made great personal sacrifices so as to give the children the precious gift of a Christian education!

Chapter XXVII

The Foundation at Baltimore

1881

The General Chapter had just completed its work; Mother St. Fulgence, filled with profound gratitude, was fully convinced that, as an outcome of the resolutions taken by the delegates, the Institute was going to be infused with new life.

She was still under the influence of that joy and hope when she received a letter from Cardinal Gibbons. This missive put a subject on the day's agenda which had previously been examined: the foundation of a convent of Nursing Sisters in Baltimore.

During a brief stay which the Archbishop had made in Paris the preceding summer, he had come to the Mother House and expressed to the Mother General his desire of having some Sisters of Bon Secours in his episcopal city. The simplicity and benevolence of the future Cardinal, and the spirit of zeal with which his words were stamped had impressed the Superior General very much. She was pleased with the idea that one day her Sisters would be found under the guidance of that apostolic man. This project, however, required serious reflection, and nothing had been settled definitively.

Cardinal Gibbons had been eagerly urged to take such steps by several Baltimore physicians, who thought that in devoted and experienced religious they would find some intelligent help for their sick people. The

Archbishop, whose broad outlook was characteristic of him, had spontaneously shared their thoughts and ideas. He expressed it very well in his beautiful work: "The Ambassador of Christ."⁹⁹ *The apostolate of good example, the eloquence of mercy and the radiance of generosity* had always appeared to him to be the most persuasive preaching and the best argument to oppose the attacks of the enemies of Christianity.

By one of those circumstances, which can surely be called Providential, there was in Baltimore an ardent Christian who was ready and disposed to support the physicians' and the Archbishop's views.

Mrs. Small, a childless widow, had dedicated her life to good works. She knew the Sisters of Bon Secours in Cork and had experienced their care. Her one great desire was to have Sisters of that same Congregation in Baltimore. With that thought in mind, she offered them temporary hospitality in her own home, which had become much too large for her since her husband's death. She wrote to Mother St. Dominique, and hoped that the Sisters would set up an oratory in her home where the holy Sacrifice of the Mass could be celebrated; and that the place, which had witnessed her happiness and her tears, would be sanctified by the presence of the Divine Host.

Mrs. Small knew how to share her enthusiasm and support of the Sisters of Bon Secours with her friends, because she had first hand experience of their amiability, unlimited devotion and great dignity. Her zeal in procuring enough money for them to cover the expenses of the first establishment was very successful, for, in a very short time, she was able to collect the sum of more than 4,000 francs.

That is what Cardinal Gibbons announced to Mother St. Fulgence on the 21st of October 1880. "I am happy to tell you that everything is in readiness to receive your Sisters. Mrs. Small has prepared her home and has collected the monies which you will need. I would be most grateful if you would tell me when we may hope to see your Sisters in Baltimore. I ask God to bless you and your Institute, etc., etc."

Prudence inspired Mother St. Fulgence to ask the prelate for a period of time to execute a plan of such importance. What appeared to be a settled matter to him, she replied, had been considered by them as a simple proposal, and had remained as such until that time. Wisdom also dictated that she make some objections on the subject of their lodgings. "It is contrary to our customs," she added, "to admit lay persons into the interior of our houses. The duties of our vocation oblige us to an almost continuous contact with the world, and when we come back to the convent we have need to live there alone and give ourselves up completely to recollection and prayer, which, before all else, is the soul of religious life."

On January 10, 1881, Cardinal Gibbons responded in a manner which put an end to all hesitations and silenced all fears.

"Dear Reverend Mother,

I can but praise the prudence which made you want to have more precise information before concluding anything. I make it my duty to give it to you.

Mrs. Small is putting her home at the disposition of your Sisters for two years; thus leaving them the necessary time to procure a permanent dwelling.

This woman has reserved an apartment in her residence which will not cause the Sisters the least inconvenience. The house has two entrances and stairways which are independent one of the other, and even though she will live in the same house, Mrs. Small and the Sisters will be as completely in their own homes as if they were in two separate houses.

I will tell you again that several communities have offered their services; your Congregation is my preference. I sincerely desire that you would make a foundation in my episcopal city, and I hope that you will be able to gratify that wish. If the contrary should be the case, I will accept the offers made to me by the other communities.

Gibbons"

Mother St. Fulgence read the letter to the Council, and after much prayer they decided in favor of the foundation. It was agreed that some Sisters would go to Baltimore in the spring in order to organize the new house. Cardinal Gibbons was informed that his desire was to be realized, and on the 5th of May, the Superior General told him of the departure of the little group.

"As soon as they have arrived,"

she added,

"the Sisters will come to see you, Your Eminence, to ask for your priestly and fatherly blessing. Knowing that they will find a protector and father in your person, Your Eminence, lessens my anxiety and very natural worries which arise from the distance and inherent difficulties which are inevitable in making a foundation.

The sense of closeness and union which exists among the members of our Congregation and of our houses is very great and the sacrifice is keenly felt by all of us; nevertheless, I hope that it will be made generously and have as its goal the Glory of God and the salvation of souls.

I have complete confidence that our Sisters will use every possible means so as to respond to what you expect of them, Your Eminence; thus giving witness that they are worthy daughters of Bon Secours by their piety, dedication and self forgetfulness, as well as by their humble and respectful obedience.

We are placing this newly conceived community under the protection of our Mother and Patroness, Our Lady Help of Christians; and, as her feast day is the 24th of May, we will consider it as the foundation date of the first community in America. We earnestly ask your permission that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass be offered on that day in the simple oratory which the Sisters will prepare so that God may bless and approve this undertaking.

May I ask, your Eminence, that in advance you bless those who will become part of your flock and pray for them as well as for their Mother.

Sister Mary Joseph, Superior General."

Mother St. Domitille, who had governed the house in Dublin since 1874, was chosen to accompany Sisters St. Ferdinand and St. Flavie to Baltimore and help them get established there. These two Sisters were to form the nucleus of the new community, while awaiting a second group who were to come to join these first Sisters.

We have seen how much Bishop Dorrian of Belfast appreciated Mother St. Domitille, and we know of the renown which she had been instrumental in establishing in that city in the space of two short years.

Her zeal had not lessened and, since she had been in Dublin, she had continued the many good works begun by Mother St. Fabien and Mother St. Hedwige. Her letters will reveal her deeply religious soul to us. At the end of April she wrote:

"Dear Mother,

I accept the sacrifice asked by holy obedience. Of myself I am nothing; my weakness and powerlessness have been proven to me too many times; but, aided by grace, directed by obedience and sustained by the power of God, I feel very strong.

We are going to begin a novena for the success of this undertaking and are placing everything in Mary's hands. She will be The Star of the Sea for us and, as it says in the hymn, she will lead our frail bark back to port in spite of the wind and the waves."

She wrote again as they were leaving Dublin:

"Thank you, dear Mother, for the Masses you are having offered for our intentions; this gives us much courage and strength. Twelve Masses have been promised for us here on Sunday. How good God is to multiply His favors! If we do only a wee bit for Him, He is so generous! and if we do more, He overwhelms us with His goodness! Oh, Mother, if only you could know the consolations I have experienced in being able to do something for such a generous God and for the Institute! It is true that I do not have the ability to say beautiful things, and often I feel as if I am like a mule; but my prayer continues: 'Do with me, as you wish, my God! I am ready for anything!' At those times I understand perfectly that, even though I do not experience those sensible feelings which lift and console, I can still love God through my works.

You have thanked me, Mother, for my sense of dedication; but is it not the duty of every religious to lose sight of herself and accept the Divine Will as manifested? I feel ready to do this with God's grace. Thus I am able to thank Him for having called me to the religious life.

Have you noticed that this year the 8th of May is the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church? What a beautiful day to begin our voyage!"

On the eve of their departure, Mother St. Domitille wrote again in the same vein:

"Yes, dear Mother, I will do everything according to what I believe would be your desire and intentions. I have all of your letters, and they will help me not to omit any of the instructions concerning both our spiritual and temporal needs. For the rest, I have put everything into God's hands. If we know how to forget ourselves and desire only His glory, we may hope that the instruments which He has chosen, though weak, will not be

obstacles to His plan. Moreover, the fatigue, difficulties, sea sickness and all the rest do not really worry me; but when I arrive over there, I will need prayers, strength and courage! God will give me all of this, I am sure, because your prayers will move His Heart and once again the Divine promises will be fulfilled: 'I will use the little ones and the weak to accomplish great things.'

Everywhere people speak enthusiastically about America; nevertheless, I count on finding the cross there and I will not find it unless I ask for it, because love of God draws its strength and growth from the cross and through it.

You know, more or less, the time of the ship's departure; a fervent Ave, Maris Stella, and your blessing, please, Mother, for me and your two Sisters who are so generous . . .

I bid adieu from within the hearts of Jesus and Mary where we may come together at each hour of the day and night."

Sister St. Ferdinand also was equal to the sacrifice she had been asked to make. She was a Breton with a strong soul and was gifted with a great spirit of faith.

You will be able to understand the esteem in which she was held, if you read some of the letters of that period. She had suffered greatly from an illness in 1875 and almost died from it. Those letters express the great sadness with which that news was received. Contrary to all expectations, she recovered, and was then sent by obedience to Tralee, and afterwards to London where she very quietly did much good. She was there when the announcement of her newest assignment reached her. She wrote to the Superior General on the 27th of September. "I am anxious to send you my 'fiat' today. What will I say to you, dear Mother, except thank you again, thank you always!

"It is a big sacrifice, oh!, yes, very big, but above all I wish to do something for God and for my Congregation. I promise to respond to this newest proof of confidence which you have given me in choosing me to be among the number of your missionaries to America.

"I am leaving London with some regrets for I had hoped, with God's help, to have been able to do some good here, but God is calling me elsewhere. Fiat . . ."

Listen to Sister St. Flavie's joyous acceptance and the expression of her profound humility. "I could not have been more surprised when your letter was received, Mother, by which I learned about the sacrifice which I was to make. Above all else I was astonished that your choice for such an important undertaking should fall upon me. It is true that *God often chooses the weak to confound the strong*; however, I am far from being a foundation stone, and especially in a country where we will be the first religious to exercise the particular ministry that is our vocation.

"And yet, I want what God wills; I know that you have given me Sister St. Ferdinand as Mother. I have always admired her virtues and her dedication, and I feel inspired by her goodness of heart."

The Superior General, whose love equaled her kindness, wanted to send the two missionaries a word of encouragement while they were still together in Cork. This thoughtfulness was a great comfort, and Sister St. Ferdinand took it upon herself to thank Mother St. Fulgence: "Sister St. Flavie and I received your letter this morning; we were very touched as we read it. Then we had a real struggle of generosity as to which of us would relinquish it to the other. It ended up that Sister St. Flavie will keep the original, since she is my senior in religion, and I will make a copy of it.

"Thank you, Mother dear, for the many excellent things contained in your letter . . . What diverse sentiments and confusion of feelings fill me as I leave Europe and those I love for a country so far away! I am under no illusions . . . many sufferings, crosses, and trials await me there; but I have confidence in Him who is the Master of the Universe. If I do not fail Him, He will not fail me. I am leaving then, happy to accomplish His will and to abandon myself anew into the hands of Divine Providence. Yes, to glorify God by our actions and to save souls for Him will, more than ever, be the object of our desires and the goal of all our actions. Believe me, dear Mother, you could send me to Australia instead of making me take the route to Baltimore, and I would say '*Fiat*' all the same. The distance, whatever it may be, will always leave me closely united to you and our dear Mother House. It is in those moments of sacrifices and trials that I always feel doubly happy to be a child of Our Lady Help of Christians."

In order to quiet her own maternal anxieties, Mother St. Fulgence wanted to put her daughters under the direct protection of the Queen of Heaven. She had a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin purchased in Cork, and directed Mother St. Domitille to place it in the oratory when they arrived, so that Our Lady of Bon Secours would take possession of the new convent from the very beginning, and consider herself as its Mistress and Queen.

She prepared everything that was necessary herself: the sacred vessels, linens and vestments, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass could be offered on the 24th of May.

Mother St. Fulgence considered prayer as the greatest resource, and knew that, in human undertakings, it was what dew is to the earth. So, she called on all of the members of the Institute to raise many fervent supplications to heaven at that particular moment. Here is the Circular letter which she wrote:

"My dear Sisters,

The foundation, which was requested by the Cardinal Archbishop of Baltimore for such a long time, has been settled.

Next Sunday, the 8th of May, under the protection of the Virgin Mary and our good father, St. Joseph, three of our Sisters will embark at Queenstown on a ship sailing to New York. They will travel over land from there to Baltimore, where they are impatiently

awaited, as you can see from the newspaper article from that city which is attached. The voyage will take ten days; our Sisters should arrive at their destination about the 18th, and we hope that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass can be celebrated in their home on the 24th, which is to be considered as the official date of the foundation.

While they are traveling from here to there, I earnestly request your prayers to obtain a safe and pleasant voyage, and generosity and dedication for the Sisters who are leaving, and also for those whom obedience will soon ask to undergo this same painful separation. But above all, pray that God blesses this first foundation in the New World, so that it can become an efficacious means of extending Christ's reign and gaining many souls for Him.

Consequently, I desire that each day, from the 8th to the 18th, the Salve Regina be said at the end of Mass and be followed by an invocation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the three invocations to Our Lady of Bon Secours, St. Joseph and our guardian angels. Then, at least once, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered for this same intention in each one of our houses.

Sister St. Domitille will preside at the foundation; Sisters St. Ferdinand and St. Flavie are going with her. As soon as they will have completed the initial preparations, a second group will join them. Pray very much for them and also for me.

*Sister Mary Joseph
Superior General"*

The clipping from the newspaper mentioned in the letter follows:

"A letter addressed to Cardinal Gibbons announces that the Sisters of Bon Secours, who are members of a community of Nursing Sisters and well known and appreciated in France, will soon leave Paris and will arrive in Baltimore during this current month of May. The residence, situated at the southeast corner of MacCollough and Hoffman Streets, has been put at their disposition through the kindness of Mrs. Small, who is the owner.

These religious are coming neither to take charge of the direction of a hospital nor to erect one, but they will go wherever their services are requested to care for the sick in which they excel by the practice and experience that they have acquired. A goodly number of them are outstanding for their intelligence and education; this does not prevent them from dedicating themselves entirely to the relief of all types of illness and infirmity, and, when it is necessary, passing days and nights at the bedside of their sick patients. We bid them welcome."

A splendid sun lit up the wharf on the 8th of May, the departure day. It was really like a heavenly smile for the travellers. The chaplain celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and all of the Sisters received Holy Communion; then he gave them Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; and one last time Sister St. Ferdinand played the organ as they called on Mary to bless the Sisters who were to carry the blessed name of Our Lady of Bon Secours so far away.

They left at ten o'clock.

Mother St. Dominique and two of the Sisters went with the travelers as far as Queenstown, where they were to board the *Parthia*.

A traveler, who uses this route for crossing the Atlantic, no matter how indifferent he may be to the beauties of nature, cannot help but be deeply impressed by the unique sight which is before his eyes. On one side, there is the town of Queenstown; it is built in terraces on the side of a hill and dominates the port with its majestic, gothic Cathedral which is one of the most beautiful in Ireland. On the other side, there extends the immense harbor which, it is said, can easily contain the entire English fleet.

The Sisters had frequently had the opportunity of contemplating this splendid panorama, because very often it was from there they embarked for France or England. However, at that solemn moment, the vast view impressed them more than ever; they felt so little, and so incapable of doing God's work.

Here is Mother St. Dominique's account of their departure: "The Sisters' little cabin was very nice and well lighted; they were comfortably installed, and if you could have seen them your mind would certainly be at ease. We remained with them until three o'clock. As you can imagine the leave-taking was sad; each one kept tight rein on their feelings so as to remain courageous. One thing that gave pleasure to all of us was that they made a special exception and attached our small rowboat to the big ship, and thus we were carried along with them as far as the sea. When we had passed the entrance to the wharf which dominates the beachheads of Carlisle and Camden, they cut us loose and we saw the steamer disappear with a dizzying speed. I am not able to tell you, Mother, what we felt and experienced then. Nevertheless, I am completely ready to leave with the second group, if I can be of any service."

Even though the Sisters all suffered a great deal from sea sickness, Mother St. Domitille still tried to write some of her impressions: "We are neither sad nor disheartened," she wrote on the 13th; "we are going where God calls us, and we are trying to respond to His voice joyously and without anxiety about the future. My companions are really admirable, they think only about doing God's will, and are ready to begin working the day after they arrive in spite of their fatigue. It is very consoling. They edify me and excite me to refuse God nothing.

"Yesterday we assisted at the funeral service of one of the seamen who had died at five o'clock in the morning. The ceremony took place about noon; the ship's bell was rung, the officers and all of the crew went to the bridge. The Captain led the prayers and the poor dead man, who had been placed in a coffin weighted with iron bars, was, by means of a plank, dropped into the ocean's waves where he quickly disappeared. This scene made a deep impression on us; we felt so little, so far down between heaven and the sea!"

Finally, on the morning of the 18th, Mother St. Domitille was able to announce that the end of the voyage was in sight, that land was near at hand. "In spite of the fog which often prevented us from advancing," she wrote,

"we hope to arrive in New York at about four o'clock in the morning. We will enter by Hell's Gate. This terrible name had been given to a very dangerous passageway, but the renovations which had been done there made it easier to have access to the port."

The Sisters landed at Baltimore on the 19th of May; they were received very warmly by Mrs. Small, who had done as much as possible to assure that they would have everything they could need. Their arrival was known, and the very next morning *The Sun*, the city's daily newspaper, greeted them with these words:

"Three Sisters of the Order of Bon Secours from Paris, who have been impatiently awaited for some time, arrived yesterday early in the morning, having landed in New York the evening before on the steamship *Parthia* of the Cunard Line after a voyage of eleven days from Queenstown. The crossing was not too bad but there was much fog.

"The Sisters went to 70 MacCollough Street to the residence of Mrs. Small who has cordially offered them hospitality. They will live there according to their usual practices and customs while they await the arrival of the three other Sisters. Thus the first foundation of the Sisters of Bon Secours in America will be established.

"The special object of this Institute is the care of the sick in all degrees and conditions, who are afflicted with any kind of illness: contagious, epidemic, pestilence or benign. The Sisters' devotion has no temporal interest involved but is based uniquely on those principles of religion and charity which they bring to the families: security, confidence and consolation. Besides this, they are persons who have been well brought up, have received a careful education and who speak English, as well as French, with such ease that it is almost impossible to suspect their nationality.

"During the long hours of the night while the family rests after the anxieties and fatigue of the day, and when most ordinary nurses doze, the Sisters, attentive and eager, surround their patients with the most intelligent and delicate care. They are of invaluable help to suffering humanity during these nocturnal vigils to which they principally devote themselves. Besides this, the faithful and punctual execution of the physician's orders contribute a great deal in assuring the chances of survival in those serious cases placed under the care of the Sisters.

"The Sisters of Bon Secours reside in the home of their kind hostess and are ready to respond, from this very moment, to whomsoever may call upon them for the help of their experience, without any conditions or cost.

"In all of the cities of France, Ireland and England where the Sisters are established, they are esteemed and appreciated by everyone.

"The Sisters brought with them from France everything necessary for their oratory, which they are preparing for the 24th of May, the feast day of Our Lady Help of Christians, the patronness of the Congregation."

Reflecting on the lines quoted above, it is easy to see with what sympathetic feelings the Sisters were awaited and judged.

In spite of her fatigue and the newness of the whole situation, Mother St. Domitille began immediately to prepare the oratory for the date that had been set. She had but one thought at that moment—to carry out Mother General's intentions and put the new foundation under the protection of Our Lady Help of Christians that she might obtain strength, light and grace for the Sisters, so that they might accomplish much good through this undertaking.

At that time, Cardinal Gibbons was making his pastoral visitation; and this prevented Mother St. Domitille from going to see him as soon as she had wished. However, when he learned of their arrival, he gave instructions to one of his Vicar Generals so that the spiritual favors formally promised to Mother St. Fulgence could be granted to her Sisters immediately.

And so with great joy in her heart, Mother St. Domitille wrote to her superior on the 24th of May. "*This is the day which the Lord has made for His poor servant. We finally possess Him in our midst. Until now we felt as if we were missing everything, because the only Everything was not with us by His real presence.*"

"We are very tired and are suffering greatly from the heat which is very oppressive; but if we can relieve the souls in purgatory by enduring it with patience, it will be a great consolation for us.

"Thank you, dear Mother, for the prayers and concern of so many. Yes, all for the glory of God with hope in His goodness; we place its success in His hands.

"Sister St. Flavie is already busy gaining a soul for the Lord. It is a young French girl who is living in a boarding school here where she is being drawn toward the protestant religion. Sister has seen her twice, and yesterday she went to confession. The devil is hard at work on this poor soul; God wishes to give her to us as a first victory!"

During those first days the Superior General wrote to comfort and encourage them:

"My dear Sisters,

I wanted you to find a letter from your own country when you arrived in Baltimore. It comes to tell you that your Mother followed you in her prayers, her thoughts and her love, and the Sisters also prayed for you. We could say that distance cannot separate hearts which are united in the same love and sacrifice.

May God bless you as your poor Mother does; may His most abundant blessings be spread over that house so that the Lord may be glorified and souls drawn to Him by your example and sacrifices.

My poor Sisters, how much suffering you have already endured! But all is for God whom we serve and love, and wish to make loved. How wonderful to have been chosen to work for the growth of His Kingdom!"

Sister St. Ferdinand quickly responded to that expression of motherly concern: "Dear Mother St. Domitille shed many tears as she read us your letter which expressed the concern shown by all of the Sisters. Oh, we knew well that you would accompany us, that you would be with us in heart and in spirit during the long crossing.

"We found here a most kind and affectionate welcome from Mrs. Small and several persons who came to meet us. Everyone seems to be very happy about the arrival of the Sisters of Bon Secours. And I had the honor of being the first to be sent to the sick.

"How happy we are finally to have Our Lord under our own roof and to be able to rest for a few moments near this good Master. May He bless this house and reign more than ever in the hearts of His daughters and yours, Mother dear! Above all may we be able to make Him glorified and loved! That is the whole desire of my heart . . ."

While grace inspired these generous thoughts in our missionaries, prayers were redoubled for their intentions. A young Sister, who had received the name St. Fabien in honor of the foundress of the house in Dublin, was dying of tuberculosis in the novitiate. She was very joyful at the thought of going to the Lord, and offered her terrible sufferings that the new foundation might be blessed. We will later see how her prayer was heard.

As had been done in most of the cities where they settled, the Sisters would commence their ministry by caring for the poor. The Sisters always considered such a beginning as a good omen and an assurance that God was bestowing His blessing on the new community. They were very soon recognized and received calls from every quarter, and Mother St. Domitille, being obliged to refuse some cases, earnestly begged that the second group of Sisters be sent.

During the first week of June, Mother learned that Cardinal Gibbons had returned to his episcopal city; so she quickly went to visit him and was received with great consideration and fatherly kindness.

"I am very happy that you have arrived," he said; "have you begun your work here? I suppose you are the Superior at Dublin? But why don't you remain with us?" "I am ready to do so if obedience asks it of me," she responded. "I will come to see you," the prelate added, "and will celebrate Mass in your home. Thus I will have an opportunity to learn about your customs and also the duties of your vocation."

The Sisters were to find a great source of support from the Suplician Fathers who directed St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, the nursery of priests and bishops which was unique among the religious establishments in the United States. The Superior was Father Magnien, a man who was outstanding in every respect and had considerable influence in the entire area. Cardinal Gibbons liked him very much and this affection never changed; when death claimed his friend, the Cardinal was able to testify:

"Father Magnien really was *Dimidium Animae Meae*. I was so accustomed to consulting him in important matters, and to depend very much on his advice, that his death is a great blow to me. I feel as if I have lost my right arm."¹⁰⁰

It is easy to understand that Father Magnien could be of great help to these religious who had come to perform such a delicate ministry in a country whose mores and customs were unknown and foreign to them; they found him to be a true father. The Superior of St. Mary's had been a professor at the Major Seminary in Orléans, France, so he knew the Sisters of Bon Secours and the keen interest which Bishop Dupanloup had for that Congregation. He also did not forget that the Sisters had been greatly loved by Father de Pierre, one of the most saintly members of the Society of St. Sulpice. Distance had not altered his love for his native land, and all of the French people who passed through Baltimore remember with what exuberance he received his fellow countrymen. Thus he was really happy to see the Sisters settle in that city, and a few hours after their arrival, he came to welcome them and was accompanied by Bishop MacColgan, the Vicar General. He has followed their progress with growing interest, and was certainly not surprised by the support which the Baltimore inhabitants always gave Bon Secours. The year before his death in 1900, Father Magnien was already gravely ill with the disease of which he was to die; and he came to spend several weeks at the convent's annex. It was a real joy for Mother St. Urban to be able to care for him and express her filial devotion.

Mother St. Fulgence felt a great sense of security when she learned that the Sisters had the advice and support of the Sulpician Fathers. "I have had great respect for all of the members of that Society," she wrote to Mother St. Domitille, "from the very first time I came to know their title. We owe them so much! The biography of Father Olier was delightful; I am sending it to you as well as that of Madame Duchesne whose life shows clearly the sufferings endured by the first religious who had the honor of working for God in America."

Cardinal Gibbons did not delay in carrying out the promise he made to Mother St. Domitille. He came to visit the Community accompanied by Father Magnien; and after having seen their little convent, he spent some time speaking with the Superior, whose great intelligence and religious spirit had touched him deeply. He seemed surprised when he learned that she had been in Ireland for twenty years. "Twenty years!," he exclaimed, "you must have left your heart there, then, and I am not surprised that you want to return."—"Oh, no, Your Eminence, I always take my heart with me wherever I go."

On June 20, 1881, Cardinal Gibbons came to celebrate Mass in their little oratory. Again, he was accompanied by Father Magnien, and after the

breakfast which was offered by Mrs. Small, he returned to speak with the Sisters. He won their hearts by his goodness; reassuring them of his continued interest in them and their work and, at the same time, expressing the satisfaction he felt in seeing them settled in his diocese. "If I am ever sick," he said pleasantly, "I will immediately send for a Sister of Bon Secours."

The poor Europeans suffered a great deal from the heat and mosquito bites, but they never lost their courage or good humor. "Don't be upset on our account," wrote Mother St. Domitille. "If you only knew how happy the three of us are to be able to do something for God and our dear Congregation! To say that we have nothing to suffer would not be exactly true; but suffering is easy for hearts in love with God or who at least have a great desire to love Him and prove their love through their work."

In spite of their very busy schedules and, subsequently, their fatigue, the Sisters still found time to write long letters to the Mother House. Mother St. Ferdinand took the first opportunity to give some interesting details about the new house: "As far as I am able to judge, Baltimore is a very beautiful city. The streets are well laid out and the houses are in straight rows; generally they are built of brick in a lovely shade of red. All of them have nice front entrances with several steps; in the better houses they are made of white marble, as are the cornices and windowsills. In the ordinary houses these things are made of painted wood. The pavements are also made of red brick; trees are planted along the sides and this creates a charming effect. The only thing which disfigures this otherwise beautiful city is the faulty way in which it is paved. The roofs of the houses are usually flat and serve as terraces.

"We receive many visitors. Every day Catholic and Protestant women come to welcome us. Here the prejudices of the Protestants seem less deeply rooted than in Ireland or England. Conversions are also quite numerous; sometimes as many as fifteen or twenty out of a hundred. The Bishop conferred Confirmation on one hundred and eighteen persons in our parish last Sunday; among these at least fifteen were converts.

"What else can I tell you, Mother? Oh, yes, we are surrounded by little black children. The one who works for Mrs. Small is very reverential, and before answering a question addressed to him he has already made three or four very low bows."

A few days later Mother St. Domitille wrote: "You would love our little community because you love whatever speaks of holy poverty. How happy we feel at being so poor, and how wonderful it is for a newborn community to be able to model itself on the family life at Nazareth!

"The imposing word *Silence* has now been put up in the usual places, and a cross with a plaque bearing our name has been hung on the exterior of our home."

It is easy to imagine how delighted the Superior General was to read this letter which echoed so well the wise advice dictated by her faith.

She wrote to Mother St. Domitille that first week of June: "My dear Sister, Yes, you are right in helping the Sisters to understand the necessity of denying themselves, and even of knowing how to do without necessary things. Is it not expedient to die little by little in order to become like our Divine Spouse? . . . The three Sisters whom I am sending are strong and generous; I am greatly edified by them. I earnestly beg our dear Lord to fill you with His blessings, to sustain you and to strengthen you. So have courage, and if the work and pain frighten you, may the rewards and success of your efforts encourage you!"

Mother St. Domitille returned to New York on the 4th of July. She went to meet Sister St. Odon, Sister St. Luc and Sister St. Angelina who were arriving from France. Before leaving she had gone to Cardinal Gibbons and asked his blessing for the new arrivals, and she received very wise advice from him which would enable the Sisters to follow all the details of *their wise and holy rule*. What he said described himself, for he had a deep understanding of what a powerful agent Christian charity could be in all phases of life in the family and in society.

The Sisters arrived laden down with a quantity of things which the little community had lacked and that the Superior General had sent to them out of the goodness of her heart. Mother St. Domitille was deeply touched by this expression of interest and concern. "This then is happiness," she said to the Sisters, "having a Mother who guesses your needs and supplies them. This is part of the hundredfold in this life promised to those who consecrate themselves to the Lord."

A few days after the new Sisters arrived, Sister St. Ferdinand learned that she had been named Superior of the Baltimore house. At the time she was on duty in Laurel with her seventh patient. She had already endured many spiritual deprivations; she had several times been very far from any Church, but the anticipation of the burden which she had been given overwhelmed her. "What a heavy cross you have placed on my shoulders," she wrote to Mother St. Fulgence. "I have none of the qualities needed to fulfill such a task! I fear that you have some illusion about the little bit of virtue and tact which I do have. Even though I know that this new cross will not necessarily be the last one, it seems to me to be heavier and more difficult than any that have preceded it. I want to see the Divine Will in it, however, and to accept it with courage. I foresee many humiliations, deceptions and trials; but I am confident that God will help me to support it courageously, since I wish to seek only His glory and the salvation of souls."

The humble religious was not mistaken, and though she knew sacrifice and suffering she also knew unmeasured graces; and during eight years she

was a center of peace and light for the Sisters who were called to perform their holy work in the New World.

During a visit made by Cardinal Gibbons to the community, Mother St. Domitille profited by the occasion to ask him to preside at the installation of the new Superior, which he accepted with his usual kindness. He spoke to the Sisters in the following words:

"In the Catholic Church the ceremonies, however small they may be, always have a meaning. Thus, my Sisters, you are going to respectfully accept the Sister who has been designated to be your Superior, promising her obedience and submission. She is and will be for you from this day forward, the representative of Our Lord. She, on her part, has duties to you which she must fulfill. She must be watchful that the Rule is observed both within and without the convent. You do not have a cloister to protect you as other Sisters do; you have only your modesty and your holy Rule. Be faithful to them, Sisters, and you will save souls and snatch victims from hell. May peace, union and charity reign among you. Be a source of edification for one and all; love to go to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to draw strength and courage from His heart, so as to overcome all the obstacles which could prevent you from belonging completely to Him."

After saying this, the Cardinal blessed the Superior and then all of the Sisters knelt before him to kiss his ring and to receive his blessing.

It required great efforts on Mother St. Ferdinand's part to carry out her task. By nature she was essentially very simple and humble; she loved to work in silence and to wear herself out at the bedside of the sick. The visits, conversations and introductions which she had to undergo were very painful for her. "How that parlor tries my patience!" she said. "But what can be done except to make myself friendly so as to draw souls to God."

And she succeeded in full measure. Everyone sought her advice, and the doorbell was rung often on the pretext of bringing some fruit or other delicacy to the Sisters; but in reality it was to have the pleasure of seeing Mother St. Ferdinand and to hear her speak about God.

The feast of the 15th of August was approaching and many preparations were underway to prepare for it. Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was to be given for the first time in the tiny chapel. Thanks to the many gifts from France and the beautiful bouquet of lilies from the children of the Providence Orphanage, it had a very festive appearance. Nothing was missing, not even the harmonium, because one of Mother St. Ferdinand's brothers, no doubt well aware of the joy it gave her, offered the community a beautiful instrument which permitted the Sisters to send some lovely melodies towards heaven.

"Many beautiful fresh flowers were sent to us by friends," wrote Mother St. Domitille, "and these, blended with the numerous candles, created a

marvelous effect. One thing, which was even more beautiful, was the sight of all the Sisters on their knees before the altar, consecrating themselves to Mary. Even the lilies in all their pure splendor seem to pale before the beauty of these women who gave themselves in such simplicity to their Mother by immolating themselves on the altar of sacrifice.

"It is quite surprising how much we already possess for our little oratory, which has been in use for such a short time; and we are very proud to be able to say: 'Everything here has come from our Mother House and the communities of Bon Secours who had wished to send some sign of their love for the newest member of their family.' "

It is true. Each one of the houses of the Institute had brought their present, big or small, to Mother St. Fulgence, and only God knows how many stitches Mother St. Mecthilde had the orphans do for the chapel in the New World.

Even as they celebrated the happiness of their heavenly Mother, thanking her for the many visible graces received through her kindness, the Sisters sadly glimpsed a black cloud rising on the horizon. The three months which Mother St. Domitille had been given in order to get them settled in Baltimore were almost over; and in a few days she was to board the ship which would take her directly to Paris, "so as to give an account to Mother General of the success of their work and undertaking, just as the apostles did to their Divine Master," said Mother St. Domitille. "I believe," she added, "that your heart will be greatly consoled because if here your Sisters haven't anything but their good will, they put themselves entirely into God's hands as His instruments, so that He can use them as He pleases. . . . I hope that later this house will be a beautiful diamond added to your crown; and that you will never regret having consented to give your daughters for this far off mission. I believe that I have done my best to be of help to them and to establish them in the manner traced out by you. But isn't it true that *though we sow and water, God alone is able to give growth!* It is also from Him alone that we expect it."

Such perfect dispositions had to draw down an abundant shower of grace on those humble, generous souls. And when the shower comes, the flower opens up its chalice and drinks; and that is how grace was poured over the spouses of Jesus Christ, and their hearts opened to receive it and to make it grow.

Mother St. Domitille left the 31st of August on the *Algeria* which went by way of Liverpool. As can be imagined her departure left the little community in Baltimore in the grip of great sadness. How were they to fill the void made by the removal of that serene, strong soul? But didn't she leave behind her the example of her virtues which the Sisters would remember for a long time?

When Mother St. Ferdinand returned from the train station, still filled with her own pain, she saw the young Sisters coming towards her and in

their simple way hugging her and promising to be *Very Good*. Those words contained a life long plan of kindness and perfection.

Later she wrote confidentially to Mother St. Domitille: "If you knew the emotions which held me in their grasp when I knelt on your prie-dieu for the first time! But, then, everything is for heaven, and it is certain that we can never do enough in recognition for the Lord's goodness in our regard . . . The more God tries me and asks sacrifices of me, the more I will feel happy to belong to Him. I see myself, at this time, as a victim in the hands of the Divine Master, who must sacrifice itself more and more; but at each onset of pain, I respond by abandoning myself into the hands of my heavenly Father."

The day that Mother St. Domitille left, the Sisters had entrusted the success of their work to St. Joseph, and they were consoled by an event which, in a spirit of faith, they called a delicate mark of his attention.

The pastor of one of the churches around Baltimore came to ask for a Sister to nurse an entire needy family, who lived within his parish and who existed on what others gave them. The four children all had scarlet fever and the mother was too sick to care for them. As the family was Protestant the priest had hardly dared to offer them his services, but when he was welcomed, his first thought was to go to Bon Secours and expose this terrible situation. The Sisters were deeply moved; and Sister Angelina left immediately, happy to have been chosen to care for those poor children.

There, as elsewhere, the generous self sacrifice which the Sisters practiced drew down blessings from heaven on the new foundation. It was not long before the beneficial influence of the Sisters on the sick was recognized; in fact, Mother St. Ferdinand no longer knew how to respond. Requests came from every quarter; one after another they came and carriage after carriage arrived to transport the Sisters to their patients. The Superior was greatly disturbed when she had to respond with a refusal. "We have only five Sisters here," she told a doctor who was astonished that his request was refused. "But there should be forty of you," he answered.

The Mother House did everything possible to foresee and provide for the growing needs of the new community and, towards the end of the year, a number of Sisters were again sent to swell their ranks.

Chapter XXVIII

*Expropriation of the Convents at
Quimper and Roubaix
Mother St. Fulgence's first voyage
to Baltimore
Events during the crossing and the return
Inauguration of the Baltimore convent.
1881—1882*

While Mother St. Fulgence's attention was anxiously focused on America and the new foundation, she received a very troubling letter from Mother St. Maurice, the superior at Quimper. She announced that an ordeal which had already been foreseen for some time, was about to fall upon the community.

The school at Quimper, which was separated from the convent by a wall, had been elevated in status to a high school and was to be financed by the government. This decision brought with it the need to enlarge the buildings, and certain considerations involving sanitary regulations made it necessary for the Municipal Council to include the Sisters' property in their plans.

The city's notable inhabitants challenged the decision, because of the great difficulties it would cause the Sisters, and they all agreed to advise the Superior General to negotiate the affair through a private contract, and not

to allow themselves to be expropriated. Canon Bergot, one of the community's protectors, wrote to Mother St. Fulgence: "When I returned here after a short absence, I learned that your house is to be expropriated without delay. My interest and concern for your Sisters urges me to tell you that the highest placed and best intentioned men of this city have stated unanimously that, in the current situation and in view of the existing circumstances, it would be to your advantage to negotiate through a private contract. I consider it my duty to inform you of this, but, you, Mother, are the one who has the grace of state to make the decision. In any case, I hope that God will so dispose their hearts that your Sisters at Quimper will obtain a large compensation which would make their sacrifice a little less painful."

Mother St. Fulgence had no difficulty in following this wise advice. The negotiations continued for three months, and were conducted by Mother St. Maurice with an astuteness and wisdom motivated by her attachment to the Congregation. Mr. Astor, the Mayor and a very well intentioned man, wrote to the Superior General: "I have had several interviews with the Superior of your Order at Quimper, and her pleasantness made the proceedings so agreeable that I could not help being satisfied. However, I must admit that the negotiations were very difficult, mainly because of the tenacity and capability with which she defended your Community's rights. One concession led to another, and finally, last evening I was convinced and pledged the payment of 5,000 francs over and above the sum originally stipulated . . . etc., etc."

"In closing, Madam Superior, I would like to tell you how pleased I am to have been able to arrive at a satisfactory arrangement regarding the acquisition of the building belonging to an Order whose dedication I admire; whose care of the sick which I and my family, under different circumstances, have had the occasion to appreciate, and for which I personally am very grateful. etc . . ."

The Sisters left their dear little convent in the autumn of 1882; it held many precious memories and was still permeated with the gentle, edifying spirit left by Mother St. Leocadie and Mother St. Pierre.

In view of the storms threatened by the Decrees of 1880, Mother St. Fulgence believed it the better part of prudence not to buy any property, and she settled the Sisters in a rented house. Thus they continued their charitable ministry; and in the records of the General Chapter in 1895 a brief summary is given which contains the entire history of that foundation: "Quimper is a little religious paradise. The Sisters protect their devotion and their zeal under the mantle of humility and the hidden life."

In 1881 the community at Roubaix also had to pass through the same ordeal which had troubled Quimper. The Sisters there were very upset but saw in it God's hand. Indeed, Divine Providence arranged everything so

that the Sisters of Bon Secours would never depart from the spirit of poverty, simplicity and detachment which had made the Institute flourish in the first place.

It may be recalled that, thanks to the generosity of the people of Roubaix, a beautiful convent was built on Rue du Square which the city's architects, who were used to modern structures, had made quite comfortable. The Sisters had been living there for eighteen years when they were expropriated in 1881 because the Municipal Council had decided to cut new roadways. At that time real estate had become very valuable, and the Mother House was distressed that there was need to search for another residence. Finally, Mother St. Fulgence decided to buy a very large building which was both old and dilapidated. It belonged to Mr. Jules Derégnaucourt and was situated in the old Rue Traversière, which has now become Rue Derégnaucourt. The house needed many repairs but, for want of something better, they had to be satisfied.

Mother St. Gervais, who had recently finished nine years as superior at Boulogne, was placed in charge of the convent at Roubaix. She remained there only a few years because, at the General Chapter in 1886, she was recalled to Paris as a General Councillor. She was replaced by Mother St. Aldegonde, whose activities we have glimpsed at Lorient.

As for Sister St. Romain, she remained at her post and continued to do immense good among the poor of the city. She was held in such high esteem, and the charitable goals of all her journeys were so well known that she traveled gratis on all the streetcars. Her daily program never varied: in the morning she pleaded the cause of her protégés with some charitable people; after a short dinner, she would return to collect what was left over from the tables of the rich and the Scrépel, Pollet and Vichon families were always the first ones visited. Then, weighed down with her treasures she would quickly distribute them among her dear poor people.

In return, Sister St. Romain had immense influence on the family life of the workmen. They were not open to reasoning, but instinctively they understood the benefit and beauty of a religion which could incite such devotion as hers. The good Sister was plainly indulgent with them, but one thing which roused her indignation was blasphemy. This was well known and those coarse, rough men did not become angry but accepted the reproaches she made to them, even when severe, for they were always softened by the manner in which they were given. "St. Romain," they said (that is what they called her), "you know very well that it is not through wickedness that we curse; we will do it no more." And, indeed, sometimes they kept their word.

This excellent religious had taken care of Louise Lateau, who had the marks of the stigmata; thus she was able to obtain entrance to the house for

many persons. A priest who had been given the task of examining the question, asked Sister St. Romain to give him a report; because she, more than others, had the opportunity of getting to know this woman who had been so favored by heaven. This report, outstanding because of its common sense and clarity, was sent to Rome.

We must make some mention of the apostolate which this Sister carried out with a young Japanese who had become lost in Roubaix. One day a woman stopped Sister in the street and asked her to come to see a young vagabond to whom she had rented a room the evening before. It seems that since arriving he had been sitting on the floor crying. Sister St. Romain, who ignored obstacles when there was a question of need, went to see the poor child who was, indeed, crying bitterly. She couldn't get a word out of him, but, by means of signs, made him understand that he must try to explain what was the matter—no matter what it cost. Finally, the boy took a letter from his pocket. It was addressed to Mr. Vichon and was from his brother, a ship owner in Boulogne, who requested protection for the young Japanese boy. His name was *Thouroude*; he was from a numerous family and had been sent to France to learn Commerce. Sister St. Romain took him quickly to Mr. Vichon who obtained a position for him.

The young man was not ungrateful and, not knowing how to express his gratitude to the religious, whom he called Mother, he brought her from time to time one of those tiny intricate works of art in which the Japanese excel. However, the work had only begun, for the poor child hadn't any understanding of religious truths. He needed instruction; so, Sister took him to the dean at St. Martin's, who willingly took on the task of his religious education. Thouroude profited quickly from the lessons he received, and the baptismal day arrived quite promptly for the young Catechumen who was twenty years old. Mr. Vichon was his Godfather and Madam Butteau, a charitable Christian from Roubaix, was his Godmother.

From that moment on his exactitude in attending the services at Church, and the care with which he guarded his baptismal grace were to be admired.

After a few years Thouroude returned to his own country and promised to be an apostle to his own people. He wrote often and the Sisters were overjoyed that the work accomplished in his soul was lasting.

The many material problems which burdened Mother St. Fulgence towards the end of 1881 did not make her forget the house in Baltimore. The news which she received gave her a great desire to go and see for herself, so as to be able to judge her Sisters' needs. The letters from Mother St. Ferdinand betrayed a certain tension and uneasiness produced by the abnormal conditions under which the community lived. It was a fact that no matter how hospitable Mrs. Small's home was for them, the Sisters lacked the benefit of the cloister, and the facility of carrying out their Rule in silence and recollection under the gaze of God alone.

In order to find some remedy for this situation, Mother St. Fulgence decided to go to Baltimore the following spring. She met with lively opposition from those with whom she lived. They did not think she was able for such a trip and that the voyage would put a real burden on her already failing health. Nevertheless, when the interests of the Congregation and the needs of the Sisters were in question, the Superior General knew better than to rely solely on her own strength. And so, she reduced all their objections to zero and boarded the ocean liner *Parthia* at Cork, on the last day of March.

Mother St. Dominique, who was still superior in that city, accompanied the Superior General. Her ingenuity and pleasant cheerfulness did much to lighten the inconveniences entailed in that voyage, which was a particularly bad one. Several storms were encountered and these only heightened the anxiety of the passengers. "In spite of everything," Mother St. Fulgence wrote, "I was not afraid. Each one, silently and in their own way, prayed; for we were convinced that, under the guidance of Mary, Our Lady of Bon Secours, and protected by so many prayers, we would arrive safely at our port. We were so confident that we often went to sleep in the middle of the raging fury."

However, one storm, which was worse than the other ones, began on the 3rd of April at about eleven o'clock at night. Mother St. Fulgence wrote: "For twenty-four hours we seemed to be hanging over a deep abyss, everything around us was upset; the wind whipped the waves to extraordinary heights and we were sure that from one moment to the next we would be engulfed by them. Suddenly a wave rose up above the deck and with its force shattered the windows in one of the salons where several persons were trying to rest. We were together in our cabin and we cried out to Heaven, trying to bolster our courage by thinking about the reason for this journey. I promised that if we escaped from this disaster I would have nine Masses offered for the holy souls in purgatory. I also thought about throwing a medal into the sea but as I could not go up on deck myself, I made this act of faith through one of our fellow passengers, a Catholic priest, who had come to give us his blessing.

"I have prayed for those who face the perils of the sea all of my life, but now that I have experienced those dangers myself, I will pray more than ever for them."

Mother St. Fulgence used this experience of the unleashed fury of the elements to consider some eternal truths: "The agitation of the waves and the ebb and flow of the ocean are a true image of human life. And yet, in the midst of the storm the ship slowly and painfully went forward, but it always advanced. Not one man left his post; and no matter how dangerous it was, all obeyed the voice and even the signals from their Captain. And I said to myself, 'this is how we must always advance towards perfection, in spite of difficulties and struggles, obeying the Divine Voice which makes itself heard

in the depths of our heart, always and without conditions, until that day when the fire of Divine Love will lead us to our eternal port in happiness and triumph.'"

During the voyage Mother was both pained and confused as she compared the indifference of so many Christians in France with the faith she witnessed among the Protestants who surrounded her. She wrote: "Only a thin partition separated our cabin from the dining room. Yesterday was Sunday and it was transformed into a chapel. We could hear their hymns and the praying of the psalms; the Captain acted as the minister. He read the epistle, a passage from the Bible and the Gospel for the day. He prayed with great fervor and I cried as I thought of the many Frenchmen who refuse to even pronounce God's name."

They finally arrived, and it is easy to imagine the sentiments of the Sisters on seeing their Mother again. She had faced so much fatigue and suffering so as to bring them her blessing and take care of their needs.

At that moment, their most urgent need was to find a house which could be acquired under advantageous conditions, so that the community would be completely free, and able to develop in such a way, that they would be capable of responding to the demands of any given situation.

Mother St. Fulgence put her whole heart and soul into the work of overcoming the obstacles encountered in such an undertaking. Nevertheless, thanks to the helpfulness of the numerous friends of the Sisters, and especially Father Foley, the pastor of St. Martin's parish, she was able to resolve the problem.

The success of this undertaking was also attributed to what could be called supernatural intervention. There was a young Irish girl among the poor who were nursed by the Sisters; she was most grateful for the good care that she had received. One day she said to the Sister on duty: "Sister, I am going to die tonight. What do you want me to ask God for you when I reach heaven?" "Well, Marie," the Sister answered, "ask the Blessed Virgin to find us a house." The child's soul winged its way heavenward a few hours later; and she fulfilled her mission so well that, three or four days after her death, Mother St. Fulgence was able to procure a house; it was well built, situated between two gardens, very near a church and located a little way from the center of town. The owner was a Jewish man, who was a new convert and wanted his home to be made into a convent. Father Foley was delighted with the choice and went himself to Cardinal Gibbons to ask his influence, so that the Sisters of Bon Secours would be given preference over any other persons seeking to acquire it. He was also thinking that his own parish would be blessed with another sanctuary where the Blessed Sacrament would receive fervent praise. Some well meaning person also advised the Superior General to add a neighboring field to the garden, which was not

very large, with the idea that later on it might serve as a good place for a chapel.

First of all, it was necessary to find the monies needed to buy the building, and once again Divine Providence intervened. Four Baltimore physicians, who had known and appreciated the Sisters in their work, agreed to act as guarantors for the money which had to be borrowed; they rightly believed that the Sisters would be able to pay back the loan in a few years time.

Besides this, the women who were fostering their work, the Misses Howard and O'Brien among others, after seeking the Cardinal's approval, took it upon themselves to open a fund raising drive which was most successful.

The generosity shown to the Sisters was extreme and unanimous; many of the persons nursed by them would say: "Sister, when you make your collection, don't forget to come by my house."

In spite of the serious problems which took so much of the Superior General's time, she thought of the other Sisters and wrote to them: "My guardian angel is kept very busy," she wrote to Mother St. Honorat, the Mistress of Novices. "I send him from house to house, from sick bed to sick bed to bring my blessing to the Sisters. In spite of the distance you are all, *all*, present to me every moment of the day . . . Oh how beautiful is the union created by love; from one end of the world to the other we are able to come together to praise Jesus, to ask Him to help us; and by this union, this mutual love we glorify Him and draw down grace on the souls which we burn with desire to save for Him! And if we do not see the fruits of our labors, it does not make them any less real."

"Today is Low Sunday," she wrote to Mother St. Alphonsine, "and I am asking Our Lord that *Peace be with you*, and I greet all of you as He greeted the apostles in this morning's gospel: *peace* of Soul; *peace* of heart and *peace* with yourself; but for this it is necessary to forget oneself and sacrifice oneself after the example of our Divine Model."

The day to depart for France arrived. Mother St. Fulgence left the New World; she was happy to have been able to improve the living conditions for her Sisters, and she was happy also at having witnessed the esteem in which they were held. She marveled at the religious liberty which was enjoyed in America . . . "When you see it," she said, "you are broken hearted as you think of the persecution which the Catholic Church in France has endured."

Mother St. Fulgence boarded the *Catalonia* on the 3rd of May with the intention of stopping in Queenstown where Mother St. Dominique would leave her to return to her own duties. The weather was good and there was every indication that the return voyage would be a pleasant one; but such was not to be. Knowing His servants' fidelity, Our Lord, without a doubt, did

not wish to preserve them from the trial through which they would give Him glory. The newspapers of that period reported the event which caused such great anxiety to the Sisters in all of the houses of Bon Secours. The *Catalonia* had left New York on the 3rd of May. Everything went well until the 7th, when one of the ship's propellers was damaged. As the weather was fine they tried to proceed under sail but they advanced so slowly that they had to give up that means of navigation. The thing most feared by all was to be caught between the icebergs which were in that region because the *Catalonia* had strayed from its course and was far to the north of their planned route. On the morning of the 9th, the steamship *Sarmatian*, which was coming from Canada, appeared on the horizon; and when it saw the distress signals, it stopped; and the Captain even consented to take on board one hundred and twenty of the passengers. He kept the *Catalonia* in tow for twenty-four hours which gave time for the most necessary repairs to be made; then he continued on his route toward Europe.

It is easy to imagine how upset the French and Irish Sisters were when they learned that Mother St. Domitille had not found the travellers at Queenstown on the expected date. At the same time the newspapers published a dispatch from New York which stated that the ocean liner had been seen in distress about twelve miles off Sandyhook, and had asked for help. Thankfully the anxiety did not last very long, because on the 15th the *Sarmatian* put into a small port in the north of Ireland, not far from Londonderry; and Mother St. Fulgence was able to send some words of reassurance to the Sisters.

They arrived in London in the evening of the 16th and the next day, after a good night's sleep, she sent an account of the events of the voyage to the Mother House:

"My dear Sisters,

I have just learned that several contradictory dispatches had made you sick at heart; I am very touched and hasten to reassure you. It is true that we were very nervous, but Jesus and Mary heard the prayers of both the children and their Mother; and at the most we had only twenty-four hours of delay. All that I can say is: All glory be to Mary! because that tender Mother has been most faithful in helping us.

In the midst of the cries, the goings and comings, the agitation and generalized upset which existed, we never stopped calling on the Star of the Sea, and we most certainly owe the arrival of the other ship to her. The Sarmatian had come south to avoid the icebergs; our ship had strayed from its course and gone north, and that is how they came to meet.

The transfer from one ship to another was difficult. Try to imagine your Mother climbing down a ship's ladder, held by only two ropes and falling into the long boat which some strong sailors brought along side the Sarmatian; then we had to go up the same type of ladder. I did it only after recommending my soul to God, for the least false movement could have thrown me into the sea.

The next day a violent storm arose; if it had come the night before we could not have made the transfer. So you see how Mary watched over us!"

While she was still in London, the Superior General received news of the deaths of three of the Sisters; among them was the young Sister St. Fabien who had been preparing to die for over a year. Mother St. Fulgence's faith showed those souls to her as so many protectresses for the Congregation but she felt these renewed sacrifices keenly!

Mother felt well rewarded for her fatigue and sufferings during the voyages to and from Baltimore, when she learned that the Sisters were all settled in their new home. July 8, 1882, the solemn opening of the convent took place. Cardinal Gibbons officiated and he was assisted by Father Magnien and Father Foley. The music was provided by St. Martin's parish and added greatly to that religious feast, and magnificent fresh flowers, which had been sent the evening before by some benefactors, decorated the altar and blended with the radiance of the candles.

About forty noteworthy persons who were friends of the community had been invited to the ceremony, and the little chapel was full.

After the Mass, Cardinal Gibbons spoke to the Sisters, and paraphrasing the text: *"I was sick and you visited me,"* he adapted it to that vocation of complete charity of the Sisters of Bon Secours. Then he terminated with the following conclusions:

"I admire the Church for the clarity of her doctrines, as much as I am drawn to her by the splendid organization of charity which she has established throughout the whole world. Every kind of suffering has its alleviations and the sick have not been forgotten. I do not know of any community which is capable of doing more good than the Sisters of Bon Secours, if they are really faithful to their mission, because there is no work more consoling or capable of producing the fruits of conversion than the visitation of the sick and the afflicted.

"Indeed, for many, their sick room is heaven's reception hall. The atmosphere of physical suffering, when patiently endured, is very favorable to the growth of virtue; human respect and the passions lose their force when sickness knocks at the door, and thus it is that God sows the seeds of repentance into hearts.

"The pious and dedicated nurse will make the seed grow and bring God's peace to the patient; and, often, she will even make God's light shine on the whole family. Its members will be filled with lively gratitude towards her, as was Tobias and his family towards the Angel Raphael.

"When St. Vincent de Paul created the Daughters of Charity for the hospitals, several were astonished that he sent them there without veils. He replied: 'Their best veil is their modesty.' The candor and modesty of your countenance that reflect the purity of your heart will also be the best armor

to protect you from insult, my Sisters. Remember that the most beautiful work in which you can be involved is the service of your suffering neighbor. You are never more truly children of God and Sisters of Jesus Christ than when you bring some rays of sunshine to hearts which are clouded by pain. The words of consolation and the acts of kindness that you will pour out upon the sick are like *'apples of gold on beds of silver.'* People were converted more by acts of Jesus' mercy than by His preaching. When He preached, they admired His doctrine but, when He raised Lazarus from the dead and consoled Martha and Mary, *many ran after him.*"

At the dinner which followed the blessing of the Convent, the Archbishop appeared to be very happy, and he expressed his great satisfaction at seeing a work, which was so precious to him, established on a solid base. Seated on either side of the prelate were Father Magnien and Doctor Chatard; Mr. O'Brien and the General de Charette were also among those invited. The General had met some of the Sisters a few days earlier. He had asked if they were French and, when they responded affirmatively, he promised to come to see them. But, meanwhile, Cardinal Gibbons had asked the General and Madam the Baroness deCharette to come to the inauguration of the new convent.

During the dinner, the benefactors were admitted to visit the convent which, in great part, was due to their generosity; and once again the Sisters could feel the current of support with which they were surrounded.

At that moment their gratitude knew no bounds. How marvelously they had been rewarded for the privations and difficulties of those days. The convent was situated a distance from the center of the city and the noise of the business district. The silence, the benefits of solitude and the beauty of the scenery which passed before them expanded their hearts and filled them with continual thanksgiving.

Chapter XXIX

The Foundation at Pont-de-Gennes
Mother St. Fulgence's second
voyage to Baltimore
Mother Mary Alice at Tralee
1882—1885

During the General Chapter which was held in Paris in 1883, the delegates again expressed their oft repeated desire of seeing that the care of the poor be of primary concern in all the houses of the Institute. A short time later, it appeared that Heaven sanctioned that faith-filled, charitable proposal. Here is what happened.

In the district of Sarthe, near Monfort-le-Rotrou, there was the small town of Pont-de-Gennes. A large landowner named Mr. Boutron had purchased the buildings of an old hospice, which for centuries had been dedicated to the relief of humanity. He had done this to regain his original direction in life and to draw down upon his family the Divine blessings promised for works of mercy. In order to accomplish his purpose, he asked advice and help from Father Robveille, the pastor of the place, who received his ideas enthusiastically. After a long and fruitless search this good priest, following the counsel of the Capuchins from Mans, tried once more; he wrote to the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris. The welcome which he received made him hopeful of an affirmative response; and he knew well how to bring this

about by a spirited plea. He wrote to Mother St. Fulgence: "I am unable not to hope for a prompt and favorable reply. You are the house of Bon Secours, and for how long a time have we cried '*Help*' for our two parishes and the fourteen others of the region! Come then, Reverend Mother, come to the aid of our afflicted and fever ridden poor. God will repay you. Accept a humble place into the society of your great foundations. Who knows? Perhaps this modest little haven will bring happiness to the others. Mr. Boutron and I have a great need to see our effort crowned with success, so as to recover from all our failures. Your arrival would also greatly rejoice a population of sixteen thousand souls of which our district is composed. Bishop d'Outremont, as you know, is praying for a swift establishment of this useful foundation. Moreover, the Nicolay family, to whom you have given care in Paris, and several manor ladies of the neighboring areas would be most supportive and devoted to you."

The Superior General went to the place herself to obtain some clear view of the situation; the negotiations began and were swiftly concluded. Father Robveille had truly the heart of a priest, and he was very happy at being able to procure the beneficial ministry of the Nursing Sisters for his poor parishoners. He took responsibility for all the repairs which the condition of the buildings necessitated, and he opened a fund raising drive to cover initial expenses. "You are my sole occupation," he wrote to Mother St. Fulgence. "I go to three or four places on my rounds to announce Our Lady of Bon Secours; and everywhere that I speak about you, they are happy; they are waiting for you and greatly desire your presence here."

Yet when the Sisters arrived accompanied by the Superior General, everything was still in a lamentable, tumbled down state. Mother St. Fulgence and the Sisters set to work immediately and quickly put everything in order. One of the smaller rooms was completely transformed and became a lovely oratory in spite of its simplicity.

The inauguration of the convent took place on May 18, 1884, and Sister St. Leontine, who had generously given both her strength and her zeal at Quimper for nineteen years, was named Superior of the new community.

Those servants of the poor were in demand from every quarter from the very first day; but there, too, the cross was to be the foundation of their work. Ten months had barely passed when Sister St. Finnbar, one of the foundresses, died very suddenly. She was replaced by Sister St. Henriette, a young religious who was full of zeal and ardor, but she, too, was to be taken from them in the full flower of her youth only a month after her profession. It was a very hard trial for her to see herself so useless to the Congregation which she had dreamed of serving. And how painful it was not to be able to devote herself to the sick, when she had just made her commitment at the foot of the altar! Sister St. Henriette was a person who was simple, upright

and resigned to God's will; wanting only to please Him. So she applied herself to suffer well since there was nothing else she was able to do. She prayed incessantly, and a few hours before her death she asked that the Office be recited in her room, "so that," she said, "we may blend our voices with those which I hear who are singing the *Te Deum*." When she spoke, her eyes were fixed on an object of marvelous beauty, but she was unable to describe it. When the priest arrived, he invited her to go to confession so that he could bestow the last blessing on her. She responded naively: "But I have nothing to say, I have just made my vows."

Mother St. Leontine was convinced that she would go straight to heaven, and she asked her to remember the community when she was so near to God: "Unfortunately I have not been able to be useful in this dear house" (she had been bedridden a few days after her arrival); "but I promise you, Mother, that if I have any power or influence with the Lord the community will never be in want."

It is permitted to believe that her promise was carried out, because since her death the community entered an era of relative prosperity, and the Sisters were able to dedicate themselves totally to their mission without any anxiety about material things. They made things for the needy, when they weren't occupied in caring for them, and vied with each other in their generosity to make Our Lord loved and glorified—doing their work in silence and humility.

Thanks to their influence, civil burials, which had been quite frequent in times past, ceased to be; and miracles of mercy and marvels of grace were worked under the influence of their charity which had received its life from the Divine Spirit.

Mr. Boutron, the principal promoter of that foundation, was one of the first to experience its benefit. By one of those unexplainable, but unfortunately frequent contradictions of life, he had scorned the help of the very religion which he found so useful for the unfortunate and the poor; and when, a short time after the Sisters' arrival, illness struck him down, it had been more than forty years since he had been to the Sacraments. The Sister who came to nurse him used every possible means to bring him back to God. Mr. Boutron expressed no hostility, but he would never consent to receive the parish priest except in the presence of his family.

Nevertheless, Our Lady Help of Christians, whom he had all unknowingly made one of the guardians of the parish, could not abandon that blinded soul; she arranged things in such a way, that one day the priest was able to find the sick man unexpectedly alone and spoke to him about eternity. When Sister returned to his room, Mr. Boutron was beaming. "Sister," he said, "I have great news to tell you. I have just gone to Confession and tomorrow I will receive my God." But he never had that

consolation, because the next day he hemorrhaged very badly and was not able to receive Communion. And thus it was that those around him could almost feel the infinite mercy of Him who had searched for that workman until the very last moments of the eleventh hour. The dying man received Extreme Unction with great fervor and died full of confidence. A short time before he expired, he said: "Au revoir. I am dying in peace and contentment. How generous God has been to reward the little good which I did in my lifetime by putting near me at the moment of my death a Sister of Bon Secours."

We cannot leave Pont-de-Gennes without saying something more about Mother St. Leontine who was superior of that little convent for six years. Strong and very intimate ties bound her to the Institute. Her aunt, Madelaine d'Ablicourt, who took the name Sister St. Stanislas, was among the twelve founding Sisters who made their vows in January, 1824; and she drew three of her sisters into the same Congregation.

One of Mother St. Leontine's close relatives willingly gave us some details about that interesting family. "The mother of those four religious," she wrote, "lived in a small village of Picardy a hundred years ago. She often delightedly looked at the beautiful children with which heaven had crowned her life. One day someone asked her what she did with so many children, and she proudly answered: 'I am not in any way troubled or inconvenienced by them; God provides for them.'

"Indeed God did provide for them and that mother saw five of her daughters enter God's service. Another one, Josephine, married and she, too, became the mother of numerous children, two of whom followed their four aunts to Bon Secours. The eldest, Sister St. Valentine founded the house in Abbeville and lived there until her death. The youngest was Mother St. Leontine, nee Clementine Midy d'Ablicourt, who, after ten years of fruitful labor in Pont-de-Gennes, was sent to Rozoy where she celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her religious profession; and she had the joy of seeing that solemnity presided over by her brother, Father Midy, the pastor of Heudicourt.

"When Sister had been a small child, she had known Mère Geay, having me her in Picardy when Mother went there to erect a Calvary at Treux, the birthplace of Mother Potel. She liked to tell the story of her first meeting with her future superior. We have left this account as it was given:

I was five or six years old when Mother, accompanied by my aunt, Sister St. Stanislas, came to see my grandmother, Madam d'Ablicourt at Montauban where we lived. In the evening I noticed that Reverend Mother gave her blessing to my aunt, and after they left I wanted to imitate them. I put my handkerchief on my head like a veil and went to my grandmother to ask for her blessing. Receiving the blessing I walked all around the room and then started all over again. My grandmother willingly played along with me, saying each

time: 'May the good God and the Blessed Virgin bless you, my child.' This little scenario upset one of my aunts and she said: 'Leave grandmother alone.' My grandmother replied: 'No, no, do not prevent the little one from acting the way she does.' " You can imagine that her response encouraged me to begin all over again.' "

That child, who had been so eager for blessings, was twenty two when she placed herself under Mère Geay's direction, and at Pont-de-Gennes, as at Quimper it was easy to see that the lessons and example she had received had produced a *hundredfold*.

This last foundation was hardly established when the untiring Mother St. Fulgence was already thinking about a second voyage to Baltimore. Her maternal concern kept her heart focused on her daughters who were in a foreign land, and thus deprived of the moral support which proximity to the Mother House gives the Sisters.

This is why, in spite of her weak health and the inevitable fatigue of the crossing, that devoted Superior wanted to personally bring a renewed expression of her tender concern and encouragement to the newly founded community.

One circumstance in particular made her desire to make the voyage again. The people of Baltimore, who demonstrated an ever increasing sympathy towards the Sisters, had planned to organize a bazaar in order to raise funds to help repay the debt that had been contracted through the purchase of the land and house on Baltimore Street. Mother St. Fulgence also wished to personally express her gratitude to the benefactors who were so good to her Sisters.

She left Le Harve on September 27, 1884 on *The Normandie*, accompanied by Mother St. Honorat, the Mistress of Novices, who did not know that on her return from the United States the government of the Dublin House would be entrusted to her. During that voyage, the Mother General had the opportunity to admire her companion's powers of endurance. Neither sea sickness, the inconveniences of the trip nor the long nights when she was unable to sleep could wring any complaints from her; she bore it all with a calm and serenity which sprang from her very close union with the Heart of Christ.

What can be said of the joy and pleasure which the Superior General's second visit gave to the little community in Baltimore? Mother was also very pleased when she witnessed the understanding and support which surrounded the Sisters, and the immense good being accomplished by them. She arrived weighed down with affectionate wishes from all the Sisters, and also some articles and pieces of hand work which the European houses sent to America for their bazaar.

Mother St. Fulgence was very impressed by the importance with which the people of Baltimore viewed the bazaar. Here is what she wrote to Mother St. Adelaide: "Everyone here is concerned with only one thing—the bazaar.

If you get on a bus, you immediately see posters announcing the event for the benefit of Bon Secours; even the conductors distribute tickets for it. The same type of announcements are posted on the doors of the Church, and the newspapers have also reproduced them and added some very complimentary articles as well. It is really overwhelming and very moving to see the interest which each one has taken in this event. Moreover, I am so touched by the benevolence which is shown to all of us, that I cannot really put it into words. There are several Protestants among the saleswomen; when I think of the fact that this event will go on for twelve days, and that it is open every day until midnight, I cannot but admire such devotion. This country certainly loves its good works."

That charitable undertaking brought forth the results it expected, and at the General Chapter of 1886 homage was given to the liberality of the people of Baltimore, that permitted the community to completely wipe out the debt which had been contracted three years earlier.

Before leaving America, Mother St. Fulgence spent several days in New York and was quite impressed by the agitation which exists in that city, where the word "business" is the magic term which inspires and directs all the action. "Everyone here is in a hurry," she wrote, "everyone runs. Business! Business! and I sadly say to myself: 'and their souls! Do they even think of them?' Poor people! What will they have after all this agitation which leads some to fortune and the greater number of them to misery?"

The Superior General returned to Cork on the 20th of November where, to Mother St. Dominique's great joy, she assisted at the first solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in their new chapel; it was given by Canon Maguire.

The erection of this sanctuary completely fulfilled the desires of the Community; they were well established on Our Lady's hill, in conditions which were excellent, and were now able to continue their work in peace. Over and above this, the Sisters lacked nothing; they enjoyed and still enjoy the special kindness and interest of their Bishop; and, as for Canon Maguire, it would be difficult to tell all the good that he had done for Bon Secours in Cork during the thirty years he directed them. He was interested in everything which concerned them, even their material needs but placed demands of great holiness on their souls. One day, a Sister who found him rather severe, made this remark: "It is strange, Mother. Everywhere I go I hear it said that Father Maguire speaks very highly of us, and, yet, when he talks to us, it seems as if he considers us as great sinners." This proves quite simply that Canon Maguire, who was a saint, wished to preserve the simple virtues which flourished in his dear Bon Secours by keeping them under humility's protective shadow.

He presided at the twenty fifth anniversary of the foundation in Cork which was solemnly celebrated in April, 1892. On that occasion he extolled

the excellence of the vocation of the daughters of Our Lady Help of Christians, and gave eloquent expression of the virtues practiced by the Sisters. "Since your arrival in this city," he said, "you have always been edifying. I have many responsibilities, but the one I assumed in becoming your Ecclesiastical Superior has never been a burden to me, because you have given me only consolations."

In 1896, he was named Prelate of the household of His Holiness Leo XIII. He had always expressed the desire of having his daughters in Christ with him in his last moments; this wish was granted, but in a manner that was quite different from what was expected. During his last years, he suffered from an internal condition for which the physicians could not discover the cause. He went to London on their advice and was admitted to a clinic where he underwent a serious and painful operation. According to the usual standards, it had been a complete success, but the sick man knew that his end was very near and he was distressed at being surrounded by Protestant nurses. So, he called the Sisters of Bon Secours. Mother St. Sulpice and another Sister, who had been one of the first Sisters under him in Cork, went to his bedside as quickly as they could. The Sister said: "My heart was broken when I found Father in such a dreadful condition. Once we were there, we did not leave him. His end was very calm, and he accepted with resignation the fact that he would die far from his dear Ireland, and the city where he had worked for the good of souls with such tireless zeal. His last words were a blessing for our Congregation, and as a last gesture he placed his hand on my head to bless us once more. On that day the Institute lost a benefactor and a friend; and I who had known and loved him so much, I cried for my father. That beloved priest still lives in our memories and we do not doubt that he is watching over us from heaven."

Indeed, Bishop Maguire's memory is still alive in the convent at Cork, and his teachings are still producing fruit; that was the only reward he wanted.

When Mother St. Fulgence returned to France, a change was made which had already been decided upon some months earlier. Mother St. Honorat, whom she had left in Dublin only a few days previously, was made superior there in place of Mother St. Domitille, who was called to Paris and named as Mistress of Novices. That religious had no illusions about the extent and seriousness of her new duties. In order to prepare for her new ministry, she wished to go on retreat for ten days, and during that time she spent many hours in the chapel. She knelt at the feet of her Divine Master and begged Him to permeate her being with the obligations of the work entrusted to her.

What she would be like as the Mistress of Novices would be seen from the very first day; and, being a gifted woman, she would give an energetic stimulus to the souls confided to her care. The first impression which the new Mistress produced was a mixture of profound respect and a certain fear. They felt intimidated before her gaze which revealed so much energy and

clairvoyance, and it was only little by little that they opened their hearts to her. Mother perceived this and was surprised. Until that time she had been with the professed Sisters who were accustomed to the struggles. One day she was overheard saying: "I am not Mother enough with the novices; I am beginning to understand that it is necessary to be a mother before being a superior." She made great efforts to modify her attitude, but to the end her love of virtue dominated everything else. Mother would have nothing to do with concessions made to human weakness, and it is recalled that, when there was a question of uprooting sentiments which had a penchant for *self*, she was inflexible.

She had profoundly indoctrinated solid virtues in all those with whom she lived during her many years in Dublin. Her spirit and the fruit of her counsel were evident in the young superior who had directed the small community at Tralee since 1882, and who had also brought along her sunny disposition, her gentle gaiety and her other lovable qualities. We are speaking of Sister St. Alice whom Mother St. Cecile always referred to as "our dear little child." She was born in Ireland at Wicklow. She had heard the call to religious life at an early age, and had studied the Rules of several Congregations; but found the ideal of which she dreamed when she knocked at the door of Bon Secours in Dublin. Mother St. Fabien quickly realized that Our Lord had sent her a soul who was very precious to His divine Heart.

Sister St. Alice remained in France for several years after her profession. During the siege of Paris, her forgetfulness of self was admirable, and prompted an enthusiastic gratitude from the wounded whom she had nursed. In later years she would willingly speak of those painful days and the anguish which often lasted through long night vigils, when the wounded and dying men, who had been confided to her care, became upset by the sound of the soldiers marching off to battle, or by the whistling of the bombs flying through the air. She did not fear for herself, but did not want to see the sufferings of her poor patients aggravated.

The dominant note of Sister St. Alice's virtue was her consistently simple, joyful self-denial. Until her death she preserved a child-like candor that blended with a compassion which nothing could exhaust, and with that kindness which St. Francis de Sales called "*the aroma of Charity*." Sister achieved the state of spiritual childhood described so well by the mystics of the XVII century; where a soul with great purity of heart and intention lives by faith, confidence and abandonment; a state which produces an intense interior life and great union with God.

At Tralee, much of Mother St. Alice's concern was focused on the poor. She opened her heart wide to them and was ingenious in relieving both their physical and material difficulties, and she did not hesitate to beg in order to find them the help which she was unable to give them. One day

Father Coffey laughingly said to some of his priests: "Don't give too much when Mother St. Alice asks for something, because sometimes some of her protégés are not too respectable. I am sure," he added, "that if the devil asked her for an alms, she would not be able to refuse him." Nevertheless, he never visited Bon Secours without emptying his purse into the poor box.

Like many of the Institute's first local superiors, Mother St. Alice had to become involved with finding a permanent and healthier residence for the Sisters. She had seen a house on *Strand Street* which appeared to have the requisite conditions, but she knew that it would be difficult to obtain. So she slipped a medal of St. Joseph in a crack in the wall, and said to him: "Loving St. Joseph, now that you are in the house, please, keep it for us." Her confidence was not misplaced, for a short time later the building became vacant and the Sisters were able to buy it. Once again Divine Providence intervened for there was a total lack of funds.

In 1883, during the scarlet fever epidemic, a Sister took care of one of Mrs. Downing's sons and became ill herself. The child's mother went to the convent immediately to ask for another Sister, and she was greatly astonished to learn that her request could not be satisfied. Mother St. Alice explained that the size of their convent did not permit them to house a large number of Sisters, and that their modest resources would not allow them to even think about another building.

Mrs. Downing told the people of Tralee about the situation; they were moved by her words and immediately organized a bazaar and lottery in order to permit the Sisters to make the changes which had become so necessary. 12,500 francs were collected. Among the generous prizes which were offered, there was a cow which was won by Bishop Higgins of Kerry. He had it brought to him and wanted to keep it, but not without giving much more than its value.

The installation of the Sisters in the new building was not accomplished without expense nor without catastrophes of every type. But these incidents were much the same as those reported by the other foundations. As always, it seems, it was soon apparent that in spite of the costly renovations that had been made, there was still not enough room. And the idea of undertaking new construction terrified Mother St. Alice, since she still had no money. However, Bishop Higgins encouraged her when she consulted him. "Do not be afraid to take out a loan, my child; you are not tempting Providence by doing so, and this debt will make you more directly dependent upon God."

On August 6, 1886, Father Coffey, who was to replace Bishop Higgins later on in the See of Killarney, laid the cornerstone for the new buildings. At the beginning of the ceremony he expressed his wholehearted support of the Sisters of Bon Secours and gave a touching tribute to Lady Donovan and to her brother-in-law who had just died.

"It is a duty and a need that I have to express the joy which I experienced

when I saw this work begun and the anxiety I feel while awaiting its completion. I do not know if the Sisters have the resources with which to carry out the enlargement of their convent, but I can confirm that, if they should be obliged to ask for help, the people of Tralee, who know their services so well, will respond to their appeal by a prompt and generous support. I know that the expansion of that house was ardently desired by a great Christian who lived among us only a short time ago, and we all have felt his loss. I also know that everything which concerned this convent and these religious, excited his generous support; and with deep pain I express my regret that he is not with us today. I am consoled, however, by the presence of his son and his young bride who have come out of their period of mourning to participate in the great religious act which has been accomplished.

"We pray that the energy and uprightness, which placed Sir Henry Donovan first among his fellow citizens, will be the lot of his son; and that the generosity that has always been associated with the Donovan name will be preserved among us for many generations."

Even though she was not very old, Mother St. Alice was not to finish her three years at Tralee. She was prematurely taken from the people for whom her kindness did so much good.

At the end of January, 1892, she was in a little greenhouse where she cultivated plants for the chapel. A small bench on which she climbed broke; and the poor Sister, in trying to save herself from hitting the ground, did more harm than any fall could ever have done. She managed with great difficulty to drag herself as far as her room; and that same evening the doctor verified the gravity of her injuries. Mother St. Alice died five days later. The Sisters had lost the best and most tender of Mothers, and the poor had lost a benefactor to whom they had never turned in vain. Many tears were shed at her tomb; and, spontaneously, the people decided to erect a monument as a memorial of their gratitude. Her spirit has survived; Bon Secours has always remained a Providence for the poor, and since 1902 the Sisters direct a hospital attached to the convent, which until that time had been in the hands of lay nurses. Five Sisters cared for the needy, who had had accidents or needed an operation. They did much good for those unfortunate people, who found them to be not only nurses to dress their wounds, but mothers to console their distress and lift up their spirits.

In another part of west Ireland, in the County of Galway, Sisters of Our Lady Help of Christians had been called upon to care for that portion of humanity on whom the most extreme distress had left its cruel imprint. For several years they had been attached to one of the hospices in the Workhouse of Glennamady, one of those havens which the charity of the English people had founded in all the great centers of the United Kingdom,

and where the poor of all religions found shelter and necessary food. But those places were very cold indeed; they were the rendezvous for every kind of misery but they were not warmed by evangelical charity. The Sisters of Bon Secours have brought that gentle, benevolent flame to Glennamady. The great and the small, the old people and the children were all brought together in a huge house in the middle of the country, and they all felt the charm of the Sisters' kindness, and experienced the spiritual and material benefits of their presence. Now, all of those poor people pray, suffer with resignation, work under the direction of the Sisters, and die piously with the hope of a better life hereafter.

Among all of the works which those holy women were called upon to do, this one is assuredly one of the most interesting and the most meritorious.

Chapter XXX

*The Superiors' retreat in 1885
The distinguishing traits of Mother
St. Fulgence's assistants
The trial endured by the congregation
at the loss of several outstanding
religious*

1885—1886

The most tangible proof that God wills a work and that it is truly His own is the concurrence of providential circumstances and secondary causes, which converge to make it live and prosper. And the greatest grace which He can bestow on a Superior, who is burdened with serious responsibilities, is to give her intelligent assistants who are open to her points of view and thinking, and are ready to go wherever the welfare of the common good calls them.

Neither one nor the other of these graces were lacking in Bon Secours. At this particular moment in its history, as we glance at all of the houses, both in Europe and abroad, we are compelled to recognize that Mother St. Fulgence was marvelously assisted by those Sisters to whom she had been inspired to give the power of authority.

In 1885 there was a retreat for all of the Superiors at the Mother House. They all came and were full of fidelity and earnestness; an assembly of religious of great personal worth and outstanding virtue.

When Mother Mary Joseph (*) gave us the retreatants' names, she also shared some of her own impressions of the opening of that retreat when all of the superiors were going to the chapel in procession; she was still a novice at that time. She wrote:

"I will never forget what I felt at that moment. The dignity, simplicity, recollection and religious demeanor of all those good Mothers impressed me so much that I was filled with very lofty ideas about the Congregation."

At Mother St. Fulgence's side was her Assistant, the lovable Mother St. Adelaide, who was so gentle and gracious and charmed everyone by her kindness and courtesy. Then came the three General Councillors: Mothers St. Félicité, St. Euphrasie and St. Florentin who were the living incarnation of the Holy Rule and traditions. Mother St. Euphrasie personified uprightness, love of work and respect for authority; and under a rather hard exterior she had a heart of gold, and many qualities which drew forth the esteem, confidence and understanding of all the Sisters. She had entered Bon Secours at sixteen years of age, and spent seventy years devoted to the management of the linen room and the manual work of the novices; and she excelled in both areas. As for Mother St. Félicité, who had worked very hard and was advanced in age, she was near the end of her career and her *soul was standing within the gates of Jerusalem*,¹⁰¹ waiting for the doors of the banquet hall to open for her.

The Mistress of Novices, Mother St. Domitille, whom we saw leave Ireland the previous year, revealed much about herself in her correspondence during the foundation at Baltimore, and in the course of the other works which she undertook for the Congregation. Even though she was still quite young, she was soon to hear the Divine call, and we will see how her death bed was like a sermon preached to her novices.

What more can we say about those sixteen Superiors? They each had their own special attraction and individual character; yet they were united in a common goal: the glory of God and love of souls. There was the courageous Mother St. Mechtilde whose charity is legendary; Mother St. Gervais whose gentleness and affability were a living sermon in the student's milieu, where obedience had placed her; Mother St. Mathieu with a heart of gold whose untiring and ingenious kindness accomplished so many marvels at Abbeville; Mother St. Bertille who had the Rule written on her soul in letters of fire; Mother St. Ferdinand whose ardent zeal knew no obstacles and who,

* The name taken by all Superiors General of Bon Secours until 1959 when government regulations required the retention of their own names.

though already sick, was not afraid to cross the Atlantic so as to re-immense herself in the spirit of the Institute; Mother St. Alice who gave the poor of Tralee all the treasures of her heart which had always remained sincere; and finally there are Mothers St. Camille, St. Reine and St. Aldegonde who were so holy in their devotions and so joyful in their mortifications.

The following words of Bishop Gay may justly be applied to these generous souls whose simplicity made them so open to all of God's gifts.

"God, who in Himself is an ocean, is but an overflow of Himself as regards His creatures. Holy Scripture speaks of a torrent.¹⁰² He creates the channels into which He will pour His life, but, when He has opened a large, deep one, how it flows, covering it over completely! What clear, living and fruitful rivers those souls become whom He has chosen to fill."¹⁰³

That reunion of 1885 fixed and closed an era, for the angel of death was preparing to gather a harvest from *the garden of the Spouse*. There were so many holy religious who were ready; some who had weakened under the burden of prolonged labor, others whose love had accomplished a long career in a very short time! The year 1886 was one of trials, but also one of joy.

Beginning in the month of January, two young Sisters, for whom they had had the highest hopes, died within two days of each other; and on the 20th of February Mother St. Domitille also left this earth. During the winter which followed her installation in the novitiate, she had begun to have a slight but persistent cough. At first, no one was worried, but it soon became necessary to recognize that she had the same disease of which her younger sister (Sister Theodosie) had died in 1880. Nevertheless, the good Mother did not lessen her observance of the Rule, and until the end she rose at the sound of the bell and participated in all the exercises. It saddened her that she could no longer speak at length with the novices and do for them the good that her heart desired so much.

Novenas were made to Our Lady of Lourdes to obtain a prolongation of that precious life, and Blessed Peter Chanel was invoked, but heaven remained deaf to all their pleas. Mother St. Domitille's days *were complete in the Lord's eyes*, and nothing could prolong her life. Even though she was already very weak, she presided at the reception and profession ceremonies on January 24, 1886. A few days later, as Mother St. Fulgence told her the gravity of her condition, she said: "It's strange, Mother, but last night someone came to me and asked me how much time I had to live. I had a hard time counting it. Finally, I answered: 'Four days. So,' she added with a smile, 'I should die on Sunday.'" Her end did not appear to be that close, but, during the night of Friday to Saturday, she had a hemorrhage which brought her to death's door. She received the last Sacraments on Saturday morning; she was fully conscious and answered all the prayers. The novices then

kissed her hand and she had a smile for each one of them. Mother remained conscious though death approached rapidly; with her rosary in one hand and her crucifix in the other, she offered all of her sufferings to her Divine Master. She appeared so calm that Father Ruat could not help being happy for her. She replied: "It is true that I am not afraid. Perhaps it is because I have never refused my Superiors anything, and I have never willingly caused them pain." On Sunday morning, Mother St. Fulgence saw that she was suffering a great deal. She said to her: "The good Jesus is slow in coming, isn't He?" "He will come at two o'clock," she answered. And so it was that a little before two o'clock her agony began. The Sisters of the Mother House and the Novitiate surrounded her; she was in agony but completely conscious, and answered all the prayers. At about quarter past two she gave a deep sigh and her hands, which were crossed and still held her rosary and crucifix, fell lifeless, and her head turned to the side. She had entered *into the joy of the Lord*.¹⁰⁴ As she died, her attitude seemed to be like one who has fought to the very end and died saying with St. Paul: "*I have finished my course, I have fought the good fight.*"

Sister St. Ursule's suffering was heartrending. She had survived her two nieces whom she had offered so joyously to the Lord when they were young. But if nature suffers and complains, the spirit, enlightened by faith, rejoices¹⁰⁵ at the glorious heritage which God reserves for His chosen ones.¹⁰⁶

Mother St. Fulgence also deeply felt this loss, which had removed one of her very valuable assistants. She asked for Divine guidance and, after much prayer, she believed that the spiritual formation of the novices could not be better assured than by entrusting it to Mother St. Alphonsine, in whom she already had great confidence through her work as the General Secretary.

Sister's name has already been mentioned several times in the course of this History. However, we will spend a little more time considering some details of her life; she was so filled with God and none of the virtues were strangers to her. To omit to do so would certainly sadden the many Sisters of Bon Secours who had spent the early years of their spiritual life under that good Mother's guidance.

In every way, Mother St. Alphonsine showed that her soul was strong in the face of suffering, strong in action and very strong in loving. According to the unanimous testimony of the Sisters who had known her, she, like Our Lord, preached through her actions and in that way acquired an immense influence. She recommended the practice of the spirit of poverty, but she was the first to practice it, and did so with a generosity that was almost heroic. She expected great respect for silence from everyone, but made it a rule for herself to avoid even the least noise. She exalted humility but put herself below everyone else. When a novice came to speak with her and open her heart, Mother would begin by kneeling before the novice and kissing

her feet. She encouraged the practice of mortification; but oh, how severely she treated her own body! The Sisters who slept near her room would frequently hear her get up at night to scourge herself. Nevertheless, the dominant thought and her life's greatest need was the love of God. "She always came back to this in her instructions," wrote one of the Sisters. 'My children,' she would say at the beginning of each year, 'my only wish for you is the love of God.' She spoke those words with such earnestness that it seemed she would have liked to put them into our very souls. When I was sent from the Mother House to nurse in Charente-Inférieure, I often received words of encouragement from her, and one of her letters ended with these words: 'Repeat this motto yourself sometimes: *Love God and go on your way*. Oh, yes, my very dear child, love God. Everything is there. If we love Him, we will go on our way, or in other words, we will follow our Divine Spouse on the way of abnegation and sacrifice.' This love was also the source of her desire for heaven which she spoke about sometimes. It really seemed that she was not able to console herself about the length of her exile except through the works entrusted to her, which permitted her to suffer for this God whom she loved so much. We could easily put the great apostle's words in her mouth:

'Indeed, I am hard pressed from both sides; desiring to depart and be with Christ, a lot by far the better, yet to stay on in the flesh is necessary for your sake.'

Yet how wise and discrete her love was! Mother St. Alphonsine would tolerate neither sadness nor discouragement, and usually said *a saint that is sad is a sad kind of saint*. She also frequently said: 'Each day at Lauds you say the words: *Servite Domino in laetitia*. Well then, let us serve the Lord in joy.' This love of God and the Blessed Virgin sometimes inspired her with pious and creative ways of revitalizing the fervor of the novices. One letter, which she wrote to a young Sister, shows how she excelled in the art of making others love virtue. "Let us go forward now, Sister; be courageous! During this beautiful month of May, which is consecrated to the honor of the Queen of Heaven, we will all be busy forming a beautiful spiritual bouquet. We have chosen a branch of lilacs as a symbol of fidelity in little things and to obedience; then we added some daisies as a symbol of love of God and neighbor. May every beat of our hearts, then, continually say to God: My God, I love you very much; I love you with all my heart! And then, may our gentleness, and courtesy speak silently to those around us and say: Sister, I love you.

However we will not be satisfied with this but will add other flowers: violets, through the practice of humility; roses, the sign of devotion and generosity; and when you become tired of gathering these flowers, you will add a few forget-me-nots saying to Him who is the strength of the weak:

'Jesus, don't forget me,' and to Mary: 'Mother, think of me!' Then we will encircle the whole thing with branches of the reseda herb whose fragrant qualities symbolize recollection, silence and the interior life so well. We will tie the flowers with a lovely blue ribbon which will express our complete submission and abandonment into the hands of God. So, get to work, my dear child, and offer your heavenly Mother a great big, beautiful bouquet of these flowers which will one day decorate your own crown."

The kindness and tender charity which Mother St. Alphonsine demonstrated towards the novices rose from the delight and joy that filled her own soul. She was extremely thoughtful and courteous. According to one of her Sisters: "Who among us does not remember her nightly visits? Even if her day had been full of cares and worries, that good Mother never went to bed without having visited each one of her flock. I can still see her making her way around the dormitory, her little lamp in her hand. She would check to see if the windows were closed; cover this one as she passed; giving another a little hot tea; putting some tincture of iodine on yet another; and speaking a few words of encouragement to someone else who was upset. Oh, yes, that outstanding Mother truly *went about doing good*."

In her retreat notes she sketches her own life, revealing her struggles but also the fervor of her love: "My God, I want each beat of my heart to tell you that it belongs to You, and that I give it to You with all its power to love; that You alone are worthy to possess it, You alone can fill it. I beg you to be its absolute Master so as to make it a perfect offering which will be lost in Your Divine Being.

"My God, you do not want my heart to become attached to creatures, or be occupied with itself, and yet, Lord, You know that I have a need to love, that I cannot live without loving. Will You let me die? Oh no, no, You are too good and You will have pity on me; and this heart, which you wish to be empty of all affection and self love, You will embrace with Your love, You will possess it completely; You will be its King and Master, and if need be, its tyrant so as to bind it closely to You forever."

We have shown that Mother St. Alphonsine was a very strong soul; she understood the benefits of the cross: "It is the cross which gives proof of love!! What consolation there is in that thought, for love is the sum of all the joy and happiness of heaven and earth. Love God! *Everything! Everything is there!!* In order to love it is necessary to suffer; so, let us suffer well so that we may love very, very much . . . I am a religious in order to suffer, and to suffer like Jesus in silence, without stopping to consider neither what I am suffering nor at whose hands I am suffering."

But this soul of fire also had her moments of dryness. After one retreat, she made known some of her complaints to the Lord: "My God, You who know everything and have seen my soul's sadness during these days of

recollection, have pity on Your servant and don't let the retreat remain without any fruit or merit. You said: *'Those who sow in tears, will reap rejoicing.'* I am putting all my trust in those words; and, counting on your infinite mercy and the almighty power of Your grace, I will hope that the aridity and dryness, with which my soul has struggled during the exercises, will produce the spiritual energy and strength in me that I need to be faithful to my resolutions."

Mother was gentle with others but very severe in judging herself: "As a Christian, I should strive for perfection; as a religious I consecrated myself to it on the day of my profession; and, as Mistress of Novices, I am under even greater obligation than my Sisters. And yet, where am I? Am I not going backwards every day? My God, You know! Don't abandon me as I deserve. In Your infinite mercy draw me out of the tepidity into which I have fallen because I have not prayed enough and have allowed the flame of Your Divine Love in me to diminish. Oh my Jesus, grace, pardon, pity, mercy! Listen to these cries from my heart; they are all I am able to offer You during these days of retreat. They have been days of real suffering and deep interior desolation. Lord, do not send me away from Your Presence, as I merit; do not spurn a soul which is guilty but also humbled and repentant. But let a ray of Your Divine light shine on that soul to make a spark of Your holy love come forth from my icy heart. Rekindle my faith, strengthen my hope and fill me with ardent charity, so that I may look for You alone, my Divine Spouse; that I may think only of You, love only You and that aided by Your holy grace I will have no other desire except to accomplish Your Will always and in everything."

Holy desires are a golden key, said St. Therese. Mother St. Alphonsine possessed that key which opened the Divine Master's heart: "To give pleasure to God—Oh, how I wish that that thought could hold sway over all the other thoughts which are always in my mind. Yes, I give pleasure to God because I love Him and to prove my love for Him. O my Divine Savior, You are the one who suggested that thought to me, and it is a grace coming from Your Heart; but at the same time, give me the strength and generosity to make it fruitful."

These quotations reveal Mother St. Alphonsine's ardent soul. She was filled with a zeal that had its source in love and which she extended far beyond the novitiate, for she understood that *He alone loves truly who works for the salvation of his brothers*¹⁰⁷ and who can truly say with the apostle: *"The Charity of Christ compels us."*¹⁰⁸ She was able to put that zeal to work in an especially fruitful manner for one of her brothers whom she loved dearly; he was an officer in the African army. He had retained the faith of his childhood but, during his military career, its practice had fallen by the wayside. As he passed through Paris one day, he came to see his sister, and they had a long

visit. Mother was so persuasive and serious that when he left her he went directly to the home of Father Ruat, the chaplain. "Father," he said, "I have been ordered to come and visit you. My sister sent me and wants me to go to confession. I am happy to pay you a visit, but the idea of Confession does not make me happy." The good priest was soon able to assure the Captain that he had not lost his faith, and even that he would lay down his life for his beliefs. There was only one more step to take—the admission of his faults. And, so, that same day Mother St. Alphonsine's brother was reconciled to God. Three years later, he became ill in Tunisia immediately after he had been named the Commanding Officer. He was brought back to Paris and died at Val-de-Grace.

The year 1886 was full of sacrifices for Mother St. Fulgence. She remained standing at the foot of the Cross like Mary, her heart broken as she viewed the sufferings and deaths of some of her much loved Sisters. After closing the eyes of two more young novices, she suffered the loss of Mother St. Mechtilde a month later; she had been the superior at the Providence Orphanage. Mother St. Mechtilde had been prepared for her approaching end by a dream in which a young Sister, who had died recently, appeared to her. It was Sister Marie du Sacré-Coeur, who, after nearly twenty years at the orphanage, had entered the novitiate. A very short time after her profession, she returned to the orphanage on Rue du Regard as one of the sewing teachers where she poured out on the young orphans that maternal love which had been given to her. Sister did not live very long and her death was one of the most gentle and consoling which it was possible to imagine. In fact, while she was ill, she was cared for by her much loved Superior and died in her arms, as did Sister St. Frederick. A short while after her death, Sister du Sacré-Coeur appeared to Mother St. Mechtilde in a dream. She was in a magnificent garden, dressed in a white robe and wore a crown of roses. Her face shone with happiness and she said in a heavenly voice: "Mother, come join me." A very dark passageway began to come between them, and she added: "Don't be afraid of that darkness; it is not as difficult to pass through as you may think. So, come quickly, Mother. If you only knew how lovely it is here. So hurry and come."

The dream made a deep impression on Mother St. Mechtilde, and she regarded it as an announcement that her end was approaching. This notice was even more astonishing in that, like so many good souls, she had a real apprehension of death and God's judgment. This was a great trial to her and, to prepare for that inevitable moment and the temptations of her last hours, she had asked Father Ruat to be with her during her agony, which he agreed to do.

After that mysterious dream, Mother St. Mechtilde prepared more carefully than ever to appear before God, like a traveler who saw the

evening's shadows beginning to gather and hurried to arrive at the end of the journey. She prepared especially by making many acts of love and many sacrifices. "I have so little time to live," she said, "I must work doubly hard so as to give God a rich harvest."

Our Lord seemed to promote her desires by furnishing numerous occasions for her to mortify herself and to suffer. Her state of health, which had always been rather uncertain, became worse and worse, and soon she understood that her last hour was near. She did not forget the help which she had in reserve and so, after making her Confession for the last time, she said to Father: "I think that I am going to die tonight. I am asking you to remember your promise and remain here at the orphanage so as to assist me in my last moments." "I will gladly do so, my child," he replied, "but I advise you to ask Our Lord if He approves of your desire." The good Father arrived that evening and was ready to fulfill his promise but, when she saw him, the sick woman quickly told him that the Divine Master had made her understand that He alone wished to be her support and her strength at that hour. Moreover, all of her apprehension had disappeared. Mother St. Mechtilde did not die until the next morning; thus, the consolation which she had sacrificed, was given to her all the same. She was assisted by her spiritual Father, and her death was quiet and calm like that of all the saints. Before giving her soul back to her God, she called for the orphans and, speaking in a firm voice, she begged them to always practice what she had tried to teach them and to love God and their work. Then she blessed each one individually and made an appointment to meet them in heaven.

Among the persons who surrounded the dying religious was Mr. Buchère, the nephew of the orphanage's foundress. He was a businessman and the Sisters trusted him completely. Until his death he was their lawyer and directed the affairs of the Congregation. He was a lay administrator at the parish of St. Sulpice, and he displayed his beliefs with pride and strength. That Christian gentleman had a deep, special respect for Mother St. Mechtilde; and when he saw her for the last time he asked for her blessing. Mother humbly refused his request, but promised to pray very much for him when she arrived in her eternal home.

A short time after that beautiful death, the feast of Our Lady of Bon Secours brought us once again to a profession ceremony. It was like a ray of sunshine in the midst of so much sorrow. The Archdeacon Caron, the Vicar General of Paris and Ecclesiastical Superior of Bon Secours, was to preside but obliged to absent himself, he expressed his regrets to Mother St. Alphonsine as follows: "It is a great sacrifice for me not to be able to be physically present with you tomorrow—at your beautiful ceremony. Fifteen for profession and nineteen to receive the habit! The harvest appears so great and I will not be there . . . I am mistaken, my heart will be there, and I

will pray for those new religious at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I will call down upon them the Good Master's best and most abundant blessings. I bless them at this very moment and ask the graces which make true and holy religious for those chosen souls."

These few words show with how much paternal interest Bishop Caron enjoyed his daughters' religious ceremonies. He had been their Ecclesiastical Superior for many years and had assisted at Mother St. Fulgence's election. He had always given the Superior General the support of his advice and encouragement with that pleasant affability which characterized all of his ministry; and that is why those who knew him intimately never called him by any name other than the *good Father Caron*.

Towards the end of Mother St. Fulgence's life, however, she was deprived of his precious help; and that sacrifice, coming as it did after so many others, was keenly felt. In 1897, Bishop Caron resigned from activity; he was very deaf, and this made his work as Vicar General extremely difficult. So, in retreat and silence he prepared to appear before his God.

Our Lord wished to complete the sanctification of his good and faithful servant through suffering. In 1902 God permitted an attack of paralysis to take away the use of his left arm and leg while leaving him all of his intellectual faculties. So he called a Sister of Bon Secours to his bedside; and, for a little more than two years, a couple of them had the privilege of caring for him, and at the same time, receiving great lessons of edification and virtue from the beloved octogenarian.

The paralysis and the complete deafness were like an anticipated death for him; and yet he never offered a complaint, though he had one real regret—not being able to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He filled his long days of solitude with periods of reading and exercises of piety which he scrupulously regulated.

In August, 1902, while all of Bon Secours was saddened by the death of Mother St. Fulgence, Bishop Caron also went to the Lord. Just a few days before his death, he confided to His Eminence Cardinal Richard, who visited him frequently, that he had offered himself to God to carry his infirmity until the very end.

We will not close this chapter without a few more lines about Mother St. Félicité. On the 4th of August in the following year, she also went to enjoy the reward *promised to good and faithful servants*.¹⁰⁹ She died while praying. That day at the time for Matins, one of the Sisters saw her moving her lips and thought that she needed something. But the dear Mother replied in a weak voice: "I am at the *Benedictus*." After having worked long and hard for the glory of God, she went to Him singing His praises.

Chapter XXXI

The Foundation at Morlaix The Superior General's journey to Rome Her third voyage to Baltimore Mother St. Ferdinand's death

1887—1889

During the year 1887, Mother St. Fulgence was burdened and troubled by many serious responsibilities. However, she was never deeply disturbed because she never lost that interior support which came from trust and abandonment which was the source of her strength. During the month of February, the purchase or rental of a building on Rue de Calais in Paris was suggested, in order that a new center for the Congregation could be established there. It contained a chapel, and the offer was very tempting; but after serious reflection it was refused because of the condition of the times, and also so as not to in any way hinder or weaken the houses which were flourishing and asking for more Sisters. A similar proposal had been made by Bishop Lavigerie who had wished to have the Sisters established in Tunis. The General Council again refused, considering it wiser and more in accord with the mind of God to consolidate the good that had been begun rather than to multiply foundations, though that would have been a glory for the Congregation.

A few months later, however, Mother St. Fulgence was obliged to deviate from that prudent role. She was earnestly entreated to re-establish a work that previously had been started by Mother St. Cecile, but this time under conditions which were exceptionally advantageous. You may recall that the convent in Morlaix was closed in 1873; the memory of the Sisters remained there, and more than once their departure was regretted. On several occasions the Sisters who nursed in Quimper had been called to that city. In fact, for several years, Sister St. Gerard cared for Madam Mège who was a relative of Mother St. Ferdinand; and two other Sisters from Quimper had also nursed in the Puyo family for a period of time, and were like consoling angels for that family which was tried by such cruel suffering.

Mr. and Mrs. Puyo were active and generous Christians; they had dedicated both their lives and fortune to works of charity. The free school of the Sisters of Our Lady of Lourdes and the Creche in the Villeneuve section were begun by their initiative. Mr. Puyo was born in Morlaix and in youth had been an orderly for one of the sons of Louis-Philippe; but he soon left that career and devoted himself solely to his artistic inclinations. A major part of the restoration at his parish Church, St. Martin's, was contributed by him. Several remarkable works were given by him; among others: *St. Corentin blessing the cornerstone at the Cathedral in Quimper*, *St. Pol throwing the dragon from the Isle of Batz into the sea*, *St. Joan of Arc listening to her Voices*, *St. Martin sharing his cloak*, etc.

The words of the angel to Tobias echoed in the heart of that good man: "*Because you have been pleasing to God, it was necessary for you to be tested*,"¹¹⁰ for he had suffered the loss of his only child, a daughter, and the two grandchildren she had given him. Mr. and Mrs. Puyo, however, gave proof that *the just live by faith*.¹¹¹ After this terrible sorrow, which they did not allow to dishearten them, they dedicated their fortune, which they could no longer enjoy, to the glory of God and welfare of their fellowmen. This was the reason why they offered a house to the Superior General of Bon Secours. It had been the home where their loved ones had suffered.

Mr. Puyo had the home constructed in better days to protect the happiness of his loved ones. It was large and agreeable in appearance, well situated and quite near St. Joseph's Chapel.

The conditions imposed on the Sisters, in return for the generous donation, were easy to fulfill; they consisted of duties which religious gratitude would make very simple.

The rooms on the second floor were to become a chapel where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass would be celebrated several times during the year for the intentions of their dear ones. The Sisters were also given charge of the Puyo family's grave in the cemetery at St. Martin's in Morlaix; they were to see to its maintenance and decoration in perpetuity.

The General Council believed it a duty to accept that generous offer, and Madam Puyo was greatly consoled. She wrote: "Reverend Mother, everyone is happy at the thought of your coming back to Morlaix. The doctors are also pleased that you will be helping them. Please be assured of my devotion to your Sisters. I am writing to you on the feast of the Immaculate Conception so as to place this new beginning once again under the protection of our heavenly Mother."

It was, however, not until March of the following year that Mother Marie Louise and four other Sisters went to take possession of their new residence. She endeavored to fulfill their benefactors' desires and thoroughly succeeded in doing so. When Madam Puyo returned to Morlaix after a long absence, she was very pleased that her wishes had been so completely understood; and she expressed her gratitude to Mother St. Fulgence: "Dear Reverend Mother, thank you so much for having understood our suffering so well, and for your considerateness and affection in having known how to give us the only happiness which we are still able to enjoy. I will often go to that sanctuary to ask to be reunited with my loved ones in heaven. One of my relatives has already told me all about the beautiful ceremony which took place in your chapel! How wonderfully you have accomplished everything!"

From the very beginning the Sisters were visibly blessed; and, a few months after their arrival, Madam Puyo again wrote to the Superior General: "Yesterday I saw good Mother Marie Louise. She told me that this week she had to refuse three requests for nurses; and this upset her very much for, like myself, she fears that it will be harmful to Bon Secours. The number of Sisters is certainly not sufficient for our small city which is so happy to have you here again. Really, Mother, you must give our Sisters some help. The need has made itself felt because, as you know, there are already three well-known men who have died as true Christians thanks to their ministry."

While she pursued the negotiations regarding the foundation at Morlaix, Mother St. Fulgence was able to accomplish a project which she had desired for along time, to go to Rome and kneel at the feet of Leo XIII, to obtain from the Vicar of Christ a blessing for her dear Congregation, which would be a pledge of protection against the threats and dangers of the future.

Circumstances permitted her to do this in the autumn of 1887. Mother St. Alphonsine was chosen to accompany the Superior General and, according to the Mistress of Novices, this journey was "not only a grace but an accumulation of graces." In her humility she thought there were others who would profit from this favor much more than she, but Mother St. Fulgence did not think that was true. So, in the intimacy of the long journey, she again experienced the rare joy of that close union of thoughts and feelings which is sometimes given to chosen souls.

After a short stop in Lyons, a pilgrimage to Fourvières, and a visit to the General of the Marist Fathers in Sainte-Foix, the two travellers headed towards Marseille. It was November, and in spite of the cold spell which was even felt in the Midi, they went up to the shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde and to Sainte-Baume "to ask for all the Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours some of Jesus' love which was faithful even to death on the cross." They returned from the grotto really *permeated* with that indefinable but completely supernatural impression experienced by all pilgrims who enter that place, where Mary Magdalen remained hidden for thirty years, living only on her tears and her love.

Mother St. Fulgence and the Mistress of Novices took the route for Italy on the 2nd of November, and arrived at the goal of their journey on the 4th. They went to pray at the tombs of the apostles, first of all; then their next move was to undertake the steps necessary to obtain an audience with the Holy Father. That favor was granted to them on the 14th of November; until then, they spent long days visiting those places which are so dear to all Christians and are Rome's glory and greatest attraction. It could be said that their stay in the Eternal City was one uninterrupted act of faith and love. They understood, in every sense of the word, what Bishop Gerbet has called the "*idea*" of Rome, Christian Rome, the Center and source of Catholic life; and their hearts were completely open to that mysterious influence so well described by the same eminent writer. "The insights of history and philosophy are sufficient," he writes, "to uncover the significance of monumental Rome; but faith and piety perceive something greater still. Souls, who have what is necessary to experience these impressions, need no unveiling of how that variety of events, peoples and epochs which are reflected in the monuments of Rome come together in a magnificent unity."¹¹²

Mother St. Fulgence and her companion had that *something else* which made it easy for them to go from symbol to reality, from the visible to the invisible. Their impressions were found in a letter from Mother St. Alphonsine to the Superior in Dublin. "I feel incapable of speaking, as I would like to do, about the splendors of Rome; all that I can say is that you could not imagine anything more imposing, precious or beautiful than these great basilicas, these churches where gold, porphyry, jasper, the rare marble and exquisite mosaics have brought together the most flawless sculpture and painting to which art and genius have given birth. Nevertheless, I dare say, that is not what has delighted me most; because these splendors, which are a beautiful homage given to the Divinity and an image of His greatness and majesty, appear very cold to me. You admire them, but do not feel touched or moved as you are in the presence of that column to which our divine Savior was attached, or as you climb the marble stairs on your knees

which He went up so painfully during His Passion. Some other experiences which impressed me very deeply were when I venerated the chains which bound the hands of the great apostle; when I went into the Mamertine prison and saw the column where he and St. Paul had been chained; and when I drank the water which had sprung from a miraculous source in the center of that prison, with which the Prince of the Apostles baptized the prisoners who were confined with him, and transformed them into confessors of the faith. What can I say, really, about the feeling that takes hold of you when you kneel on the very spot where Peter had been crucified, or where Paul had his head cut off or again when you kiss the relics of so many saints, both men and women, and that ground which was bathed in the blood of the martyrs? Oh, how all of this stirs the soul! What eloquent preaching! How confused and humbled you feel before your own cowardice, when you think of all that so many others have suffered.

"How gentle were the emotions we felt this morning as we assisted at Mass in the room where St. Stanislas died. The statue is life size and he is dressed in the black robe of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus; he is carrying an image of the Blessed Virgin in his right hand and in his left are a large crucifix, his rosary and a lily. The statue is very well done, the novice's face is very gentle and serene and seems to be imprinted with such holiness that you do not grow tired of looking at it.

"What profound impressions we again experience as we go through the catacombs, where the first Christians used to gather in faith and charity to celebrate the sacred mysteries, or the Colosseum and the Forum where so many others were torn apart by the deadly teeth of the lions, bears and panthers. Yes, Rome truly is the Holy City by reason of the imperishable reminders which are found at each step along the way.

"On Sunday we had the privilege of entering the room of Blessed Benedict Labre. It has been converted into a chapel and the saint's patched clothing, prayer books and bed are all preserved there, and may be venerated by the faithful. We also saw a white marble statue which shows him lying down with his rosary in his hand and his discipline and a branch of lilies beside him. It is a masterpiece!

How magnificent God's rewards are and how true it is to say that He lifts up the needy from the dunghill to place him on a throne of glory and honor!"

We did not wish to cut anything out of this long letter which reveals Mother St. Alphonsine's sentiments so well; and which also make us understand, once again, the good which a pilgrimage can produce when faith is its only motivating power.

Mother General carried the remembrance of her daughters with her everywhere she went in their travels, and she tried to draw blessings for all of them at each source of grace she visited. Thus she wished to have the Holy

Sacrifice of the Mass celebrated at the Mamertine Prison where she kissed St. Peter's chains.

Finally the day they had awaited so long, arrived; and we will again let Mother St. Fulgence's companion tell us about the audience on the 14th of November. She wrote: "We arrived at the Vatican a little before seven o'clock, and were ahead of the scheduled time, as we had been advised. After crossing St. Damasus' courtyard, we found ourselves before a sumptuous white marble stairway with mosaics on each landing; on the first of these were found two stained glass windows representing St. Peter and St. Paul; they were life sized. We climbed a number of steps and came to a very large antechamber in which there were numerous portraits of the Popes, and there were curtains of white silk with red borders at the windows and doors. From there, we passed into a second salon which was impressively furnished and which opened into the Holy Father's Chapel, or rather, into a room which precedes and is connected with it. The tapestries in that room were very solemn. There were also several rows of chairs for those privileged persons to be admitted to the Holy Father's Mass. The first row of chairs is generally reserved for Princes and Princesses; we were placed in the second row.

"One of the Chamberlains had opened the door and the curtain on the chapel door at seven thirty, and we were able to look about at leisure. The altar is not large; in front of it there is an embroidered gold cloth and its entire design is of excellent style but very simple.

"The Holy Father arrived at eight o'clock; he was dressed in a white soutane and wore a long red cloak with a large collar. As he entered the chapel he turned toward those present and, in greeting us, he blessed us. Following this Leo XIII went towards his prie-dieu and made his preparation, then His Holiness went back to the altar where three chamberlains in purple soutanes helped the Pontiff to put on the priestly vestments. The respect that they showed is difficult to describe. During the Mass the Pope prayed with a fervor that was most impressive and all who heard him were deeply moved; I would not know how to share with you the pleading expression of his voice as he prayed the *Hail Mary* and the *Hail Holy Queen* after the Holy Sacrifice. You can imagine the feelings we experienced as, from the blessed hands of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, we received Him who became a perpetual victim for love of us. Our dear Mother had great difficulty holding back her tears, I would almost say sobs, as she came back to her place.

"After a Mass of thanksgiving which was celebrated by one of the assistant Bishops, the Holy Father sat in an arm chair that was placed to the right in front of the altar; and all who were present went in turn to offer him their respectful veneration. We kissed his ring twice; we were so close to His Holiness that our cloaks touched his as we passed, and we felt like two little

children surrounding their father with respect and filial love. When he heard the Chamberlain announce that we came from France, Leo XIII said: *'Ah! some religious from France! And what have you come to Rome to do?'* 'Most Holy Father,' Mother General replied, 'we have come solely to receive your blessing for ourselves and for our whole Congregation.' The Pontiff appeared to be touched by this simple request and he replied: *'Oh! yes, may you be blessed, you, your works and all your children and may the blessing of God be with you always!'* He placed his hand firmly on our heads. Then, noticing the medals and rosaries which we held, he said: *'Oh! you have some things to be blessed. I will do it willingly.'* We are still under the influence of the impression which that wonderful audience made on us; and it will remain among the most consoling memories of our lives."

The two travellers departed from Rome on the 20th of November after having assisted a second time at the Holy Father's Mass, and again received a blessing and precious favors from His Holiness. They returned penetrated more than ever with the conviction that there is no truer consolation for religious souls than to be active members of the Holy Church, and to live most closely united to its leader and under the aegis of his protection.

In the springtime of the following year, Mother St. Fulgence had to prepare for another journey which was imposed on her by very urgent and sad circumstances. She would go once again to the New World because the condition of Mother St. Ferdinand's health was most disquieting. In 1886 at the General Chapter, we already saw that it had required a great effort for her to come to France. When she returned to Baltimore, she seemed somewhat better; but it was like a momentary surge which a flame gives before dying out, and little by little she visibly declined.

Mother St. Ferdinand had slowly worn herself out in the accomplishment of her heavy task. She had always been tireless in spite of her weak health. "Why should we spare ourselves?" she would frequently say, "soon we will be in heaven and we can rest there." It is true that she drew her strength from its source, that is, from an ardent devotion to the Holy Eucharist. Like the prophet *she thirsted for the living God, her heart and flesh longs for Him.*¹¹³ She spent all of her free time at Jesus' feet, and many times as she left the chapel she said: "If we only understood the grace we have been given in living so near to the good God." Mother St. Ferdinand also said, more than once, that she would die on a Thursday; and in fact that is what happened.

Nevertheless, Mother St. Fulgence wanted to see with her own eyes the true state of things, and also to be sure that the community was not incapacitated because of the Superior's diminished activity. She was able to convince herself once more of that great truth which states that a just soul accomplishes much more by suffering and example than she does in health and full activity. The Rule was always scrupulously observed in Baltimore;

happily, great unity and the most perfect charity existed among the Sisters, and their works were also very fruitful. Everyone appreciated them and loved them: priests, doctors, Catholics, Protestants and even Jewish people called for their help.

At that time, Father Leterrier wrote to the Superior General: "You should find great consolation in the undeniable proof of the union, good spirit, dedication and joy which exist in your family. Your Sisters are doing God's work and He is blessing them. I must say that I am always struck by the air of serenity and contentment which seem to characterize that community."

Doubtless there were crosses and contradictions. But, as Mother St. Fulgence said, it is impossible to gain souls to God without suffering; and our Divine Saviour's example is always there to proclaim that law.

During her time in Baltimore, Mother General learned of Sister St. Ursule's death; she was a much loved older Sister who had also been the Aunt of Mother St. Domitille and Sister St. Theudosie, who was very upset. "So that dear Sister has left us for the heavenly country. When I departed she had a presentiment that she would not see me anymore; and yet I had hoped to see her again. She was so upright, punctual and pious, and a model of respect for authority. She leaves a great void in my heart. When I was a young novice, I always respected and loved her. Those dear old Sisters were so good and so understanding with us."

The Superior General's presence had a happy, but temporary influence on Mother St. Ferdinand's health. She appeared to be better and the farewells were not overshadowed by sad misgivings. When autumn came, however, with its brusque changes in temperature which are characteristic of the climate in America, the cough which exhausted the poor Mother became much worse; and she knew then that her end was approaching. She returned to God on the 14th of February, 1889, leaving the convent, which she had founded, permeated with reminders of her virtue. She had been strong and courageous throughout her life and she remained so until her last hours. In an account given at the General Chapter, 1889, we read: "During her long hours of suffering not a murmur ever passed her lips, never any other desire than for heaven. She calmly followed the progress of the disease, designated the place which was to receive her mortal remains and wrote out the death notices herself."

A few days before her death, the sick woman asked to be gotten up; supported by two Sisters, she went to the window on the garden side so as to say farewell to everything and see the spot where her grave was being dug. Then, as they took her back to bed, she smiled and repeated these words: "*I never knew it would be so easy to die!*" She expressed her regret that she would not see Mother St. Fulgence again on this earth, and be able to ask her pardon for any pain she might have involuntarily caused her.

Father Leterrier, who had been Mother St. Ferdinand's confessor in Dublin, was in America at that time as Provincial of the Society of Mary. He was residing in Boston and came to see her; and, like all the other priests who came, he was very edified by her flawless disposition. He wanted to give her the greatest possible consolation so, for the last fifteen days of her life, he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in Mother's room. She was very happy and confident as she went to sleep in the Lord, for she was surrounded by her Sisters, and also by one of her brothers who had crossed the ocean to see her again, and she was in the arms of Him who had *promised eternal life to those souls who had left all to follow Him*.¹¹⁴

His Eminence, Cardinal Gibbons was extremely kind at that time and, as he stood before her coffin, he expressed his sympathy and his regrets to the Sisters. A benefactor had sent magnificent bouquets of lilies and had deemed it an honor to defray all the expenses of the funeral. The Sisters carried their Mother to her grave themselves; and soon a pious monument was erected over it as an expression of gratitude from the people of Baltimore.

Mother General was very sensitive to the calamity which had just struck her Sisters and also to the immense void that had been made in their community. Thus she could not resist the desire to bring them some consolation and expression of her motherly affection. She crossed the Atlantic for the fourth time, and by the 20th of March was able to pray at Mother St. Ferdinand's tomb. The Sisters were very distressed but courageous, and still under the influence of that edifying death. They were all prepared to receive the new Superior, whom the General Chapter was to name the following July, as the one chosen by the Lord.

Mother St. Honorat was named to the post. She found there a field that was prepared to display and broaden her capacities and great talents, that had been developed particularly through long experience with souls and in government.

During the previous autumn, Father Foley, who had been the Sister's Confessor for the last six years, was named as Bishop of Detroit and consecrated by Cardinal Gibbons. He was replaced at St. Martin's by Father Broderick who had zealously devoted himself to all the good works of the parish for over twenty years. The one that he liked the most was the spiritual formation of his dear Sisters of Bon Secours. The Sisters had always found in him a father and a protector. He understood their vocation very well and was careful to encourage and advise them, so that their life would be truly apostolic, completely devoted to the relief of the sick, but especially the poor. That holy priest was very happy about the History of Bon Secours which was to be published because, he recently wrote to Mother Mary Joseph: "your Institute is fragrant with the charity of Heaven."

He was also the one who spoke on the occasion of the jubilee ceremony of the twenty fifth anniversary for the foundation in Baltimore.

We must give in to the temptation and digress a bit so as to mention that beautiful ceremony which took place on May 24, 1906. You may be able to imagine with what profound thanksgiving it was celebrated. His Eminence, Cardinal Gibbons, who was detained during the morning by a pastoral responsibility, came and spent several hours sharing the joy of Bon Secours' beautiful day, and he did not leave his Sisters until after he had blessed them.

Mother St. Urban was guided by her heart, and she had some very thoughtful inspirations. First of all, in memory of the twenty five years that had been so blessed by God, she wanted to share something of the Jubilee they were celebrating with the poor by serving them a substantial meal. Then, she also wanted the priest, who had offered the Holy Sacrifice that first time in Mrs. Small's oratory, to celebrate the Jubilee Mass and also to wear the same vestment and use the same chalice that Mother St. Domitille had brought for May 24, 1881.

The community was offered numerous gifts at that time, and most of them were given to be used for the chapel. Many of the friends and benefactors of those first days were missing from the celebration, but their names and those of the founding Sisters were on everyone's lips and in everyone's heart.

The Sulpician's Major Seminary was largely represented at the Solemn High Mass, which was sung by the very competent choir from St. Martin's. After the Gospel, Father Brodrick went to the pulpit and eloquently praised the work that had been accomplished by the humble daughters of Our Lady of Bon Secours in the preceding twenty five years. Those Sisters would, no doubt, be pleased to see a part of that discourse here.

"In the Book of Exodus, Chapter 12, we see that the all powerful God commanded the Israelites to celebrate their going out of Egypt by the feast of Passover; and He said to them: *'This day shall be a memorial for you, you will make a feast for the Lord through all the years to come.'* Then He prescribed for them the rites according to which the feast was to be observed.

"Since the coming of Christ as God, Saviour, and King, we have celebrated, in the Church, the great mysteries of His life and death, and our whole Catholic culture consists in the commemoration of those mysteries.

"In the course of time, both in religion and in society, there have been many other commemorations since God first gave the command to Moses.

"In religion, we celebrate the feasts of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints throughout the course of the year. In society, we have the commemoration of important events which happened in the existence of a nation, a community or of an individual.

"That is why we are assembled here today in the chapel of this convent. We wish to offer solemn thanksgiving to God on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Sisters of Bon Secours in the city of Baltimore.

"Thirty years ago, in these States, and I could say in the entire country, they did not have what we now call a home nurse for the sick. I remember that, when the venerable Doctor Dubruel, the Superior of the Seminary, was attacked by the illness which was to carry him to the grave, it was with great difficulty that we were able to obtain a nurse from one of the hospitals to give him the care he needed. Thus it is not at all surprising that the doctors of this city recognized the necessity of having nurses. In view of this, when his Eminence Cardinal Gibbons went to Rome in 1880, (he was Archbishop at the time), the principal doctors of the area went to him and asked that, as he passed through Paris, he obtain a foundation of those Nursing Sisters whose services were so much appreciated by the doctors in France.

"The Superior General of Bon Secours acquiesced to His Eminence's wishes, and a small group of those religious were sent to Baltimore. A year after their temporary installation with a charitable christian woman, a part of this present property was bought by Father Foley, the pastor of St. Martin's; and the Doctors Johnson, Charles O'Donovan, W. Ghero Van Bibber and George W. Miltenberger were guarantors for that purchase. I cite these names because those distinguished gentlemen have all gone to heaven, and also because it is a duty to gratefully remember those benefactors of suffering humanity . . .

"The Sisters of Bon Secours continue their very Christian work, and it can be said that, for twenty five years now, they have courteously and unostentatiously tried to accomplish the duties of their vocation by spending themselves at the bedside of the poor as of the rich, of the black as of the white, of the Jew as of the Gentile. And even though the Community has increased since that time, the requests for nurses always far exceeds the number of its members.

"In the existence of a community such as this one, a period of twenty five years is short; but in the life time of each individual member, that span makes up the better part of it, that is, the vital strength and energy of a life. The graves in the convent's little cemetery speak to us clearly enough about the premature sacrifices that were asked of those magnanimous souls.

"Who would know how to assess the true value of this ministry's dedication and real sufferings? Long hours of silent vigil, the restless desire to bring some relief to the patient, and even the vivid feeling of powerlessness to do this; the uncertainty, the fear, the hopes, the tedious hours of anguish, the last agony, the terrible groans forced out by pain, and often, the inevitable death: that is the lot of these generous souls.

"My dear Sisters, to always live in the midst of these sad scenes and darkened images, day after day, year after year is truly to live a completely super-natural life. Very few among us have carried such heavy burdens and successive sufferings without any respite. Nevertheless, that is your life; and today there are here with us some of the pastors of this city who have witnessed your difficult work and do appreciate your dedication. They join with us in thanking God that your community has been able to fulfill this noble and sublime mission throughout these twenty five years. It is by God's grace that you have done this. The apostle Paul says: '*I can do everything in Him who strengthens me,*' and you have succeeded because your life's Foundation is in Him. Like our Divine Saviour, *you have gone about doing good* among all classes of society, and today, after twenty five years, not a word of reproach or blame has come, even from those who were the most difficult to satisfy. Isn't that silence glorious praise?

"May God bless you then, and may the same spirit always animate your community, because, once again, your mission is not from earth but from heaven . . .

"Today, numerous people of this country rejoice with you, for how many owe their salvation to your edifying example, your consoling advice and your untiring devotion?

"Continue your great work of mercy among the afflicted, not only from one jubilee to the next, one century to another, but until time disappears and God has dried the tears from our eyes, and suffering, grief and pain are replaced by unchanging joy, infinite happiness and the true and eternal life which has been promised by our Father who is in heaven!"

Father Brodrick expressed these sentiments publically in 1906, but many, many times he had praised the Divine mercy for having used those humble religious to open the way to truth for souls who had strayed into heresy. These conquests were even more remarkable since the only means that the Sisters could use were prayer and example. Indeed, when working among Protestant families, they had to practice great discretion and speak of religious matters only if the patients themselves agreed to it.

The facts we will relate prove their influence and to what extent grace assisted their wordless preaching.

"I was sent to care for a Protestant woman," states the Sister, "who was about forty years old. She was slowly dying of a disease of the lungs. Shortly after my arrival, she told me that some of her friends had urged her to come into the Catholic Church, but that she would never consent to change her religion. I said very simply that, naturally, it should not be done without true conviction. She was a good, virtuous woman; I thought very highly of her and cared for her affectionately. However, in spite of all my efforts to relieve or distract her, she remained sad and pensive. One night she called me and said: 'Sister, I find the time so long and I am tortured with sad and disturbing thoughts when I cannot

sleep. Could you say something consoling to me which would remain written in my memory and help me to bear my sufferings?’

“Before replying to the poor sick woman, I prayed an *Ave Maria* in the depths of my heart and I begged the Blessed Virgin to inspire me with what I should say. Then I tried to show her that God was her Father, that He loved her more than any person on earth ever loved her, and that if He allowed her to suffer, it was only to make her once again worthy of Him and the great reward He was preparing for her. The woman thanked me most affectionately and said that the thoughts had really helped her.

The next day she asked me to read to her from the Bible; I took the book she offered, but, because the print was so fine, it was impossible for me to read it. ‘If that is so,’ she said, ‘take the one on the table, there is not much difference between the two.’ It was the New Testament. I asked her to choose the chapter, which she did most willingly. Here is the text to which she opened the book: ‘. . . Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven.’ The sick woman interrupted me immediately and asked me to close the book and explain the words to her. I again had recourse to my *Ave Maria*, and I set about doing what she had asked as best I could. ‘Do you believe in Jesus Christ,’ I asked her first of all, ‘and do you believe His words?’—‘Yes, certainly.’—‘Well, then what He said was: *Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven.*’—‘Then you really believe, Sister, that when you go to confession, you are pardoned of all your sins.’—‘I believe it quite firmly.’ Following this I showed her how the admission of one’s faults to a man like oneself is a very great penance for a proud person; and the apostles would never have succeeded in getting the world to accept it if Confession had not been Divinely instituted. ‘Yes,’ I added, ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the apostles the power to forgive through the words which you have just heard; and the apostles have transmitted that power to the Bishops and Priests in the holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church and they will possess it until the end of time. Madam, are you unconvinced, and do you still believe that Our Lord established two different religions?’

“I had forced the issue in saying such things even as I feared that I had gone too far, but my fears were in vain. I knew that I spoke to an honest soul who did not wish to reject the truth. She reflected seriously on all that she had heard and allowed her self to be convinced. The same day she asked to be baptized, and went to confession; two days later she made her first Communion with great fervor and blessed God for having brought her back to the fold. ‘Now,’ she said to me, ‘I can die in peace, I am ready.’ During the few days that she remained alive, the new convert told me something which explained the favor she had received. When she had been a child, she had taken music lessons three or four times a week at the Visitation Convent in Washington. The Sister who gave the lessons, before beginning the class, would recite the *Ave Maria* with the child who liked it very much and said it most willingly; but when she was in a bad mood you couldn’t get her to open her lips. The teacher was very patient and would simply say to her: ‘Oh, well, I hope that the next time you will be in a better mood and will recite my little prayer.’ Those words had more effect on the pupil than a scolding. The Blessed Virgin had never forgotten the child’s *Ave*

Maria's, and it was on her death bed that they produced their effect: the grace of conversion and entrance into heaven. Eight days after having been baptized, she received Holy Communion once again and drew her last breath as she made her thanksgiving."

Once again we see a Sister of Bon Secours being Mary's messenger and the instrument of her mercy. During the autumn of 1888, Mother St. Ferdinand's former superior in Dublin went to heaven ahead of her, even as she was wearing herself out while waiting for the Lord. We have already spoken about Mother St. Hedwige and how she had borne the great trial that struck her community in 1872. When she was recalled to London in 1874, she was happy to find a refuge there, as she felt little capacity for governing. She became a discrete, hidden but very useful Assistant to succeeding Superiors; first to Mother St. Marguerite, then to Mother St. Bertille with whom she revived the practice of the spirit of poverty, obedience and fidelity to the Rule. In the principal traits of her correspondence one recognizes the essentially humble soul, so well described by Father Lescoeur, one who "accepts her own ordinariness and spiritual indigence without being disturbed; finds it very just that God reserves His choicest graces for others than herself; willingly makes herself the admirer, the servant and the hidden helper of those chosen souls, and never thinking of counting herself among them."¹¹⁵

During Mother St. Hedwige's last illness, which lasted six months, it was possible to measure the extent of her virtue. The Sister who nursed her was convinced that she was caring for a saint. She never complained; everything pleased her: cold, heat, fever, lack of sleep. Her weakened body, broken by pain, was already dead to the world. Prayers were always on her lips and she liked to be left alone so as to pray when she wanted to do so. The lay people, who knew her, both admired and respected her; her relatives and friends, out of their tender love for her, often sent things: fruits, grapes, etc. Mother St. Hedwige, however, never touched them, and she asked the Sisters to distribute all those delicacies to the poor. Mother died on the 20th of October; she was happy to leave this life which had been a long exile for her.

Just now we have seen fruit, that was well ripened through suffering, drop from the tree. Next let us look at a frail branch which holds great promise, and which the angel of death comes to pull suddenly from the trunk.

On January 24th of the previous year, Bishop Coullié, the successor of Bishop Dupanloup in the See of Orléans, had come to the Mother House to participate in the reception ceremony of a young woman from his diocese, Miss Suzanne Miron d'Aussy. He, too, was a faithful friend of Bon Secours, and when he announced to the Superior General that he was coming, he wrote: "It will be a truly great joy for me to see your dear religious family once again, and to bless them, as I bless our young woman who becomes

yours on that anniversary day of so many precious memories. Archbishop de Quelen's pastoral ring is all that I can bring of his; it is a precious relic and I have worn it as a sacred talisman since my own consecration; but I will bring you my own complete devotion, and from this day, Reverend Mother, I call down the best of blessings on your dear religious family."

The new postulant had arrived at Bon Secours with a heart overflowing with love of God and was ready to begin her novitiate. We will allow Bishop Chapon of Nice to unveil the beauty of that soul and tell us about her departure for heaven. We did not wish to omit a single word from this touching biography which appeared in a selection of articles for young women.

"Miss Miron d'Aussy belonged to that great family whose memory is associated with the most generous good works and which had had the honor of dedicating one apostle and three young women to Jesus Christ in less than half a century. She was the youngest of those predestined souls, but the religious life was to be for her only a rapid transition from earth to heaven. We found her lying in her coffin in that beautiful chapel on Rue Notre Dame des Champs. She was in the same place where she had first appeared before us dressed in her holy habit and joyously bringing the first fruits of her sacrifice to the feet of her Bishop.

"To speak truthfully, the world had never possessed her. As often happens with many souls whose destiny is to concentrate their tenderness and their strength on one great devotion, her soul was silent and veiled. Common-place relationships ordinarily left her disturbed, even cold; but when she felt understood, she came out of herself and gave of herself with extreme earnestness. It was at the bedside of the sick whom she loved, that she first dreamed of the suffering and self-sacrifice, the charm of which takes its life from the cross, and has lured so many young people and so much love away from the world for the last eighteen centuries. It helped Suzanne to understand the meaning of the Divine call and its grace which she had felt in her heart for so long. From that day forward, all her young girl's fondnesses, hopes and dreams gave way to the ambition of being the servant of Jesus Christ, suffering in the sick and agonizing, and so she left.

"Her last act before leaving Orléans was one of great thoughtfulness; she visited the grave of Bishop Dupanloup and placed a wreath there to express her filial gratitude. She had been the youngest of that great Bishop's spiritual children towards the end of his life.

"After the distress of separation, where she had received as generously as she had given, she opened up her heart to those first early and unforgettable joys experienced in religious life. Her countenance was beaming, and those who saw her have kept in their memories a shining image of peace and happiness.

"With what eagerness she already desired to go to those beds of suffering and agony for which she had left everything! But it was she who was to die. There is no doubt that there is a nuance of beauty which would be lacking in heaven if God did not sometimes take to Himself the chosen soul in its initial elan of love, to fix and immortalize it through death. This disintegration of youth's most holy ambitions becomes the object of an exquisite sacrifice which, when freely accepted, carries the soul to heights which our earthly thoughts do not know how to attain. If we were to believe the world, then those who had left it should die without any regrets, because there would not be any more attractions or delights to hold them here below. However, that is to be unaware of the powerful attraction of sacrifice and the charm it gives to life. It was painful to see herself dying without being able to spread abroad the treasures of charity and devotion she had accumulated in her young religious heart, and to be so far from the souls whom she had dreamed of consoling, raising up and returning to God; the world, with all its broken hopes, does not have such cruel deceptions. To accept such a trial with a filial heart, and to abandon to God even the joy of sacrifice, after having given everything else to Him, so as to find them again only in His holy will, is a greatness equal to martyrdom. Such was Sister St. Cecile's trial and she did not falter. She savored all the agonies of her slow and premature death throughout four months; her heart had been touched by a mysterious grace and her resignation and peace remained unclouded. She even had a moment of happiness when permitted to pronounce her vows, and in dying to bind herself to Jesus Christ in the imperishable union which she had desired so much. During her long days of suffering, the Sisters came regularly to offer her some little act of charity; they never overheard a murmur, bitter complaint, regret or even any desire escape her lips, except that she wished to be buried as a poor person would be, because by virtue of her profession she had become poor.

"We crossed the long pathways of the Montparnasse Cemetery, which the autumn winds had already laid bare; and the sun shone in a cloudless sky as we took her to the simple grave she had chosen. She rests there near the Sisters under the faithful pledge of memory and prayer!

"In a rustic cemetery in the North of Italy, these melancholy words can be read on the tombstone of a young man: 'Weep over the dead, because he is taking his rest.' Dear and courageous young woman, that inscription is not suitable for your tomb, and we will prevent that regret from appearing on your memorial, for it has been written that the sinner's thoughts will perish; the generous and holy desires which fill your heart are seeds blessed by God which will always bear fruit. No, your rest will not be unfruitful, neither for your loved ones, the Church, your family nor the unknown souls whom you would have consoled. You remain at their service, together with the serene

compassion of the angels, the irresistible prayer which it inspires, and that discrete but powerful influence which the dead blend into our restlessness, in favor of the destinies and work which they appeared to have relinquished in leaving us. You breathed out your last sigh in pain and love; you belong to those glorious dead of whom it is written: *The dead are more alive than we are.*"¹¹⁶

Chapter XXXII

The foundation at Lens

1891—1897

In 1891, Sister St. Anselme from the community in Lille was called to Lens to the bedside of the wife of one of the important employees in the mines, who had undergone a serious operation. Sister gave the surgeons such intelligent cooperation that they thought about asking the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris to care for the injured workmen who were victims of such frequent accidents in the mining centers.

The desire suggested another one; that of also confiding to them the direction of the schools which they planned to establish at Vendin-le-Vieil for the children of the miners of shaft #8—Mr. Daniel, president of the Administrative Council of the Lens' mines, initiated the necessary proceedings with Mother St. Fulgence. This request, however, put the Superior General in a most perplexing situation.

In fact, she had just made provision for a house in Belgium, not far from the French border to make the foundation at Helchin which the threats, accumulating on the horizon, justified. She had been obliged to refuse to send nursing Sisters to Antignac, in the Cantal, where a pastor had very earnestly asked for them.

The objections formulated by the General Councillors were numerous, and the Superior General knew that they were wise. Yet her zealous heart was captivated by the thought that, among that neglected and deprived

mining population, her daughters could be missionaries without leaving France! What good there was to be done among those forsaken children, who were often completely neglected by their parents, because they were solely absorbed in the work and the monetary allurements of gain.

Those considerations shifted the balance in favor of the work that had been requested, and all of the Administrative Council's conditions were accepted.

At that time in Lens, the General Manager of the mines was one of those militant and generous Christians who went about doing good. It was Mr. Bollaert, whose name always evoked memories of innumerable good works and gratitude which can never be erased from their minds.

From the material as well as the religious point of view, he was the founder, organizer and mainstay of that beautiful mining city, which would have been an ever growing center of peace and prosperity if the Sectarians had not succeeded in spreading their poisonous, subversive doctrines there. With the help of the administrators, it was he who brought into being those moral and scientific labors which made the Mining Company in Lens one of the most flourishing in France.

The education of the children was his first concern, and he was inspired by these words of a well known lawyer: "I cannot conceive of a school without moral philosophy and a moral philosophy without God;"¹¹⁷ and he did not rest until he had procured a religious education for the benefit of the miners' children. Until that time, the children had gone to the public schools in Lens and had received unwholesome instruction from unbelieving teachers. Is there any need to add how such an education was the cause of much perversity and vagrancy among those poor children, who were deprived of all supervision?

Mr. Bollaert corrected that great evil and it is due to him that edifying schools in Vendin were opened during that period. He built a church next to the school, procured a priest and established him there; from then on the miners could no longer use the pretext of distance as an excuse for not going to church on Sunday.

Several weeks before the opening date, the indomitable Mother St. Fulgence wished to go to the building to look over the work which was being done on the school and convent that were under construction. When she arrived on the 11th of November, nothing was ready, and the entire work force was found together in the new house; there was not even one usable room. The workmen, at first, refused to allow her to enter the site; and she had to ask for the overseer who was quite surprised to see the Superior General moving into the building under such conditions. But as she entered Mother said: "I am here and I am staying; a little bit of courage on our part will suffice, and we will have that needed courage because we have come here to do God's work."

Her presence and activity had the desired result, and everything was ready for the 1st of December. During those eighteen days, Mother St. Fulgence went to Lens each morning at five o'clock to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and be nourished and strengthened by Holy Communion. "The road, which is so beautiful now, was hardly serviceable then," wrote one of the founding Sisters, "and we had to walk in the black mud. Sister St. Wulfran armed herself with a lantern, but it gave only a very small bit of light. It required great courage to undertake that pilgrimage each day, but who would think of complaining while Mother General led the way with such animation and good humor? She was exceptionally kind and knew how to cause many little incidents which provoked laughter and gaiety and made us forget our tiredness." Nevertheless, one day, Mother St. Fulgence became so ill while at church that, without Mother's knowledge, Sister St. Nathalie went to find a carriage to take her back to St. Auguste City. During the return journey Mother was stopped by a miner who asked her to baptize his new-born child, which she was happy to do. Mother herself was the Godmother and gave the child the name of Marie Joseph; a few hours later the little angel went to heaven. That day the Sisters understood more clearly the mission which God had entrusted to them, and they shed tears over those numerous children who died without baptism during that time when they had to travel so far to find a priest.

During the time it took to get settled, the Sisters got acquainted with the people. The mothers and children came in great numbers to see the Sisters, and to ask when the school would open, for they were eager and impatient. Some candy was distributed and the little girls returned home delighted with the kindness with which they had been welcomed and treated.

On the 3rd of December, the feast of St. Francis Xavier which was also the first Friday of the month that year, our Lord came down for the first time among those unlearned people who had been abandoned for so long! The temporary chapel, which occupied a part of the building, was blessed by the pastor from Lens, who spoke to the people from the depths of his heart; and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered by the new priest.

"We were greatly consoled," wrote one of the Sisters. "The new temple which had been opened was in our hands, and all of those young souls whom we were to lead for the first time were also entrusted to us to accomplish God's work in them. The task was not easy. Poor souls! we believed them to be pure and innocent, and the devil had already gained entry into their lives; some among them were well advanced in moral evil, and many of the young girls of ten and twelve years of age had no knowledge of any prayers and didn't even know how to make the sign of the cross.

"Nevertheless, it must be added that basically they all had great good will. Little by little their mores would change and our little students would

acquire habits of order, cleanliness and good behavior. At the end of a few weeks, they understood that it was necessary to keep quiet in class and not to whistle with the locomotives which passed frequently."

Eighteen months later, the construction of the church was completed; and on May 24, 1894 it was solemnly blessed by Bishop Williez from Arras. It was a joy-filled day and everyone worked together to make the feast as splendid as possible. We will let one of the Sisters tell us about in her own words: "The procession began at about three o'clock, and we went in a special carriage with the Officials of the Lens Mining Company. It was led by the little children who had been preceded by a group of miners in the clothes they wore in the mines; they formed in lines on each side of the road all the way to the Rue de la Justice; following this was a magnificent banner of the Blessed Virgin in shades of deep blue velvet, on which was mounted a picture of the Immaculate Conception, a gift of Mrs. Bollaert. Then there came a group of young girls carrying lilies and roses. Next, the banner of St. Barbe was escorted by the miners and some of them also carried the canopy under which the Bishop walked to the Church. Bishop Williez blessed the exterior and the interior of the new building, and then went to the pulpit to give a short address which I shall try to summarize for you. 'It is a very beautiful ceremony which has brought me here today into the midst of your most interested and concerned population. What, then, is a church, my people? It is the universal house, the family house, the meeting place for all christians. It is where we come to speak to God in the words which the lips of your little children begin to lisp and which Our Lord Himself taught us: *Our Father, Who art in Heaven*. The intelligent, noble, devoted and generous hearts which empower you have recognized that a place was necessary where father, mother and children could come together, and they have given it to you. There before us you can see the bell which will also be blessed later and which has the duty of announcing to the entire parish the happy and unhappy events which make up your lives. A new child is born! Who is going to make that happy news known? The church bell. When the son or daughter, whose birth that bell announced, reaches their First Communion, it is again the bell which, in its own way, will announce the family's joy; and, through the emotions provoked by its solemn tones the parents are invited to nourish themselves with the same living Bread which their children are receiving for the first time. When Easter time arrives, is it not once more the bell, which by its joyful sounds, seems to call back to the fold a lamb who has strayed, whom the Shepherd has noticed and to whom He appears to speak these words: Come then, too, to nourish yourself with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Then, when mourning visits a family by taking a cherished child or devoted mother, it is once more the bell, by its mournful tones, which asks prayers for them. In the morning, when you go to your hard and tiring work at the mine, does not the Angelus invite you to offer your day to

God, reminding you that you must not only work as a miner but as a Christian?" The Bishop assured the workers of his fatherly interest and concern, then afterwards, he began the blessing of the bell; its godfather was Mr. Auguste Scrive from Lille, and its godmother was Mrs. Bollaert. When it had been raised into its place in the steeple, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament took place and the *Te Deum* was sung."

A few days later another ceremony took place which reanimated the thoughts of the Christian life in all souls. It was the feast of Corpus Christi, a procession of the Blessed Sacrament was organized and it wasn't without emotion that they saw their Divine Master passing through the streets of their blackened mining town for the first time. The good will with which all worked together to decorate and beautify the pathway for Our Lord was a powerful encouragement for the Sisters. They had hoped that through these exterior ceremonies some souls would be touched; they were not mistaken. A few months later, at the time of the Forty Hours Adoration, a great number of persons came back to God who had been away for many years. There were 150 Communions on the closing day. The Sisters were very happy to see the Mayor and his colleagues among those who first approached the altar rail. "Those days of adoration had been days of heaven for us," they wrote.

Little by little the City of St. Auguste became a nursery of little Christians; the children of the home, the students, the young girls from the workshop, and through them, the other members of the families experienced the good influence of the religious spirit. The Sunday Reunion was begun in an effort to preserve the young people; it was a powerful safeguard against the dangers which lay in wait for souls in highly populated areas.

In view of these consoling results, Mr. Bollaert wanted his neighbors in mine number 12 to have the same benefits, and he put the new workers' town under the protection of his own patron, St. Edouard. Soon, in the shadow of the church, there also arose schools, a home or day center for the very small children and a workshop or domestic class to help form and prepare diligent mothers of families.

April 22, 1897, Mother St. Fulgence arrived in Lens to preside at her Sisters' installation. The schools and new convent were blessed on the 1st of May. That same day, for the first time, the bell in the parish church rang out the *Angelus* in a place where the blessed names of Jesus and Mary were so little known. An incident, which happened a little after this, made those believers who witnessed it conclude that hell was searching for means to revenge itself for the arrival of the Sisters of Notre Dame du Bon Secours.

Since the parish church would not be ready until the next day, the Dean from Lens had celebrated Mass in the Convent's oratory, and had temporarily reposed the Blessed Sacrament in that sanctuary. The Sisters were delighted to possess their Divine Master under their own roof for the whole day and established an Honor Guard. In mid-afternoon an odor of

something burning permeated the whole house. When they looked for its cause the oratory was found filled with thick smoke which came from the floorboards. The engineers had lit the furnace in order to reduce the humidity in the walls which had dried badly, but the heating system was defective and the flooring had caught fire. If the incident had occurred a few hours later, the house would have been consumed by the flames. The miners, however, arrived quickly and succeeded in extinguishing the fire. The day which had begun so beautifully for the Sisters was certainly clouded over by those circumstances, and the oratory, which had been so charmingly decorated, was unrecognizable; the covers were all soiled, the flooring was soaked, the furniture was all disarranged and offered a very lamentable spectacle.

The next day, Our Lord took possession of the new church, and the Dean from Lens warmly congratulated the Administrators and especially Mr. Bollaert for having procured such an invaluable benefit for the workers of mine number 12. A baptism took place that same day after the ceremonies to gladden the angels of that new sanctuary. One of the mine's employees had come and asked that his newborn daughter be the first to be baptized in St. Edouard's Church. Since Godparents had not yet been chosen, the Dean of Lens and Mrs. Felix Bollaert fulfilled those functions. The father's joy at seeing his desires fulfilled can be imagined!

A few days later, classes were begun and, as at St. Auguste, the Sisters quickly realized the difficulty of their task. There were about thirty who could read, the Catechism was completely unknown and most of them hadn't the least notion of God. Mother St. Fulgence had made it abundantly clear that they would be like true missionaries among those neglected people. In view of these circumstances the Sisters placed themselves entirely in the hands of the Lord, and said with St. Paul: "*I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.*"¹¹⁸ Moreover, they did not lack encouragement. The Bishop of Arras came to preside at the installation of the pastor of St. Edouard City, and he wished to visit the schools and the convent. He expressed his interest and concern for the Sisters who have preserved the memory of that day. He related that it was at Portel during the cholera epidemic that he had first seen a Sister of Bon Secours from Paris, and he had met them again at Etaples where one of them had become a victim of her own devotion to duty. The prelate said: "She was up and about at noon, and that evening she was dead. How much those good Sisters were loved! What respect and admiration the parents of the families afflicted by that terrible scourge had for them!"

The children arrived in great numbers from the very first day of school, and the Sisters went to work with great eagerness and courage to gain all of those young souls for God and, through them, to reach their parents. How could they hope to produce fruit that would last, if the children found

themselves again surrounded by a completely irreligious milieu and impregnated with principles which were absolutely contrary to those they had been taught at school? The Sisters were greatly supported in their efforts by the zealous pastor who had been chosen with great discernment for that difficult post. They were ingenious and creative in making piety likable and attractive, but above all else prayer was never neglected. Permission was obtained to celebrate Mass before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on Thursdays; and during the good weather after class on Wednesdays, the children would gather cornflowers and daisies to make crowns. Then on Thursday mornings they brought their beautiful work with them to Mass. After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, they sang a hymn to Mary; and at the verse:

Take my crown,
I give it to you.
You will give it back to me
in heaven. Is that not so?

they all raised their crowns towards the Immaculate Virgin. The Mother of God did not remain insensitive to the naive gestures and innocent expressions of those little ones, for, little by little, many of the parents' faith was rekindled and they returned to the church.

There is no doubt that some seed fell on stony ground and never sprouted, and often the birds also carried off some before it had germinated. How many of the young girls, who approached the Sacraments regularly, were threatened or stopped by the laughter and mockery, and thus became victims of human respect! One Sister, who spoke of her discouragement to Mother St. Fulgence, received this response: "Scatter the seeds, sow ceaselessly; God will harvest it when He wishes! The good teachings, which seem to have such little influence on the mind of the child, will come back to her memory someday. It might be in the midst of an illness, perhaps even at the approach of death that she will remember God and her own soul. It is then that the planting will bear its fruit. So, always have courage! May nothing here below stop your zeal or your good will! *'Everything which you will have done for the least of mine, I will consider as done to Myself,'* our Master has said. May these words sustain you in your task."

And how those humble and untiring workers did sow; up until the day of the terrible law which closed the field of their labors. Will the seed grow all the same? Will others come to gather what has been sown? Yes. May God be a thousand times blessed! The only and most excellent consolation which remained was the belief that other pious hands would take care of the good grain, help it germinate and produce a hundred fold. Thus those words of our Savior will be dispelled: "*Cursed be he who scandalizes the little ones! It*

would be better for him if a millstone was hung about his neck and he was thrown into the depths of the Sea."¹¹⁹

While zealously cultivating the youth, the Sisters did not forget that the care of the sick is an excellent means of doing God's work. They did not neglect it and were consoled at being able to prepare the way for the priest everywhere when death approached. The conversions which they helped bring about cannot all be told here, but we will relate just one, for the details of many are very similar.

A young woman, who had never been provided with any religious principles, was dying of tuberculosis. A nursing Sister often went to visit and console her in her sufferings, but the essential question was never broached. The poor woman had been married civilly and, in order to receive the helps which religion could offer her, the marriage needed to be blessed before God; to do this the consent of the man whose name she bore was necessary. The difficulties were great because he shared his companion's erroneous opinions. The school children were asked to pray for this poor sick person, and the results of their child-like requests were overwhelming. The husband, by dint of earnest entreaty, consented to go to confession and quite naturally his wife did so, too. When this was done, the pastor blessed their marriage. The dying woman was then able to receive the last Sacraments and a few days later she died, not as she had lived, but as a Christian.

Mr. Bollaert was not to enjoy the fruit of his work for long but, then, neither did he have the pain of assisting at the destruction of all that he had built so laboriously. That great Christian died almost suddenly in January, 1898, and his passing was greatly regretted by the miners and his collaborators. Bishop Williez gave the eulogy before his mortal remains. He spoke of him as a man of duty, a genius, a friend of workmen, a builder of churches and schools which by dint of his intelligence and lively faith had known how to transform that Lentille plain into one of the richest industrial centers in France.

In St. Auguste City a moving tribute was also paid to the memory of their benefactor who had disappeared too soon. After the solemn High Mass which was offered for the repose of his soul, the pastor recalled the virtues of charity and intelligent zeal of Mr. Bollaert. "How pleased he always was to speak to me about the spiritual needs of his dear workers, and what joy he experienced on seeing them all profit by the religious benefits which he so willingly lavished upon them. Sometimes, but rarely, when I spoke to him of my own consolations as a priest, he became very excited, and a joy that was more than human lit up his countenance. Such was that man of faith! That is the Christian for whom we weep!"

An illustrious publisher of that period, LePlay, examining the depths of the social question, brought into relief the influence which a good man is able to exercise, not only in his own home and on his children, but outside of it and

on all who come under his direction; and glorifying the eminently preserving and traditional mission which they fulfill, he called them the *Social Authorities*. Mr. Bollaert had been among those who merit that high qualification, and to bestow it on him is to render a just tribute to his memory.

Chapter XXXIII

The foundations at Eu and Arras

1895—1899

While Mother St. Fulgence was busy extending the apostolate by establishing the Sisters at the St. Edouard City in Lens, she was also preparing a permanent dwelling for the little community in Eu which had been in existence for about eighteen months.

For many years the Sisters at Abbeville had often gone to Eu when requested by a physician or a sick person. During that time the attention and interest of one of the noble families in the area was drawn to Bon Secours. Two unmarried sisters by the name of Dewismes lived together. When their third sister whom they loved very much died, they realized the great benefit and consolation the presence of a religious could be for a family at such a sad and painful time. Thus they conceived the idea of bringing the Sisters of Bon Secours to their native city and the providential help needed to accomplish their plans was not lacking. One of their friends, Mrs. Taquet, whose husband had also been nursed by one of Mother St. Fulgence's sisters during his last illness, wanted to provide the unfortunate poor with the assistance and help which their state necessitated. This octagenarian loved the poor with a passion, because she saw the image of the suffering Jesus Christ in them. Her compassion was so great that, had she lived in the time of Paul and Monica, the honors and praise given by the Church to the widows in the first century could have been applied to her because of her heroic charity. She had decided that she couldn't make any better use of her fortune than to dedicate

it to the relief of the unfortunate, and Mrs. Taquet took the measures necessary to accomplish her desire. She shared her plans with the two Dewismes sisters who gave it their highest approval and it was not difficult for them to persuade her that the Sisters of Bon Secours completely corresponded to her ideas.

Father Caulle, the pastor at Eu, approved the choice of the Congregation she had made; "its members," he said, "were well formed in the religious life." The foundation was decided upon promptly, thanks to that priest's intervention; and in the beginning they were contented with a place that was very small, situated on the Rue Jeanne-d'Arc. The installation took place on November 21, 1895, the feast of the Presentation of Mary. The five founding Sisters began their mission to the sick at once. The Superior also spent her days at the bedside of the sick, and often she did not have time to prepare the meals. However, the Sisters of Providence Convent was next door to Bon Secours, and they were very happy when they could prepare a meal for their neighbors who were so forgetful of themselves. How much misery was relieved! How many souls were brought back to God through them!

Finally in March, 1897 it was possible to install the Nursing Sisters in a larger house where they had the blessing of a chapel. Mother St. Fulgence obtained the permission to have the Blessed Sacrament under their own roof, and she also decorated and furnished the sacred vestments needed for the celebration of the Liturgy. The Holy Sacrifice was celebrated in the new convent on the feast of St. Joseph, and Father Caulle called the permanent installation of the Sisters in Eu a blessing for the poor. Commenting on the words: "*The Master is here and He is calling you*,"¹²⁰ he reminded the Sisters with what love Jesus had come to live with them. "No matter what natural capabilities God has placed within you: devotedness, energy or amiability, your mission will not be fruitful unless you draw from Our Lord's wounds and heart, the strength and light to generously accept the sacrifices which He demands of you. Also, when you are called to the bedside of one of His suffering members, first of all throw yourself at Jesus' feet so that He may impregnate you with His spirit. And you should also ask Him for the *simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the serpent*, because zeal is not sufficient to gain souls to God in today's world. But the *Master is here and He is calling you*, and, like Lazarus' sisters, you will be found near to Him and in Him."

Mrs. Taquet, however, was not satisfied; she dreamed of better things for them though she surrounded them with kindness and concern. So, in spite of her eighty years, she undertook the construction of a convent which would respond to all of the community's needs. The chapel, which is attached to the new building, delights the eye in its gold and white decor; and as you enter you immediately feel drawn to pray, and especially for the one who provided that sanctuary where Jesus teaches His spouses the infinitely sensitive and considerate ways of charity.

The statue of the Blessed Virgin which appears over the altar deserves special mention. It is very old, and in former times it was considered to be miraculous. In fact, one foot is completely worn from the pilgrims' kisses. It had been hidden during the Revolution and later was ransomed by a priest. When he died it was willed to some of his poor relatives who lived in Eu. They were later nursed by the Sisters of Bon Secours and gave the statue to them as an expression of their gratitude. It was in a very sad state; but, when Mother St. Fulgence learned its history, she had it restored, and the Madonna then took up her place of honor in the chapel.

Before moving on, we would like to make a special mention of Sister St. Florentin who died in the midst of her work in 1901; she had just completed her novitiate. Sister was to pass the night with a patient who was dying. During the long vigil the cold and dampness of the place penetrated to her very bones. The next day she became gravely ill and, after several weeks of great suffering, the young Sister died; she had never uttered a word of complaint. The people and civil authorities expressed great sympathy to the nursing Sisters.

It wasn't long before what was being done so modestly at Eu, the care of the sick and dressings, both at the Convent and in the homes, was soon also being accomplished at Arras on an even greater scale. This was possible through the help of people who, for a long time, had been devoted to Bon Secours. One of the Congregation's outstanding benefactors was Miss Herreng de Boisgérard who spread the warm influence of her great goodness all around her, not only in Bouvigny, where she spent most of her life, but also in Arras.

A great sorrow in her life, a trial which could destroy a weaker person, was the beginning of Miss Boisgérard's rapport with the daughters of Our Lady Help of Christians. In her youth she had devoted herself to her mother who, from every point of view, was a very remarkable woman; and she had never formed any other future plans than to remain with her. However, God, who always works for the sanctification of souls through all His mysterious plans, broke those intimates bonds and called Mrs. Boisgérard to Himself. Her daughter allowed her grief to become excessive and lost all courage to continue to live. Little by little she became indifferent to everything, and her brothers, who were perfect gentlemen and true Christians, were not able to fill the void which had come into her life. She wanted to die so as to join her mother, and became almost obsessed with this thought. Her closest relatives believed that, by complete silence about the painful event and many distractions, they were acting wisely to weaken the memories which seemed to be too crushing. But the poor woman's pain became only more intense and Miss Boisgérard became very ill. So, it was thus that a Sister of Bon Secours was called to the Bouvigny Manor, and Sister St. Euphrasie was sent there. Sister was given many instructions regarding her patient; it was

necessary to distract her, prevent her from crying, thinking or speaking about the past too much, etc., etc.

After a few days Sister realized that those remedies were worse than what they prevented and that, on the contrary, it was necessary to relieve the oppression she felt and permit her to pour out the overflow of her bitterness into a friendly heart. As soon as the patient was able to expose her pain and see that it was shared, she was relieved. To be able to speak about her mother to someone who understood was a very great consolation to Miss Boisgérard. She began to again take some interest in life, her strength returned. When nature had conquered the illness which had weakened her, Sister taught her how to look beyond the horizon of her own sufferings at the sufferings of others around her. And so, after having been God's instrument in delivering her from the winding sheet which choked her, Sister also became the messenger of her generosity. The poor people in the village and the sick were frequently visited by Sister St. Euphrasie, and, through her, they learned to bless their benefactress's name. The church on the Herreng de Boisgérard family's estate was once again repaired and decorated as in the happier days in the past. The young girls' school became the object of her special preference and generosity. She liked to follow the children through the difficult days of adolescence and multiplied the means available to preserve them from evil ways. She also facilitated many a young man's entry into the seminary, and supported them until they were ordained to the priesthood.

It is easy to understand her gratitude toward the one who had given back to her so much more than her life: those generous desires and that passion for devotion which made existence both enviable and meritorious.

An unexpected event strengthened the ties which united the young woman with the religious. The doctors had told her to go bathing in the ocean, but one day she lost her footing and was being carried away by the waves. Sister St. Euphrasie was on the beach. She didn't stop to think of danger to herself but threw herself quickly into the water, got a grip on the poor woman and brought her back to firm ground again. From that day on Miss de Boisgérard became more and more attached, not only, to Sister, but to all the Sisters of Bon Secours whom she considered as her second family. When obedience called Sister St. Euphrasie to London, the lady came to the aide of that community which was still in the state of poverty which marks all beginnings. Her generosity was showered next on the Providence Orphanage where Sister St. Euphrasie was named Superior after the death of Mother St. Mechtilde. The children who were there at the time would never forget Miss de Boisgérard because she provided them with one of the most enjoyable times which leaves such happy memories. On two different occasions, twenty five of them, who had always lived in the city, went to her

estate in Bouvigny to spend a whole week in the midst of all the pleasures of country living.

That good woman also showed great interest in the communities both at Lille and Abbesville where Mother St. Euphrasie became Superior. She outlived both of her brothers and, as their house in Arras held many memories, she wanted to see it placed in loving hands and to become a haven of prayer and a refuge for the unfortunate.

The Sisters of Bon Secours were happy to make her dream a reality and moved into the de Boisgérard's mansion. It was too small for what had been proposed, so the Sisters had a building constructed on the same site. It was to serve as a convent and clinic, and the physicians who came gave their services free of charge to the poor patients.

An incident, which took place while that building was being constructed, gives us a glimpse of Mother St. Fulgence's spirit of poverty. She went to Arras to see the progress which had been made in the work. She noticed that the architect had changed a detail in the plans and put in a very elaborate door which was not in harmony with the entrance to a convent. In spite of the objections that were raised and the expense it occasioned, Mother remained adamant and finally it was replaced with one of simpler design.

Mother seemed to grasp the spirit of the great St. Teresa, who said: *"For the Love of God, I beg you, do not erect magnificent buildings; and if it should happen, then my wish is that they will collapse on the day they are completed."*¹²¹

Miss de Boisgérard had the joy of seeing the fruitfulness of the good work she had helped to create. She died on April 7, 1906 and was blessed by all who had benefited from her generosity. All at Bon Secours were saddened at her death and their love and gratitude followed her even into heaven.

God's blessing remained on the house she had founded, and *there the body was cared for in order to reach the soul.*¹²² The Superior at that time wrote: "Often those who have had surgery are cured when they leave us, but they are also determined to follow God's path for them. Those who cannot regain their health, however, all leave this world reconciled with God. And how many conversions have been recorded among those poor sick ones whose homes we visited!"

From the very beginning the Sisters were appreciated very much, and many of the wealthiest families also requested their care and experienced their good influence.

The following story was written by one of the Sisters:

"We had been in Arras only a few days when a Sister was requested to nurse in a home not very far from the convent. I was designated to go and set off with the person who had come for me. As we walked along she confided that the sick person's lack of piety made her very sad. 'He is going to die,' she said, 'and does not want to even see a priest, and his wife is also absolutely opposed to it. All of

his friends have tried in vain to make him change his mind; and yet it has been forty years since he has been to confession.'

Though I felt overwhelmed, I tried to convince my companion not to despair; I assured her of the Blessed Virgin's great power and that we should be glad that he had agreed to be nursed by a Sister.

When I arrived at Mr. K's bedside, it was soon apparent that his condition was very serious and that there was no time to lose if I wished to save his soul. I did everything possible to relieve him, and then suggested the recitation of an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* to ask God to grant him a good night. He agreed to my request and said the prayers at least with his lips, while his wife remained quietly at the foot of his bed and did not object. He had a very bad night and oh! how I prayed to the Blessed Virgin to help me! There was not even a crucifix in the house. The first thing I did the next day was to put a small medal of Our Lady of Lourdes in the corner of the fireplace and also under the sick man's pillow.

The second night I again proposed that we say a prayer; that time Mrs. K. knelt down and made a sign of the cross. This encouraged me and I suggested that she have a priest come to see her husband, but she replied: 'A priest will never set foot in my home.' I urged her to think of the responsibility she was incurring and the consolation she would experience at having secured her husband's salvation; but nothing I said could move her.

I had brought a crucifix with me, so I placed it in a prominent place so that the sight of it might make some impression on the sick man. I also decided to speak to him about the Divine mercy and the happiness he would experience if he made his peace with God, but he replied: 'We'll see about that later on.' Would there be a 'later on' for him? The thought plagued me and I insisted and implored him not to compromise his eternal salvation any longer. Then he said: 'My wife will never allow a priest to come up here.'

I was certain that the Blessed Virgin would overcome all difficulties; so the next day I went to the parish priest, who had already tried to see him three times, and I begged him to make one more attempt. He did come. The maid had been instructed not to allow any priest to enter; however, she decided to ignore the order and came up to the sick room and announced the visitor. When she saw him, the wife became very angry and declared that he would not enter the room, but her husband protested and affirmed his desire to see the priest. That desire was so explicit that she did not dare oppose him, and so the priest was able to accomplish his mission, and brought back both peace and joy to that poor soul who had been away from God for so long. The next day Father brought him the Holy Eucharist which the sick man received with great faith and confidence. He lived for three more days and then very peacefully and generously made the sacrifice of his life.

Chapter XXXIV

How the Sisters of Bon Secours die

In his book, *"La Mort des Justes"* (*"The Death of the Just"*), Father Perdreau says that one day he visited the Mother House of the Sisters of Bon Secours on Rue Notre Dame des Champs in order to obtain some details of the edifying deaths of the Sisters. They were to appear as part of a volume he was preparing as a memorial to those who had died in the Lord. The book was to be an instruction for all the faithful and, at the same time, a panegyric of the church. The response he received was as follows: "Up until now we have not kept any such records, because, you see our Sisters are familiar with being so close to and seeing the dying that they die very simply and calmly when their time arrives!"

In fact, throughout this history, this is what we have seen; and is that not one of the anticipated rewards given to those who dedicate their lives to helping the dying? Death became familiar to them and filled them with that experience described so by Perreyve: *"Even if there is only a presentiment about it, death shows the extreme simplicity of all things in a very strong light. Details disappear, everything that is destined to die pales little by little; and all that remains present to the soul is an ever growing awareness of God, that God with whom she is going to be united."*¹²³

As they saw the deaths of both the just and the impious, and assisted at the terror of the one and the joy of the other, they understood the importance of that supreme act of our lives which crowns all other. At the same time they also comprehended the utter emptiness of all things that pass away.

Yes, death's lessons are certainly eloquent, they penetrate like a sword to the very depths of our being and produce that detachment which is the

secret of the just one's virtue and strength. And how many times have these lessons not made saints!

The Sisters of Bon Secours experienced that beneficial influence and, except for a few rare instances, they went out like a candle which burns itself out in the sanctuary with neither noise nor struggle. In 1861, Mother St. Cecile's description of Sister St. Marceline's death recalls that same image: *"She had a calm and peaceful death like all Sisters of Bon Secours."*

It would seem that those few words will suffice as a summary of the deaths of all those holy religious, in as much as we have frequently stood at the death bed of many of them throughout this account, and know that they have left after them places that were very hard to fill. In order to make known and praise the great works which God has accomplished in his creatures through His Grace, we will spend some time contemplating several of those humble souls who never held important positions, and whose brilliant inward light was not seen or noticed until their last moments. That thought pushed us to insist so that those intimate details which were still alive in the Sisters' memories would be confided to us; and so, without any chronological order and also from the documents entrusted to us, we would make our selections.

The death of Sister St. Anasthasie was the manifestation of a life of hidden virtue. She was deformed in body. One day she said to Father Ruat: "I have always been happy, content and at peace in my vocation and I own much of that to my deformity. I was not usually welcomed very sympathetically, and because of my appearance, esteem was a long time coming. I suffered very much but I tried never to complain and, in return, God has given me great peace. I am also dying filled with joy."

Sister St. Josephine was the portress at the Providence Orphanage for many years. It seemed that she was not capable of any other work. As she lay on her deathbed, she said that one day in a moment of great fervor she had begged God the grace to live out in her life those words of the Imitation of Christ: *"To love to be counted as nothing."* And she added: "I was taken at my word. I was often forgotten at the door . . . It was hard . . ." But that humble soul did not know that in community she was called only "the saint."

Sister Marie Antoinette, Mère Geay's niece, was struck down suddenly during the cholera epidemic. How filled with joy her departure for heaven was! The chaplain hurried to her bedside and she quietly said to him: "Father, tell me, why am I not afraid of death?"; the response was easy to make because Sister had been the personification of duty and charity in its most loving form.

The young Sister St. Ernest was very eager to go to heaven; and she had the happiness of being informed of her approaching death. She was taking care of a young girl whom everyone regarded as a little saint. A few days before her death the child said to her: "Oh, Sister, look at The Blessed

Mother! She is there, and she is holding out her hand to me and also to you." The Sister could see nothing; but on the 2nd of January she was very sick when she returned home, and a short time later she died, quite happy to go to God.

Another one was Sister St. Constance who had tuberculous and was joyfully awaiting her release. Like many others, she had asked to die on the 19th of March. In the afternoon of the 18th her Confessor came to see her and said: "The bell for the first vespers of tomorrow's feast has rung. St. Joseph can come to take you now." It was two thirty. The priest went down to the chapel for Confessions, but an hour later, though he had not been called, he felt the need to go back to the infirmary. The prayers for those in their last agony were being said when he arrived. The Chaplain blessed the dying Sister again but she could not speak. Her eyes were open, however, and seemed to be looking attentively in front of her. She continued to gaze there and her expression seemed full of happiness and joy. Suddenly her face seemed even more animated, and she held out her hands and made a movement as if to hurry towards some object, which those present could not see. Then, with a beautiful smile, she sighed and breathed her last.

Sister St. Justine had remained in the world several years because of family obligations. From the moment she entered the novitiate, she had practiced all of the religious virtues with unmatched vigor. Her love of prayer was very intense and her companions recalled her attitude during her thanksgiving. She had remained deeply humbled before her God, her hands joined on her book and her body erect and still; almost like a statue. She was energetic and always full of joy, yet she gave away everything that was not absolutely indispensable so as to prepare better for her profession, but her vows were to be pronounced on her deathbed. She was overwhelmed by a contagious disease and, when she became aware of the gravity of her condition, she did not become upset. She appeared to be very happy and from that moment refused all efforts to give her relief. Someone offered her something pleasant to drink. She said: "Oh! please, just a little water! Our Lord only had vinegar to drink." When they tried to raise her a little and place several pillows so as to make her comfortable, she refused, saying that for over three hours Our Divine Savior had only a crown of thorns on which to rest His head. Then, as she prayed the *Miserere*, she repeated the following words in French over and over again: "*You will wash me with hyssop and I shall be whiter than snow.*"¹²⁴ Her ejaculatory prayers poured from her heart continuously; there was no need to suggest them. She pronounced her vows and then, until the very last moment, allowed her heart to overflow in expressions of love for Our Lord.

Sister St. Epiphane entered the novitiate at sixteen years of age and was to finish her career ten years later. Her death was also very beautiful. Sister's resignation, courage and fervent desire to going to her heavenly homeland

filled everyone with admiration. She had several heart attacks which caused her terrible sufferings and, from time to time, she would place her hand over her heart as if to contain the pain. "My heart is suffering," she would say, "but that is because it is impatient to fly away to you, my God, and you always prevent it." Sometimes when the pain would make her cry out, she would grasp her crucifix as tightly as she could and say repeatedly: "O Jesus, Jesus, yes, yes!" If she was asked what could give her a little bit of relief, she would reply: "Give me my Jesus; He alone is all that is necessary." Another time she appeared to be sleeping and was heard to murmur: "It is only the body that is complaining; my soul is quite happy." Thus it was that that holy child progressively reached the moment she desired so much. A few moments before dying, she stretched out her hands as if impatient to go to God. During those last days of her life she had been given many messages to take to heaven. The infirmarian had heard the conversations and said: "You will have many things to say when you reach heaven." "Oh," she replied, "it seems to me that in heaven every glance at Jesus will be a prayer."

Sister St. Alix had been the one who had taken care of that good young Sister, and she, too, was soon to be invited to the marriage feast in heaven. The virtue of obedience was her greatest attraction. She would often say to her Superior: "I wish that everything in me would be an act of obedience." She was at Lille when her illness was diagnosed. When she understood that there was no possibility of a cure, she asked, as a special favor, to be allowed to continue her work to the very end. She taught music to the students, and she knew how to hide her sufferings very well, so that it could be thought that her work was not at all tiring. Sister St. Alix had only a few days to live when she was carried to the chapel to play the organ for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; it made her very happy. No complaint ever passed her lips and her ever present gentle smile was her way of thanking the Sisters for the least service they did for her. But above all else, her obedience was remarkable. One day the superior noticed that she seemed to be burning up with fever. So, to allow air to reach at least her hands and freshen them, she took them and gently placed them outside the covers. A few days later the superior made a remark about the fact that she constantly had her hands in the same position. Sister replied: "But, Mother, you placed them that way; I though I was obeying by always putting them back in the same place." Several times the Superior thought the end was very near and had begun the prayers for those in their last agony, but she always stopped at the words: "Go forth, Christian soul!" And Sister would say: "Say them, Mother, say them, I wish to die through obedience. Oh, I want it so much. Mother, say: 'Depart, Christian soul.'"

Finally, one evening the doctor said that she had only a few hours to live and the superior told her the news. She welcomed it joyfully and in her

happiness tried to sing in spite of the great difficulty. All of the Sisters and the students were crying and, yet, an atmosphere of joy seemed to overpower their sadness for they understood how happy she was!

A young religious died in Morlaix at about the same time. It was Sister St. Jacques who greatly edified the doctor who was treating her. He did not believe in God, but he came very frequently to see Sister, though there was nothing else he could do to relieve her; he greatly admired her patience and resignation. A few hours before dying she said to her companions: "If you only knew how happy one is when you reach this moment, to have always done what you could for the good God." Her spirit of self-sacrifice was also outstanding. As a novice, when she undertook some difficult task, she was often heard to say:

You I love, You only I want,
Jesus, my joy and my crown.
To you myself I give, my all,
Whatever You wish do with me, My God.

Then there was the octogenarian Sister St. Jules, who, after having cared for the sick in Lille for many, many long years, went to Helchin to die. How could she ever be forgotten? There was an influenza epidemic and the community did not escape it; Sister St. Jules was a victim of that terrible scourge. She paid little attention to her own condition but was very concerned over the health of Mother and the Sisters, and begged those who came to her not to put themselves out for her. Father Leonard was her nephew, and lived in the area near Lille. He obtained the Holy Father's blessing for Sister, and that act of kindness made her very happy. She went to sleep in the Lord with a smile on her lips. Until the very last moment she kept repeating her favorite prayer: *"In you, Lord, I have hoped, and will never be disgraced."*

Among these memories, which record the beautiful, happy deaths of the daughters of Our Lady of Bon Secours, can we forget the community at Dublin? How peaceful and gentle was the death of Sister St. Benedict who, on that last day of her life, went to the chapel and received Holy Communion; she became ill a few hours later. Her younger brothers were students at Blackrock College; they were sent for immediately. However, when she saw them crying she couldn't keep herself from saying: "You should be happy to see me go so quickly to God. If you are going to cry then say goodbye to me now, because on such a beautiful day I don't want any sad faces around me." The doctor also had difficulty in hiding his feelings when he saw her. "You surprise me, Doctor," she said: "don't you know that we enter religion only to learn how to die well, and that I am like a spoiled child to be called so soon by my heavenly Father?" Sister hoped to live until the

next morning so she could receive her God once more, and several times asked if it was nearly midnight. However, at eleven thirty her agony began. She turned toward her Superior and said: "I cannot wait for my God, Mother, I must go to Him!" Her beautiful smile lingered on her face for a long time after she had breathed her last.

Sister St. Magdalene's death wasn't any less beautiful or consoling. The Superior's tears prevented her from continuing the prayers for the dying, so Sister asked another of her Sisters to take the book. When she said the words: "*Go forth, O Christian soul . . .*", Sister sat up, put her arms out in front of her and cried: "O, Sisters, look! The Blessed Virgin and the Angels are coming towards me!"

Another very calm, peaceful death which took place in Dublin was that of Sister St. Ludvine. She had received the Last Sacraments in the morning and then asked how long she had to live. She was told that she probably wouldn't die before noon; so she spent the morning praying aloud. When the clock struck eleven thirty she murmured in a very soft voice: "We still have time to say a rosary." And so it was not until after she had recited the *Angelus* that she exhaled her last sigh without any apparent pain or struggle.

The deaths which took place in the house at Cork seemed to be stamped with that same calm and serenity. On one occasion, a priest, who was giving a retreat to a group of lay people, spoke to them about the death of the just; and he was able to say: "Oh, how much you would learn if you could be present at the deaths of the Sisters of Bon Secours. A young Sister recently left for heaven, Sister St. Aure. I cannot tell you how much I was taught as I heard her express her longing to see God. May our last moments resemble hers!"

The memories about Sister du Sacre Coeur, Sister St. Ladislas, Sister St. Hilaire and Sister St. Theophile bring to mind the same image. When the priest asked Sister St. Theophile if she didn't want to be cured, she replied: "Oh, no, Father. I would like so much to go to God; nevertheless, whether I live or die, may His will be done." All of those Sisters had carried out their assigned tasks until the very end and were models of regularity and obedience.

One death which left a memory of undefinable hope and peace was that of Sister St. Gaetan who died in Dublin a short time after the war of 1870. Mother St. Hedwige and the Sister infirmarian were saying the prayers for the dying. When they reached the words: "*Go forth from this world, O Christian soul,*" the dying Sister stopped them. She sat up and in a very calm voice said: "How beautiful those words are: "*Go forth from this world, to see Jesus, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph!*" Then, she picked up several holy pictures near her bed and began speaking aloud to the people in heaven. She spoke and prayed in this way for more than a half hour while the other Sisters who

were present listened and shed tears of joy for her. When the moment had passed, she asked that the prayers for the dying be continued and they prayed with her all through the night. The next morning, the priest brought the Holy Eucharist; she could no longer swallow, however, so he blessed her with the Sacred Host and a few moments later she died.

It is with reluctance that we must limit ourselves; however, we cannot move on without some mention of the two Sisters who died as victims of their devotion. Sister St. Jean de Dieu, from the Abbeville convent, was sent to St. Valery-sur-Mer to nurse a young man who had smallpox. In spite of all her efforts, she was not able to save him; and then, in succession, all five members of the family contracted the disease. Sister remained on duty with them day and night and, finally she, too, was struck down and serenely made the sacrifice of her life and died eight days later. Sister was only twenty-eight years old but had always been noted for her unlimited devotion and great simplicity. After her funeral the following tribute was made in honor of that obscure martyr of duty.

"It seems to us, that at this moment in history, when our government would like to rid our schools and hospitals of the many and diversely dressed religious who dedicate all their efforts, even their whole lives to the sufferings of all humanity, we owe a final tribute to this casket. In the tomb it will join many others belonging to those heroic souls who remain unknown to the world and are known only to God. The sectarian government may do what it will; but neither the resources of its budget nor the hypothesis of its newspapers, any more than the ruins it is accumulating will ever be able to hand over to it that secret of death, without expressions of the devotion which gave of itself to the point of immolation. Only the Christian has that privilege, because he alone can offer the ray of divine hope and the certitude of immortality to those who mourn, as well as to those who suffer."

Sister St. Mathilde's death was not less glorious. During the cholera epidemic which devastated the Pas-de-Calais region in 1892, she nursed the cholera victims for five months, going in succession to the towns of Portel, Etaples, Pont-de-Briques and Preures. Three hundred and thirty-five persons were cared for by her; one hundred and fifteen died of the dread disease but all had been prepared and received the last sacraments. The hardships which Sister and her companion, Sister St. Eulalie, had endured cannot be adequately described. The inhabitants of the areas which were infected were crazed with fear and refused to take the necessary precautions; their poverty was extreme and the Sisters found several of the poor sick ones sleeping in cellars; and there were heartrending scenes of whole families struck down as if by lightning and disappearing.

The Sisters' devotion was recognized and honored and the Government awarded a gold medal to Sister St. Mathilde.

A few months later typhus broke out in Breck-sur-Mer, and the authorities again appealed to the charity of the Sisters of Bon Secours. Sister St. Mathilde asked, as a special favor, to be permitted to fulfill that perilous mission. Neither the condition of her health, which had become somewhat precarious after the previous work, nor the fear of contagion could stop her.

The plague was made even worse because the heat was intense and weakening, and for over five weeks Sister St. Mathilde cared for the victims. When she in turn became ill, there were only a few cases left which required care. She was brought back to Boulogne and, until the very end, she showed both the confidence and gaiety that crowned her life that had been spent in joyful self-sacrifice. She died without apparent sufferings and went to heaven carrying an abundant harvest. How many dying persons who received the last Sacraments owe that grace to her, and how many sick persons were brought back to life through her care!

The inhabitants of Boulogne knew that Sister St. Mathilde had died a victim of heroic charity; and quite spontaneously they expressed the wish to erect a statue which would perpetuate her memory. The Sisters, however, knew the deceased's humility too well, and could not accept an honor which was so contrary to her spirit and desires.

Sister St. Mathilde had been Irish, a worthy and courageous daughter of St. Patrick. From the beginning of her vocation she had felt a very strong attraction to human suffering in its cruelest forms. Therefore, when a contagious disease broke out which demanded souls who were thus exceptionally penetrated, she asked to go, and her face showed her joy. So, already in 1884 she had been sent to nurse in a family where several members were ill with diphtheria. It was not long before Sister St. Mathilde also became ill, but they were able to save her; however her companion, Sister St. Monica, was a victim of that dread disease. She was only twenty-seven years old. Three of her sisters had preceded her to Bon Secours, and in order to answer the divine call she had to cause her aged and infirm father great sorrow. The memory of the lonely old man never left her thoughts, and she continually asked the Sisters to pray for him.

When she left the novitiate, she was sent to Boulogne. Sister was asked to nurse a Freethinker and, at the time, felt urged to offer her life in sacrifice for his soul which was in peril. The holocaust had been accepted and the generous Sister understood; when it was suggested that she receive the last Sacraments, she cried out in her joy: "It is true, then, God has accepted my sacrifice. How happy that makes me!"

Sister St. Monica wanted to tell her family of her longed-for departure and, so, a few hours before her death she dictated these words: "My dear parents, brothers and sisters, God is coming to ask you for another sacrifice; but since it is He who is asking, make it courageously, please, I beg you. I was

anointed yesterday and they hold out no hope for my recovery, but may God's holy and lovable will be done in this as in all things! For myself, I am very happy and, so, say goodbye forever in this world, hoping to be reunited with you in the next."

Before closing this Chapter we will include this one last account about Sister St. Euphrasie¹²⁵ who, for such a long time, was called the venerable senior Sister at Bon Secours.

She died at Rozay-en-Brie after having been a model of fervor, obedience, poverty and simplicity for over seventy years. In the course of the General Chapter in 1895, the delegates paid a tribute of affectionate respect, and the testimony of their deepest admiration to her memory. At her death, like the great apostle it could have been said of her: *"Lord, I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith and now await the crown of life."*¹²⁶

The life of the just is often compared to a light which grows purer and brighter when going out. Wouldn't it be true to compare that beneficent life to a radiant sunset which, before disappearing behind the horizon, seems to throw a mysterious clarity over everything, and extend a peaceful and restful veil over the whole world? Yes, the death of the just is mysterious and always leaves a trail of bright clarity and a feeling of inexpressable peace. But when it is a dedicated virgin who goes forth marked with the signs of her good works, there is still more: their victory can be imagined; instinctively we seem to hear those words from the liturgy which angels sing in those invisible regions: *"Come, spouse of Christ, receive the crown which has been prepared for you from all eternity."*

Chapter XXXV

The last years of Mother St. Fulgence's Life *Her death* *Her vow realized* *1896—1902*

The foundations of Eu and Arras mark the end of Bon Secours' expansion under the government of Mother St. Fulgence. Very few important events are worthy of note during the last years of her life, except the departure for heaven of several Sisters whom she had regarded as the pillars of the Institute. In 1896 the Congregation lost one of its best supports, Mother St. Bertille, who had been superior of the house in London on two occasions; and it was there that she ended an existence which had been so full before God. The mists from the Thames River hastened her end; nevertheless, she did not wish to ask for a change or to accept any relief, preferring to leave all to the will of God. Though London had very few priests, Mother could easily have had a St. Charles' Father to come each day to celebrate Mass in the convent chapel. But she always refused that consolation, and two weeks before her death she still dragged herself each morning to the parish church. She always thought of others, and each morning she would say to the Sister who helped her: "I am upset at keeping you so long out in the cold, if only I could walk more quickly! But that is not possible."

When Mother was forced to remain in bed, she prepared herself for her departure with great calm and continual prayers, and also consoled the

Sisters who were desolate. "Don't be so upset," she would say to them cheerfully, "if the good Lord wishes to take me, may His holy will be done! I have always put all my confidence in Him." Her gratitude for the care she received was very touching. "May the Lord reward you," she would say repeatedly, "and when you are sick may others do for you as you have for me!"

Mother St. Bertille went home to God on the 11th of March, 1896. She had been very courageous throughout her life, and was so to the very end. Jesus was in her soul, the name of Mary was on her lips, and her hand was raised to bless the Sisters when she breathed her last.

Mother St. Fulgence had been notified by telegram, and traveled all night to get there; but she arrived too late to see her. The Superior General remained with Mother's body until the funeral Mass. A gentle serenity seemed to pervade the dead Mother's face, and Mother St. Fulgence could not tear herself away from her; eternal hope seemed to be speaking so loudly there! The St. Charles' Fathers wanted to sing the *Requiem* Mass for Mother St. Bertille whom they had respected and admired.

The preceding year another void had occurred; it was no less painful. It happened as the result of the death of Mother St. Mathieu, who left this world in the fiftieth year of her religious life, as she prepared for the golden jubilee of the Abbeville convent's foundation. The great good she had accomplished in that city was easily recalled; she had drawn many souls to God by her wisdom, her kindness and her exquisite tact. When she was named Assistant General at Paris in 1889, her departure for the Mother House had provoked unanimous regret.

Moreover, the Superior General was to be asked yet another sacrifice which would be felt even more keenly than the others; Mother St. Alphonsine, who was like her right arm, was also to be taken, and her death was to be a great loss to the Institute.

During the Eighth General Chapter, which opened on October 19, 1898 under the protection of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Superior General had stirringly praised the Mistress of Novices for her faithful devotion. She said to her: "The novitiate is the future of the Congregation. Those young women who arrive full of eagerness and good will have an incomplete knowledge of the difficulties and duties of religious life. Therefore the novitiate is also the mold from which they should leave both transformed and growing. Wise direction and great patience are needed in order to penetrate those young minds and hearts with clear ideas of true and solid piety; and to help them understand that to be a religious is to be self-forgetful, dedicated and consumed for God and souls. It is a long and doubtless a fruitful work; but one which demands constant concern and untiring devotion, in as much as it does not always produce the fruit that was

expected. Many springtime flowers are knocked over by the first wind of contradiction, or withered before their time by a breath from a restless or inconstant spirit! How painful that can be for the one who has worked so hard to bring those souls alive in God!

That is a good description of the ministry to which Mother St. Alphonsine had dedicated herself. She could say with our Lord: "I know my sheep!"¹²⁷ Her motherly heart rejoiced when they remained faithful, and wept bitterly when they withdrew, however rarely it occurred. One day she said a few words which revealed the deep pain that each vacant place in her flock caused her: "When a postulant passes through that door into the novitiate, she takes up a place in my heart, and she cannot leave without breaking it."

Mother St. Alphonsine always took an active part in the General Chapter; and it had scarcely ended when she died without any apparent symptoms that could have caused alarm or given warning of the sad event which was to happen. It is true that Mother St. Alphonsine's health had been failing for several years, but she managed to keep going and hid it so well that no one was really worried about her. After her death, those who had been her superiors were unanimous in saying that they never had to reproach her for anything except for having neglected to take care of herself for the good of the Congregation.

She left behind many examples of generous energy. In spite of suffering from phlebitis, she always made her meditation on her knees, and thoughts which were on fire with love enlightened the prayer of her soul. When the novices would notice her sufferings and offer some small means of relief, she would say: "Thank you, my dear child, I need only my God's love." Love of her Divine Spouse influenced her whole being. Once, when her condition forced her to go to bed, a novice offered to help her to her room, but Mother refused her assistance. She said: *"Our Lord went up to Calvary without any help."*

The expression of the burning desires which consumed Mother St. Alphonsine were found in her private notes; some of them have already been given. They can all be summarized in these words: "O Jesus, my Divine Savior, make me love You or let me die, because I cannot live without loving You. I need You, I need Your love! Heaven is my home! Oh, heaven, heaven. *When shall I go, when shall I appear before the face of my God?*"¹²⁸

Those burning desires were visible to others. One day, as she gave a conference on the joys of heaven, her voice became vibrant and her face seemed to almost glow. She was speaking to the novices and yet, at the same time, seemed to be caught up in rapture. The novices were astonished and awed.

The love which consumed Mother St. Alphonsine was an active love which she spread all around her. One of the Sisters wrote: "When I listened

to her profound and moving words of instruction, I felt filled with good will and sincere desires. And as I heard those words burning with love, my heart was transformed, and little by little they set my soul on fire and communicated some of the zeal which filled her own heart. When I left one of her conferences, I felt ready to make any sacrifice and capable of going to the ends of the earth even if it was to save only one sinner." That is what saints can do. Each of their words are like little sparks which start a great fire when they touch a heart.

The last letter of spiritual direction which was written by Mother St. Alphonsine has been preserved. It was written to one of the young Sisters in 1898, a short time before her death. A mixture of both strength and sweetness are found in it: "If I had followed my first impulse, I would have answered your letter at once, but it seemed to be more in the spirit of poverty to wait until the Sisters left for Orléans to send you news of the novitiate. First of all, let me tell you that I was very happy with the tone of your letter; it gives me proof that you have resolutely decided to become a soul who is generous and energetic in searching for and wanting only God and His holy will. May the Divine Master be blessed over and over again! Yes, my dear child, love this Jesus who has loved you so much that He sacrificed Himself for you and wants to have you for His Spouse. Oh, love Him! love Him very, very much! Love Him for himself, love Him in times of consolation but even more so in those moments of dryness through great fidelity to your spiritual exercises. Love Him especially in the pain, toil, contradiction, trial and suffering, and in the constant practice of self-denial—'It pleases Jesus; that is sufficient! What does it matter if it pleases me or not?'—In your moments of ennui and sadness (and who doesn't have them, especially when so far from the nest), console yourself with acts of love; often kiss your crucifix and think about filling up your wedding basket. Until now, it has remained quite empty; it is time to fill it with an abundance of those presents which are most pleasing to your Divine Spouse. And never be afraid of doing too much; you know that the *richest fiancées* are in the greatest demand. So, have courage then and get to work without any hesitation or discouragement, put all your energy into it and, if it is necessary, some stubbornness in your will to become a saint. From time to time, recall the theme of the first meditation during retreat: *I must become a saint, I can, I will*. Have courage then, I repeat. Be devoted and generous and go forward, having God in view, Jesus as model, Mary as helper, the neighbor in charity and yourself always in sacrifice. My very dear and grown up daughter, my wish for you is that you will live out this motto, and I bless you most maternally."

A short time after writing these words, Mother St. Alphonsine was called to the heavenly banquet, and she appeared there adorned with the precious jewels of all her virtues and good works.

Her death raised a very important question: who would replace that saintly mother to care for the novices, the hope and future of the Congregation? The Superior General's thoughts turned quite naturally towards Mother St. Honorat, who had previously been the Mistress of Novices for many years, and had guided the formation of many faithful and courageous souls. She had been to France for the General Chapter and was then in Cork awaiting the departure of the ship which was to take her back to the United States. She had been the superior there since the death of Mother St. Ferdinand in 1889, and had characteristically devoted herself humbly but actively to that community. Through her wise but gentle initiative many improvements had been made, and the construction of a chapel attached to the convent was also one of her accomplishments. The great good which she had done in Baltimore was well known; and, at that same Chapter in 1898, the delegates had made an exception to the Rule and had extended her term of office for three more years.

The human heart is made in such a way that it loves its own work, and Mother St. Honorat was no exception; she ardently loved her work. Nevertheless, no one even suspected the extent of the sacrifice she made in responding so generously to Mother St. Fulgence's call, which asked her to return to Paris.

Mother General, however, was aware of the virtue and dedication that were hidden within the response that was made in such a filial and deeply religious spirit. The knowledge of that silent self denial was like a soothing balm for her own soul, which had been so sorely tried by Mother St. Alphonsine's death.

The only thing left to be done is for us to take a last glance at Mother St. Fulgence, who also was to go to receive the crown of life¹²⁹ after twenty five years.

When you go through the records of the General Chapters which were held during the last ten years of Mother St. Fulgence's term as Superior General, you can follow almost with the naked eye the progressive ascent of that generous soul, the expansion of her moral energies and the development of her great abilities.

Little by little her natural qualities had put on something of the supernatural, which gave them a new prestige. The prudence and wisdom, of which she had always given proof, dissolved into an abandonment which made them invincible in the face of trial, and filled her with an inexpressible serenity. At the same time the vitality with which she pursued the observance of the Rule became more and more maternal.

We have already mentioned how her lively intelligence and keen insight in discovering the weaknesses of the human heart sometimes made her quick and perhaps a little rigid in the exercise of her authority. But we will remove that shadow over her memory and speak of how energetically she

worked against that natural tendency, and of the diligent watch she kept over herself in an effort to integrate both a mother's tenderness and a Superior's formality. Her own private notes, found after her death, reveal her resolutions, struggles and victories. The members of the local community saw Mother St. Fulgence as ingenious in watching over their well being, giving them pleasure and finding little surprises for them. They would never know that, like St. Francis de Sales, she had to work very hard on herself in order to achieve that benevolence and openness which made her so pleasant and kind.

Everything else in her life was influenced by an absolute forgetfulness of self and a great love of souls. She never spared herself in a difficult undertaking; she knew how to get results and also, by her example, to raise her daughters to great heights of courage. And there is no doubt that she had excellent assistants to accomplish it. As we followed the course of the General Chapters, it was wonderful to get a bird's eye view of her visits to the houses of the Institute, throughout Europe and abroad. All of the members were in such perfect accord with the Mother House; they conformed to its customs and lived by its spirit, which after eighty years of existence had still preserved that same stamp of humility and simplicity. At the General Chapter of 1898, the Mother General said: "If we sometimes are informed of the little troubles and weaknesses which are inherent in human nature, we should draw great consolation at seeing the zeal with which all of our Sisters are animated, when there is a question of working for the conversion of sinners. They do not draw back in the face of any sacrifice and they make use of tears, fervent prayers, supplications and self denial in order to snatch the prize from the devil's grasp. Oh, let us be glad and rejoice, give thanks to our God and revive that sacred flame of zeal all around us."

One of that dear Mother's last joys, in 1901, was that she was able to show how well her appeal for faithful and generous action had been heard. The storm clouds were already gathering but the Sisters of Bon Secours simply and confidently drew more closely together around their Mother. They were certain that she would know how to provide for them and armed with that conviction, they quite naturally continued their humble ministry. No matter what might happen, they would be able to brave the storm and ward off its blows; because with the steady hand of a navigator, Mother St. Fulgence guided her ship with both firmness and gentleness until the sun of peace would once more spread its rays over the church in France. The poor Sisters did not have the least suspicion that God was preparing to take their Mother away from them in circumstances which were very distressing.

Mother St. Fulgence, though elderly, had always remained quite active; however, she did say that her strength was gradually failing; but, if anyone expressed concern or wished her a long life, she invariably replied; "*I ask neither to live nor to die, but to do the will of God.*"

It was with just such an attitude of abandonment that she left for Pont-de-Gennes in the spring of 1902. She was accompanied by Sister Marie Antoinette, the General Treasurer. They were to go from there to Morlaix, so Mother decided to travel at night so as to arrive at their destination at an early hour. Mother St. Fulgence appeared to be very happy and in good spirits during the last evening of her visit with her daughters in Morlaix, and there wasn't the least anxiety or foreboding to overshadow her departure. It was only as she stepped down from the train in the little station at Monfort that she complained of having some slight difficulty in breathing. "It's nothing; it will pass," she said as she sat on a bench in the waiting room. However, when Mother did not get any better, Sister Marie Antoinette became anxious. She gave her smelling salts and rubbed her forehead with cologne; but nothing helped. In the meantime, Mother herself realized what was happening and cried out: "*Jesus, have mercy on me!*" Thus, while Sister Marie Antoinette recited an act of contrition, Mother St. Fulgence gave her soul back to her God. Her last words were said to Him whom she had served so faithfully; they were a call for His mercy. The fifth Superior General of Bon Secours was seventy-one years old when she died and had been professed for forty-seven years.

The immensity of the pain into which the Sisters at Pont-de-Gennes were plunged is quite understandable, as was that of all the members of the Institute when the devastating news was spread . . . "Mother is gone! Mother is dead! Where? When? How? Sitting on a simple wooden bench in a village train station at eleven o'clock at night, and with only one of her daughters to help her."

The profound anguish which seized everyone and that act of great resignation which they all had to make during that painful trial remained a living memory. In reality, that loss was very, very great! Moreover, it happened under conditions which were extremely distressing and at a time which seemed lost forever. The days which followed were filled with tears, prayers and sacrifices; they were days of painful sowing that prepared the harvest which was to come.

Mother St. Fulgence's body remained in Pont-de-Gennes until the 25th of April. "In the name of the whole Congregation we have watched over these precious remains with much filial love," the Mistress of Novices wrote at a later date. "Until the very last moment we could not stop looking at her features, which remained stamped with that natural dignity and candid simplicity that had characterized the person that she had been."

The heartrending scenes the Mother House had witnessed at Mère Geay's death in 1861, were experienced once more when Mother St. Fulgence's mortal remains were brought back to Paris. Nevertheless, there was deep gratitude as well as desolation in the Sisters' hearts, for Mother had been a real treasure to the congregation; and they had enjoyed and benefited from

such a possession for twenty-five years. So, through their tears, each one said: "Thank you God! Thank you for her! Thank you for us!"

That same sentiment was found expressed in the numerous letters of sympathy which were sent to the Mother House. One letter, which seems to summarize them all, was written by the community's Extraordinary Confessor to the Assistant General: "I thought very highly of your dear Mother. She had been hand picked by God and was exceptionally gifted by Him; and her intelligence, too, was above the ordinary. I do understand the depths of the pain and sorrow which you and all of the Sisters have experienced.

"In the difficulties which exist at this time, her death is most regrettable. Nevertheless, have confidence! God is always good and merciful, and He will know how to balance the abundance and skill of His *Bon Secours* with the many needs that exist.

"Do not be anxious as far as your good Mother is concerned. I am able to say before God that she was always ready. Death could come unforeseen and still not surprise her. All of you should find much consolation in the wonderful example left to you in every aspect of her life. Certainly, I will pray for her, we must always do so; but I will do so with the confidence that my prayers will benefit others. I will also pray that God may soon designate the one who is to carry on her work.

"Your work is blessed by God, and its slow but continual development is certain proof of this. Now you have one more intercessor in heaven, and you can be sure that Mother is still very interested in the work which she loved so much here below. Her love will grow even greater in such close contact with the Heart of Jesus, and will also become more powerful. So, have confidence even in the midst of your sorrow.

"I could easily be persuaded to say that Heaven is your Congregation's most important residence, because you have so many members there; it should be your true Mother House. And Mother Mary Joseph (Mother St. Fulgence) is there in her own place. . ."

"When your footsteps falter as you pass through this world which, more and more, seems to become a desert to all religious souls, you must raise your eyes to heaven above, daughter of Our Lady of Bon Secours. Reflect on the lives of those who have gone before you and now enjoy the fruit of their labors in *the court of The Lord!* They have opened the way for you, they have worked the ground and sown the seeds, and at what a price! It is a great honor for you to be able to follow them and, in your turn, also to sow; and how great your reward will be!

"Jesus lends you His Hands to spread the balm which soothes and the remedy which cures and saves over all the wounds of body and soul. *He has chosen you* to be other Good Samaritans and the dispensers of His mercy.

Your vocation is beautiful and so enviable that it already forms a part of your happiness. What, then, will it be like on the judgement day when your Divine Spouse will call you to see Him as He is, and will pour *the grace of His joy* and the superabundance of His love and glory into your transfigured being.

“Your task certainly has become more difficult since that day Archbishop de Quelen dedicated your first Mothers to the holy mission of Nursing Sisters. Since that time eighty years ago a change, which is difficult to measure, has occurred in the minds of many. The ever present struggle between good and evil has become unbalanced, and appearances seem to indicate that evil is presently gaining the victory.

“But you may believe me when I say that as long as there are dedicated religious in our world, whose lives are permeated with the Gospel values, which are expressed to all peoples and in all situations and offered to God as an acceptable sacrifice, evil will be held in check.

“Today, there is much talk about the active virtues, and, certainly it is very necessary in order to mend the damage done by Satan and rebuild what has been destroyed. Nevertheless, in comparison to the exterior activities and battles which the situation requires, is there any virtue that is more active or result-producing than the silent self-denial of a religious, who is dedicated to the relief of the afflicted and the sick, because through her faith she sees in each person one of the Master’s crucified members and a soul to be won for God?

“Twenty centuries of experience have proved that the practice of humility, devotion, mortification, voluntary poverty and love of neighbor is infinitely powerful against Satan, no matter what form he may give to his evil work. These virtues, which the world misunderstands if it knows about them at all, have conquered paganism. France has been called forth out of its inhumaneness by them, and they always will be the unique and infallible remedy against the egoism and love of comfort of which our society is dying.

“Once again I will say to all of you who followed the example of your older Sisters and have attained that ideal of perfection so perfectly, your share is a beautiful one, *He who does these things shall never be disturbed!*¹³⁰ Since that time, haven’t you also been a hidden but very powerful element of salvation, and a propitious instrument in that terrible struggle which takes place before your very eyes?

“That single thought, as well as the glorious perspective of your life, should be a source of comfort to you when the continual death to self required by the exercise of your holy vocation seems to be too difficult. Then, too, as you know, there is delectable fruit hidden under sacrifice’s extremely hard shell which makes it very worthwhile. Reflect a moment on those former Sisters whose gentle lives I have tried to capture in words. Look at the peaceful joy

which, like the sun, glows at their life's setting! A completely serene and joyful self-denial gave them mysterious strength until their very last moments, and it really seems that *The Lord renewed their youth like that of the eagle*.¹³¹

"Mother St. Fulgence had had a wish, and she reiterated it many times in the General Chapters. She had a burning desire to see the virtues of your former Mothers made known along with all the providential circumstances that have given your Congregation its special place in the Church.

"We have endeavored to make that wish a reality; and, since *the virgins follow the Lamb*¹³² so closely, we trust that the heavenly corps of the Sisters of Bon Secours prayed for us as we developed this present work; and that they asked God to guide our pen and to help us put together a *Family Book* for the Institute, which would contain not only facts and dates, but a sacred testimony.

"These lines have been written during the course of that violent upheaval which covered the soil of France with ruins. And we cannot help repeating that, in the midst of that sadness which filled our hearts, it was good to be able to point out the price of the sacrifices on which those Congregations were founded. Their activities were very powerful and very good, and yet today they are being persecuted and dispersed.

"We have placed this work at the feet of Our Lady Help of Christians so that she might bless it and make it abundantly fruitful. These pages will recall your past; they will also remind her of the many joys which your Institute has given her motherly heart.

"May your glorious patroness cover you with the cloak of her tenderness, and make you more and more courageous in your struggles, helpful to all who suffer and wise in that knowledge of *charity which is the fullness of the law*!¹³³"

Supplement

A few remarkable conversions due to the zeal of the Sisters of Bon Secours

The first few lines of this section were found in a review of the Eucharistic Congress held in Metz in August, 1907. The American Archbishop of Covington, Kentucky was speaking to a group of fellow priests at one of the meetings at the Congress. He spoke from his own personal experience and eagerly encouraged them to love the sick and to prepare them very carefully for their last Communion, *the First Communion of Eternity*. He added: "There are two keys to the human heart: the love of children and the love of the sick"

It is easy for us to see that the Sisters of Bon Secours possess those two keys and we know that they use them to open the hearts of the sick to Our Lord, especially in preparing them for that first Communion of Eternity, the souls' final meeting with God!

Oh the power of charity! It is useless for man to resist God, to put up barriers between himself and the Father whom he does not wish to love or to serve; it is also useless for him to try to close off all the avenues of his soul against the Divine Master. The Master and Father whom he insults and offends is the God of all Mercy, the *Redeemer who has come to seek out and to save what was lost, to give life to what was dead*.¹³⁴ Furthermore, though God silences His voice of justice, He does not tire of waiting for the sinner; then, at that ultimate moment of life, He sends him a messenger of His mercy. Thus, with rare and sad exceptions, at the force of the powerful breath of

charity and the apostle's words, the barriers fall and his heart opens to Jesus, who enters as its Savior.

The establishment of the Sisters of Bon Secours is a *loving ruse of Divine Providence*,¹³⁵ according to a certain Bishop who placed those holy women at the bedside of the sick, so that the hearts of those who were obstinately blind would be opened to the light of grace through their all embracing kindness and incessant prayer.

Throughout this history we have already spoken of many conversions which were due to the Sisters' influence. It would be impossible to share all of them, but there are a few events recorded in the annals of their apostolate which appear to be of particular interest.

Sister A. was sent to nurse Mr. Orthois B. in Paris, brother of one of the well known Senators. Sister was very attentive and kind, and showed a true motherly concern for him; so it was not long before she won his confidence. One day she dared to suggest that he think about his eternal salvation. He stopped her abruptly. "Sister," he said, "do not mention that subject. I did not bring you here to sermonize me but to nurse me. The care you give is perfect and I am grateful, but, please, do not go beyond that."

Sister was very upset but not discouraged by the response. She prayed more than ever for his soul, which she believed was gifted with many great qualities. She also believed it her duty not to hide the sadness which she had experienced. She let it be seen, and it was not long before Mr. B. noticed that the pleasant openness and smile had disappeared from her face. He was unable to ignore it and said: "Sister, you are so different. You seem so sad that it hurts me to look at you." "It is true, Sir," she said; "I am very sad and I have reason to be so."—"Why then; have I upset you?" "Yes, Sir, very much."—"That was never my intention." "Don't you remember what you formally forbade me the other day? It caused a real wound in my heart as a religious. If I left my family, and if I had the courage to tear myself away from the affections of all my loved ones, it was not only to relieve human suffering, but also in the hope of being able to save souls. You have forbidden me to speak to you about your own." After saying this, she left the room.

A half hour after that conversation, the patient sent for his nurse. "Sister," he said, "I ask your pardon for having upset you and, because you persist, I will see Father Langénieux. Would you please ask him to come." The future Archbishop of Rheims was pastor of St. Augustine's parish at that time.

You can imagine how quickly the message was sent. Father came that very day to see the sick man and remained with him for an hour. Sister anxiously watched for him to depart, and, as he came out of the room, she asked when she should prepare for the Last Sacraments. "When I will tell you to do so," replied the priest in a serious voice. When Sister saw the expression on Father Langénieux's face, she immediately understood that nothing had been accomplished. And she, in her turn, also expressed the deception she felt by her silence and sadness. Mr. B. questioned her again: "Sister," he said, "you still appear sad, and yet I saw the priest." "Yes, Sir," she replied, "but you have not put things in

order with the Lord even though you are very sick. How are you going to present yourself before God's throne to be judged if you have done nothing to obtain your pardon? The other day's visit doesn't count. It is one more grace that you have thrown back in God's face." These energetic words produced their effect. Mr. B. did not reply at once, but a little later he said: "I am a coward, Sister. Ask Father to come back again, please; and this time, I promise you that everything you desire will be done."

That evening, when Father Langénieux came out of the sick room, he was beaming. "Sister," he said, "you have accomplished a real miracle. Mr. B. wishes to receive the last Sacraments in the presence of his whole household."

His bedroom was transformed into a chapel and decorated with candles and flowers. It was as a conqueror that God entered the heart of that workman, who had been called at the eleventh hour.

Mr. B. lived eight more days. He continually blessed Sister for having been the instrument of his salvation, and gave thanks to God for having waited for him in His infinite mercy.

The history of individuals, as well as that of people, shows us that in his mercy God always placed the remedy along side of an evil. Thus it was that in the 19th Century He gave us the devotion to Mary as a powerful antidote against the moral wounds which were eating away at our society. Devotion to Mary Immaculate had never before shone so brilliantly; also, in no other moment of history has Our Lord, through many expressions of His love, shown us how much it has pleased Him.

One of God's great servants has said: "The soul devoted to Mary cannot be lost." Each day there are numerous examples which prove the truth of these words.

Edgar G., a former student of St. Stanislas, had followed the disastrous example of the majority of young persons of that period. When he left school, he was filled with all the impetuosity and inexperience of youth, and had embraced the dangerous sophisms of irreligion. In spite of the voice of conscience and his own most intimate convictions, he declared that he was a follower of atheism and independence, and was striving for the ironic title of a strong mind.

Left to himself and away from all surveillance, he had indulged extensively in the novelists and modern philosophers, and had assimilated large quantities of poisonous ideas. No one knows where those new masters would have led him if God, in His mercy, had not struck him with an illness which all the resources of medicine were unable to ward off.

He was plagued by fever and, without knowing it, was destroying himself; he had an acute form of tuberculosis. Mr. G. counted on a future he would never see and had very little concern about his eternal destiny.

His poor mother deluded herself as long as she could with regard to the destruction being caused by the disease. Finally, she was forced to see it, and she also began to think about his soul. Her motherly concern led her to ask

for a Sister of Bon Secours to help care for her son and to prepare him for the journey from time into eternity. The Sister who cared for him will relate the story:

“When I arrived at his bedside, the young man’s face already revealed signs that his end was not far off. I was concerned. I asked his mother if he had seen the priest, and she sensed my anxiety.

Mrs. G. sadly told me that her poor son had totally abandoned all practice of religion, and also that she had great difficulty getting him to accept a religious to care for him.

I was alarmed by what she had told me because the sick man’s condition appeared to be very serious and I feared that he would die in his mistaken dispositions. I prayed with all my heart and placed his soul in the care of the Mother of Mercy, and she helped me over and above my greatest expectations.

I noticed, first of all, that after a few hours the young man’s dislike for my religious habit seemed to diminish and, little by little, it was replaced by an attitude of confidence. He talked with me about many different things. One of them was that he wanted to get well. Poor soul! To him it seemed a very hard thing to leave this world at the beginning of his manhood, when life seemed to smile on him and be full of charm. I replied: ‘You must pray to Our Lady of Lourdes, the Blessed Virgin is very kind and very powerful!’—‘You are right, Sister, and if you would get me some Lourdes water, I would be most grateful.’ He continued in a voice which I will never forget; ‘I had doubts about everything, but I have always had confidence in the Blessed Virgin.’ When I heard those words my hope and joy overflowed and I was no longer afraid. I suggested that we make a novena and he agreed most willingly. Encouraged by his attitude, I also recommended that he receive Holy Communion during the novena to obtain the grace he desired, and surprisingly he did not object but agreed with my proposal.

The night passed without incident. When morning arrived, I left, presumably to return to the convent; but I had told the patient that if I should meet his former teacher, I would ask him to come to visit him. I went to St. Stanislas as quickly as possible and explained the young man’s condition and attitude to the Director. Then I immediately returned to my patient’s home and arrived there only a few moments ahead of the priest. As Father entered, the sick man greeted him with the words: ‘Oh, Father, I am so happy to see you!’ And I left them as they gave each other a hug of welcome.

What a change had taken place! What had become of the Freethinker who insulted all religion and anyone connected with it? Was this one of those numerous mysteries of grace which are found in the annals of Marian devotion?

The priest heard the young man’s confession and gave him absolution in the name of the God who loved, pardoned and saved him. He left, then, and went to the parish church to ask that someone bring Holy Viaticum to the young man. However, the patient was so eager that the time seemed long, and he begged me to send one of the servants to the Church. As soon as he saw the priest arriving, he said quickly: ‘Father, I forgot a sin. I must confess it before receiving the Holy

Eucharist.' After this was done, he welcomed Jesus into his heart with great fervor and faith.

The poor young man lived a few more days; he suffered a great deal but was very resigned. When his pain became very intense, he would ask me for a little Lourdes water and told me that after he drank it, he always felt better. He had one very bad spell and I really thought it was the end. I gave him my crucifix to kiss; as I did so, he asked me: 'Sister, was this crucifix blessed by the Holy Father? When I touched it I experienced something I can't put into words.' When I replied that it had received a special blessing for all the sick, he added: 'I am no longer surprised at what it has done for me.'

I was deeply impressed as I heard those words that revealed the depths of faith that still existed within him, and I thanked the Blessed Virgin for having watched over him. I asked his mother if he had ever worn a scapular. 'Yes,' she replied, 'but he hasn't done so for a long time.' I looked through his chest of drawers and, sure enough, some brand new ones were there. I took them out and he allowed me to put them around his neck, saying that whenever he left school for vacation he had always made sure that he had a supply of them. What a strange contrast between the sentiments of this young man who sought protection for his body by wearing Mary's scapular, and his conduct which threatened the life of his soul as he followed the corrupt maxims of the world.

In spite of the seriousness of his condition, the young man continued to hope that he would soon be well. The grace which he was to receive, however, was different from the one for which he had hoped. The novena, which had been made that he might recover, came to an end; and that very same day, under the watchful eye of his Protectress, he entered *the land of the living*¹³⁶ *to exalt the mercies of the Lord forever.*¹³⁷

*God does not wish the sinner to die but to live.*¹³⁸ *He does not quench the smoking wick;*¹³⁹ and His patience and mercy were equaled only by His power and majesty. God often sends His grace in a vibrant and penetrating way at the very last moment of a life that has been spent far away from him. The following account furnishes a striking example.

"I was sent to care for an elderly man with a heart condition who had spent much of his life far from God. The doctor had told his daughter that he could die at any moment. She was terrified by this news and decided to ask for a nursing Sister to help her in caring for him. Until that time she had not wished to entrust his care to anyone. When I arrived, she took me aside and said quite firmly: 'Sister, the least excitement could make my father die. I want you to care for him, but only on condition that you never make any mention of religion.' I hesitated a moment, and then, fortified by grace, I answered: 'Then you want your Father to die without receiving the last Sacraments?' She replied: 'Sister, my father has read all of Voltaire's works; he detests priests. He believes in God and that is sufficient. Furthermore, I agree with his ideas completely.'

These words were said in a very cutting tone and I understood that the only one I could count on was He who holds all minds and hearts in His hands. 'So,' I added: 'I promise you that I will be silent on the matter, but only on the

condition that I may be free to pray in the sick man's room.' She did not dare to refuse me, and took me to her father. The old man received me rather coldly, but I saw that he seemed to be trying to control his reactions. After a brief silence, he said: 'Sister, I ask you not to speak to me about religion. My ideas about it are very fixed and I am too weak to argue.'—'I will do as you wish, Sir, only to ask you to allow me to pray.'—'As far as that is concerned, Sister, pray as much as you wish.' And the conversation came to an end.

I asked about the treatments which the patient was receiving, and adjusted myself to his routine so that nothing would be changed. Then I began to pray as hard as I could so that I would not hinder God's work, and I kept repeating this prayer: 'Lord, save this soul which You have redeemed by Your precious blood! Save him! You are the only one who is able to do it. Give me the devotion and patience I need to care for his body so as to touch his soul and bring him back to You. My God, by the merits of your Divine Son, I beg You not to allow this poor unfortunate man to die without the help which religion can give him.'

His daughter loved him very much; and that first night she remained behind a screen in his room to see if he would accept my care. And during the nights which followed she often came unexpectedly to the sick room so as to be sure that I was keeping my promise.

The illness was making rapid strides. Continual small heart attacks had greatly weakened the poor man. He saw that he was slowly dying, and not a good thought or least words about his soul and eternity were mentioned.

I became very anxious and redoubled my prayers. I hoped against all hope and, thanks to the God's inexhaustible mercy and love, I was not disappointed. One night, as my patient apparently slept, I was on my knees reflecting on the Stations of the Cross. Suddenly, he opened his eyes and said to me: 'Sister, you are praying for those who do not pray.' 'Yes, Sir,' I replied. 'Then, you are praying for me?'—'Certainly, I am, and I have not stopped praying for you since I came to care for you.' 'Would you say the prayers you are praying now aloud?' I was very happy, but I said: 'Sir, perhaps that would be too tiring for you. I am making the way of the Cross.' 'Oh say them, say them, Sister. Don't be afraid. When I feel tired, I will stop you.' So, I began and he followed me very attentively. When I was at the fourth station *Jesus meets His Holy Mother*, he began to sob; no doubt thinking of his own mother. I wanted to stop but he begged me to continue, if I wasn't too tired. How could I have been tired? I was so happy! Once more I began to pray and was interrupted frequently as the old man cried out: 'O my God, how moving! It is beautiful!' When I had finished, he thanked me and said: 'Sister, if I have become an unbeliever, it is because I have known some very bad priests in my lifetime, and that has left me with a terrible feeling against them.' In order to calm him, I reminded him that Our Lord had a Judas among His apostles. 'And,' I added, 'if this is true that some priests do forget their high calling, how numerous are Christ's true and faithful ministers?' 'That is true,' he replied; 'I know two of them: Father Morel and Father Leblanc. I have seen their work. They are true priests.' My happiness knew no bounds as I heard him speak in this way. His heart had been changed, but much prudence was still needed and also much help from above.

I suggested that he rest for awhile; it was more than needed after the emotions he had experienced. He was tired and very soon was peacefully asleep; he had a fairly good night. The next day, I told his daughter everything that had happened, and then I added:

‘Now, Madam, since your father himself has spoken about religion and, so to speak, has indicated the priest who is to reconcile him with God, you will be responsible for his eternal salvation if you don’t let me act.’ These made some impression on her, and she revealed the presence of some religious sentiments which were not entirely extinguished. Her eyes were filled with tears as she answered: ‘Do whatever is best, Sister, but be prudent so as not to frighten my poor Father, for he could die very suddenly.’—‘Have confidence, Madam; God will sustain him.’

Father Morel was not at home; so, I went to see Father Leblanc, who took care of everything. A few hours later the priest entered the sick room. The old man welcomed him with open arms and asked him to hear his Confession. When he received the Last Sacraments he wanted all his children and his grand children to be present. He blessed them and urged them to love their religion and to live and die as Christians.

He repeated that same advice over and over again throughout the few days that he lived. Everyone who came to see him also was encouraged to love God and to accept the difficulties of life with resignation. A moment before breathing his last, he said: ‘Lord, I place my soul in Your hands.’ The daughter followed her father’s example and became a good, fervent Christian.”

There was a young woman who was very bitter because of her sufferings, and had a great hatred for God and His ministers. What a victory over hell her conversion was!

Madam X. had cancer of the stomach. Unfortunately she never had anything to do with religion, except to make fun of it, to mock the priests and to blaspheme God; and yet, it could have given her strength to bear her sufferings. The Lord, however, is always compassionate and merciful; He had pity on her soul. Once again, He used a Sister of Bon Secours to bring back to Him that sheep who had strayed from Him for such a long time and had remained deaf to the sound of His voice. A Sister was called to the sick woman’s bedside on December 28, 1878. The task which she had assumed did not appear as if it would be an easy one, for, when Sister had spoken a few words about God that first night, the woman’s expression showed deep contempt.

“She was in so much pain. I tried in vain to relieve her and, finally, I suggested a few short prayers to ask God to lessen her sufferings. My efforts, however, were useless because she had no faith in the power of prayer. She didn’t want to suffer anymore, and yet she obstinately turned away from the only One who could relieve her sufferings. She had such a horror of the cross that, if my crucifix would touch her as I was caring for her, she pushed it away violently

with an expression of hatred that it pierced my heart. I also suggested that she wear a medal of Our Lady of Lourdes; she refused, but I slid one under her pillows.

The disease made rapid progress for several days. I was frightened at the state of her soul which was soon to appear before God. My prayers were redoubled; I continually begged Our Lord to have pity on her whom He had redeemed by His blood, and not to abandon her.

One of the maids responded to my question about the woman's attendance at Mass by saying: 'Sister, Madam never set foot inside a Church. But, please, don't ask me anything else.' These words only served to increase my concern for her soul. So I did not hesitate to prolong my stay in that home, ever though it cost me dearly, for I wanted to win her soul back to God.

Each day some new symptom revealed the progress of the disease. Death was approaching very quickly. I wanted to say: Wait a little while yet, your victim is not ready! So I begged God to prolong her life through my prayers, and the hardships and sacrifices which each day presented.

Soon the doctor indicated that there was no further hope of recovery and that she could die at any moment. I broached the subject of sending for a priest as delicately and gently as I could, but she replied: 'Sister, please, I beg you, let's remain friends. Leave the church for those who want it; as for me, I know what I have to do. You know how I feel about priests; you also know that I will never consent to have one enter my home, even less would I speak to him.' 'But, Madam,' I said, 'if you die . . . !'—'Then, at least I will die undisturbed.'

My God, what should I do? To whom should I turn? In desperation I went to her husband. 'Sir,' I said, 'you must realize that your wife is dying, and you also know that to avoid going to hell she must be reconciled with God and receive the Sacraments before leaving this earth. You have much more influence over her than I do. So I am counting on you to get her to see a priest and settle her affairs with the Lord.'—'You understand my wife well enough by now to know that she will never accept the idea of seeing a priest; she detests them. How do you expect me to talk to her? Furthermore, she does not need one; she has nothing on her conscience, I can assure you. I will take full responsibility for this decision, if that makes you feel any better.'—'Sir, you make me tremble! Didn't you ever learn your Catechism? Don't you know that there is a hell for those who refuse to be reconciled to God? In the name of your own father who died a Christian, in the name of your mother who has always been faithful to her religious duties, allow your wife to receive the sacraments and die as a Christian.'—'If she wants it, I will not oppose it,' he replied; 'but I forbid you to speak to her about it. Also, the doctor doesn't wish it either, it is very necessary that she be allowed to die in peace.'

The next day the poor woman had frequent vomiting spells. Nevertheless, the doctor wanted her to think that she would recover. 'In a few days, you'll leave for Midi,' he said, 'and you'll recover your health there. Don't let anything upset you, and above all stay completely quiet.' When evening came, the poor woman appeared to be much worse. Would she live through the night? God alone knew. Was I going to let that poor unfortunate soul die without trying once more

to talk to her about her salvation? Was I going to let her fall into hell without trying to hold her back from the edge? No, my God, You entrusted her to me, and I wish to save her with the help of Your grace. So I decided to make one last effort. Approaching her bed, I said: 'Oh, you are suffering so much! What can I do to give you a little relief? If you only knew how I have prayed to Our Lord, the only true physician, and have begged Him to apply the merits of all the sufferings He endured for us. You are on the cross with Him. Raise your eyes towards this Savior God and ask Him for strength and courage. I am a religious; allow me to speak to you without interrupting me, and do not be surprised at what I am going to say. Have a priest come here tonight to hear your confession. Tomorrow it will perhaps be too late. Do not misuse God's graces; think about the fact that he sent you a Sister of Bon Secours to tell you that you are at the gates of eternity. I beg you, don't resist Him anymore.' 'The doctor promised me that I will recover,' she answered. 'Unfortunately,' I replied, 'man's power is very weak and God can call you at any moment. You must be ready.'—'But you know that I detest priests.'—'Don't the priests have the power to forgive sin and open heaven to us?'—'But I despise them and have always said that I would never see one, even at death!'—'There is still time to change. Think of hell and its torments; but, most of all, think of heaven which can still be yours.'—'Ask my husband to come here. I do not wish to go to hell.'

He went into her room and, a few minutes later, he came to me and, with a shrug of his shoulders, he said: 'You can go for the parish priest, but make him understand that he must not tire my wife.'

I needn't tell you how rapidly I covered the distance to St. Louis d'Antin Church. The pastor did not delay, and he remained with the sick woman for about an hour. He came again for the next two days, and then on the fourth day Father brought the holy Viaticum to her. He spoke a few words before giving her the Last Sacraments and she was very moved. She received the Sacraments with great reverence and recollection.

During the days which followed there was a short remission of the disease. It was as if God wished to allow her time to prepare for her last journey. I often urged her to repeat short little ejaculations, and we said our morning and evening prayers together. I was so consoled to see her able to suffer with resignation and to really make efforts so as not to be impatient. She used to say to those around her: 'don't make me sin; I went to Communion this morning.'

The respite did not last for long; death was approaching very rapidly and choking spells became more and more painful. I doubled my prayers and my vigilance to keep the devil away from her; and when she was able, I would have her repeat: 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul . . . be with me in my last agony . . .' I said the prayers for the dying and gave her my crucifix to kiss. She made an act of faith and gave her soul back to God."

As we went through the many documents, we were able to verify how much the presence of a religious in a home had contributed to the transformation of all the members of the family. Sister St. Thérèse has left written accounts of several such happenings. How many conversions and

cures were obtained through her prayers! There is not room for all of them; but the following one has been chosen.

Sister has been called to nurse the head of an important Copper factory; he was a Protestant. His wife, though a Catholic, was very inconsiderate and completely lacking in kindness. The patient had a cancer just above the stomach and he suffered a great deal. The doctor had made an opening into the stomach in order to feed him, and prevent him from dying of hunger.

"I began my work there by saying a prayer, placing my patient under the care of the Blessed Mother, and she always took care of them. They allowed me to do this, and each morning and evening I said a short prayer out loud. There was a lot to put up with from the very beginning from Mrs. X. I was obliged to take all my meals with her, and she took every opportunity to speak against religion, priests and religious. Sometimes she would say to me: 'Well, where is this good God of yours? Show Him to me if you can.' I always prayed before replying and I offered it all for her husband's conversion. Each day, it seemed, he became more and more eager to hear me speak to him about God. We even got so far as to do some reading each day from Father Faber's book, *All for Jesus*; then we would read a chapter of the *Imitation*; and if I forgot it, he would remind me.

Another book which interested him a great deal was: *The Life of Father de Ravignan*. Little by little a great change took place, and one day he announced that he wanted to see a priest.

No sooner said than done. The very next day Our Lord came to visit the new convert. I arranged an altar in his room and decorated it with flowers and candles. He was delighted. He liked the altar and asked me not to take it down until his friends had seen it. When the priest had gone, he said to me: 'Sister, I promise you that if God sees fit to prolong my life, I always will be faithful to my religious duties. No matter where I may go, I will attend Mass every Sunday and go to Communion on all the big feasts.' Then he added: 'Sister, now if only you could convert my wife. She is rotten to the very marrow of her bones.'

The poor man did not know how much I had suffered already from his wife, yet I prayed for her every day. She spent part of her day in the factory which was located behind the house. When I opened the window in my room, she would get the workmen to sing obscene songs. Naturally I closed my window.

There was a young maid in the home, and I tried to talk with her about religion. She listened most willingly but said that it would be impossible for her to go to Confession as long as her employer did not do so. It appeared to be an impossible situation for the poor woman had no such thoughts or inclination. However, God was going to give me that soul; and here is how it came about:

One day, after having insulted me as usual, she burst out in a stream of crude, abusive language against the Blessed Virgin; I was so indignant that I, too, exploded like a volcano. I no longer remember what words I used, but essentially I told that woman that although I had accepted all of the personal abuse she had thrown at me in silence, I was not going to allow her to insult the Blessed Virgin. The outburst had a marvelous effect. Madam X. appeared to be very touched and asked my pardon. Then she acknowledged that, for some

perverse reason which she did not really understand, she had done everything she could to tempt and upset me; but she finally was convinced that my vocation was true and real. She added that very often she had admired the serenity of my expression.

I began a novena for that poor soul immediately; and one day I found her in tears. I asked her what was the matter, and she replied, through her sobbing: 'I can no longer continue to live like this; I must change my life and go to confession.' You can imagine my joy and how I encouraged her in those good resolutions. The next day she went to Confession and received Holy Communion. When she returned from the church she made an act which proved her sincerity. Madam X. went to the factory and told the workmen what she had done, and she urged them to follow this good example as they had followed the bad one she had given them. I was able to open the window of my room from then on.

Mr. X. was delighted with the transformation which grace had brought about in his wife; and my stay in that home, which had been so painful, was now the source of much consolation. My patient's condition improved somewhat and I was able to leave him. A few months later, however, he died after having received the last Sacraments with great fervor.

In 1883, a Sister of Bon Secours was sent to take care of Mrs. A. whose brothers were the Deputy and the Mayor of the town where she lived. The two men were both Sectarians; the Deputy was very proud of the fact that he had gotten a law passed which required that the crucifixes had to be removed from all schools and public buildings. The Mayor, no doubt, feared that his subordinates wouldn't be too conscientious about this duty; so, he went to work himself and removed the crucifixes from all the public places in his area. Divine Providence placed Sister in this situation, and we'll let her tell it in her own words:

"I was called to Mrs. A.'s home in a rather mysterious way. Someone came to get me at the convent, when we had gotten into the carriage, she told me that she would let me off at St. Augustin's Church and indicated the house where I was to go. Mrs. A. did not know that I was coming; nevertheless, I was to remain in her home in spite of any protests she might make. If I was asked who had sent me, I was to reply simply that I did not know. Such a beginning was not very reassuring, and I did not know how I was going to get out of the situation.

I arrived at the house that had been indicated, and the maid introduced me, since she thought I had come for a visit. Mrs. A. received me very pleasantly; but when it became apparent that I wasn't leaving, she asked me why I had come. Madam, I answered, 'I came to take care of you.'—'Take care of me? But I am not sick; and, furthermore, I did not ask for a religious.' In spite of this dismissal, I persisted: 'Do you believe that I am not able to be of help to you, Madam?' She thought for a few moments, then replied: 'Well, why not! I am ninety years old and perhaps the care you give would be useful. Remain, then, but on the condition that you will not put on any airs with me.'

So the first hurdle was passed, and much more easily than I had dared to hope. I took my meals with her because of her age and, as we began I, quite naturally, made the sign of the Cross and said the blessing. She said to me: 'I hope you're not going to start your tricks, for I will not have it.' As gently as I could, I told her that the sign of the Cross was not a trick and that my prayer was asking God's blessing on the food. 'It doesn't matter,' she said, 'don't do it in front of me.'

The next day and the following ones, I said my prayers away from her presence; but, from time to time, I did recite the *Hail Mary*, and she became furious. After a few days she seemed to become more at ease with me. One day she said: 'You are very young; I could be your grandmother! So, if you want me to like you, you must call me Nanny,' which I did most willingly. From that moment on, we were the best of friends. Her brother, the Deputy, came to see her and expressed his astonishment at finding a Sister with her. Mrs. A. replied: 'I did not ask for her, but she is young and pleasant and she keeps me company.' And the conversation ended.

A few days later he came back again, and found the two of us going from one armchair to the next. She would sit on each one for a few minutes and then move on to the next one, making her way around the room. By some fancy of old age, she had asked me to follow her, and we did this for about three hours.

Sometimes we must comply with the patient's apparent caprices, and I did not consider my doing so to be in any way extraordinary; but her brother thought otherwise. He watched us for a while without saying anything and that made me nervous. Finally he said: 'I would really like to know why you became a religious?' 'That is very simple,' I replied; 'I became a religious in order to love God better and also to make Him loved by others.'—'Well, you should succeed! I must say that I no longer hold to such things, but if I remain here I will end up being converted. Since I do not want to change, I am going.'

That gave me a little bit of hope. Also, my dear ninety year old allowed me to say my prayers near her without protest; that was a great deal. She was very old and I knew that she couldn't count on having much longer to live. So, I carefully watched for the right moment to do something about getting her reconciled with God before death surprised her.

One day after Mass, I asked one of the parish priests to come to see her. The Blessed Mother certainly had guided me in my choice, and you will see why. When I returned to the house, I said to her, 'Nanny, do you know that the parish priest who visits the sick in this neighborhood asked me how you were?' She began to laugh and said: 'That's not possible. I have never set foot inside the church; and to tell you the truth I do not even know if I am Catholic or Protestant.' 'That might be,' I said, 'but that doesn't stop the priest from being interested in his parishioners.' 'Well that is very funny,' she said; 'but meanwhile, I do not want him to come to see me.'

Nevertheless, since I had asked the priest to come, he came; he met Doctor X, the old woman's grandson, who arrived at the same time. Father was very surprised to recognize the doctor as one of his old friends whom he had not seen since he had entered the Seminary. Their meeting was providential, and it

was to have a twofold effect. The two friends began a long conversation; they recalled many memories and discussed present day events. One thing led to another, and finally they talked about what was keeping them apart at that time. The doctor finally told his friend that he had abandoned all practice of religion several years previously, and this gave the priest the desire to win his soul back again for God. The friendship that had been interrupted was begun again and, as they spoke, the doctor's heart was touched and his faith renewed. Finally, he promised the priest that he would resume his religious duties. Easter was very near; so that was the date he chose for returning to the Sacraments.

That first visit of the parish priest certainly produced results. An indifferent Christian had become a good one. Over and above that, the old woman was quite impressed by her grandson's example. She saw such a change in him; he was so open and happy that she decided there must be something good about religion. She asked me many questions and, like Nicodemus, it was always during the night that she would ask me to sit near her and answer her questions. You could almost feel God at work in her soul. I did learn that she belonged to the Catholic faith but that she had followed the Protestant teachings all her life. She would say very often: 'How I wish I knew what was really true.' Her doubts were finally dissipated by means of answers that were as simple as possible, and with the help of God's grace. One day she asked to see the priest. She went to Confession at least three times and gave every indication of sincere repentance. Then she would ask me: 'Oh, Sister, do you really believe that the good God will pardon me forever for a life of forgetfulness?' I reassured and encouraged her, and recalled St. Augustine's words *that there is nothing in us so terrible that Christ's death cannot cure.*¹⁴⁰

She had a very peaceful death and, up to the very last moment, she asked God's pardon for having misunderstood Him for so long."

How can we bless you, oh, unfathomable mystery of Divine Mercy? You accept the very last efforts of a blemished soul and place them as a counterbalance on the scales of justice! How can we adequately sing your praises?

A Sister of Bon Secours returned to the Convent at Abbeville. Her last patient's illness had been long and difficult; and she was looking forward to a little time to rest. But such was not to be the case, for in their life's work they could not count on having even a free hour.

"I had hardly gotten back to the convent when I answered the call of a very distressed family, who had asked for a Sister to care for a young man who was dying. I left immediately and found the sick man at death's door. Here is what happened. The young man belonged to a very good family, had been well educated; and, until he left college had been considered as a model of good behavior. Like so many of his peers, he wanted to enjoy life. He was rich and used all his money for luxury and every type of pleasure. One day, when he came home from a dance, he went to his room and drank a pitcher of ice water. He got into bed and immediately had a severe chill; and his temperature went up

very rapidly. The doctor was called at once and diagnosed his condition as a very serious inflammation of both lungs; his poor parents were devastated. Every possible treatment was tried but nothing could be done. Towards evening, the doctor said to me: 'Sister, there is nothing more I can do, your patient will be dead within forty eight hours.' 'In that case, Sir,' I said, 'it would be helpful if you would tell the family so that he can be anointed.' The doctor refused however, saying that he was an only son, and that he didn't have the courage to tell the parents. 'They will know soon enough,' he added. I thought otherwise and took the painful task upon myself. However, it was not easy because the poor mother couldn't believe that her son, who had been so strong and healthy only the day before, was going to be taken from her so quickly. 'As far as the Sacraments are concerned, we must wait a while longer,' she said. Since I couldn't get anywhere with her, I decided to proceed otherwise. I began by speaking to the young man himself, reawakening his faith by talking about his days at school and the religious instruction he had received there, and he seemed to enjoy our conversation.

'Oh yes, Sister,' he said, 'I was very pious in days gone by and sometimes, when I think about it, I wonder how I have been able to live in such a sinful way these past few years. Many times I have made my mother cry, and I am really sorry; and if I get better I've made up my mind to change my way of living.' 'That's fine,' I said, 'but what if God does not let you recover?' 'How you go on, Sister!,' he replied with a smile, 'You're joking. I am not that bad!' 'No, I am not joking. Your condition is serious, very serious; and if you would agree to see the priest and go to Confession, I would be very pleased. Father will know if you should be anointed.'—'Well, upon my word! Is it possible that it is time for me to appear before God? But, Sister, what is to become of me? I have done nothing! I spent all of my youth having a good time; I have done nothing that is good or worthwhile! Oh, Sister, Sister, what is going to happen to me?' I reassured him as best I could and told him that he could trust completely in the Divine Mercy; then I went for the priest.

Father came at once and heard his confession. The poor young man continued to grieve over his sins and all the years he had wasted. The priest then brought him the Holy Viaticum, and gave him the Last Sacraments. There wasn't much time, for he became delirious barely an hour later.

The poor mother came back to her son's bedside after a few hours of rest; and when she saw his condition, she became almost frantic. 'Sister,' she moaned, 'I am so upset! Won't my son have time to make his peace with God? Tell me, won't he come out of this delirium?' I quickly reassured her and told her everything that had happened, and how humbly and fervently her son had received the Last Sacraments. It is impossible to describe the poor woman's gratitude. She realized that she should not have objected to the priest coming while he was still conscious. She said: 'Sister, without you, my sin would have been irreparable.' She understood fully and through her tears she continually blessed and thanked the Lord. The young man remained delirious until the very end, and talked to God the whole time. 'My God,' he would say, 'I have

done nothing for you. What a pity!, What a shame! Pardon me! *In You, O Lord, I hope.*' He finally breathed his last but never regained consciousness.

The poor mother grieved at the loss of her son, but she acknowledged that her suffering was nothing, if compared to what it would have been had her child died without turning back to God."

*If the wicked turn from their ways and come to me, I no longer will remember their sins.*¹⁴¹ This marvelous promise is accomplished each day before our very eyes!

The following account was related by one of the Sisters.

"In 1865, I was sent to care for an elderly sick man whose condition offered no hope of recovery. I learned that he was a Free mason, and that he had not received the Sacraments since his First Communion. God had hardly revealed Himself, when the unhappy man had left Him to follow his own evil inclinations.

The old man had held an important position during the Revolution of 1830, and his hatred of the clergy was so great that he had all of the churches closed in the city where he lived. Nevertheless, his family was Christian, or rather, so called Christians. Can they be called by that title when they would refuse to allow a priest anywhere near the sick man to anoint him with the excuse of not wanting to upset him?

Another thing that surprised me was that, when I entered the house, I was forbidden to speak to the patient about the priest. The most that I would agree to do was to be very prudent, and I said, there and then, that each day I would say aloud a short prayer in the patient's room. They did not object, but, to assure themselves that I was not talking about the priest, one of them remained in the sickroom with me each night.

When I saw the obstacles accumulating, I felt discouraged. I turned to Mary, and asked her to bring about this conversion which seemed so difficult; and almost immediately my confidence returned.

As soon as I could, I slipped a miraculous medal under the sick man's pillows. I was sure that the devil would not come near him as long as Our Lady remained there. Wasn't it important to keep the devil at a distance? After I had done what was necessary to make the patient comfortable, I said: 'I have been told that your nights have been difficult. Let's say a little prayer so that God may give you a better night and that you might regain some strength.' I expected the old man to object; but Mr. C. remained silent, and during the prayer he showed no reaction. The first part of the night was fairly good and he even slept a little.

When morning came, I went to Mass and prayed as hard as I could for the unfortunate man's conversion. I begged the Blessed Virgin to open his eyes and to obtain at least a few days for him to find himself. That good Mother must have been listening to me, because each evening I was able to pray aloud for a few moments; and one night I was surprised and overjoyed when the old man made the sign of the cross with me.

Mr. C.'s nights became more and more difficult and his condition had visibly deteriorated. I had been there five days. When I went to Mass that day, I stopped

to see the parish priest to tell him about my patient's condition; and added that I intended to ask the family again to allow him to come to see the old man. The pastor then told me that, the previous day while I was resting, he had gone to the house, but was not allowed to enter it. This upset me very much. I pleaded with Our Lady, the refuge of sinners, and spent half of my sleeping time in prayer. That evening when I went on duty, they told me that Mr. C. had had a very bad day and had asked for me several times. It did not take me long to realize that death was approaching rapidly. Come what may, I decided to speak. At nine o'clock I asked everyone to leave, but Mrs. C. said that she would remain with me. What was I to do? I was desperate. 'My God,' I said, 'won't you give me just a few minutes to speak to him about his spiritual needs?' So I said: 'Sir, let's say our usual little prayer, and hope that this night will bring you some rest. You are there on the cross with Our Lord! Offer Him all your sufferings so that they may be worthwhile.'

When the prayer was finished, Mr. C. convinced his wife to take some rest. He assured her that he was well cared for and that she had no need to worry. So she went to a corner of the room and was soon fast asleep. I continued to pray quietly. Suddenly, Mr. C. called me and asked me if I would read to him. In surprise I answered that I would do so willingly, but that at that moment I had no books with me. 'What about that one,' he said pointing to the table.—'That is the *Imitation of Christ*. Would you like me to read a few pages to you?'—'Yes, Sister,' he replied. 'In that case, Sir, you choose the chapter.' He opened the book and passed it to me without looking at it. It was the chapter on *Preparation for Death*.

I acknowledged that I hesitated. When I did not begin, he finally said: 'Well, what chapter is it?'—'It is the Preparation for Death, Sir.'—'I am listening, Sister.' So, at his invitation I began to read; I stopped from time to time for fear of saying too much. But each time I paused, he would ask: 'Is that all? Go on to the end.'

When I had finished, he thanked me and spent a long time apparently deep in thought. Without a doubt, God had spoken to his heart and invited him to turn back to Him.

Very early in the morning, Mrs. C. went to tell the family how their father was. I profited by her absence and told her husband that I was going to mass in a few minutes. 'Would you like me to bring the pastor back with me?' 'I would like it very much, Sister,' he answered simply. 'Ask him to come during the morning hours if it wouldn't be inconvenient for him.'

His answer filled me with great joy and I hurried to tell the family before I left. No one opposed the priest's coming anymore because the patient himself wanted it. 'May God be praised,' I shouted to myself as I ran to the church.

A few hours later the pastor heard the poor, misguided man's confession; then brought him the Holy Eucharist and administered the Last Sacraments. The old man never lost his calm or serenity after that moment and quite visibly he was happy.

His agony began that very evening and was to last for four days, and he died kissing the crucifix."

At Our Savior's birth *Peace was promised to men of good will*.¹⁴² There are several stories in the Sisters' accounts which prove the truth that God also

performed miracles rather than allow souls, who are sincerely seeking the Light, to lose heart and perish far from the fold.

"In 1883 I was taking care of a young woman in Boulogne, who was the niece and ward of a rabbi. The doctor came to get me and told me that the patient was a Jewess. At first, I pretended that I did not know it; and when I arrived that evening, I said to her: 'I am going to say a little prayer for you and, if you wish, you can join with me in your heart so that you will not tire yourself.' Then I said aloud the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary* and three invocations to Our Lady.

When I got ready to go back to the convent on the third morning, the young woman asked me: 'Will you come back this evening, Sister, if I tell you what I am?' 'Oh,' I replied, 'whether you are a Protestant, Jew or atheist, that would not prevent me from coming to take care of you.'—'Promise me, then, that you will come back this evening.'—'I promise.' Then she said in a small voice: 'I am a Jewess. I lost my parents and my uncle is my guardian. He is one of the great French Rabbis who has dedicated his whole fortune to the construction of synagogues. And I must tell you that I made him a solemn promise that I would never change my religion. Nevertheless, from the little bit that I know about your religion, I strongly believe that you are right and that we are mistaken. It is the first time that I have had any close contact with a Christian, and I would like to take advantage of it to learn more; but no one must suspect anything. Another thing, my uncle knows that I am sick, and he is bound to come and visit me. He is upset already because I am being taken care of by a religious. God, however, does direct everything for He arranged that not a single lay nurse could be found. My uncle is sure to ask to see you. Please, Sister, I beg you, don't make even the least allusion to religion.'

The very next day, her uncle arrived. The dreaded visit passed without incident and I kept my part in the conversation as short as possible. When he had left, the sick woman called me and said with a big smile: 'My uncle will permit me to keep you with me, but with a condition which will make you smile. 'I want you to retain the religious,' he said, 'but on the condition that after her departure, you will break all of the dishes that she may have used or that became impure from contact with her.' To be sure, to keep you, I promised; but since you are using my best china, instead of breaking them, I will use them for myself. That will bring me good luck.'

I was more than happy to open up the truths of our religion to that beautiful, sincere soul! She asked me many questions and I taught her some prayers. She came to love the Blessed Virgin very much and promised to call on her every day to obtain the grace to die a Catholic. Once in a while when she had a bad choking spell caused by her bronchitis, she would say to me: 'I beg you, Sister, if I am in danger don't leave me to die without baptizing me. Or would it be possible for a priest to come dressed as a lay person to baptize me? Oh, how I love your religion! How beautiful it is! And what a grace this illness has been; it has given me the means of learning about it.'

That dear woman did recover. I left her a small medal of the Blessed Virgin for she certainly was already a true Christian in her heart. Later on I learned that a

priest had finished the work I had begun, and that the Catholic Church had one more member.

The following incident also took place in Boulogne. One of the Sisters from that community had met a young English woman who was a Protestant at the bedside of her patient. Sister was quick to realize that the woman was deeply pious.

"One day I laughingly said to her: 'What a pity that you are not a Catholic, Madam. It seems to me that you would be very fervent.' At these words she sat up straight and said: 'Oh, no, I will never change my religion.'

Some time later, I met her on the street, it was the day before our Forty Hours Devotions; so I invited her to come. 'But, Sister,' she said, 'what would I do in a Catholic chapel?' 'The same thing you do in your church: pray to the good God.' Out of courtesy to me she came, and Grace was waiting for her there.

The priest who was to speak that evening could not come, and the one who replaced him hadn't time to prepare a sermon. So, he took the words of our opening hymn and commented on them.

. . . *How can anyone doubt Your presence*
O Sacrament upon our altars? . . .

The priest made numerous comparisons between Catholic dogma and Protestant misconceptions concerning the Holy Eucharist. We did not know the priest, and he had no idea that there were three Protestants in the congregation.

The next day I again met the young Englishwoman. As we met, she said: 'I truly do not know what came over me yesterday. That hymn!' (it was the *Te Deum*), 'during which everyone was standing and which I did not understand, impressed me so much that I remained kneeling the whole time and couldn't hold back my tears! Oh yes, that hymn took my breath away! However, believe me when I say that I have no intention of becoming a Catholic. But if I should ever decide to be baptized, I would like it to be done in your chapel and I would ask for that hymn which touched me so deeply.'

Two years passed. I would see her from time to time and I always asked her: 'When can we sing the *Te Deum*?' 'Never,' she would always respond energetically, 'but I can never forget the impression I experienced on hearing it.'

Finally, one day, she came to find me; she was beaming. 'This time, you can sing the *Te Deum*,' she said. 'I will be baptized in your chapel the day after tomorrow and the Bishop has said that, even though it is Holy Week, we can sing it because he knows that I began to catch a glimpse of the truth the first time that I heard that hymn.'

The Baptismal Ceremony took place in our little sanctuary. The new convert was accompanied by one of her Protestant friends and her twelve year old son, who were both baptized six months later by the Bishop of Philadelphia.

My friend made her First Communion on Easter Sunday in our chapel. She was so happy! 'If you only knew how happy I am,' she said! 'I cannot believe it is possible for me to be happier, even in heaven! I would never have thought that God would give Himself to any soul so intimately. Oh, if all Protestants could be

aware of my good fortune, there wouldn't be a single one left. If it should be necessary for me to die for my faith, I am ready to do so!

There is no doubt that God had given her an overwhelming experience of His presence, so as to give her the strength to overcome the difficulties which awaited her. When her parents began to suspect that she had changed her religion, they took her back to England to an ambiance that was completely Protestant. As soon as they verified that their suspicions were well founded, they put her out of the family home. 'I have complete trust in God and offer Him all my sufferings,' she said."

This next conversion took place in London, and the account was given to us by one of the Sisters who went to that city when the foundation was established there.

"I was sent to the home of Mrs. Wells who was very ill. She had septicemia, and she also had a carbuncle on her neck which appeared to be very inflamed. As she saw me enter her room, she cried out: 'Oh, come, come, Sister, and bring me the light.' I thought the poor woman was delirious, but I picked up the lamp from the table and carried it to her bed.—'No, no, Sister. It is the light of faith which I want and I need you to bring it to me. I feel that I am going to die and I haven't any anchor of hope to cling to.' I asked her what religion she professed. 'I am a Protestant,' she said, 'but I am not happy.' And again she repeated the same words: 'I have nothing in the next world, no anchor of hope to cling to.'

Her words affected me and left me troubled. Finally I asked her: 'Do you desire to be received into the Holy Catholic Church?'—'Oh, yes, Sister.' 'Have you ever spoken to a priest about your desire?' Her response was negative; so then I asked her how long she had thought about changing her religion. To my great surprise, she answered: 'Since you entered my room. When I saw you the thought which suddenly came to me was: Now I have an anchor of hope which will help me be saved.'

I was at a loss to know what to do. The patient's condition appeared to be very serious; moreover it was late and I did not know how to set about getting a priest. So, I went to Mrs. Wells' daughter and asked her to go for a Catholic priest. It would be impossible for me to repeat the names she called me, and the crude expressions she used in response to my request. 'No, no, never will a priest enter this house!' I went back to the sickroom and left her daughter in a very angry state. Then I prayed to God with all my heart to come and help me. Divine Providence did not delay. Mrs. Wells' son-in-law arrived in the meantime; he was a convert, and when I told him the situation, he offered to go for the priest himself. He returned very quickly and had Father McGrath of Southwark with him. Father saw that Mrs. Wells was extremely ill, and he received her into the Catholic Church that same evening. He had asked for two wax candles for the ceremony and the young woman angrily refused them. Since then, I have always carried two candles with me.

Words cannot describe the poor woman's happiness. Father McGrath came back to see her several times, and he was awed by the work that had been

accomplished by God's grace, and the progress that she had made in faith and love of God.

Contrary to all expectations, Mrs. Wells recovered and succeeded in converting her daughter and her other children."

The same Sister was the instrument of grace in the following case.

An English gentleman, who possessed a large fortune and was wise and distinguished, had been an outstanding and very successful student of Oxford University. However, he lacked one thing which is essential: the faith. He did not believe in life after death and was part of the Agnostic Sect.

He had numerous friends from every walk of life, but none of them were Catholic; only his wife belonged to the Church. Unfortunately, she was so worldly and frivolous that her influence remained nonexistent. Nevertheless, she considered it a point of honor to convert her husband, above all since she was informed that he was seriously ill. She relied on her own power to do this, however; rather than on God's help. So, she took care of him for a long time and was very devoted to him. Then, when she was exhausted from the continual care which his condition required, she knocked at the door of Bon Secours Convent.

"I went to the house on the 9th of February. I arrived at the patient's bedside but was not warmly welcomed. He told me that he did not need my care; then he told his wife that he would not call me Sister but Nurse, and I accepted that.

My ministry in that house was most difficult. I was obliged to keep a close watch over myself, and this made it even harder; moreover, the sick man had no respect for my religious habit, but treated me like someone he despised. The unfortunate man was suffering from a disease which the doctors couldn't diagnose. In an effort to seek its cause, they used radiation on his abdomen, and it was left in a distressing condition. A large, deep wound formed, and the dressing needed to be changed every half hour. Then a malignant tumor developed, and its growth could not be controlled. In spite of his condition and the fact that the doctors had told him that he did not have more than a month to live, Mr. R. continued to nourish false hopes.

His wife agitated, irritated and tormented him; for, in the midst of all that he suffered, she wanted him to say the rosary with her. 'You make me sick with all your prayers,' he said one day. 'Sister doesn't torment me like you do; she does her duty and gives me my treatments with great exactness and devotion.'

I was dressing his wound one evening towards the end of February. He said to me: 'Sister, you give me so much relief, you do so much good. Sometimes I ask myself how you are able to perform such a task so perfectly.'—'I do not do it for you, Sir.' 'For whom, then?'—'In you I see Jesus Christ, Our Lord stretched out on the cross, and I am glad to be able to take care of Him in His suffering members.'—'Is that why you are so good to me?'—'Anyone, who is kind by nature, would do the same as I; but I am a religious and, as such, I should have a motive which is above the natural, is supernatural, when I do something.'—'That is beautiful! How I would like to think as you do!'

The days and weeks passed quickly and I was obliged to ask for someone to replace me during the time I slept. Many friends came to visit Mr. R. and he liked to tell them how struck he had been by my answers, and they would all say: 'Their vocation is beautiful. They are 'noble women.' ' One day, he asked me a few questions about the Oratory, a magnificent Church in London that had been constructed according to the same plan as that of St. Peter's in Rome, though much smaller. I spoke to him about the priest who was in charge of that parish. He, too, had gone to Oxford; then he was an officer in the English army before he became a Catholic, and then entered the priesthood. 'I could ask him to come and visit you, if you would like me to do so. I think you would like him; he is pleasant, spiritual and has a keen intelligence!' 'I would like that,' he replied, 'but only on the condition that he not speak to me about religion.'

Father Sebastian Bowden came; he quickly captivated the sick man's mind and heart and was asked to come back again. The next time he brought a book by an outstanding Protestant author. Then he gave him *Fabiola* by Cardinal Wiseman and, little by little, the works of Cardinal Newman. As he read those last books, Mr. R. was touched by God's grace, and he responded with his whole heart and asked to be received into the Catholic Church.

His admission into the Church was very impressive, and the next day Our Lord came to him in the Holy Eucharist. The altar, which was erected in his room, was decorated with lilies, roses and palms; nothing had been left undone in order to give the ceremony the importance it deserved.

A Protestant Minister learned about the change that had taken place in the gentleman's sentiments, and he quickly came to see him. But, instead of disturbing the sick man, he said to him: 'Enter the Church of Rome, if you prefer it. I see nothing better for you than to die a Catholic.' An Anglican Bishop also came to visit; but the patient would not receive him.

Two days later, Bishop Stanley came with Father Bowden and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to the new convert; and, from time to time, the prelate returned to visit the sick man.

Six months passed. Mr. R's. strength had increased a little bit, and he was able to sit up in an armchair for a while each day. He received Holy Viaticum every week, and two of us continued to take care of him.

Mrs. R. grew tired of hearing that the Sisters had brought about his conversion. She became jealous and had us replaced with lay nurses. The arrangements had been made without her husband's knowledge, and we were sent away and were forbidden to say goodbye to our patient; but we would not agree to do that. We entered his room while his wife watched us from the hallway. The poor man cried and begged us not to leave him, and, as we went down the stairs, his voice cut through my heart. How cruel the human heart can be! The carriage was waiting and Mrs. R. promptly put us into it.

The sick man had stopped speaking and he began to shake all over. They sent for the priest who heard his confession once more. His wife was terrified and sent for me immediately. When I arrived, Mr. R. breathed his last and his soul, which had been purified by all his sufferings, returned to God to praise Him for all eternity."

Mary is honored by the least expression of respect for her and she knows how to reward it.

One of the sisters was sent abroad to take care of a sick man. When she arrived at his home, she learned that he was a Protestant. However, he showed no aversion for the Catholic religion, and he even asked Sister many questions concerning it. She was very circumspect and patient as she answered his queries, and he wasn't accustomed to such behavior from those who disagreed with him.

There was a painting of the Immaculate Conception in his room, and Sister asked him where it had come from. "I brought it back from Italy," he said, "to please my wife; she is a Catholic." Sometimes, when his sufferings were intense, he would ask Sister to say a little prayer. She would say the *Memorare*, and he never tired of it. "Oh! that prayer is so beautiful," he would say. He even asked Sister to copy it for him so he could learn it by heart.

The Mother of God did not delay in speaking to the sick man's heart, and it was not very long before he asked to come into that Church which was watched over by Mary. The priest, who had been asked to come, hesitated however, because he thought that Sister had inspired the request. Mr. R insisted and affirmed that he had decided freely to ask for instructions, and he received Baptism with the best possible dispositions. The good man did recover and was a very fervent Catholic.

One of the Sisters from the London community has shared the following story which demonstrates how our Blessed Mother surrounds those misguided souls, who have shown her the least sign of confidence and veneration, with her tender love and concern.

An Officer in the English Army had a very close relationship with a Catholic family. One year, they came to Paris together, and visited the Church of Our Lady of Victories. As they knelt before Mary's altar, one of the group gave the Officer a miraculous medal and said: "Ask the Blessed Virgin to prove to you that the Catholic Church is the only true one and to give you the grace to enter it." The young man did not refuse, but took the medal and put it into his pocket.

Our Lady's influence on his life did not become apparent until twelve years later. At that time he became very ill and then he asked to come into the true Church. Contrary to all expectations, he appeared to improve a little. His family had been very upset that he had changed his religion and they asked him to leave the family home.

He did not become discouraged, but he went to the home of some Catholic friends and asked to stay with them. They treated him as one of the family and, when he had a relapse and was at death's door, they asked for a Sister of Bon Secours to take care of him. That is how I learned of the great grace he had received.

The young man was very weak and was not able to pray as he wished; but he repeated these words over and over again: "My God, I believe everything that Sister believes."

The little medal of Our Lady was still in his suit pocket; he had kept it for those twelve long years.

In the old law the Lord said: *Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.*¹⁴³ Under the law of Grace, the merits of Jesus Christ's blood which poured from his hands and feet and heart are the guarantee of redemption which is expressed in those words of mercy. Should it surprise us then, that God's grace accomplishes such wonderful things each day?

Sister St. M. wrote in 1897: "I was sent to Lille to take care of a patient and, when I arrived he said to me: 'I am thirty-five years old but, because of the kind of life I have lived, my age should be eighty.' He had not been to Confession since his First Communion and, even then, his father had to whip him before he decided to go. The poor man was extremely ill and death was very near. Several priests had tried to see him but he always refused. As soon as I realized the situation, I placed a medal of St. Benedict under his pillow and suggested that we say a short prayer for his intentions. He offered no objections, but he did not join me or even make the sign of the cross; yet he told his mother that he had prayed with me.

I did the same thing on the succeeding days. Then, one evening, I deliberately did not say the prayer at the usual time. The sick man called me and asked: 'Aren't we going to pray today?' When I agreed that we would, he added: 'wait just a moment so that I may arrange myself in a suitable position to pray.'

The next day, I thought that perhaps I could go a bit further. So I suggested that we make a novena for his recovery. 'I would like that,' he replied. 'You do know, don't you, that in order to obtain grace from God there are certain conditions you must fulfill?' The sick man understood immediately! 'Oh, Sister,' he cried, 'you hurt me. You are going to make me die a month before my time.'— 'Why do you say that, Sir? I go to Confession and Holy Communion very often and I do not die because of that.'— 'It is not the same thing with you! I do not want to see the priest; and, if he should come, I will throw myself out of this bed and crawl to my father's room. He cannot force me to go to Confession because he doesn't do it himself.'

It seemed more prudent to let it pass for the moment, and that evening I prayed with him as if nothing had happened. A few days later, I asked the parish priest to come one more time. The priest arrived as requested. I opened the door of the sick man's room and said: 'I hear the parish priest downstairs; he has come several times to ask about you. May I bring him up?' And, as the priest entered, I asked the other members of the family to leave; and I left, too. We all prayed together that the visit would be fruitful, and even his father knelt with us, for he realized that it was a very important and serious situation.

The young man rang for me to return to his room, but I took my time and waited for the priest to come out. As he left, Father told me to relax and said that he was pleased with how things had gone. The devil, however, was not going to give up so easily; he held in reserve many terrible assaults which he would make on that soul that had belonged to him for so long. In fact, that very day, my

patient insinuated that he did not really believe in the Sacrament which he had received. He said: 'All of that is just a hoax; and, furthermore, there is no hell!' The unfortunate young man feared that his friends would make fun of him. I was very distressed, and increased my own prayers; I also urgently asked the school children to do the same; and we were heard. That evening my patient called me and said: 'Go quickly and get a priest for me, but most of all the Holy Eucharist.' He did not speak again after he had received the Last Sacraments and, a few hours later, he died. His father followed him from the world in the following year. He also was taken care of by our Sisters and the memory of his son's conversion helped him to prepare himself to die as a Christian."

When a sinner finally consents to open himself up to receive God's love, grace becomes like a river or, better still, like a deluge. This is what happened in the conversion which follows:

"About the year 1875, Mother St. Claire at Lille received a request for a Sister to nurse Colonel P., who was extremely ill.

He was a man of some importance but, unfortunately, he was very hostile to religion, and had spent his life in every type of pleasure. He had some questionable relationships and continued to maintain them in spite of his paralysis. Sister St. E. had much experience in taking care of the sick, and immediately saw what she had to do and the difficulties she would face in trying to penetrate the darkness of his soul. What should she do to give him back to God when his heart was so taken up with creatures? It seemed that first of all she had to gain his esteem and interest, and in order to do this she made great efforts to please the patient as much as possible.

The Colonel liked his dogs very much; especially one that was sick and had lost all its hair. Sister had to take care of it and pet it. Moreover, she had to carry out Mr. P's every whim, because he would become very angry at the least sign of resistance. He already had sent away some Sisters from another Congregation, and he even made them leave in the middle of the night.

Sister St. E's persevering compliance gradually began to soften the Colonel's irascible character; and she knew that she had gained some ground. There were others, however, who also were watching and who interrupted the work that had been begun. So the prayers and sacrifices were increased; Sister made many herself and also asked the help of the members of her community and the other sick persons whom she cared for in the daytime. One of these was a nine year old child who thought of offering her life for his conversion.

At last, Our Lord approached the sick man; and he abruptly terminated a relationship to which he had been very attached, he even burned all her letters and everything that could remind him of her. The Father of all mercy had been victorious and this was expressed through an intense devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Mr. P. gave her a place of honor in his room, and a small lamp was kept burning before the statue of that tender mother day and night; and fresh flowers were placed before her each day.

We can only marvel at the work that grace has accomplished. The sick man, who had lived only for the pleasures life could give him, now lived only for God.

The Colonel lived for three long years; he was happy in the midst of his sufferings and even in the deterioration of his body. 'My good, good God,' he would say, 'my dear, good God, take Your revenge now as You destroy me through Your love. Yes, take all of my members, all of them, even my mind if you so desire. I accept all the humiliations which will come.' His good God left him the full use of his mind, but it pleased Him to crucify the heroic convert as he had requested. During the last year of his life he went to Holy Communion every two weeks, and the servants had been told to line the hallway and stairs with fresh plants and flowers everytime the Divine Master came to visit the house.

As his body slowly disintegrated, the Colonel's soul became more and more perfectly united to the Lord's holy will. He loved the Blessed Virgin intensely; he prayed to her continually; and his last words, as he saw that the lamp before her statue had gone out, were: 'Oh relight the lamp before my good Mother.' It had never been refilled, and yet after his death, that little lamp burned brightly and continued to do so until the funeral.

The Gospels tell us that one day as He was about to perform one of his greatest miracles . . . Jesus *trembled* . . . , an eloquent expression of future miracles of grace.

Who will tell us if that movement was an act of pity and love for men or of infinite thanksgiving to His Father? Who will analyse that mysterious emotion of His soul? Without a doubt, the angels stopped their singing and the Most High bent towards the Son who was so pleasing to Him.

The Foundation at Washington

We ended our work of the History of Bon Secours with the events of the year 1902; but it is impossible not to say a few words about the foundation that was made in the New World since Mother St. Fulgence's death.

The Sisters in Baltimore exercised their ministry in many different parts of the United States, even as far away as Texas. However, they were called to Washington very frequently; and sometimes, there were as many as twenty Sisters in that city during the height of the typhoid fever epidemics which re-occurred several times there. A desire for a foundation in Washington had often been expressed so that the Sisters would be able to promptly respond to the calls for their help.

When the Mother General was approached about the purchase of the former rectory of St. Anne's Church in Tenleytown, a suburb of Washington, she agreed to the proposal. Mother believed it was God's will that she do so, in as much as Cardinal Gibbons greatly favored the project.

The Sisters placed the undertaking on the firm foundation of a spirit of faith from the very beginning; and, in order to succeed, they wished to have recourse to only one means . . . abandonment to Divine Providence. Mother St. Urban expressed this in words which asked for the grace: "to know how to seek only God in all the sufferings and hardships which are never lacking in the beginnings of such a work."

Indeed sacrifice became the cornerstone of the new foundation, for the decision had barely been made when the Baltimore community received a terrible trial. Several of the Sisters had been taking care of families who had Typhus. When they returned to the convent, they, too, had the disease; and two of them died. These victims of devotion to duty were filled with joy at the thought of going to God, and the sadness experienced by their loss was without grief. The trial was regarded as a pledge of blessing on the proposed foundation.

The convent in Washington was opened officially on October 1, 1905, the Feast of the Holy Rosary. Mother St. Urban made all the arrangements herself, and provided everything that was necessary with great motherly care and concern. After Mass had been celebrated in the beautifully decorated oratory, Mother St. Victorine was presented to the community as the Superior. All of the Sisters promised to obey her, and the atmosphere was one of great simplicity but also of much affection. Mother St. Urban wrote to the Superior General: "Your children of Washington, both mother and daughters, have wonderfully fulfilled what God and the Congregation required of them. I live in constant gratitude for the favors and graces granted to us. We have had our crosses and anguish of heart, it is true, partings, illness and death. But all these trials are forgotten when one sees such acts of faith and abnegation; and one can only say, 'What glory this gives to God, how many merits for eternal life!'"

The people of Washington expressed their interest in the community in a very touching way. With one accord, the tradesmen of both furniture and provisions refused to accept any payment, saying they were only too happy to do anything to help the Sisters who had done so much already for the sick and the poor.

On the occasion of that foundation, several newspapers, and especially *The Washington Star*, devoted whole articles to Bon Secours, speaking of the universal favor with which the Sisters were received by all, Protestants as well as Catholics. They spoke enthusiastically of the abnegation with which the Sisters accepted the different conditions of life that their life imposed. One instance was dwelt upon in particular. It was a case where a Sister was called on to take care of a whole family stricken down with a contagious disease. During most of the time she spent in that home the only food available was a few boiled potatoes.

This newspaper also recalled that, since the Sisters' arrival in the United States, a certain number of them, who were still very young, had been victims of overwork or an epidemic; and that all of them had offered their lives to God without regret or complaint, thus remaining faithful to the spirit of their vocation.

Aren't such examples the best sermons as well as an eloquent witness in favor of the Church in a country where heresy has so many followers?

Appendix

In the thirty-second chapter of this book, there was a brief mention made about the Sisters of Bon Secours at Helchin, a small Belgian town not far from the French border. Helchin has a very interesting history, and it would be a pity not to share it.

In the tenth century, the Bishops of Tournai already were the temporal lords of Helchin, and they possessed a medieval citadel. The "*Maison Castrel*" came into renown at the end of the 13th century, when Michel de Warengien, the Bishop of Tournai, had it rebuilt (1286–1295) with royal splendor. The chroniclers said that Helchin's splendor surpassed that of all the lordly dwellings in the country. The Bishops of Tournai also liked to remain there for long periods, and sumptuous receptions took place there.

Little by little a large number of dignitaries established themselves around the episcopal palace and formed an important conglomerate. In the middle ages, the residence, for the Canons who served as chaplains to the palace, had been on the same location where the convent of the Sisters of Bon Secours was later built. It was constructed in 1637 by Canon Loyseau, and passed through many different hands before becoming the property of Madam de Bissy, the daughter of Mr. Levaillant, a relative of one of the Sisters.

The lordly mansion had been restored in the eighteenth century by the Bishops of Gand and renovated to more modern tastes. The Count Ernest Salm and Guillaume Florentin, the Prince of Salm-Salm, his successor to the See of Gand, preferred it as their residence. The Prince did not leave Helchin until the beginning of the French Revolution, when he was named the Archbishop of Prague. A few years later, an inhabitant of Lille bought the Chateau very cheaply and had it demolished, thus destroying all vestiges of a glorious past.

In 1890, the de Bissy family decided to leave Helchin and give up the property it possessed. Madam de Bissy wanted the house, where her children had been born and raised, to pass into the hands of the Sisters of Bon Secours. She approached Mother St. Fulgence regarding this, but the good Mother did not wish to answer her, until she had time to learn how the Bishop of Bruges felt about it, and had given his assessment. The Bishop assured her that he would be most happy to have the Sisters of Bon Secours in his diocese; he promised them his fatherly protection at the same time, and he kept his word: "The motives of your intentions were such that I accepted them at the outset. Besides, the letter from Cardinal Richard and his praise of your Congregation made me thrice happy to be able to be of use to you."

The negotiations were begun and a satisfactory transaction was concluded.

The Sisters at Helchin preserved the memory of the visit which the Bishop of Bruges made to their new residence and the kindness which he continued to show them.

The late Father Decock, the pastor at Helchin, also put himself at their disposition. He was very kind and, for a long time, he celebrated Mass in the convent oratory several times each week.

The sisters did not remain inactive there. They visited and cared for the needy sick people in the area; they often had the consolation of provoking some returns to God, and obtained a happy death for them.

Several young Sisters died at Helchin, and their short existence there permeated the place with the ardor of their virtues and their resignation.

Footnotes

Chapter I

1. Romans 11:29.
2. Hevre Bazin, *Les grands Ordres et Congrégations de femmes*, Paris, LeCoffre, 1889.
3. *ibid.*
4. Matthew 4:4.
5. Charles de Ribbes, *Les Familles et la Société en France avant la Révolution*, 3rd Edition, Vol. I, Paris, Albanel, 1874.
6. Mgr. Bougard, *Le Christianisme et les Temps présents*, Vol. I, Paris, Poussielgue, 1874.

Chapter II

7. Acts 10:38.
8. Romans 6:23.
9. Psalm 41:3.
10. Alfred Nettement, *Semaine des Familles*, 1862.
11. Mgr. Gay, *Vie et Vertus chrétiennes*, Vol. III, Fraternal Charity, Paris, Oudin, 1888.

Chapter III

12. Canticle 2.
13. Psalm 45.
14. "The present statue of white marble is the work of Pigalle. It replaces a massive silver statue by Bouchardon which was destroyed during the revolutionary turmoil." Charles Hamel, *Histoire de l'église de Saint-Sulpice*, Paris, LeCoffre, 1901.
15. Viscount d'Avenel, *Les Evêques et Archevêques de Paris*, Casterman, Tournai, 1878.
16. *Ami de la Religion*, Vol. XXXVIII.
17. Psalm 133:1.

Chapter IV

18. John 12:24.
19. Luke 10:21.
20. Mark 10.
21. Imitation of Christ.

Chapter V

22. Psalm 22.
23. Proverbs 31:11, 25, 15, 28.
24. Mother St. Anne, Assistant.
25. In a spirit of conciliation she had a Calvary erected at the birthplace of Mother Potel at Bécordel in the Somme.

Chapter VI

26. Letter from Father de Riencourt, 1820.
27. Inauguration of the statue of the Immaculate Conception.
28. Wisdom 7:11.
29. Municipal resolution.
30. Psalm 91:1.
31. Paul Triare, *Récamier et ses Contemporains*, Paris, Baillière, 1899.
32. *La Gazette de France*.
33. Mandate of the Capitular Vicars announcing Archbishop de Quelen's death.
34. When Archbishop de Quelen appealed to the generosity of the faithful for the hospital which he established at Conflans to receive those with Cholera, the Convent of the Sisters of Bon Secours was appointed as one of the centers where the offerings were received.
35. Resolution-September 12, 1832.
36. Cardinal Guibert.

Chapter VII

37. *Mémoires de Mme la duchesse de Tourzel, gouvernante des enfants de France*, by the duc Des Cars, Paris, Plon, 1883. Miss de Pons saw her father die on the scaffold in 1794. Three years later she married the Marquis de Tourzel, and it was she who wrote the following lines which we have taken from *Souvenirs de Quarante ans*, Paris, Bricon, 1883 by the Countess de Bearn, Pauline de Tourzel, who followed the Royal family to the Temple: "My brother's marriage has brought a bit of joy and happiness among us; he has given us a lovable and charming sister-in-law. Augustine came to live with us and brought much delight to our midst."

38. Proverbs 31.

39. In 1825, Father de Pierre was promoted to the bishopric of St. Claude; but his attachment to his parishoners made him refuse this dignity.

Chapter VIII

40. Count Molé.

41. Baron Henrion, *Vie et travaux apostoliques de Mgr. Louis-Hyacinthe de Quelen, archevêque de Paris*. 2nd edition, Paris, Adrien Le Clère, 1840.

42. Peter 11:5.

43. Matthew 5:5.

44. Cantic 4:9 (literal translation).

45. *L'Ami de la Religion*.

46. Liturgy.

47. *L'Ami de la Religion*.

Chapter IX

48. Matthew 25:35.

49. Isaiah 61:9.

50. This account is taken from *Consolations* by Father Lefebvre, S.J.

Chapter X

51. Matthew 15:32.

52. *Journal Officiel* of January 27, 1848.-De Tocqueville.

Chapter XI

53. Matthew 16:25.

54. Mgr. Gay, *Vie et Vertus chrétiennes*, Vol. I, The Religious State.

55. I Corinthians 9:22.

56. Psalm 133:1.

57. Isaiah 42:3.

58. Psalm 18:10.

59. Viscount d'Avenel, *Les Evêques et Archevêques de Paris*.

Chapter XII

60. Rev. Father Lescoeur de l'Oratoire, *Une Retraite au Carmel*.

61. Matthew 20:12.

62. *ibid.*

63. Mgr. Gay, *Vie et Vertus chrétiennes*, Vol. III, The Church.

64. Perdreau, *La Mort des Justes*, Vol. II, Paris, Douniol, 1866.

65. *ibid.*

66. Wisdom 3:1.

67. Matthew 5:37.

Chapter XIII

68. Baron Kervyn de Volkaersbeke, *La Lutte de l'Irlande*.

69. *ibid.*

70. This marriage gave birth to one son and one daughter; the latter married the Marquis de Choiseul; she lived and died in France.

71. A very strong tasting English preparation.

72. This holy priest died May 14, 1882, just as he completed the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Chapter XVI

73. Matthew 20:12.

74. Mgr. LaGrange, *Vie de Mgr. Dupanloup*, Vol. I, 2nd Edition, Paris, Poussielgue, 1883.

Chapter XV

75. Psalm 1:3.

Chapter XVI

76. Proverbs 21:28.

Chapter XVII

77. Mgr. Gay, *Vie et Vertus chrétiennes*, Vol. II, Poverty.

Chapter XVIII

78. Daughter of Admiral Montagnies de la Roque.

79. Ad. Perraud, P. de l'Oratoire, *M. L'abbé Frédro*, 1870.

Chapter IXX

80. Sister St. Félicien at the Corps Legislatif; Sisters St. Martial, St. Adèle, St. Eleuthère, St. Philippe, St. Perpétue at the College Stanislas; and Sisters Hermanie, St. Dorothee and St. Grégoire at the Rue Neuve-des-Mathurins.

81. Francis Wey, *Chronique du siège de Paris*, Paris, Hachette, 1871.

82. The Times.

83. Perraud, de l'Oratoire, *Oraison funèbre de Mgr. Darboy*.

84. R.P. Simler, *Vie de l'abbé de Lagarde*, Vol. I, Paris, Le Coffre, 1887.

Chapter XX

85. Thureau-Dangin, *La Renaissance catholique an Angleterre*, 1906.

86. Newman, *The Second Spring*.

87. Cardinal Wiseman, *Lettre aux Evêques de France*, October, 1845.

88. P. Ragey, S.M., *La Crise religieuse en Angleterre*, Paris, Le Coffre, 1896.

Chapter XXI

89. Isaiah 1:2.

90. Acts 10:38.

Chapter XXIII

91. Job 29:15.

92. Matthew 10:16.

93. Philippians 11:8.

Chapter XXIII

- 91. Job 29:15.
- 92. Matthew 10:16.
- 93. Philippians 11:8.

Chapter XXV

94. The cornerstone bears this inscription: "In nomina sanctissima Trinitas et in honorem beata Mariae Virginis. Gulielhum Delany. Episcopo Coxegiencis haec condita est ecclesia. 1879."

- 95. Matthew 26:11.
- 96. Paul Dubois, *Le Correspondent*, June 10, 1906.
- 97. Mgr. Gay, *Vie et vertus chrétiennes*, Vol. II, Poverty.

Chapter XXVI

- 98. Cardinal Gibbons, *The Ambassador of Christ*.

Chapter XXVII

- 99. Cardinal Gibbons, *The Ambassador of Christ*.
- 100. *A Memorial-Very Reverend A.L. Magnien*, St. Mary's Seminary. Baltimore, 1903.

Chapter XXX

- 101. Psalm 122.
- 102. Psalm 46.
- 103. Mgr. Gay, *Vie et Vertus chrétiennes*, Vol. I, The Religious State.
- 104. Matthew 15:23.
- 105. Romans 8:5.
- 106. Ephesians 1:19.
- 107. Venerable Bede.
- 108. II Corinthians 5:14.
- 109. Matthew 25:23.

Chapter XXXI

- 110. Tobias 12:13.
- 111. Hebrews 10:38.
- 112. Mgr. Gerbet, *Esquisse de Rome chrétienne*, Vol. I, Paris, Tolra et Hatton, 1866.
- 113. Psalm 64:2, 84:2.
- 114. Matthew 19:29.
- 115. P. Lescoeur, *Une Retraite au Carmel*, Paris, Oudin, 1883.
- 116. Bishop Chapon of Nice.

Chapter XXXII

- 117. Portales.
- 118. Philippians 4:13.
- 119. Matthew 18:6.

Chapter XXXIII

- 120. John 11:28.
- 121. Saint Teresa-The Way of Perfection.
- 122. Mgr. Gay.

Chapter XXXIV

- 123. Perreyve, *La Journée des Malades*, Paris, Douniol, 1866.
- 124. Psalm 50:7.
- 125. For many long years, Sister St. Euphrasie was in charge of the linen room and, during more than sixty years, got to know the novices who were professed there. She also had the task of dressing the Sisters who died at the Mother House.
- 126. II Timothy 4:7-8.

Chapter XXXV

- 127. John 10:14
- 128. Psalm 41:2.
- 129. Apocalypse 2:10.
- 130. Psalm 15:6.
- 131. Psalm 102:5.
- 132. Apocalypse 14:4.
- 133. Romans 13:10.

Supplement

- 134. Luke 19:10.
- 135. Bishop Dizien of Amiens.
- 136. Psalm 26:13.
- 137. Psalm 35:9.
- 138. Ezekiel 33:2.
- 139. Matthew 12:20.
- 140. St. Augustine.
- 141. Ezekiel 33:11-12
- 142. Luke 2:14
- 143. Isaiah 1:18