

**LIFE OF REVEREND MOTHER
ST. MATHILDE**

**FOUNDRESS OF THE MISSIONS OF ST.
MAUR
IN MALAYA AND JAPAN**

by **Sr. St. Francis de Sales**

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FOREWORD

I think it is well to acknowledge, before I begin my story, the sources from which I have taken these accounts.

1. I spent four or five years in the company of, or in the immediate neighbourhood of, the Foundress of our Missions, Reverend Mother St. Mathilde Raclot, between 1883 and 1901 – and, with the view to one day writing the Memoirs of the pioneer days of our Establishments in the East (Malaya and Japan), many and many a time I prevailed upon her to talk to us about her journeys and undertakings for the service of God.

Without her suspecting my intentions, I also turned the conversation to her childhood, her country, the time of her religious life in France, and then I used to take notes on all that, because I wanted to be as sure as possible of not being mistaken in what I expected should be written one day.

2. During my stay at the Mother-House, from Autumn 1903 until August 1905, having had charge of the Archives, and consequently, having had the facility of studying the documents relating to our Missions, I found there and read attentively all the letters of our first missionary Sisters, which confirmed, in all their details, the memoirs of Mother St. Mathilde recorded in my notes.

Moreover, I found in the Archives, a long account of the beginning of our works in Asia, written from Mother St. Mathilde's own dictation, in November 1883, at the time of my first arrival in Japan.

I got this account from her, despite the resistance of her humility, always a lover of silence, by telling her how much it would please Reverend Mother St. Albert Echelbrenner, Councillor, and afterwards General of the Congregation, who

was so zealous for all that related to the history and the archives of our Institute.

3. Since then, some pupils of the venerated missionary, who are still alive, and some friends, have completed my information about her.

A special mention is due to Monsieur l'Abbe Ligneul, priest of the Foreign Mission Society. In his veneration for the brave religious whom he had seen at work during the last 30 years of his life, he wrote a manuscript of nearly 140 pages, containing his observations and personal memories.

To this material, provided by friends of the venerated Mother, I have added occasionally, information which would make my narrative more accurate and vivid. It remains for me to say that I have written it to fulfil the wish of my past Superiors. May my work fulfil their intentions and animate, if it were only one soul, with the resolution of devoting itself to the salvation of poor pagans "seated in the shadow of death".

May it also be pleasing to our holy Founder, Reverend Father Barré, who from heaven certainly looks with kindness on the works by which the desires of his heart, full of zeal and love for God, are so well realized.

Everything induces me to relate, with as much accuracy as possible, the Foundation of our Missions, that holy undertaking formerly dreamt of by our Venerated Fr Barré and his First Daughters. (In the lifetime of Fr Barré, there had been question of our departure for America, French Antilles – and, later for Siam, afterwards realized in its providential hour, two centuries later.)

When a religious simply and in silence renounces the hopes of this world, when she sacrifices her youth, her affections – in fine, all that she possess – and goes away, a voluntary exile,

under a fiery sun, or towards shores so far away that she will scarcely ever hear a feeble echo of her beloved country, she does not look for an earthly eulogy: she is born for other things.

But in the place of this glory which our predecessors did not wish for, we are allowed to give them modest pious, and well-merited praise.

To the Master, to the Lord Jesus, immolated on the cross to save all people, in order to reserve for them in His Eternal Dwelling the Divine reward of their sacrifices.

Sr. St Francis de Sales

CHAPTER 1

REASONS FOR WRITING THE LIFE OF THE REVEREND MOTHER

“Mother St. Mathilde” said Monsieur L’Abbe Ligneul, in the unpublished account which we owe to him, “during her lifetime was always afraid that noise would be made about her person, her works or even her Congregation.”

“A worthy daughter of Reverend Fr Barré, a Minim and Founder of her Institute, and heiress of his spirit which, is moreover, the characteristic of the religious order to which he belonged, she was eminently one of those who thought that noise did no good, and that good made no noise. “We are only little Minims”, she used to say often, alluding to the origin of her Congregation, that of the Holy Infant Jesus, called “of St. Maur”, which through Fr Barré is connected with the Minims and their founder, St. Francis of Paula.

“If she could have saved the whole world and remained hidden, her desires would have been fulfilled.”

One day when a certain visitor asked to see one of her houses, she apparently hesitated. Then, in reply to the apology of the former, who guessing her reluctance, and fearing he had been indiscreet, she said, “Sir, I believe King Ezechias was severely punished because he showed his treasures to the King of Babylon.”

Moreover, after this consideration, she submitted graciously and showed the visitor the little children she had educated and nourished, but she did it as if she were in a stranger’s house. She was afraid that, in taking away pleasure in the good which had been accomplished, she would compromise the work of God and lose its supernatural recompense. That helps us to understand how she would have welcomed the idea of

relating the story of her life and achievement! But what she would not permit during her lifetime has become possible and even proper now when she has entered into her eternity.

On the one hand, we the exiles of this world, obliged to walk towards the Fatherland, being wounded more than once along the rugged road, can be edified and comforted by the spectacle of the virtues of the brave missionary. On the other hand, no dangers exist for her in the memories which will follow. Neither praise nor blame can henceforth reach her in the repose of a happy eternity and in the glory of the reward which we hope she is enjoying.

May God help us then to relate something of the magnificent career of this faithful religious who, almost a centenarian, lived in this world from 1814 to 1911.

About 66 years of this long life were passed in a Congregation, whose Rule she, by her spirit of penance, made for herself harder, more austere and laborious than it is in its letter.

The 58 years following her religious profession were spent in the Far East in continual and excessive labours.

During the first 27 years which were spent in Malaya, she revived (re-established) the House in Penang and founded those of Singapore and Malacca. Then she went to Japan where she founded the Establishments of Yokohama, Tokyo and Shizuoka.

But, before beginning the story of her apostolic works, let us stop first for some time to admire such a beautiful life from its dawn; we shall find it of great interest and an example for us to follow.

Her Native District

Surianville, where Mother St. Mathilde was born, is a fine town situated on the highest plateau of the Vosges, in the canton

of Bulgneville, district of Neufchateau. It is situated on the borders of the Lorraine, not far from Douremy, not far either from Mattaincourt, and near Coutvexeville, where the source of its famous hot springs was found in a meadow which once belonged to the Raclot family. Joseph, the only brother of Mother St. Mathilde sold this meadow before they discovered the precious spring which might have procured great wealth for the whole family. But, we must believe, God did not wish these material riches for the parents of His future missionary, whose very honourable and old family belonged to the good country middle class. They owned land and houses and the wealth they enjoyed at that time, that is the time following the Revolution, was almost a fortune.

Excellent Christians, the heads of the Raclot family had always given the example of loyalty, courage and honour. The grandfather of Mother St. Mathilde was for a long time the mayor of Surianville. Without too much harm, he saw the bad days of the Revolution pass, and as mayor, he united with the inhabitants and hastened to recall a priest at the earliest possible opportunity.

This good Christian had four sons: Francis, Peter, Anthony and Joseph. Although he was the oldest, Francis was in no hurry to marry: he allowed his brothers, and even the youngest, Joseph, to follow that road before him. The family troubles which afflicted the latter did not serve to encourage his oldest brother to enter prematurely the state of matrimony.

Joseph Raclot's Adventure

Joseph had scarcely built up a home when his young wife died, leaving him with a little boy, to whom, before long, very peculiar things happened. Sometimes, the child uttered piercing cries; sometimes they found that he had fallen from his cradle; or they even discovered traces of blows and of burns on him. In spite of the most exact vigilance, the cause of these strange happenings could not be detected.

A young servant girl of fifteen or sixteen years, declared that the suffering soul of the mother had returned to ask, by this obsession, prayers and Masses to be delivered from purgatory. Grieved at the cries of his poor child, frightened by his wounds and almost disconsolate at the thought of the sufferings of her whom he mourned, Joseph Raclot willingly gave the alms and the necessary offerings for Masses to obtain the repose of the suffering soul, and the prompt deliverance of the deceased. The young servant posed as one inspired from heaven, She led an extraordinary life and she used to live – it was believed – almost without eating.

These events were noised abroad among the neighbours to the great displeasure of the Raclot family. The oldest of the brothers was more displeased than the others and with that firm good sense, that calm right reason, which, one day he would pass on to his daughter (Mother St. Mathilde), he understood that there must be some fraud in the servant's story, under the guise of the supernatural. To discover it, one evening he stole quietly into the kitchen of his brother's house and, hidden in a press where he had taken the care to procure for himself a narrow opening to examine the room: he patiently waited for the so-called ghost.

About midnight, he heard footsteps and saw enter the kitchen, not a soul in pain but the self-styled anchorite, who, soon seated at table, began to make up for her supposed fast by a hearty meal.

The account of this adventure, which Mother St. Mathilde heard in her childhood, contributed much towards filling her with a true horror for all false visions and visionaries. Just as she was piously zealous with the seraphic fervour of the Saints, so did she flee from and detest all that was false, exaggerated or simply extraordinary. She gave numerous proofs of this during her long life, as also of the kind of intuition which made her detect fraud in its least manifestations.

The Marriage of Francis Raclot with the Widow Madame Royer nee Charlotte Lamirelle:

Francis Raclot, as we have just seen, showed himself such a good brother, gifted with courage and a sound judgement, he also fulfilled the duties of a devoted son towards his father, who was already an old man. He often acted as secretary for him in the town hall and registered the official records.

In the course of the year 1812, while he was fulfilling this office, a certain Monsieur Lamirelle came to make the declaration of the death of his son-in-law, Monsieur Royer, to whom he had given his daughter Charlotte in marriage two years previous. Her husband, who died of consumption, left her childless.

While he was writing the record of the death, Francis Raclot said to himself, almost involuntarily: "I have let pass the years in which marriage is usually contracted, (he was a little over forty), a young woman would not suit me, but here is a young widow who, without doubt, offers me all the conditions desirable to become my wife; I must examine this project."

He examined it and so well that a year later, Charlotte Lamirelle, the widow of Royer, became Madame Francis Raclot.

In this family, well provided for, from the point of view of religious convictions and social position, (Charlotte brought a substantial dowry to her husband) – it seemed that the greater part of the qualities of mind and heart belonged, nevertheless, to Monsieur Raclot. Mother St. Mathilde did not hide the fact that she had a marked preference for her excellent father and this predilection was based on the esteem, admiration and love which he had inspired.

Moral Portrait of Monsieur Raclot and of His Mother

Among their most eminent qualities, we must remark their uprightness, their calm, and good sense of judgement: constancy and fortitude of the will; finally a certain patient kindness which tended to assure the success of their enterprises. Many features of this character, steadfast, practical and serious, were found again in Mother St. Mathilde. That is why it is particularly interesting to study it.

Monsieur L'Abbe Ligneul, in his notes, calls it the "Vosgien" character and he asserts that it is hereditary in the families of that region. Be that as it may, it is certain that Francis Raclot's mother, consequently one of the ancestors of Mother St. Mathilde, was an example of the most perfect type of these virtues of another age, as it were. Her patience, piety and wisdom had won her the veneration of all her children whose oracle she was, in every difficult situation. Mother St. Mathilde, who was about fifteen years old when her grandmother died, never spoke of her without revealing the deepest emotion. She told about her virtues, bore witness to her piety, particularly her devotion to the Blessed Virgin, a medal of whose Congregation, dating from the 18th century, she kept and regarded as a kind of precious talisman. It is certain that the Raclots had been preserved from all adversity during the terrible days of the Revolution.

But – if it is permissible to speak thus – what was most remarkable in the life of Madame Raclot was her death, which could be called sacred and which recalls in many ways, the death of St. Bernard's mother.

Indeed Madame Raclot knew that she was going to die and she announced the fact to her children and grandchildren. She had no very definite illness, but simply a progressive weakness by which she knew that the end was near for her. Then she wished to see her family once more and she invited them to a last meal. In the morning, the venerable woman had asked for, and had

received Extreme Unction, after which, at the appointed hour, she asked to be carried to that last meal in the midst of her fine and numerous family. She did not partake of anything, but she spoke to all of them with her habitual kindness. Each one experienced an extraordinary emotion: an indefinable mixture of joy, sadness, peace and anguish. They still had their venerable mother, but they knew that they were about to lose her, since she declared with so much certainty that her last hour in this world had come. At the end of this farewell meal, the holy woman asked to be carried to her bedroom, where she called each of her children and grandchildren to encourage and to bless them. Then she asked that for the night, her husband, Monsieur Raclot, should be removed from her presence for he was then well advanced in years and in bad health, and the painful moments of her death would be too much for him. Then, as she had predicted, at daybreak, she slept in the Lord, with the serenity of the Saints.

When Mother St. Mathilde spoke of this admirable death, she seemed to be still filled with sentiments of sadness, but also with a supernatural consolation, which she and her parents had experienced on that memorable occasion.

The Courage of Monsieur Raclot

Monsieur Francis Raclot, the eldest son of this virtuous woman, evidently inherited in a large measure the fine qualities of his old mother. On more than one occasion, he showed heroic courage: especially in 1815, when the Allies, returning into France after the hundred Days, were animated with sentiments much more hostile, than they had been on the occasion of their first invasion. Surianville was open to the incursions of certain troops of the vanguard who, less well disciplined than the army corps, applied themselves readily to pillage.

On one of these occasions, the little town was invaded by a detachment of Cossacks, who revelled in appropriating everything to themselves. The cellars above all, roused their covetousness

and Monsieur Raclot had heard that the Cossacks had entered the presbytery. Monsieur le Cure, old and infirm, was unable to defend himself and the servant, weak with fear, had fallen on the stairs of the cellar. Heeding only his indignation and his courage, Monsieur Raclot seized an old sword, rushed to the presbytery and ran to the cellar, where he found a crowd of the enemy, fully armed, engaged in bursting open a cask and emptying bottles. Probably these men were already drunk and at the sight of such an intrepid man, believing that they were in the presence of some officers, they fled in disorder. Monsieur Raclot did not stop there: he went and complained them to their commanders who punished them severely.

It was only after the emotion had left him that Monsieur Raclot realized the danger which he ran in exposing himself alone and so badly armed, in an underground place, to the anger of plunderers whose orgy he had interrupted.

To the near as possible perfect, moral portrait of this good man, it must be added that he was extremely charitable and that his door was never closed to the needy. Many were those whom he sheltered, warmed and nourished in his hospitable home – whether they came and knocked at his door, or whether he had met them on the roads, during the severe Vosgien winters, and had brought them back with him in his carriage on his return from fairs and neighbouring markets.

A Few Words on Madame Francis Raclot

Madame Raclot (Charlotte Lamirelle) was intelligent, energetic and a good Christian. But the strength of her character sometimes changed to a certain harshness, God having permitted this to exercise the growing virtue of His future missionary. It must be also admitted that if Monsieur Raclot's preference was for his daughter, Madame Raclot, like many other mothers, had an indisputable predilection for her son (the second child, born after an interval of a year). That explains the sort of difficulty which

was evident in the relations between mother and daughter when the latter had left her infancy.

Birth of Justine

It was a year after the marriage of Francis Raclot and Charlotte Lamirelle that the child of benediction, who was, one day, to be Mother Mathilde, was born. Her entrance into the world took place on 9th February 1814, at nine o'clock in the evening. They consulted the calendar to find out what was the feast of the following day, when the dear little child was to be baptised – the ordo showed that it was the feast of St. Scholastica.

Her Baptism

“My child will never have that name”, said the young mother, immediately. “I wish her to be called Justine”; that was the name of Madame Lamirelle, Madame Raclot's mother. In spite of this family connection and although Mother St. Mathilde faithfully celebrated the feast of her patroness, it is certain that she considered herself especially under the protection of the blessed sister of the illustrious St. Benedict. She admired her great love of God, her lofty contemplation and her heavenly conversation with her brother. She put her in the rank of her special friends in Heaven, whose fervour and generosity in the way of perfection she sought to imitate in a special way.

The newborn child was baptised on 10th February in the Church of Surianville, and was given the names Marie-Justine. She was so frail and delicate that her life was despaired of, but time was to prove that physically and morally, she was typical of her country. That is to say, she belonged to a race, strong and vigorous from every point of view.

Various Members Of Justine's Family

She had three uncles in the Lamirelle family - Etienne, Xavier and Nicholas.

Etienne had two daughters a little older than Justine; the older, Octavie, was later to become a religious of St. Maur and God used her to bring her young cousin to the house of the Congregation at Langres. It was there that the future missionary heard the divine call.

Octavie's younger sister was called Heloise. She was Justine's intimate friend. Uncle Etienne had also two sons - Victor and Achille. He lived at Lamarche, not far from Surianville, and as in the homes of the Raclot uncles, this fine generation of cousins were acquainted with one another, loved one another very much and always understood one another very well.

To finish this picture of patriarchal life, Mother St. Mathilde used to add the charming memory of her two grandfathers and her two grandmothers. We have already made the acquaintance of her ancestors on the paternal side.

As for Monsieur and Madame Lamirelle, they were not less good than the other members of the two families. Moreover, old Monsieur Lamirelle had an ingenuous turn of mind which gave a graphic touch to his conversation. He amused his children and grandchildren but, at the same time, they were never lacking in the respect due to the good grandfather. Being a widower, he used to spend almost all his evenings with his daughter and son-in-law, and he soon initiated their little family circle into all that concerned himself.

Justine had on her conscience the fact that she had played an innocent trick on him. She discovered a way of having free "entrees" in her grandfather's fine dairy. With her tiny finger she used to scoop out "works of art" in the delicious cheese. She was

always afraid of being found out and one evening she heard her grandfather say to his children: "It is strange; there are extraordinary mice in my dairy. They have a grudge against my cheese, but never until now have they made holes. There are holes of all dimensions and of all shapes. And what is more, the mouse-traps remain empty ... it is strange, it is strange!"

Never was the "true mouse" caught in the act although the cousins suspected its name, and in her old age, despite a little regret for her roguish trick and her childish gluttony, Mother St. Mathilde still used to laugh at her old grandfather's astonishment.

Baptiste, the Old Servant

She excelled in making spiritual comparisons between her childhood memories and the religious life. So she loved to recall the memory of their old servant, a certain Baptiste, who was by no means exempt from some striking faults. During the course of the year, at every blunder and mistake of Baptiste, Monsieur and Madame Raclot decided to send him away on the Feast of St. Michael, the customary time for contracts with servants. But, when this Feast had arrived, Baptiste's masters would look at each other and say: "After all, there is some good in him, and who knows whether in changing him, we will not find worse, let us keep him for another year." And thus Baptiste passed his whole life in the service of the Raclot family. Then at the sisters' annual renewal of their holy engagements towards God, (after perpetual vows, this ceremony was only a practice of devotion since the engagements were irrevocable), Mother St. Mathilde, with tears in her eyes, used to say to the community: "Oh, my Sisters, what bad servants of God we are; all full of faults and imperfections ... how many times already should this good Master have sent us away. But He wants to keep us again, like Baptiste!" She would add gaily, "and renew our hiring as they used to prolong his. Let us show Him our gratitude by more fidelity, until the day when we will have the happiness of dying in His service."

Traits of the Early Childhood of Justine

The first years of Justine's life saw the dawn of the preference of Madame Raclot for her son, a sentiment which made her slightly unjust towards her eldest daughter, and not very affectionate towards her. The little girl, however, was a lovely child, very happy, tolerably playful, very intelligent, but she had become afraid of her mother because of the unseasonable and too frequent reproaches which she received. She must have been, as far as we can judge, a pretty little girl, blond and rosy cheeked, as nice as many others. Nevertheless, her mother never missed an opportunity to tell her that she was ugly and to reproach her on that account. Then her little heart, quite sad because of this fault which was not hers and which she could not repair, Justine went to tell her sorrow to her grandmother, the venerable Madame Raclot: "There, my child, console yourself," the latter used to say, "she who has all her limbs is handsome, and thanks be to God, you are not missing any." That was enough to bring a happy smile to the lips of the little girl, who returned with a light heart, to her amusements.

But there was another sorrow: she used to run and jump with so much life that sometimes, a dress, put on for the first time in the morning, would be in rags in the evening. Often, this dress had been made from a piece of material which Madame Raclot had already used. At that time when the fashions did not change with the seasons, mothers could indeed pass on their dresses to their daughters – without however, remembering that the material was not as new as it was the first day.

But Madame Raclot did not understand. "What," said she, in an indignant tone to her daughter, "I wore that dress for so many years and you have found the means to destroy it in a day!" This lecture made Justine profoundly sorry: "But" she remarked smilingly later, "if I had been less simple, I would have understood that it was precisely because my mother had worn the material for

several years that one day of violent exercise was enough to tear it."

Well these reproaches more or less just, contributed to the hardening of the little girl's heart towards her mother, but we can already see in this the design of Providence.

If she had met only with tender affection, praise and admiration, self-love would have prevailed, more especially as – she often assured herself of the fact – this tendency to over estimate herself was what she had to struggle most energetically against until her last day.

Nevertheless, the child found a compensation for her mother's unreasonableness in the affection and preference of her father, in the love of her grandparents and in the sincere friendship of her cousin. It is certain that the wounds of her young heart carried her to seek in God what she did not find elsewhere.

The "Doll" Nuns

A mysterious instinct already directed her towards the religious life, but her tact, which had developed early, made her understand that she must keep her attraction a secret from Madame Raclot, because, Justine knew, she loved her children for herself, and although she was a sincere Christian, she wanted them to be happy according to the world's standards and not in the religious life.

Her daughter was instinctively conscious of such sentiments. That is why, having dressed several dolls of different sizes, as religious, she hid them in the wood-house, behind a heap of faggots, because she was afraid that she had betrayed her thoughts.

Unfortunately, her childish inexperience had not foreseen everything. The day came, when the faggots having been burned,

the crowd of little religious appeared crouched carefully against the wall.

There was great astonishment followed by some emotion. They called Justine more dead than alive. Her mother forced her to admit that she was the owner of this strange battalion. Then fear made her lose courage and she saw only one resource, that of disowning her religious, by affirming that they did not belong to her... a little cowardliness and a lie for which she blamed herself even at an advanced age. Her great fear and the unexpectedness of the questioning can account for the fault.

Her First Studies

When the child had reached her sixth year, her father thought it was time to get her to begin her studies. But as there was no school at Surianville or anyone who could teach her, it was decided that she should go to Lanvielle. Her cousin Heloise, being almost the same age as she accompanied her. Their mistress was a good old lady who taught them – as they said then – “the first elements of grammar,” that is to say, reading. But they had to stop at that for the good teacher knew no more! At the end of a year, the pupils returned to Surianville.

Monsieur Pultier

Fortunately, during her absence, there came to the district, a valuable man – versatile, capable of doing all sorts of things and to whom people entrusted the most varied tasks. Schoolmaster, businessman, sacristan, private secretary and friend of M. le Cure. M. Pultier’s school was composed of two rooms. In one of them the school, properly speaking, all the children of the village assembled. The other, which was at the same time, a classroom, a kitchen and a dining room, accommodated the aristocracy of Surianville and Mlle. Raclot was among them.

To do his work, the good teacher divided himself into two: he was sometimes in one room, sometimes in the other, the door between remaining open. It is necessary to add that the children profited by this primitive organization. For them, “when the cat was away, the mice could play.” (M. L’Abbe Ligneve)

A Playful Trick and Curiosity

This good Monsieur Pultier was – we have already seen – sacristan. One day when he brought home the lovely little case containing the bottles of holy oils, he imprudently left it on his desk. When he had left the room, the child whom we already know to be playful and daring, yielded to the curiosity of the daughter of Eve; opened the case, looked attentively at it and even dared touch it with her fingertip. But scarcely had she satisfied her whim, when she felt great remorse, more especially as her companions loudly complained of the profanation. Not knowing any better than they, what was permitted and what was not, the little inquisitive girl was terrified by her own boldness. At the same time, she was anxious about how she should accuse herself of her great sin in the next Confession which she would make on the occasion of her Confirmation.

Confirmation

She was then seven years of age, her Confirmation having taken place during the summer of 1821.

The desolation occasioned by the Revolution had not yet entirely disappeared: the episcopate reformed its ranks so that the opportunities for receiving Confirmation were rare. Both very young and very old people were called to the Sacrament at the same time, the priests in the different parishes being anxious to administer the Sacrament to those who had been delayed, and not wishing to cause the children to wait too long for the special graces destined to make them perfect Christians. With this intention, M. le Cure of Surianville, asked and obtained the favour

of bringing his parishioners who were not yet confirmed to the principal town of the Canton, Bulgenville, situated about two leagues from Surianville. Mgr. De Forbin Janson, Bishop of Nancy, was expected to administer Confirmation. Those who formed part of this holy pilgrimage included great extremes of age, but the youngest of all turned out to be Justine and her cousin Françoise, daughter of Pierre Raclot.

They knew by heart the four chapters of catechism referring to Confirmation. When Mgr. De Forbin Janson saw these little ones, he turned with surprise to M. Mangin and said that he could well have waited until later for these children. The good Cure modestly replied that he would rather like them to be examined.

Justine having been questioned satisfied all the demands of His Grace with such graciousness, simplicity and intelligence that Mgr. was astonished. He confirmed them, Justine and her cousin, without hesitation.

And how much greater would have been the consolation of the holy Bishop if the veil of the future had been lifted and he had seen this little child to whom he had just given the Holy Spirit with the abundance of his graces, destined by heaven to work for the salvation of millions of pagan children.

Bulgneville church was so small that only those to be confirmed were admitted and it was only at the end of the ceremony that M. Raclot learned from M. le Cure what had happened. The former proud of his dear little daughter and the latter of his young parishioner, they returned home together, M. Raclot carrying the child in his arms. (This fact testifies to her smallness at the time). Then to finish the happy day, M. le Cure asked them to stay with him for a few hours and then to say night prayer with him in the church. While they were waiting however, the two cousins gave clear proof of their age, by helping themselves in the middle of their games, to the ripe gooseberries

in M. le Cure's garden. In relating these childish pranks, M. St. Mathilde regretted not so much her childish gluttony but her age which, she said, prevented her from preparing for her Confirmation as well as she would have wished.

She reproached herself for duplicity while she was at school, a duplicity which won for her the compliments of M. Pultier, but which was for the pupil the cause of great remorse of conscience. This is what happened: M. Pultier had given his older pupils a composition to write. Not very sure of the talents of his First Class pupils, he had taken care to read a model composition for them. During this time, the madcap was doing anything rather than listen, so when the time came to write the exercise, she was greatly perplexed. M. Pultier had gone, leaving as he always did when his various duties called him, an old servant, Mademoiselle Victoire to supervise the two classes.

When Mademoiselle Victoire saw the child's predicament, she showed her M. Pultier's coat which had been left hanging near the desk and added in an undertone that the model composition was in one of the pockets. Justine availed herself of the information, read the model attentively without rousing the suspicion of her companions and returned triumphantly to her place. Her exercise, as one can imagine, left nothing to be desired. M. Pultier declared that he was delighted with it and even added – for he was deeply touched – that such a pupil did him credit and made his work easy. Justine also felt great satisfaction but her pleasure was mixed and superficial and did not last long for she soon became aware of the disloyalty of her conduct. Her upright conscience did not pardon her and once again, she knew that she must accuse herself in Confession. It is to be remarked to her credit that if she did commit little faults, as children do, reflection and repentance came quickly and led her to make reparation. Something else from this period of her life for which M. St. Mathilde reproached herself was the fact that she was led astray by a ridiculous vanity. For example, when she had learned how to sew and embroider, she loved to place herself on

the doorstep or some other conspicuous place when she was doing her needle work; or she would deliberately leave her work in a friend's house – all this was done so that she would be complimented on her skill. But what reparation did she not impose on herself for this childish vanity. In order to expiate it, she did not hesitate to speak of it until the end of her life and above all, to those who had great esteem for her, as if she wished to draw upon herself their contempt ... if that were possible.

M. le Cure of Surianville

With the passing of the years, a weakening of faculties became noticeable in M. le Cure. This dear priest, a good friend of the Raclot family who had, it must not be forgotten, contributed in large measure to restore him to his parish after the troubled days of the Revolution, began in his old age to seek unjust quarrels with his best parishioners even with those to whom he had been most attached, such as M. Raclot and his son. One day, Justine's (paternal) grandfather paying no heed to the presence of the child, said bluntly that M. le Cure had become a "grumbler". The little girl found this new word very amusing and not understanding the meaning too well, repeated it several times in the presence of different people. Then, as always happens in such cases, the idea came to her that she had been wrong. How would she accuse herself of that sin? Her conscience, however, obliged her to confess it and tremblingly she tried to make herself understood. Useless efforts; it was impossible to speak. M. le Cure seeing her difficulty said gently: "Come now, my child, do not be afraid". "Father, I said ..."; "what did you say?" "Father, I said that you were an old grumbler!" "Surely you did not invent that! You must have heard someone say it!" "Yes Father, I heard grandfather Raclot say it". The innocence of a child! Terrible innocence! M. l'abbé Ligneul remarked. Nevertheless, according to M. St. Mathilde, from that time on, M. le Cure seemed to have become more amiable ... at least, for some time.

The child had reached her twelfth year and yet she had not made her First Holy Communion. The custom had long been introduced into the East of France of delaying the time of First Holy Communion for children. Jansenism was still in the surrounding atmosphere and its influence was only too well noticed in many things. This influence applied to other circumstances in M. St. Mathilde's childhood.

Although the time had not been fixed for her First Holy Communion, the child was following the catechism classes in preparation for this great event. One day, M. le Cure called on her and asked her name: "Justine Raclot is my name", she replied. Then he made her sit down without examining her further. This little event was the coup de grace which induced M. Raclot to send his daughter to finish her studies in the boarding school of the Dames of St. Maur at Langres.

M. Raclot's Decision

Her father's decision was a providential happening in M. St. Mathilde's life. More than eighty years afterwards she wrote with emotion and gratitude "Happy grievance which set me on the true path and was the beginning of my happiness!" She marvelled also at the hidden arrangement of Divine Providence which induced her father to choose the boarding school of the Dames de St. Maur at Langres. This Convent had indeed a very good reputation in the district. Founded during the turmoil of the Revolution, it was at that time (1826) enjoying considerable prosperity.

Octavie Lamirelle

Stephen Lamirelle's eldest daughter, who was a little older than Justine, had been gifted with a warm and vivacious nature and was therefore more exposed than others to be a victim to illusions of the heart and to inexperience. To shelter her from such dangers, her father sent her to the boarding school at

Langres. Octavie returned quite another person: she had kept her charming manner and her vivaciousness but she had learnt the meaning of life. Her very ardent heart had been turned towards a supernatural end and after having been the source of happiness to her family for a few years, she became a Religious of the Institute of St. Maur where she died, very young and inflamed with the love of God. Her death was that of an angel anxious to return to her fatherland. She had a beautiful voice which she loved to consecrate to the praises of her Divine Master and it was while she was singing a hymn to the Blessed Sacrament that she was taken up to heaven.

To return to that time when she returned from Langres to Lamarche, the Lamirelle and Raclot families were so satisfied with her that they sent several of their daughters to the same boarding school. "And so", M. St. Mathilde remarked, "God made use of the deficiencies in my cousin Octavie's character to lead me where He wanted me to be ...", "How good He is and how wonderful are His ways!"

CHAPTER 2

MADemoiselle Raclot at St. Maur's and in the World.

Justine's entrance to the boarding school of the Dames of St.Maur:

The new boarder had then been preceded at Langres by her three cousins – Octavie and Heloisie whom we already know and Josephine, daughter of her uncle Nicholas Lamirelle. Consequently, she found herself at home there and that was one of the reasons why her father consented and made the big sacrifice of being separated from her.

Her First Holy Communion:

When the time arrived at the boarding school, the First Communion day had already passed and according to the custom of the times, she had to wait until the following year to be called to the Divine Banquet. On 26th May 1827, she communicated for the first time. She was then thirteen years and three months. If one regrets that this soul particularly dear to the Lord had been called so late to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, one can be consoled by the fact that the ardour of her love for our Divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament must have made up to him for the homage and communions which she could not offer Him in her childhood.

From the very beginning of her sojourn at Langres, a sincere and lively piety developed in the new pupil. Now she listened to her conscience not after but before her actions, and all the seeds of the great virtues which she practised later were noticeable in her. The little act of disobedience of her life in the boarding school which she remembers is too much to the credit of her delicacy of conscience for it not to be quoted.

The Miraculous Virgin

In the boarding school of Langres, there was a statue of the Blessed Virgin which was well known and which was said to be miraculous. The nuns who had been dispersed by the Revolution had confided the holy statue to Madame Liegault at the time of their forced departure, assuring her that it would preserve her from all danger. Not only was this promise confirmed but every year, further development took place in the house. The nuns and pupils profoundly venerated the statue which was sculptured in stone and worth very little from the point of view of art. The pupils who had been reprimanded were sent to reflect before it and very often it seemed to them that the sweet image of Mary was going to speak to them, either to reprimand or to encourage them. They passed it by on the way to the dormitories and the influence of the Celestial Guardian of the house could be seen in the extreme care the boarders took to observe the rules and silence in every part of the boarding school.

One day, Justine had left her alms-bag in the dormitory, (alms-bag formerly took the place of pockets) and she went back to get it. But she had not asked permission to do so and this was against the Rules. Then she remembers ... and how could she dare to pass the Venerated Virgin? Would she not reproach her for being disobedient? Her delicate conscience made her feel quite small and with eyes cast down, she passed by the statue of Mary.

Progress of Piety

So great was the impression made that day that she promised herself that she would never be disobedient again and she kept her word. Delicacy of conscience and energy: the whole life of M. St. Mathilde is already evident in this trait. As well as a lively piety and a great fidelity to grace, the mysterious attraction of the apostolate was developing in the soul of the young boarder.

Foreshadowing of Future Vocation

She had as early as this time, the conviction that she was called to the religious life and to a particular mission which she even knew already, more or less by one of those intimate, mysterious and silent revelations which God deigns to give sometimes. So it was that the pupil leaning over her Geography books used to gaze eagerly at the map of Japan and read there with an interest Superior to that of a simple student the details concerning that distant land because she had at that time, the firm conviction that she would one day go to the ends of the earth and live in that country. In the depths of her soul, she heard a voice repeating to her "There will come a time when you will go there to win souls for God!" That was why in the account written by herself in 1853 of her arrival in Japan, she could say: "I see at last that beloved land, the subject of my childhood's dreams."

One event in Justine's life as a boarder is too remarkable to be passed over in silence because it was an attempt made by the devil to lead her astray by substituting a mirage destined to disappear for the truly solid missionary vocation which he foresaw in her. (The devil does not know the future which depends of man's free will, but, on the slightest indication, he guesses it with intelligence much Superior to ours and he strives to injure us).

There was at that time in the house at Langres a person who, sincerely or otherwise, believed herself to be the object of heavenly communications. Undoubtedly, her case was hard to judge, for the good and wise chaplain M. l'Abbe Lorrain was persuaded that his soul was in direct communication with God. She spoke of a great and holy work which was to be undertaken for the conversion of the infidels: a congregation was to be founded and a mission established in an idolatrous country. That contributed in a special way to secure the sympathy of M. Lorrain for he was very zealous for the conversion of the heretics and the pagans. In the meantime, the future foundress was hiding her plans and sounding the dispositions of the older pupils who

seemed more likely to fulfil her designs. M. Lorrain, on his side, spoke of future hopes to those young souls whom he saw earnest and generous.

So it happened that Justine, on her return from the short summer holidays which she had just spent at Surianville (towards the end of her life in the boarding school), saw herself surrounded by several of her companions who, with an air of great mystery and happiness announced that she had been chosen by the future foundress – (it must be admitted that the latter had at least good taste) – to share in the establishment of the new convent and in the projected departure for the pagan countries. They were going to lead her off in triumph to the young person, the so-called favourite of Heaven, who had deigned to cast her eyes on her to collaborate in her approaching apostolic labours. But Mademoiselle Raclot with the good sense with which she was already gifted was cold and impassable, and clearly seeing through fraud she set little store on the choice which had been made. (Perhaps the adventure of her Uncle Joseph's servant came back profitably to her memory!)

Then when the good M. Lorrain induced her to dispose herself to answer the divine call with which she had been favoured, she appeared not to understand his words. She did not want to hurt the worthy priest by a positive contradiction and preferred to be considered dull-witted. Soon afterwards, when the virtuous chaplain, in whom zeal did not exclude prudence, submitted the case which was preoccupying him to the Archbishop of Besancon, he was advised to give no credence to it. In consequence of this decision, everything returned to normal in the boarding school at Langres.

At that time, only a few months remained before Justine returned for a last time to her parents. She was then sixteen years of age. Probably she would have remained longer in the boarding school if her mother had not noticed the development in her of a profound piety and the behaviour of a future religious. As

Madame Raclot did not approve of that vocation for her daughter, she hoped that by recalling her to Surianville, she would better succeed in diverting her from her projects.

The last months of Justine's life as a boarder were marked by a still more generous practice of virtue. "In that holy house of Langres", Mere St. Mathilde used to say, "the pupils of the first class and the children of Mary were tried like novices. There was no generous effort for good which was not asked of us, and, for our part, we never thought ourselves courageous enough in the practice of virtue". Nevertheless, the communions of these excellent pupils were not frequent, another result of that narrow Jansenistic spirit from which France and especially the eastern provinces had suffered for such a long time. Justine felt it deeply. Her heart longed for the Holy Eucharist and suffered intensely for being deprived of it. Such privations being results of heresy, contrary to the desires of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord and the spirit of the Church, were happily partly compensated for by the habit of strong, virile virtue which they developed in the courageous young girl.

Justine's Dispositions on Leaving the Boarding School

Solidly instructed and exercised in the practice of virtue by her mistresses accustomed to follow the promptings of her delicate conscience, energetic in the austere practice of self-sacrifice, this excellent pupil left Langres well armed for the struggles of life. The voice of the Divine Spouse of souls had been heard; she knew then that she was destined to belong entirely to Him. Furthermore, had she not left school firmly determined to return one day and give herself as a holocaust to her Sovereign Master, by the immolation of the religious life? But this happy honour was to be painfully bought by renouncement and the combats which were in store for her during her last sojourn at Surianville.

Her Sojourn at Surianville

Indeed if she had clear-cut ideas on the subject of her vocation, she was at a loss to know how to carry out her plans. Her childish roguishness had been replaced by a real shyness; she did not dare to share her intimate thoughts even with her father. As for her mother, the antipathy which she had felt for her daughter even from her earliest years had but increased, because Madame Raclot was aware of her daughter's fervent desire and that was another disappointment for her. She showed her feeling by coldness and a lack of indulgence which became more apparent every day.

Different Kinds of Suffering

If only the young girl had been able to have recourse as often as she liked to the Divine Consoler by approaching the Holy Table, but we will see what obstacles raised themselves between the Merciful Host of the Tabernacle and the faithful of all ages. Yes, indeed, admission to the sacraments was not allowed frequently and preparation had to be made a long time beforehand. Furthermore, there was only one Mass at Surianville at ten o'clock on Sundays and feast days, and Holy Communion was never given except during Mass. Mother St. Mathilde used to recall an unhappy feast of the Assumption in 1827, the year of her First Holy Communion, when she was on holidays at home and because of defective organization of the parish services, she was deprived of Holy Communion on such a great feast day. She had been to Confession in the morning and had the very good intention of approaching the Holy Table during Mass. But, the heat was excessive and ten o'clock being a long way off, Justine inadvertently drank a big glass of cool water. When she realised what she had done, she was inconsolable. She shed so many tears that her mother, in spite of her usual lack of indulgence, did not scold her. But the Communion which she had so much longed for, instead of being postponed until the following day, was delayed until the next feast day, a fact which added very much to

the pious child's regrets. And indeed many times the customs of that time prevented her from having recourse to frequent communion which would have been a source of great joy and strength, especially during the last sojourn with her family.

Divine Consolations

But God, in His kindness knew how to answer a soul which looked for Him ardently and sincerely. By other means, He communicated Himself in a very special manner to the soul of His young servant.

At that time, Justine had a very decided and a quite supernatural taste for good reading. She had a very special preference for the lives of the saints. The heroic examples of these friends of God awakened in her a noble emulation and undoubtedly that was one means by which our Lord sanctified her.

Apprenticeship to the Contemplative and Penitential Life

She found an extraordinary and special charm in the lives of the Fathers of the desert: their continual contemplation, the burning ardour of their love for God and their austere penance awakened in her a holy desire to imitate them. And she made the effort secretly. When the fine days had arrived, as soon as she had the permission to go, she used to hide in the woods near her home. She brought with her one of her favourite books: "The Loves of the Hermits". One piece of bread was her only provision. Then usually she rested in a lonely valley, which was watered by a cool, limpid spring. The delightful memory of this charming spot always remained with her. There, seated near this pure spring, very often she became intoxicated with the thought of God and of the plans she was making to serve Him all her life like the Saints. The hours passed swiftly, the day came to an end too quickly. When midday arrived, the young hermit never failed to dip her bread in the stream and prepare her meal as did the solitary hermits of old. Sometimes, she went so far as to add to her frugal

repast, some wild roots or unripe fruit. One day, however, she made herself so sick that she was obliged to give up this practice. Henceforth, she contented herself with dry bread and fresh water and became more fervent in silent contemplation. "What do you think of during all those long hours?" someone asked her on one occasion. "I think of God. I have no other thoughts", she replied.

Happy and innocent child! Once more, the God of glory showed that He was looking for a pure heart to take His abode there in. Every evening, she would return home full of a celestial joy. She had not lost her time because she had a twofold apprenticeship: first of all, that of constant, fervent and heroic prayer which was always her favourite means of winning God's heart and of obtaining from Him the most abundant blessing on her undertakings and on herself. Furthermore, by very real and austere penance, she had accustomed herself gradually to become insensible to fatigue and to be able to undertake the hardest possible work, not only without succumbing but even by living without any ailments for almost a whole century.

Virtues in Her Family Life

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to believe that the young girl lived her life of a hermit always. These delightful days of communion with God and of courageous mortification were, after all, exceptions for her.

She was gay, amiable and rendered a service willingly. Even though she was no longer the roguish Justine of old who used to pillage her grandfather's cheese and monsieur le Cure's gooseberries, she never refused to take part in the family feasts and she got on very well with her numerous cousins. They did not succeed, however, in making her take part in amusements which were too noisy or too worldly. That was why Justine would never consent to dancing, and one day they formed a plot to force her but she cleverly made her escape. She hid in the church and

remained there in prayer while the "danger" lasted. To such a pleasure she preferred an interesting excursion or a pious pilgrimage. It is more than probable that she wanted to go to Domremy (situated a few kilometres north of Surianville) – through veneration of the holy Liberator of France. She loved her so tenderly! Later she was very happy when she heard St. Joan being familiarly called her fellow-countrywoman.

In any case, it is certain that she went on a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Peter Fourrier, "the good father of Mattaincourt", as he is called in Lorraine. Providential assistance, connected with this event, as the following will show, was given to her to help her to follow her vocation.

Being active and charitable, she loved particularly to attend to the poor whom her father used to receive with kindness, giving them food. This was another apprenticeship to her future life. How many times indeed, during her long life has she come to the assistance of poor wretches and dressed their wounds in order to save their souls. It happened one time that one poor man whom her father had sheltered was not only reduced to the most lamentable indigence but was the victim of a wound in the leg which left him incapable of earning a living. Justine wished to dress the sore herself.

Was it skill on her part or special assistance from God? ... At any rate, it is certain that the wound healed with a marvelous rapidity, a fact which surprised everyone and which she herself found it difficult to account for. Naturally, the person most delighted with the cure was the poor workman. Two or three days later, he set out with sprightly step, showering thanks and blessings on his charitable nurse.

CHAPTER 3

VOCATION...NOVITIATE

Justine's Anxiety

So the days passed fruitfully for the young girl: doing good around her and finishing her preparations for the religious life. Her mother's severity counter balanced any self-esteem which might have so easily dominated her heart through complacency in her good works. She was worried about her vocation: how would she ever succeed in following it foreseeing, as she did, her mother's opposition? There is, however, no doubt but that Madame Raclot was a good Christian and on one occasion her daughter was given a striking proof of her sentiments of faith: she came upon her suddenly while she was absorbed in pious reading; her mother was weeping copiously, and, not suspecting that she was being observed, gave full vent to her profound emotion. Puzzled by such sensitiveness which was so contrary to a character by no means demonstrative, Justine unobtrusively took note of the book which her mother was reading. Then when the latter had gone, Justine took up the book which was the cause of her mother's tears. The passage in question was from an 18th century collection of sermons in which was forcefully described the misery of a soul separated from God for all eternity. Madame Raclot had such a lively faith and so great a desire not to be separated from God in the future life that she was unable to read those pages without being completely overwhelmed with emotion. Her daughter was impressed and edified by the fine sentiments of holy fear and love of God of which she had just been given an example. It seems then that this mother who was so attached to her own personal point of view is more to be pitied than to be blamed for her behaviour towards her daughter, particularly at the time of the latter's departure for the Convent. Moreover, are not similar illusions too often to be found in the world? How many parents give in without realising it to human affection and form

plans for the future to make their children remain in the family circle. They also think that they have not exceeded their rights when they oppose the religious vocation of their sons and daughters by showing, in every possible manner, their displeasure, if those children called by God still persist in their holy desires. We must admit that this error may be excused where uprightness of character is concerned; this was the case with Madame Raclot. Having made these remarks, let us take the account of Justine's final struggle in claiming the right of giving herself to God.

She was eighteen years of age and she still kept "in her heart" the precious secret of the Divine Call. A silent reticence, which was another secret of hers, and her shyness kept her from unfolding her plans for the future even to her father. Prayer was her victorious weapon at that time as it was to be later during the course of her life.

Pilgrimage to the Tomb of St. Peter Fourier

The main topic of conversation at this time in the country and in the whole of Lorraine was the important pilgrimage to the tomb of the good Fr. Fourier. Mlle. Raclot having gained the consent of her parents resolved to take part in this pious manifestation and accompanied by other members of her family and acquaintances, journeying sometimes by foot and sometimes by carriage, on the morning of the fixed day, she arrived at Mattaincourt situated about twenty kilometres to the north-east of Surianville.

But no one had foreseen the extraordinary congregation of pilgrims gathered at the tomb of the Saint. The clergy, the people of the country, the hoteliers, all were crowding in and the result was that everyone was extremely tired. The pilgrims could scarcely approach the relics of the "good Father" to kiss them. It was necessary to organize a procession which would only have to cross the church, entering by one door and going out by the other.

They files passed before the Saint's relics and they hurriedly honoured it, each one stopping only for a few seconds. During these moments, too short for the ardour of her devotion, Justine begged more fervently of God through the intercession of the Holy Father Mattaincourt to grant all her cherished intentions and particularly, the realisation of her vocation.

Unsuspected Aid for Confessing her Desires to her Father

As she was following the procession, she noticed farther down the church, Victor Rauivell. The young man saw her from his side and he was suddenly struck by her attitude of piety and innocence for he immediately thought, "I am sure she wishes to become a religious, for I can see she does not dare to ask her parent's permission." Then they lost sight of each other in the crowd, and such was the confusion that reigned everywhere that they could not possibly rejoin, nor even see one another again for the rest of the day.

Sometime afterwards, the pilgrims having returned to Surianville Justine was indeed surprised to see her cousin arrive there and still more, pleasantly surprised to hear him say to her, "Isn't it true that you wish to become a nun but you do not dare to say it to my uncle." And on an affirmative sign from his cousin, at once frightened and happy she replied, "very well, I must inform him for you" and the excellent young man kept his word. That evening, he saw his uncle. He recounted to him the intention for which he had come – the first to speak to her father of her vocation – to help the holy little girl to accomplish her noble plan.

"It was indeed by divine inspiration that my cousin did such an extraordinary thing and rendered me such a signal service", said Mother St. Mathilde while relating this providential occurrence – "and I admire again in this, the goodness of God. Left to myself, I would never have dared to reveal my desires and moreover, on account of my timidity, I would not have plucked up courage to do so until it was too late."

Monsieur Raclot and his wife were not quite ignorant of the secret desires of their daughter, her conduct indicating that she was not meant for the world, but he had been waiting for her to broach the subject, without her cousin's help.

On the following day, he spoke to his daughter – "is it true then, my child, that you wish to enter religion?" 'Yes, dear father'. "Since this is what you desire, follow the path to which God has called you. I have neither the right nor the power to prevent you from doing so, despite pain of separation."

Extreme Difficulties with her Mother

Her good father knew that the most difficult task was to obtain the consent of her poor mother, who was so opposed to this wish. She began by exclaiming that she would never agree, and to be certain of keeping her daughter near her, she said that she would give her neither dowry nor trousseau if she persisted in her resolution. What miserable days were those that followed. At last, summoning that calm courage which she was to demonstrate so often in later life, the aspirant said to her mother – "if you oppose my entering as a Choir Sister, allow me then, dear mother, to enter as a lay sister. I would belong to the same Master and I would be vowed to His service as a servant in His House, very happy at this honour."

This was the trump card. So effective was it that Madame Raclot yielded immediately despite her disappointment in not having prevailed.

The fortune and trousseau were prepared and Justine's departure was fixed for 15th October 1832. The following was the usual procedure in the Institute of St. Maur. She would have to present herself at first in the Langres House and remain there some time as a postulant, before entering the novitiate at the Mother House.

Her Courageous Departure for Langres

15th October always remained a dear memory to Mere St. Mathilde. She was very happy to have taken the first step in the immolation of her religious life on the feast of the great St. Teresa, whom she tenderly loved on account of the admirable fire of divine love which consumed this seraphic soul. Besides, the leaving of her own home was very hard for Mother St. Mathilde as it had been for the saintly reformer of Carmel. With a courage which recalled that of the heroic saint, that of St. Jeanne de Chantal and that of many other religious, obliged to crucify their hearts in order to respond to the appeal of their celestial spouse, she performed a heroic task in leaving her father's roof.

Actually at the moment of parting, she could not find her mother in order to embrace her, either her emotion was too great or her disappointment too strong but Madame Raclot did not wish to see her daughter again at the end. Unfortunately, she did not live long enough to smooth those feelings which without doubt had softened. She died on 10th November 1835. Her end was sudden that she had no time to convey to her daughter the affectionate words which would have effaced the painful memories of separation. As to Monsieur Raclot who accompanied his dear daughter to her convent on the day she left Surianville, he always kept up correspondence with her. Nothing ever altered their mutual affection, not even when Monsieur Raclot remarried, unable to bear the solitude of his home after the departure of his daughter, the death of his wife and the marriage of his son. He lived for some years more and died the death of the just on 2nd July 1844.

Mother St. Mathilde lavished on her step-sister born of the second marriage of her father all the deep sentiments of tenderness which she had had for him. Without having lived together, rarely seeing each other, the two sisters loved one another faithfully all their lives, which is proved by the regular correspondence which was for the younger strength, sweetness

and consolation and for the elder, another means of doing good and of leading a soul to God.

Mother St. Mathilde's only brother, Joseph Raclot, shared none of his mother's displeasure towards her. On the contrary, he always had sentiments of the most respectful affection for his sister and one of his daughters (Mathilde, afterwards called in religion Sr. St. Bernard) came to Singapore and later to Japan. There she died a holy death a little while after Mother St. Mathilde. The manner in which she spoke of her feelings towards the valiant foundress of the Missions of St. Maur proved without doubt that everybody in her native district was proud of her.

The family which the young postulant left under these circumstances she never saw again. About the year 1867, during her first visitation in France and again when she was Superior in Singapore, Mere St. Mathilde made a very short appearance in her native district and this was rather to see her brother about his children's education than for her own satisfaction. Actually it was at this time that two of her little nieces followed her. One died in the flower of her youth before having realised her religious ambitions. The other – Mathilde – mentioned above - joined her later in the Far East. The sacrifice that Justine Raclot made in leaving Langres was therefore completely heroic and irrevocable.

Finding herself in this beloved convent where her Divine Spouse had spoken to her heart seemed to her like going home. She knew where she was going, what she had to do and she was well known there. Her experience of the world, short as it had been, had greatly deceived her. She knew how to conquer herself, thanks to the solidity of her piety and to the practical school to which she had been sent. Thus she threw herself with great generosity into the life stretching before her and resolved to refuse nothing to her Sovereign Master.

At this time, the Superior of Langres was a nun of eminent virtue, Mere St. Bernard Lucy who later became Mistress of

Novices. Very good hearted, she had in her whole person such gravity and dignity that she impressed everyone even her daughters very much. Everyone had the deepest respect for her virtue but secretly this great respect made them fear her a little. The good Superior knew this – she suffered on account of it and brought all her goodwill to bear on loving her subjects. Despite this, it is true that she never entirely gained their confidence.

The new postulant humbled by her low opinion of herself dared even less than the others, to be frank. She had a sort of reverent fear of her whose religious goodness she nevertheless knew and whom she filially loved. She lived a hidden life, occupying herself only with her work. According to her testimony, the senior pupils at Langres were treated, in the exercise of virtue, like novices; one could say that postulants had to possess an abnegation almost as great as that which the nuns experienced in the sacrifice of their holy state.

She had been advised to finish her studies during the few months she had to pass at Langres but she also had to help the Mistresses in the different classes at different works. Before long everybody knew her willingness to oblige, her untiring devotion so that she was made use of incessantly. And the lovable postulant worked thus, replacing others when there was need of it so that her days flew in rendering service for everybody and in occupying herself too little with her own studies.

After some time she was informed that her departure for Paris was near at hand. Full of joy at this prospect she wrote to her father about it as if it was already arranged, then she took her letter to Mere St. Bernard Lucy. She found in this an occasion for trying the virtue of her postulant and said to her in a calm and solemn tone which was characteristic of her “but, Sister dear, here is something which great surprises me. You have told your father about your departure for Paris – we must know before-hand at what stage your studies are – please get me your exercise books. I will see for myself with what zeal you have worked.”

More dead than alive Sister Raclot did what she was told but she knew well how her exercises were, occupied as she was from morning to night in serving everybody and believing herself thus to be fulfilling her duty of charity as well as obeying the intentions of her Superior.

With her head down and without thinking of excusing herself the poor postulant presented her work to Mere St. Bernard. Alas, scarcely was the first page of each exercise filled . . . and Mere St. Bernard made the trial worse “very well, very well, my dear child, you will not go yet.” In a few years we shall see.”

Justine weeping over her lost hopes had not the courage to go back to her room. On the staircase in front of a window her tears fell copiously while she meditated anxiously on those terrible words “in a few years”. Who knew how many? Ten years perhaps!

Being in such pain and perplexity it came to pass that the venerable Mere Liegault the ex-Superior-General, foundress of the House at Langres where she had recently made her retreat, her great age not allowing her to carry the heavy burden of Generalship, came upon the postulant. With all the simple familiarity that her advanced years and her special knowledge of the postulant allowed she said “what is wrong, my child?” and on hearing what had happened she said to her “oh, do not be so sorrowful. Mere St. Bernard only said that to try you. The Sister who was to replace you has fallen ill – she will not come till later on. But be patient – you will go after a little while.”

The smile came back to the face of the afflicted postulant on hearing this maternal explanation given by the venerable Mere Liegault.

She is sent to Paris

A little later she left indeed full of joy and generosity for the regular Noviciate of the Maison-Mere. She entered there on 5th September 1833.

Noviciate – Mistress of Novices and Companions

M. St. Mathilde never spoke much about what concerned her in the Noviciate. She preferred to recall the memory of the Mistress of Novices, M. St. Philippe de Vaquine whom she deeply respected and of her companions, some of whom were particularly dear to her. One of the latter, who was some months younger than M. St. Mathilde and who had been received a few months before her, was remarkably gifted. God destined her, like M. St. Mathilde for a very long life, serving the institute of St. Maur with exceptional talent and fidelity. Her name was Emile Millet, as Sr. St. Aloysia she succeeded Reverend Mother de Faudoas forty years later as Superior General and held this office for twenty-four years. Within a few months of each other Mother St. Aloysia and Mother St. Mathilde received the recompense for their long life of devotedness in the service of God and of their Congregation.

Mere St. Philippe who had both the character and the make-up of the ancient religious of St. Maur preceding the Revolution also possessed their inheritance of requisite politeness, perhaps a little old-fashioned but full of attention and delicacy. She contributed not a little by her example to teach her novices to wear the religious habit given by Fr. Barre to his daughters, with grace and respect and a true dignity reminiscent of the original members; those of the days of Louis XIV from which time it dates. It was the costume of the noble widows of Versailles.

That is only the exterior side of the teaching which the virtuous Mistress of Novices gave to her children. She was especially remarkable for a strong spirit of faith and a deep

knowledge of prayer – source of a constant union of God. Nothing could better gain her the respect and confidence of her latest postulant, as for the rest neither her gravity of manner nor her habitual recollection interfered with her happy and frank gaiety at recreation time.

Octavie Lamirelle, who became Sr. St. Xavier, was not sent on province after her reception on account of her exuberant spirits – she had a great understanding of a novice of her own time Sr. St. Dominic (Louise Ford) a young English girl, formerly a maid of Honour to the Duchess of Angouleme. Her origin sayings and good humour won her the love of her young companions. Mother St. Mathilde loved to recount incidents recalling this pleasant friendship because she too was a happy character, always animated by a tranquil joy which flowed from the innocence of her heart, her generosity in the accomplishment of her duties. This is why she used to embellish her conversations with their charming and amusing accounts thus rendering the community recreation agreeable. In preserving this joy around her, she again acted according to duty because she knew that God is served most faithfully when the heart is recreated by clean and lawful joy.

Thus, with regard to Sr. St. Dominic, Mother St. Mathilde recounts the following Noviciate incident: It seems that Mlle. Ford, on one of the very first days of her postulancy found the morning repast very lean. Without doubt it did not resemble that of a Maid of Honour to the Duchess of Angouleme! But, without being too pretentious, the new postulant presumed permission to buy some chocolate, so ignorant was she of religious discipline. She went off without saying a word to anybody and the following morning, instead of finding in her place what she had bought, she had only the common fare and she was informed that her menus could not be according to her own choice, but just like those of the others. She heard this little lesson in silence and with a serene face and after a while left the refectory with a light step. Someone, curious to know where she was going followed her. Straight up to Chapel she went, there genuflecting on the threshold, facing the Altar and

thinking she was alone, she said out loud, quite frankly with her arms stretched towards the tabernacle “Well, then, my God, you will have to be my sugar and my chocolate.”

Reception

Hours of prayer, hours of study and religious gaiety made the time in the Novitiate pass quickly and soon came that hour when, leaving the name and habit of the world, the generous postulant from Lorraine donned the religious habit, taking the name of Sr. St. Mathilde on 2nd February, 1839. What of the spirit of the world? It is certain that the new novice, having had a little of it beforehand, bade it a hearty farewell on that day.

Her Perfect Generosity

Nothing in particular singled out her Novitiate year, which she made without being sent in Province. The aid which she had formerly given at the House at Langres took the place of the experience to which Novices are usually submitted, in order to exercise them in teaching before their Profession. Mother St. Mathilde at the time of her religious formation was already one of those finely tempered souls, who accomplished their duties in silence and walk with an even step through all their days. In spite of the absence of special information about this period of her life, one could doubtlessly guess that her generosity was great and perfect, for experience teaches that the foundation of the religious life is laid during the Novitiate. If then the life of this faithful servant of God was admirable from every point of view, it is undeniable that she was an unusually fervent novice having prepared herself moreover for this by the virtues she had practised in the world. “She knew to whom she would give herself on her profession day. For a long time He alone had ravished her heart. She knew Him as an infinitely holy Master – good and just and thus she had recourse to Him in all the trials of her soul. She longed and desired to suffer and work for Him. It was for that she had given herself. She also knew that He would count her pains and efforts

to please Him. Absolutely sure of Him, of His promise and His heart, her sacrifice was thus made sweet. Finally understanding that her happiness depended on herself, she was assured of it in the measure of her fidelity.”

Her Profession – 19th March 1835

Without any doubt whatever those were the sentiments of Sr. St. Mathilde on the day of her profession. (She had only 1 companion – Sr. St. Charles who died a holy death at Nimes in 1893 after having passed her whole religious life of fifty-eight years there.)

If the witnesses of the distant date have disappeared, she who writes these lines has seen Mother St. Mathilde’s tears flow on the fiftieth Anniversary of her profession. And the sentiments which made her rejoice at that moment are echoes of those which animated her at the dawn of her religious life. Her happiness was so deep on 19th March 1835, that she feared she would be incapable of pronouncing the formula of the renewal of her vows. Thus she was happy because she was faithful to Him Whom she had given herself without compromise. She would have wished to recommence a thousand times and make a thousand times more perfect and entire that offering which, long ago, she had made to Him of herself.

This was the substance of the answer she made to the Rev. Fr. Midon, (the Chaplain of Yokohama, who later died as Bishop of Osaka, in central Japan). In order to have the pleasure of hearing one of the fervent sayings of the venerable nun, he asked her if she “regretted” having consecrated herself to God fifty years ago. “Ah!” She replied with animation, “my former joy is multiplied a hundred-fold, having experienced the goodness of God. Not with one heart, but with thousands of hearts would I wish to renew my consecration to Him, of all that I am and have.”

It matters little then, that nothing has been written of what the young nun felt on 19th March 1835, or what were the fervour of her soul and the generosity of her sacrifice. Her life has spoken for her and has revealed to her last breath, that she gave herself completely to her vocation. Vowed to God, she was thoroughly so and she always showed this by her “holy habit”, the dignity of her person, her fidelity to the Rules of her Order and her complete devotion, at the same time both humble and great, to the Master Whom she had chosen.

CHAPTER 4

APOSTOLATE IN FRANCE

First Obedience In Bagnols

Immediately after her profession Sr. St. Mathilde was sent to Bagnols which had been founded at the height of the revolution by Srs. Manole and Faudet. The former came from Bagnols itself. When the young professed received this obedience by Mere Bichot – born at Lyons in 1783, she retained the memories of this terrible epoch. Sr. Faudet lived also at this time and her memory was full of the terrible scenes of this same period. Sr. St. Mathilde herself heard accounts of it from these venerable Sisters. She too recounted them in her old age.

She also spoke, as if she had seen it herself or had been told it in a very vivid manner, of the Sister who was a “victim” and of whom there is mention in the history of St. Maur. She was an old nun in another congregation, charitably sheltered for a few years by Meres Marron and Faudet and when the reign of terror had passed, she offered herself as a victim to God to appease His anger. Her sacrifice was seemingly agreeable. She suffered from an obsession which manifested itself often at Communion-time.

Besides these strange and venerable sufferings, Sr. St. Mathilde also saw at Bagnols a new “visionary”, who had fantastic fits of devotion and for whom she felt perfect contempt. A servant in the house claimed to hear extraordinary voices. She pretended to have received Holy Communion from the hands of Angels, but as her conduct did not conform with such high fervour, she was closely watched, and it was discovered that the Hosts which were suddenly found on her lips, by some clever trick, far from bearing the imprint of Paradise, bore a faulty mark which was traced to a newly- founded Carmelite Convent. The deceiver unaware of this particular mark, was constrained on being discovered, to avow her deceit, and to seek dupes elsewhere.

On arriving at Bagnols, Sr. St. Mathilde for the first time came in contact with the people of the South of France, so different from those she had hitherto known. This did not prevent her from being sincerely attached to the pupils, whom she taught to utilize their talents and combat their faults. On the whole, at first their Mediterranean exuberance caused her some surprise, and she good-humouredly told of the fear she experienced, on the first manifestation of these high spirits. She was accompanying her pupils to High Mass on the Sunday following her arrival. The place assigned in the Church to her little group was a pew opposite the pulpit and she did not notice that there was a second pew just behind the first – chiefly the resort of late arrivals. That did not show very ardent devotion on their part, and moreover a thing which the Cure would not have liked very much, it seemed that these parishioners in the second tribune played cards instead of listening to the sermon.

Sr. St. Mathilde was quite unaware of all this and she only noticed with alarm that the Cure in the pulpit often threw threatening glances and gestures towards her pupils and herself. The young Mistress grew pale, then flushed and looked around in vain to see which of her charges could thus provoke the displeasure of the preacher. But what did she feel, when he could no longer contain his just indignation against the disrespectful players, and uttered in an involuntary exclamation towards the second pew, "Villains – rogues." This word "rogues" seemed to re-echo in the ears of Sr. St. Mathilde, when she recalled in an amusing manner, the attitude and energy, with which the Cure had accompanied his malediction. She said that if she could have disappeared underground that minute, she would certainly have done so. Thus she heard the rest of Mass in violent anxiety.

Happily on her return to the convent, all was explained, and the adventure concluded by entertaining the Community. Doubtless the players deserved blame and the exclamation of the good Cure was not altogether unjust, as regards respect for the

Holy place; all was less serious than one would think at first sight, and one could laugh at it as did Sr. St. Mathilde.

Poverty, Detachment, Mortification

She kept happy memories of the House at Bagnols and of Mother Bichot, but in this Community, she was not spoiled, from the view of natural comfort and certain spiritual aids. There, she had to go to God simply, courageously and without the support of "spiritual direction."

Mother Bichot, formed in the hard school of the revolution and the persecution of the preceding century, was a finely-tempered soul, but one whom, by the very force of circumstances, disapproved of finding God except by one's own unaided effort. Thus she little understood the need of many exterior helps to go to Him. These were very rare in the Community of Bagnols, and for the annual Retreat, their usual Retreat-Master was "Fr. Silence."

This did not greatly upset Sr. St. Mathilde. Since those wonderful solitary evenings spent in the woods and by the pure stream of Surianville, she had learnt to converse alone with God. But, at Bagnols, she underwent another kind of apprenticeship. There she had no great forests full of light and shade, there no sound of birds singing, no springtime scents. Gone was the dear stream. In a word, there were none of those beauties of nature which scarcely seem to veil their Divine Author. No, though at Bagnols, the sky was blue and the sun enchanting, the retreatants did not perform the Spiritual Exercises by contemplating them.

Shortly before her death, Mother St. Mathilde, speaking of Bagnols, left us the following details. They refer to the time when she lived there, since then the necessary improvements have been carried out. The Convent was well situated but not very big. Moreover, it was not very satisfactorily managed. The same room served as a Chapel in the morning, and the rest of the day, either a refectory or a parlour. This room could hardly fit six Sisters

together, and in order to leave room for others at the time of the Annual retreat, the youngest in the Community, Sr. St. Mathilde and Sr. St. Julie used to remain in their own bedroom. In order to be more alone, they used to go up to the attic – it was always a little nearer Heaven! – and there sitting on logs, they used to continue at leisure their pious prayers.

Thus, by an altogether providential guidance, Sr. St. Mathilde grew in virtue, solid virtue, which was one of the most salient features of her sanctity. Certainly she found God in all things, in consolation if He bestowed it on her through the splendour of the skies; in the raging tempest or the perfume of a flower. As a passing comment, how touching it was to see her weep from love of God or at the colour of a rose or the majestic and terrible force of a Japanese typhoon. But she also found Him in disagreeable things and in every sort of mortification. She knew how to converse with Him just as well facing a wall as under the stars, in the soft air of a spring day as burnt mercilessly by the tropical sun. By her heroic mortification, she became a vigorous person as insensible to cold as to heat, an unbreakable soul by her fidelity to duty. Virtue for her did not depend on circumstances. Always indifferent to herself, she was occupied with one thing – the Will of God.

Zeal In The Accomplishment Of Duty

Sr. St. Mathilde's superior could not overlook her generosity, already so striking in each duty of her holy state, no more than her natural qualities with which she was endowed. From the first days of contact with her pupils, she had the upper-hand – authority springing from the profound respect with which she inspired them and from her calm and disciplined character. Moreover, she was kind to the children confided to her – a kindness neither soft nor sentimental but born of the supernatural affection she bore each one of them. She was very intelligent and industrious, also very observant, with a certain intuition which made her capable of grasping the right means to gain her end.

She was zealous and conscientious to the extreme, for the intellectual and moral advancement of those whose education was confided to her. Already at Bagnols, she showed herself to be the perfect mistress who later was to leave at Cette, indelible memories in the hearts of all her pupils.

Beziers

These virtues and qualities were precisely what led to her first change. The establishment at Beziers passed, however, through a little intimate crisis which happens everywhere when there are human wills to discipline and guide.

First Years' Revolt

The pupils of the first year in this house were rather rebellious. No one quite knew the reason. It is certain, however, that their lively and exuberant natures were given free rein for many months and that no new Mistress had come to control them. They themselves finding the power of their bad habit of disobedience declared in imaginative language: "to conquer us and make us return to order would need an angel or a demon." It was an angel and what was more – a saint, who was sent to them. When Sr. St. Mathilde found herself face to face with these strong youngsters who stared at her brazenly, her heart would certainly have trembled if it had not been so fixed in God. Throwing herself with all the impulse of her soul into the arms of her Omnipotent protector, she armed herself exteriorly with impressive and cold dignity awaiting events.

How Sr. St. Mathilde Triumphed

After the first few days the pupils thought they knew their new Mistress sufficiently well to play a few tricks. They thought of causing distraction, which was not their first time – thanks to their former bad behaviour. At a given signal, one of them got up and asked permission to leave the class. Two minutes afterwards,

another freed herself by the same means, then a third and finally the whole class disappeared. Silently, coldly, Sr. St. Mathilde gave the required permissions. When the last of her rebels had departed she went out herself. Guided by some clue she traced them. By a dark staircase they all arrived in a room which was plunged in complete darkness. Sr. St. Mathilde slipped in with the last arrivals unnoticed. On the contrary, they laughed and congratulated themselves on the fine trick so easily played. They resolved to begin idling again since the new Mistress was so gullible, and all the while they handed round in the dark a feast which was the reason for their present escapade. Sr. St. Mathilde suddenly lit a torch which she had brought and showed herself, severe, in the middle of her amazed pupils. She ordered them in a tone which did not admit reply to return to their classroom. Arrived there, what did she say to them? She has kept it secret, but she knew so well how to humble them and make them understand their wrong ways that they returned to duty once and for all. Some time elapsed before the "angel" succeeded in subduing them by that lively and sincere piety which she knew how to radiate around her and there were no more allusions made to former bad days. If occasionally, a bold trend re-appeared in one of the children, it was only in a prank without malice which Sr. St. Mathilde had the wisdom to treat with indulgence. How well she knew how to see the pleasant side of things!

Departure For Cette

Thus when she later received news of her change (the purpose for which she had been sent to Beziers having been realised, she was needed for the first Class in Cette) she was able to reply in a very amusing way to one question posed by the father of one of her pupils. Naturally, everyone was very sorry after her at Beziers, where, in a short time, she had achieved a happy influence over all who approached her. The parents of the young girls whom she had reformed were not slow to express their sorrow at her departure. "At least, Madame", the father of

one of these said "I hope that, in going to Cette, you will remain the same?"

"Ah, yes. Monsieur" she replied gaily, "exactly the same!"

See then the generous Sister arrive in Cette, this was her last appointment in France before her great venture for the Eastern Missions. During the ten years of her sojourn in this Community, we see an increase in all her virtues, and God putting the finishing touches to this heroic soul for the immense work for which He had destined her.

If, up to this, Sr. St. Mathilde was very faithful in her co-operation with this supernatural work, she was even more so, it seems in the ensuing years. Thus we are called upon to help paint this beautiful picture, before following the courageous missionary to pagan lands which will abundantly enjoy the fruits of exceptional graces poured on her soul.

Two Superiors

At Cette Sr. St. Mathilde had two Superiors. Outside the sentiments with which a nun like her would be animated towards those who represented Divine Authority to her, she loved them sincerely and was equally esteemed and loved by them. The rest of her new Community had a like affection for her. The first of these Superiors was Mother St. Ponce. The Foundress of the Mission never spoke of her without affectionate emotion and it was evident that a close reciprocal sympathy united them. It was also easy to see that the good Superior had relied with full confidence on her dear daughter. She could not have chosen better help for the frequent occasions when bad health required assistance. The tact and charity with which the Mistress of the first Class showed towards her Sisters enabled her to play this role to the satisfaction of all. At the same time she wielded considerable influence over her Sisters and the pupils. This was the result of the veneration which she inspired in both the one and the other.

When Mother St. Leonce died in 1846 to the great sorrow of the Community and of Sr. St. Mathilde in particular – she was succeeded by Mother St. Bernard who carried out equally well her task of Superior, but perhaps with a heavier hand, or if one could say it, a less indulgent one than that of her regretted precedent. However, between the new Superior and the 1st Class Mistress, there always existed the same confidence and esteem. How could it be otherwise when both Mother and daughter had a deeply religious spirit? From her arrival there Sr. St. Mathilde occupied the principal charge in the Convent, which she held until she was called to Paris by Mother de Faudoas at the end of September 1852.

She was helped with the first class at first by a companion endowed with fine qualities, also called Sr. St. Bernard, but the latter was so inflexible, so strict in disciplining the pupils that Sr. St. Mathilde's kind heart was pained and she often had to console and encourage the children, kept in a sort of terror by the heavy constraint imposed on them.

After this severe assistant, Sr. St. Mathilde got another who was exactly the opposite to the first – full of good indulgence and confidence, an excellent and virtuous Sister – Sr. St. Regis – who died many years ago. Many edifying details have been given about her in this chapter and the following one. Imitating the future Missionary, Sr. St. Regis had a strong affection for all the religious virtues. However, she had not learnt from her the art of controlling children. In speaking of Sr. St. Regis for whom Sr. St. Mathilde retained a sincere affection, she recalled that the first class so restricted by Sr. St. Bernard was on the contrary almost in revolution when the kind Sr. St. Regis had left them. So much so that between one thing and another she confessed that she had suffered much in her work at Cette.

First of all she had to encourage her pupils, afterwards she had to repress them and at the same time console Sr. St. Regis who could not understand that her exercise of kindness was the

sole cause of the trouble, and she was distressed that she accomplished nothing despite her knowledge and goodwill. During this time the devoted First Mistress continued to do everything for everyone and accepted in peace and without complaint the contradictions invariably attached to good works.

Salutary Influence On The Entire Community

Sr. St. Mathilde was not content with gaining hearts by her goodness and patience, she also knew how to influence them and lead them in the path of virtue. She had certainly received from Heaven a particular gift for this. Without the least affection or exaggeration her conversation was almost always about God and on the happiness of serving Him well and loving Him with all one's heart. In her mouth such words were quite natural and simple. They came so clearly from the abundance of the wonderful sentiments of her heart that nobody could resist her or find this manner of conversation repulsive. She had also much gaiety and amiability. With her, one was always in a completely supernatural atmosphere. Her holy methods re-activated fervour for most of the Feasts of the year. She prepared (with the full approbation of her Superior) little leaflets where either Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin or the Saints were supposed to speak to the soul and request such and such a sacrifice. Sometimes it was a few verses from the Gospel or from a pious book seeming to be expressly chosen to console, encourage and stimulate. There were as many leaflets as there were Sisters in the Community. The Superior handed them around during recreation, and each Sister drew from them the courage of the holy words. They believed that it was sent from Heaven to guide them in the path of perfection.

These words were heavenly no doubt. They were not only full of the fire of divine charity which burnt more brightly each day in the soul of the faithful religious. Sr. St. Mathilde did not lose her former preference for good books and we will see her all her life piously zealous to nourish her soul with the strong, clean doctrine of ascetic authors. For her it was a means of seeking her beloved.

It resulted in her being remarkably informed on everything concerned with the life and virtues of a religious. Her natural and developed talents, which did not mature till later life, show themselves during her sojourn at Cette. There we see the good influence she exercised on the Community. Everyone both cherished and venerated her. Happy indeed were her Sisters to have such a saint and such an amiable companion in their midst. In her dealings with the children, she had that courage and constancy of which she had given proof in the two previous houses. It was also evident that she had made a resolution never to lose a minute, and one could easily prove that she kept her promise till the end of her life.

Ardour To Perfect Herself In All Things

Many chances thus came her way in her everyday life of perfecting herself. Not content with the science of the Saints to augment the treasure of her spiritual reading, with great foresight and a lively intelligence she never neglected a chance of acquiring knowledge which might one time or another be of use to her.

It is thus, that later on we see her equal to everything and apt for every work, whether it be success in a building plan, in delicate and rich embroidery or in the making of charming artificial flowers for the Chapel Altar.

It happened one day in Japan that she had to show some workers, charged with building their first Convent in that country, how to make good mortar. (Though very clever householders and carpenters, the Japanese did not know at this time how to mix lime and brick in the European way. In fact, they knew nothing whatever of it for their houses and even their palaces were made of wood). But where did Mother St. Mathilde gain her knowledge of masonry? At Cette, where very important building was being done during her sojourn there.

Thus we see that if Our Lord was very generous in the natural gifts imparted to this faithful lover of His glory, she on her part did not waste any of the talents of which she would have to render an account one day.

As well as embroidery, she had also learnt art, more by her own work and observation than by lessons. She had an artistic taste most remarkable in this child of a Lorraine village. She knew how to produce beautiful handwork of every kind which was very useful to her in later years. Already at Cette, she made use for the service of the Altar, of her talent as florist. She was adroit and she showed so much taste in arranging them that an amusing adventure resulted.

Anecdote

In order to facilitate a prompt execution of this kind which was urgently needed, her Superior summoned one day a professional florist and his wife to help the young Mistress in her work. Astonished at the dexterity of her fingers, the florist and his wife, not realizing that Religious are not interested in material gain, offered her a brilliant position in their firm. She, without embarrassing them on their gross error, smiled without replying. This made them redouble their insistence to gain her consent. But, to reprove them for the indelicacy of their procedure, not to speak of its foolishness, she allowed them to continue in this tone for some time. Then, seizing the moment when the Superior had come to pay the florist for their work, she threw her a knowing look while saying: "See, Ma Mère, what advantageous positions Monsieur and Madame have made to me (she enumerated them). Do you think I could accept?" It was a case of the "fox that a hen had caught." They were more than glad to have concluded the day while they received a good and meritorious lesson on the value of voluntary spiritual work.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

Eminent Virtues Of Sr. St. Mathilde

As regards the exceptional influence exercised by Sr. St. Mathilde on her pupils for whom, as we have already seen, she constantly perfected herself in virtues and talent, no testimony would be more eloquent than that of two of the lady-boarders at Cette.

Testimony Of Her Past Pupils

These testimonies written shortly after her death are much more remarkable than the memoirs written more than sixty years later. What then must their depth and force have been, when they appeared fresh and vivid after so many years? Here are these interesting documents:

The first (which is attributed to one of her pupils who entered the Sisters of St. Maur as Sr. St. Nicephor) was written by this pupil of Sr. St. Mathilde aged seventeen years when she left the Pensionnat of Cette: "This excellent Mistress was regarded and venerated as a saint. We all loved her with respectful affection. Two things in particular struck us. We never saw in her the least sign of preference for any of us and we noticed that she was always the same. She was never moody – in fact, she was always what she should be. She never laughed loudly or raised her voice. A glance accompanied by an expressive word sufficed to control us. I never saw her sitting down in chapel except for office or a sermon. One could even say that she didn't stir, for one day kneeling down during meditation, she saw a mouse climbing up her dress and going in to her pocket, without making a movement to stop him, she contented herself by pinning her pocket to keep it closed and after Mass she asked permission to go out and liberate her prisoner which made everyone laugh.

She made us share, at recreation time, the effusions of divine love that she felt, in pronouncing certain words of the Office because she spoke joyously of God and with great simplicity. We knew also that she was so zealous that she would rise every night to visit the dormitories. One of us, who slept very lightly, discovered this easily.

Her nourishment was very scanty. At mid-day she had an average-sized meal. In the morning she took little coffee or tea (a gastric ailment from which she suffered for a long time was the pretext for this denial). In the evening she contented herself with a simple collation. This happened throughout the year but her Lent was far more severe. She fasted from Ash Wednesday to Easter. For the most of the time she lived on morsels of bread and two glasses of water, no more no less."

Here is a longer account which reveals to advantage the edifying points already shown in the first. (It was written by Sr. St. Valerie Asprol, a Sister of St. Maur). "I regret that such a long time lies between me and those happy days about ten years ago when I had the privilege of living under the watchful care and influence of Madame St. Mathilde at Cette. Many circumstances and incidents have escaped my memory over the years, but as regards the impression of sanctity Madame St. Mathilde left on my mind, that remains constant. In thinking of her, it is like thinking of a saint, and now the remembrance of her takes me spontaneously to Heaven, where I invoke her with confidence. On this earth she was so good, so devoted, without doing anything extraordinary, everything she did was sanctified.

At this time, the nuns – her companions – went to Holy Communion four times a week. I saw her communicate every day and how full of the Presence of God she was. Not only was she pious and recollected in Chapel, she was so everywhere. When she said the prayer before Mass, how edifying she was. Often she included little reflections, to increase still more in us the love of the good God, for whose good pleasure we did all our actions. Even

in the course of the hour, she recollected herself to make an act of faith or love etc. If we were working on a page of manuscript or on embroidery, when she made her tour around the class, her reproach was always the same when she found some cause for it – “Is it possible, my child, that you are not doing this to please the good God?”

What shall we say of the way she taught Catechism! She made even the most indifferent pupils interested and for us all the three o'clock to four o'clock class was always most entertaining. After it she took us for a little visit to the Chapel. Before leaving the classroom for this visit, she filled our minds with the good thoughts of – what we were about to do, to say, to offer, to this good Jesus Who longed and waited for us, to bless and encourage us.

At recreation she had charming conversation and irresistible gaiety telling us the funniest stories, or amusing us with diverting games and even though we were young, we well knew that it was the love of duty alone that gave her so much condescension.

I have never seen her when seated leaning against the back of the chair in class or in the refectory, less still in Chapel – when almost a centenarian she was still faithful to this practice. Her heroic and constant mortification did not escape us. Among other things, we noticed that at table she took everything that was given to her and never asked for anything, even for water. It has happened that during the summer if we forgot to pass it to her she took her meal without drinking.

Here is an account of something that I witnessed myself. One day she called me up to her room during recreation time and asked me to dictate to her a page of a French Dictionary that she was gradually translating into English. It was shortly before her departure for Malaya. (We shall see later on, how she sacrificed her study of English). We were seated at her prie-dieu, the under-

side of which when opened and propped up served as a desk. We both had our feet up on the kneeler of the prie-dieu. I unconsciously put my feet up on hers, and like all active children I trampled them incessantly for at least half an hour without realising it. She never made the least movement to prevent me. When I realised what I had done, she responded to my lively excuses by a smile and a caress. I remember another circumstance similar to that. One of the little girls threw herself blindly down on some embroidery done in gold and colour with much care by the skilful Mistress. The child ruined the thread so badly that it was impossible to repair the disaster that the work had to be recommenced. However, not a sign of blame or impatience escaped the virtuous artist. She was all kindness and sweet words of excuse for her pupil. She endeavoured to know every pupil's baptismal day and wrote them down in a special catalogue. She reminded us of the anniversaries of these occasions the previous evening so that on the morrow we could thank the good God for the great grace of baptism about which she spoke to us very often.

She had a most fervent devotion to St. Francis Xavier (the great saints were always her friends). No doubt she often asked him, to be a missionary, one day, like himself. We knew that this was her supreme wish. She always wanted for herself and for us the grace of being fully penetrated with the words which caused the great Saint's conversion ‘What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his immortal soul?’ “My children,” she would say, “if you fully realize that all else is nothing in comparison with the soul, you are saved!”

Regarding herself she was fully convinced of her own worth. Her words, her manner of judging everything and her conception of the world were certain proofs of this, her love of God, her longing for heaven, the salvation of souls were her true occupation, her motive-power, her life and the things that guided her always.

In spite of all her virtues, she was never remarkable or singular. She was as simple as she was intelligent and her activity never encroached upon her patience or sweetness. All the beauties of nature and each event of life carried her towards God. I seem to see her once again before a flower or a blade of grass, her soul full of admiration, acknowledging her Creator.

At the late recreations during the lovely summer nights, she would interest us in astronomy and it was then above all that she let herself go on the praise and adoration of this great God that she loved so much. She tried to excite in us her own sentiments through the study of those magnificent skies. She would say to us – “my children, we will go to the dwelling place of the Author of these wonders of which we now speak. When will it be! Oh! Would that the day were soon.” She is now in that wonderful dwelling in the House of her God. And her pious child adds in closing her account ‘I hope that she will obtain for us the grace of meeting her there once more’.

The Love Of The Faithful Religious For God Went Even To Holy Folly

On reading these descriptions, eloquent in their sincerity and capable of being multiplied by many more of her pupils, we cannot but conclude that the virtuous Mistress certainly belongs to the lineage of saints. Here one remembers an extract from the life of St. Margaret Mary written by Monseigneur Bougand. “Ah, the Saint cried one day in naïve poetry whose principal merit was that of expressing faithfully her seraphic sentiments:

The hand of the hunter has wounded me,
His dart has pierced to the heart.”

“All the saints were like that” – adds Monseigneur Bougand. “For us, the majority of men, God is a reality Whom we hail from afar. For some, He is a friend, for very few an intimate friend. And then, there are those in the crowd to whom God is

more than a friend, more than a father or a spouse. These have for Him a love that urges on passion and love like folly. The world does not understand this mystery. It laughs and mocks at it but what does it matter. It is so.”

Let us thank our Heavenly Father that it is so. About them another point of view: what would become of our poor earth if some of its children did not love their Creator and Saviour unto a holy folly? Let us not deceive ourselves, it is only those hearts burning with an ardent flame of divine charity that know how to forget self and immolate themselves for their unfortunate brethren.

And it was only right that because He destined her to carry the flame of faith to the ends of the earth, to so many hearts deprived of eternal hope, that the Saviour drew His future messenger of good tidings in the paths of a growing sanctity.

She Profits By Every Lesson, Austere Or Touching, To Grow In Perfection

To the lessons He had taught her in the past, God added others, sometimes moving, sometimes terrible to make her understand still better that He alone is great, He alone is good, He alone deserves to be served with all the energy of heart and soul.

Among the lights which she received on the final end of man, of which the Holy Spirit has said that serious meditation on it will prevent sin, Mother St. Mathilde remembered the death of a young Sister, which circumstance had greatly struck her, shortly after her arrival at Cette.

Sr. St. Anthony was a faithful and fervent nun. She went in the flower of her age at twenty-nine. What was remarkable about her death was, that she was subjected to extraordinary temptations which recall and even surpass, those of the dying Father Barré. In a half-conscious state, she thought she was suspended between earth and heaven, and one could follow, by

her words, the different struggles she sustained with the evil spirit. She was first tempted against Faith and the other theological virtues, then against humility and fidelity to her vocation. (There was an interval between each different temptation – when the young Sister had triumphed on one point, she regained calmness, but soon another attack presented itself). At one moment as if the tempter had used his own voice to trouble her, she imitated in a striking and terrifying manner her mother's voice, which seemed to bid her fly in order to escape such an early death.

Unable to aid her except by ardent prayer, the Superior and some other brave Sisters, among whom was Sr. St. Mathilde, encircled her bed in inexpressible terror and implored the Saviour not to abandon the soul who had always been so faithful to Him.

After several hours of this sad struggle, intended no doubt to purify completely her soul, Sr. St. Anthony came to herself. A calm smile appeared on her lips – “It is finished, Ma Mere,” she said to her Superior, “Satan is conquered – I am going to Heaven.” Then she gave up her soul to her Creator in peace.

A few months afterwards, some arrangements were made about the tombs of the Sisters in the cemetery at Cette. Sr. St. Mathilde was one of those chosen to assist at the translation of the remains of the dead and she was amazed to find that almost nothing remained of the mortal frame of Sr. St. Anthony, so shortly buried. This striking spectacle of the nothingness of this earthly life deeply impressed her and the remembrance of the severe temptations of her young companion made her understand better the necessity of preparing oneself by constant fidelity to grace, for the extraordinary succour of which we have need at the moment of death.

After this austere lesson, there is one more touching. Sr. St. Mathilde was witness, in the same Convent of Cette of a dear manifestation of the goodness and power of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

One of the nuns was stricken with illness, grave enough to make her Superior consider sending her away from the House if the remedies were still unable to cure her. But none of them seemed to be able to procure the desired effect. This Sister, who was only a few years professed, was very holy. She resolved to storm the Heart of Jesus in order to prevent this departure from her Community. What took place between the Divine Master and His little servant? She has not told us, but one day after her departure had been decided upon, she got permission to stay in Chapel while the Community was at dinner. When her Sisters came for the prayers after dinner (Sr. St. Mathilde has told us this and her testimony is outside suspicion of exaggeration) they saw their dear invalid, Sr. St. Francis, kneeling before the Altar. A ray of light seemed to be coming from the tabernacle and encircling her head (the seat of the disease). They approached and questioned her. She was evidently moved and smiling sweetly. Her incurable infirmity had disappeared forever. There was not the least trace of it. During a long life, full of edification and uncommon virtues, this good Sister spent in the service of Our Saviour that health which He had given her.

Drawing spiritual profit from everything, Sr. St. Mathilde advanced more rapidly each day in the ways of sublime perfection. God who is not outdone in generosity guided her continually by marks of His predilection.

Fervent And Continual Prayer

From the testimony of another old pupil, we hear that Sr. St. Mathilde “never seemed to lose the sense of the presence of God – that if she were pious and recollected in Chapel she was likewise out of it.” This is proof enough that the Sovereign Master possessed her whole heart and meant everything to her. One could go farther and say that the beauty of God ravished her soul to such a degree that, like St. Margaret Mary and the other great Saints, when she was before the Blessed Sacrament she verily

lost all count of time – the hours passed all too quickly for her. For this fact we have numberless proofs.

All the Sisters who knew her either in Malaya or Japan strongly attested the above and it is certain that this happy state of her prayer began even as far back as her days in Cette. If she had not been so simple and humble and believed that all souls consecrated to God experienced such favour she might have become proud, but no, her one thought was to communicate to others her own love of prayer. She had a particular gift of speaking about God without affectation or ostentation – without boring anyone – on the contrary she made them eager to partake with her of her own celestial joys. It was thus that one time she decided (certainly not through vanity) to follow a procession in Cette from a little distance. The contemplation of the Sacred Host threw her almost into an ecstasy and gave her one of those intoxicating moments wherein the friends of God beg Him to moderate His favour so that their bodies may be able to support them.

It became more and more evident as time went on that the Lord had wonderful designs for this soul. She drew her along the path by which He ordinarily conducts those souls that He has designed for glorious works and intense suffering for “His Name’s sake.”

The exceptional fervour of this holy nun showed itself in extreme mortifications which face recalls to us an incident in the life of St. Ignatius.

A religious was once spoken of in his presence as a man of great prayer, “Then,” replied the Saint, “he is also a man of great mortification, for one does not go without the other,” the same remark can be applied to the future Foundress of the Mission of St. Maur.

Heroic Mortification

Apart from what we will later learn on this point about the time she spent in Bagnols, and the constant and wonderful practices of mortification which did not escape her pupils’ attention at Cette – we must add that it is known, from other reliable witnesses, that she accepted uncomplainingly all the inconveniences of weather and every other situation.

For example, at Cette, she suffered for many years from a gastric complaint which prevented her from taking breakfast. But she never complained, never asked for any special relief, or omitted to take her classes for this reason (indeed she never did so for any other reason either).

She did her duty with invariable constancy, without letting it be known whether or not she was “on her last legs.” She cured her gastritis unaided, by sheer force of will, proving by example her belief that it was one of those maladies which a strong will can cure.

She did not deem it necessary to inform her Superior of her suffering that nevertheless lasted quite a while. “It would not be really worth the trouble,” she said later. And by this forced and prolonged fast she accustomed herself to voluntary fasts which she imposed on herself later on during her twenty years at Singapore. After the example of the Saints, not content with such privation she also taught herself other mortifications.

Sr. St. Regis, her companion at school, discreetly took account of that. She tells us “My good sister otherwise so complacent never let me approach a certain box. I was never allowed to touch it, still less to open it, but I suspected that it was the hiding place of numerous penitential instruments which she used with her usual energy.”

Chapter 6

THE RELIGIOUS OF CHARITABLE INSTRUCTION OF THE INFANT JESUS KNOWN AS ST. MAUR

In the preceding pages her religious family was only referred to as “The Institute of St Maur”.

Its real name is “Congregation of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction of the Holy Infant Jesus”. They are better known since their restoration at the beginning of the XIX century, under the name “Dames of St Maur” which they acquired simply because their Mother House is situated in Paris on a street in the Saint Germaine district called “Rue St Maur”, today “Rue de l’Abbé Gregoire”.

But they have no connection with the “Benedictines of St Maur”, religious who disappeared during the upheaval of the revolution. The latter had a strong leaning towards Jansenism and that is why Mother St Mathilde did not want her Institute to be mistaken for them. As long as possible, she wished that the houses founded by her on the missions were named after the Infant Jesus, but to avoid further inevitable and irritating confusion, since other Congregations there were known by the same title “ of the Infant Jesus”, she had to accept that her daughters in the Far East would be known, as they were in France, as “The Dames of St Maur”.

Besides, this name was not the only one given to the « Religious of the Charitable Instruction of the Infant Jesus », it was also called, in the seventeenth century : Sisters of the Christian Schools, Daughters of Providence, Daughters of the Sacred Heart, and, later, in the Midi, « Dames of the Faith » and « Black Sisters ». However, out of all the names, that of « St Maur »

By the year 1850, Sr. St. Mathilde had become a nun of eminent virtue and a source of wonderful edification for her sisters.

She was as happy as she was generous in the perfect accomplishment of her duty.

Secret Presentiments That God Was About To Call Her To A Great Task

Always, however, the enclosure of a Convent and classroom walls proved too limited a field for the ardour of zeal. The number of souls which she was able to reach was nothing in comparison to those which she would have wished to save, and it is remarkable to state that she approached this same period by a sort of secret inspiration from above – desires of tremendous zeal rose in her spirit, at the same time as mysterious inspirations developed her soul and made her heart beat ardently. She recalled the yearnings of her infancy and youth towards far-away missions. Vast horizons opened before her. Without doubt, in her conversations with God she experienced an indescribable happiness. Her piety gave her extraordinary fervour; her will a new courage and sometimes she had confessed that she was transported outside of herself.

persisted and even the Holy See itself mentions it in the Decree of Approbation of the Rules for this Institute.

So many names had the effect of throwing a veil over the existence of these sisters and it wasn't by a secret design of Providence. It was rather because, through their founder, they were attached to the Order of Minims, of which one of the distinctive characteristics is to be silent, fleeing everything that attracts the attention and praise of others.

Spirit of St. Francis of Paula and their Founder

Such was the spirit of St. Francis of Paula and to the same high degree it was also that of his son Reverend Father Nicolas Barré, founder of the Sisters of Charitable Instruction of the Holy Infant Jesus who lived in Paris in the second half of the seventeenth Century.

The Minims has been in France since the reign of Louis XI.

Coming of the Minims to France

The king seeing his death approaching sent for the humble, saintly Francis of Paula, who was reputed to be a powerful healer.

The king wanted healing; the saint did more and better; he taught him to submit to the divine will, and miraculously, he who inspired fear on earth but had reason, in his turn, to fear the judgement of the King of Kings, died peacefully in the arms of Francis of Paula.

Louis XI did not prove ungrateful towards one whose virtue he had tested before according him complete confidence. In his will he was careful to assure Francis de Paule and his religious

establishments in France. Consequently, the next century the Minims were flourishing there.

Unfortunately, since the Revolution, which destroyed these Houses, the Order was not restored in France; it continued only in Rome and Italy. Nevertheless, even in France, a humble shoot grew again after the storm – it was the Congregation “Ladies of St. Maur” which had been founded in 1666 by Reverend Nicolas Barré.

Father Nicolas Barré

It is difficult, in just a few words, to convey the greatness of this holy religious whose chosen work has stood the test of time.

Born in Amiens, at the age of seven he made a vow of chastity and shortly after, his prayers won the miraculous healing of one of his sisters.

His advanced studies, outstanding intelligence, and the status of his family – all promised success and happiness. But, a more powerful voice spoke to his heart; he sacrificed all earthly hopes and entered the Order of Minims, attracted by their great austerity, humility, learning and zeal for the salvation of souls.

His virtue, learning, talent as a preacher

Eminent professor of deep theology to his young colleagues, preacher of extraordinary talent in the conversion of sinners, Nicolas Barré was led by God in ways that were rugged and full of love, bringing him to a point where he was often on his knees lost in the Divine Presence.

He became a spiritual director with rare and precious insight into souls, knowing from personal experience aided by grace both moments of deep union and crucifixion. In his school of

spirituality one had to learn relentless detachment from self and limitless love of God.

The spiritual letters of Reverend Father Nicolas Barré attract to his teaching by their conciseness, originality and forceful expression.

This man of God, so deeply touched by all that affected the salvation of his neighbour, could not but be disturbed by the state of ignorance in which the inadequacy of Primary Education of the time left the majority of the poorer classes. Very soon, he was seeking to remedy it.

Contemporary and friend of St. John Baptist De la Salle, he made a great effort to bring together and form Masters for the young boys of the poorer and middle class.

If Nicolas Barré had to give up this enterprise, at least he never ceased encouraging his holy friend in the task begun, and it is he especially who advised De la Salle to give up his canonry and riches in order to form the first Brothers of the Christian Schools in the way of perfect renunciation.

What St. John the Baptist did for the boys, Reverend Father Nicolas Barré achieved for the girls.

First Charitable Schools Established in Rouen in 1662 – 1666

It was in Rouen that Reverend Father Nicolas Barré succeeded in recruiting his first “Charitable Mistresses”. Their names have come down to us. One was Marguerite Lestocq, the other Françoise Duval, daughter of the bourgeois Honfleur.

The success of this first school attracted vocations very quickly. Many foundations came from Normandy, and it was quickly recognised that immense good was achieved for poor children whose ignorance of religion was the main cause of vice among the people even from a young age.

It was then that Reverend Father Barré proposed to his daughters who had previously been free from obligation, to form a religious association by uniting themselves under a common rule. This is how it came about, relates Marguerite Lestocq, with charming naïveté.

“Reverend Father asked us: Do you want to live in a community with this condition: that you will lack all security? You will have only what is necessary and that sparingly.

“See”, said his Reverence, “what your answer will be.”

We replied wholeheartedly, “Yes, we want it and we abandon ourselves to Divine Providence with total disinterestedness.”

No sooner said than done, we entered community under obedience to a Superior who was then Madam du Buc. There we lived in holy unity – gently, humble and condescending towards one another.”

Paris in 1675

Generously supported in Rouen by good Christians and others who venerated him as their Father and Master in spiritual matters, Reverend Father Barré was seeing his work solidly established in Rouen and its surroundings when he was called back to Paris in 1675. There he continued his holy and zealous enterprise on a larger scale.

There too, his ardent charity met with success. So numerous were the requests he received from several for charitable mistresses formed in his training centre that it became clear that his work answered a need of the times.

More and more the holy religious used all his energy and knowledge in the formation of his first daughters, in the spirit he

wished to bequeath to his spiritual family: limitless zeal, deep humility, detachment to the extent that he wished that none of his houses would have a steady income.

He gave them as costume that worn by widows of the court of Louis XIV.

Their first Superior General was very Reverend Mother Marie Heyer, who had earlier been in charge of the school opened in the parish of Saint Jean de Gréve in Paris.

Requests kept on increasing to obtain from Rev. Father Barré some of his “Charitable Mistresses” in view of new foundations. Very soon, the parish of St. Sulpice had up to eight of their schools, and the steady increase continued until all the parishes of Paris were similarly endowed.

Mademoiselle de Guise, Marie de Lorraine, the last heiress of her illustrious family, introduced the daughters of Father Barré in her estates. Madam de Maintenon obtained twelve for the beginning of her house “St. Cyr”.

Nicolas de Lamoignon, Lord de Basville, called “the king of Languedoc” where he was Governor, after the foundations at Nimes and Montpellier, never stopped asking for new Houses entrusted to the “Mistresses of the Christian Schools” (one of their names) for the instruction of those newly converted from Protestantism to the Catholic Faith.

Death of Reverend Father Barré

When his work was prospering and at its peak, the Lord called the humble and zealous founder to Himself on 31 May 1686, after a short illness during which he underwent painful attacks of the devil, destined, we can guess, to increase his reward.

Fully alert to the end, he could send to his daughters words of adieu and encouragement through Monsieur l’ Abbé de Montigny Servien, one of his best friends and his immediate successor in the government for the future congregation.

He asked that they be told that ‘he left them the Holy Spirit as guide’ and that “they would go almost to the end of the world”. This was interpreted in the Institute either as referring to the future foundation of their Missions “at the other side of the earth” or a kind of promise of protection through Divine Providence almost to the end of time – of their Congregation, “this little body in the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit” – another saying of Father Barré quoted word for word.”

Development of The Institute of St. Maur During The Eighteenth Century

Fortified by the teaching and blessing of their Father, those who had the happiness of being formed for their apostolate by him did not give in to discouragement after his death. Valiantly, they continued to walk in the way he had marked for them.

Guided by devout ecclesiastical Superiors, among them several of the society of Foreign Missions – who among other services, saved them from Jansenism – encouraged by virtuous and intelligent Superiors Generals like Very Honourable Mothers de Bosredon (past pupil of St. Cyr), des Barres de Lesniers, the Charitable Mistresses of the Holy Infant Jesus saw their houses grow and prosper during the 18th Century.

Little by little, they had been led to add boarding schools for the rich to their free classes for the poor – the primary aim of their institution - but one did not cause the other to be neglected. Also, the teaching of religion by “the catechism” to rich and poor was a sacred task that the Charitable Mistresses placed above all others.

Among the very flourishing institutions of the eighteenth Century let us mention that in Levignac three leagues from Toulouse, a magnificent Boarding School referred as “the St. Cyr of the South”.

Towards the end of the peaceful pre-revolution period, the Institute in France reached about a hundred houses.

Then came the sombre hours of the Revolution and Terror: The daughters of Father Barré, united in deep fidelity to God, did not abandon their Mother House or any other throughout the country, except when under constraint or forced to do so by the folly and violence of those sad days.

Honourable Mother Aldebert, then Superior General was the last to leave the much-loved House of Rue St. Maur, with its memories of Venerable Father Barré. She only withdrew in the face of violence, but neither she nor her daughters abandoned their vocation or the work to which they had consecrated their lives. They did their best to keep up relation by letters, and each one in her place of exile quietly sought means of spreading the knowledge of God and the truths of salvation.

Many Houses of this stricken and banned Congregation (resurrected in the nineteenth Century) date from this time when elements of destruction seemed to destroy forever all before them.

Madam Liegault at Langres, Madam Caprony at Montbauban and others succeeded, while the Terror raged, in opening Boarding Schools to which the parents were too happy to send their children.

Courageous Mother Aldebert, a refugee in Lozere at Chirac, her birthplace, never ceased teaching catechism there to young children.

And as everything passes, even the worst days, the dawn of the nineteenth Century brought better promises.

Reopening of the Mother-House in 1806

As soon as possible, the Sisters of the Infant Jesus sought means of restoring among themselves steady relations. Some could even return to their former Mother House and think seriously of reconstituting their old Congregation. They were helped in this difficult enterprise by a past pupil of Madame Caprony at Montauban, Stephanie de Beauharnais, then an imperial princess. This amicable young lady, a pearl in the court of Napoleon the First, by her attractiveness, distinction and virtue, was cherished by the Emperor who was not slow in arranging her marriage to the Grand Duke of Bade.

She remained sincerely grateful to her former mistresses and her entreaties, joined to those of Madame Letitia, obtained precious favours for the Sisters of St. Maur.

The Emperor saw to the return of the Maison Mere to the Sisters and granted 10,000 francs compensation. Later on several occasions, he granted subsidies for the novitiate and finally by a Decree of Approbation, he recognised the legal existence of the Congregation.

It was on 18th July 1806 that the survivors of troubled times had the joy of taking back their religious habit after a retreat preached by Abbot Jauffret, Chaplain of the Imperial Court, who obtained for the touching ceremony the tapestry and ornaments of the Emperor’s Chapel.

A little later the first clothing ceremony for the new Postulants was accorded still more solemnity; the high-ranking ladies of both old and new aristocracy wanted to be godmothers to the young novices.

Reestablishment Of Congregation Under The Government Of Madame De Fumel

The Venerable Superior General, Madame Aldebert, was asked to take back her former post among her daughters, but feeling her end was near she wrote to them that they should choose another.

One of the young religious who had been driven out of Levignac by the Revolution was Madame Henriette de Fumel from a noble family of the diocese of Mende. She took refuge in Toulouse after having endured persecution and prison there with her former Superior of Levignac, the energetic Mother Martin. Their detention had lasted until the end of 1794.

Immediately after being freed, they set about grouping around them some young girls in order to educate and instruct them, at the cost of great difficulty.

In 1799, Mother Martin passed away peacefully and Madam de Fumel was placed in charge of the little community of Toulouse where all was as in the past without the religious habit.

In the Congregation, in spite of the dispersal, the virtue, prudence and talents of Madame de Fumel were known, So, after the refusal of Venerable Mother Alderbert to accept responsibility that had become too heavy for her, the Sisters assembled in Paris unanimously called on the Superior of Toulouse to accept the honour of reconstituting their religious family with the same spirit as of old: the spirit of humility and zeal of Reverend Father Barré.

The respected Mother Alderbert wrote from Chirac to add her appeal to that of the Sisters in Paris. Thus she who has been justly considered the Reviver of the Congregation, was elected Superior General.

She fully answered all expectations and had the joy of seeing many of the convents that existed before 1793 open again, so that at her death the total number of houses raised up from their ruins and houses newly founded was twenty seven.

Among the Boarding Schools from pre-revolution days which had secretly continued and now again enjoyed their former glory, Toulouse was one of the finest and most fervent. Very Reverend Mother de Fumel has won for it superabundant blessings, by her hard but fertile toils during years of trials.

Three Superior Generals followed: Very Reverend Mother Liegault, Goulard and Varney.

And it was under the third that Sr. St. Mathilde Raclot took the religious habit and made her profession in the novitiate of Paris.

Madame de Faudoas, Superior General

At the same time, there was as General Bursar at the Mother House a virtuous religious of remarkable capacity, Madame St. Francois de Sales de Faudoas. She had been a pupil and postulant of Toulouse – which had emerged so magnificently from the ruins of the Revolution.

She belonged to the highest nobility of Languedoc, being a daughter of the Marquis de Faudoas-Barbazan (a family that has died out) but what was more important, the Lord had called her to St. Maur where fidelity in following her vocation produced in her a rich harvest of graces.

Two years after Sr. St. Mathilde's profession, in 1837, the combined votes of the Sisters called Madame de Faudoas to the highest office of the Institute.

She was destined to hold this responsibility for forty consecutive years, which she did with such courage, so supernatural an outlook, such love and understanding of what was necessary to preserve and to foster growth in the ways of God, that she was considered to some degree as the second Founder.

It was she who asked for and obtained for her Institute the formal approbation of Rome, a precious pledge of stability for the work of the humble Father Barré.

It was she also who authorised and saw the birth of distant foundations of the daughters of the holy Minim.

With this claim, her time as Superior General is linked directly to the History of the Missions of St. Maur.

That is why we must now see the beginnings of this sacred work, so beautiful and with almost incalculable consequences for the development and destiny in the Church of the Congregation of “the Charitable Mistresses of the Infant Jesus.”

CHAPTER 7

THE CALL OF THE RELIGIOUS OF ST. MAUR TO DISTANT MISSIONS

First Overtures For A Foundation In Malaya

In 1851, 40 years after the election of Reverend Mother de Faudoas, when the institute was flourishing and developing under her enlightened government, a Malayan missionary, Monsieur L’Abbe Jean Marie Beurrel, came to France. He had been sent by his ecclesiastical Superior, Monseigneur Jean Baptiste Boucho, Bishop of Atalie and Vicar Apostolic of Malaya, with the view to finding brothers and nuns who would consent to come to the Peninsula of Malaya and there consecrate themselves to the children of this already flourishing mission.

It was decided to establish schools for the boys and girls of the two most important towns of the country – Singapore and Penang. In the former, Monsieur Beurrel had been working for twelve years to spread the knowledge of God; in the latter the Apostolic Vicariate had been established.

For quite some time, apostles from the Foreign Missionary Society had been coming from Siam to evangelise Malaya. Then when the Christians there, became too numerous to be directed from a distance, the Holy See, in 1840, made of it a distinct Apostolic Vicariate under the government of Mgr. Courvesy. When the latter died in 1845, he was replaced by Mgr. Boucho.

Because Singapore was the most important outpost of Malaya and the most central point of all the missions in the Indies, it was decided that it would be the first to be provided with the schools which were so eagerly desired.

Monsieur L'abbe Beurel

Consequently it was quite natural that the devoted missionary who had been placed in charge of these Christians found it difficult to provide them with religious teachers. Mgr. Boucho, relying on Fr. Beurel's prudence, gave him full powers to deal with this very important business.

Having arrived in France in March 1851, the worthy missionary at once set to work. Concerning the schools for boys he negotiated with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. For the girls' schools he visited many religious congregations in Paris and throughout the country, in some of which he received a most enthusiastic welcome. As for Reverend Mother de Faudoas and her Assistants, Mere St. Bernard (Lucey) and Mere St. Theresa (Nourrit) "while they received Fr. Beurel with the respect and the religious sympathy due to him, they made no advance nor expressed any desires."

The zealous missionary, however, yielding to a feeling which one may believe came from God, felt himself drawn to prefer The Congregation of St. Maur to all others. He said so himself, in a letter of 1st June 1851 addressed to Reverend Mother de Faudoas: "After having got all the information desirable and having thought it over carefully, I believe that no other Institute in France however worthy of respect it may otherwise be, offers us more benefits or security than that which you govern with so much wisdom.

Deliberations Of Reverend Mother De Faudoas

No doubt such benevolent thoughts regarding this religious family were partly the result of the very favourable testimony which Monsieur Beurel must have received from his confreres of the Foreign Missions.

From the very beginning, the relations between that society and the Institute of Venerable Father Barre had been most intimate so that it was not surprising that the Directors of that time should continue the same devoted service which the first Superiors of St. Maur had received from Fathers Tileirge and de Brisacriers (Superiors of the Foreign Missions in the eighteenth century).

At the same time we are justified in believing also that the divine will in this matter, coincided in a special way with that of men; for the day had come when the Master of all things, realising a distant and mysterious promise, was going to cast into the arms of Mother de Faudoas those innumerable children which, as a young girl, she had perceived in a sort of a vision in the ancient church of Salbern at the close of a retreat and of a novena made to St. Francis Xavier in order to discover her vocation. From far and near, from beyond the seas, she saw them running to her and imploring her aid! She recalled with emotion this remarkable incident when she heard a request being made for Sisters for the missions of the Far East. If she could not herself cross the seas, she was yet ready to come to the help of souls who were calling her, by sending them her daughters. She had a presentiment of the immense and somewhat novel good which they had to accomplish in Malaya. It would indeed be a false idea to think that missionary religious ought to confine their devotedness to teaching class. They must above all teach the dogmas of Faith, and not only to their pupils, but also to those hungering for truth whom they would meet continually on their way and in every circle, whether it be the poor or the sick who come to claim their spiritual or material aid. Thus their establishments ought to be called not so much "schools" as "house of doing good" according to the expressive name given by the Japanese people to the house at Yokohama.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Beurel did not delay in finding out what he could hope for from the virtuous mother. He wrote to her later from Singapore, on 3rd January, these significant lines:

“The tone of your letter makes me see more and more how great an interest you have in the mission; this interest I have known since the day when I had the happiness of first being presented to you. I understood you at my first interview”.

Far from being discouraged then by the apparently little success of his first advances, Monsieur Beurel followed up the project which was so dear to him, with the persevering patience which we have so often had occasion to admire in him. Without doubt, he also redoubled his prayers.

During this time, Mother de Faudoas on her part stormed heaven with her admirable faith, to know the Divine Will. Not content with the advice of her ordinary council, she asked, through private letters the advice of each of the Superiors of the Institute. More and more, everything indicated that the Finger of God was there, for the replies were found conformable to the desires of her apostolic soul. The ecclesiastic Superior, Monseigneur Gaume, when consulted and the Archbishop of Paris, then Monseigneur Sibon, also gave their approval to the project.

As a result of these different activities, the Superior General was able to write in a circular letter of July 19th 1851 the following words:

“The unanimous assent of my dear Sisters Superiors for the great undertaking of a Mission in Malaya has brought us a very real satisfaction. I am glad to take this opportunity of telling them that this General spirit of apostolic zeal and of devotion to the interests of the glory of God has given me much consolation and hope for the fruitfulness of our holy Institute. This generosity, so worthy of our holy vocation, has confirmed the decision of the ecclesiastic Superior and our own and made us accede to the request made to us by Monsieur Beurel, Apostolic Missionary of Singapore and special delegate of Monseigneur Boucho, Vicar Apostolic of Malaya.

Four of our Sisters are ready to leave with this respected Missionary, to found the first Mission of our Institute at Singapore.

This decision has been sanctioned most willingly by the Venerable Archbishop of Paris, who has deigned to take a lively and paternal interest in the undertaking. We do not yet know definitely the time of departure. We continue to recommend this important affair to your zeal for the interests of God’s glory.”

We have just seen that there was question of four Sisters for this first departure; here, in fact, is what Father Beurel wrote in his official letter of request on 1st June, 1851, “Our resources do not permit us to found several establishments at once, we shall content ourselves with founding one for the moment at Singapore, the most important post of the Mission; then each year we shall try to form a new one, until we reach the completion of our task.

I think, Reverend Mother, that you would do well to allow us four subjects for the first establishment for, even though we shall probably not have many children in the beginning, nevertheless it is well that this establishment should be well provided with subjects, so that they may, without excessive fatigue, apply themselves to the study of languages which they must learn from the moment of their arrival; the climate being very warm, one cannot work with the same energy as in France.”

Arrangements continued all during the autumn of that year 1851. A boat had to be found, long and complicated preparations to be made. At that period, sea voyages were far from presenting the facilities and the rapidity which they have acquired in our days. In the present case, it meant a prospect of a perilous crossing of four or five months by the Cape of Good Hope! What involuntary anguish must have filled the heart of the courageous Superior General before this uncertain and dangerous future!

Definite Acceptance By The Act Of Nov 21st 1851

Finally, on 21st November 1851, a contract was made between Messieurs Albrand and Beurel of the Foreign Missions and Reverend Mother de Faudoas. Monsieur Albrand acted as delegate for Monseigneur Boucho (through a special power given by His Highness on 29th November, 1850).

The chief promises made, on the part of Mother de Faudoas, were:

- (1) To give four Sisters of her Congregation, ready to direct the Girls' School which was to be established in the Malayan Mission.
- (2) On the part of Monseigneur Boucho: to provide suitably for all the expenses of the voyage and for the installation of the said Sisters and that he and his successors would treat them with great kindness.

Concerning this last promise, Monsieur Beurel had written to the Superior General in this letter, already quoted, of 1st June 1851 – “We will endeavour to support these good Religious and to console them in the midst of their hard labours and all the trials and painful tribulations inseparable from this life. As for the rest, since they will have left all, even their earthly fatherland for Jesus Christ, divine consolations will not be wanting to them”.

Today, a hundred years after these words, so full of charity, were written, it is just to remark, to the credit of the Society of the Foreign Missions, that this noble engagement has been nobly kept, and that not only in Malaya but wherever the Daughters of Fr. Barre have found the devoted apostles who invited them in the name of Christ to come and share their labours. Another consoling remark: It was on 21st November, Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, that the

Superior of St. Maur, personifying her Institute, made the final engagement to go and conquer souls for the divine Son of Mary; and that at the cost of every sacrifice ... some years later the Son of that Mother gave to the Charitable Mistresses a testimony of their satisfaction in making that same Feast of the Presentation the day of the Approval of their Congregation by the Holy See.

From 31st November, Mother de Faudoas had made known, by a circular letter addressed to all the houses, the approaching execution of that great project which had been occupying their minds for six months. She expressed herself thus:

“My very dear Sister, here we are on the eve of beginning our great enterprise. On 17th November, at eight o'clock in the evening, our dear Missioners leave for Anvers, from where they are to embark. I intend accompanying them as far as there. But first of all, allow me, my dear Sisters, to beg once more the help of your prayers. You guess then, I am sure, you feel how rapidly my heart bears, with how many anxieties it is filled. But all has contributed and still contributes to confirm our belief that God has special designs on us and that He will bless our devotedness. It is to Him above all, therefore, that we are going to confide our so dear daughters. Come and help us, my dear Sisters, to obtain from this good God, through the intercession of Mary, his fatherly protection and His most abundant blessings at the beginning of such an important Mission. I continue in the firm confidence that it will be a source of grace for us and for our Holy Institute.”

Then Reverend Mother concluded by prescribing special prayers to be said throughout the whole length of the voyage and the offering of the Holy sacrifice on the days of departure from Paris and from Anvers. Finally, she gave them the names of the Missioners. Here it is appropriate to give them special mention.

The First Missioners

On the advice of those who knew the Malayan Mission, it was decided that young subjects would become more easily acclimatised and would learn more rapidly the two languages which were indispensable for the exercise of the apostolate.

She who was elected Superior of her companions was Sr. St. Pauline (Marie Rodet). She was thirty years of age, had been a religious for ten years and had been for some time Superior of the "Maison de Marines" near Paris. Gentle, amiable and courageous, she deserved nothing but praise up to the moment of her painful death which she generously accepted.

After her came a sister almost of the same age, of whom they had great hopes because being English, she spoke the language which must be taught in the future school. Of a Protestant family, she had been converted and baptized at Nimes. Having entered the Institute of St. Maur ten years later, she had been teaching since 1844 at Bailleul where she had shown talent and initiative in the education of children.

The third Missioner was called Sr. St. Eudoxie (Selanie Zelina Clarbout). She had made profession on 2nd October 1848, having entered the Congregation at the age of sixteen years. At the moment of departure, she was barely twenty-two. Her robust health, her good spirit and her piety gave every hope for the future.

The fourth choir sister, Sr. St. Euthyme (Julie Pierrette Perrot) had just made Profession on 29th April 1851; she was only twenty-four and a half years old. Her knowledge of English, her musical talent and her intelligence made her a remarkable subject. At the School of Mother de Faudoas, she had learnt to love God above all. It was her consolation and her safeguard in trials.

To the four Choir Sisters, chosen with great care and of whom she made a generous sacrifice, the Superior General added Sister Rosalie Flammerion who had taken the habit in 1842. Still in the prime of life (thirty-six years) she was counted on for the material labours which, doubtless, would not be wanting in such foundation.

Everything seemed to be foreseen, humanly speaking, for the great work. However, the devil, enemy of all good, did not see without great rage what help had been sent to the poor souls of those countries where he had so long reigned supreme; and, as one may imagine, he promised himself vengeance. But greater than he, was God, and if He permitted that the path marked out for the Missioners was a way of sorrow and tears, it was because the Cross prefigures the most abundant blessings.

In order to arrive at their Mission, the first Sisters called to the honour and trial of that distant Apostolate had to tread the hard path but even in that it is but just to see the Hand of God. He was demanding the price of innumerable souls with which He wished one day to recompense the sacrifice of His new Apostles.

CHAPTER 8

THE DEPARTURE – FIRST TRAIL

The Missioners Leave Paris

Arrangements concerning the boat had been left to Monsieur Beurel. He decided that they would take a Belgian Trading ship which left Anvers and reached Singapore by rounding the Cape of Good Hope. “La Julie” was quite a beautiful sailing boat. The little colony of Missioners comprised twelve: Monsieur Beurel, Messieurs Chagot and Beure, newly-ordained, **four** Brothers of the Christians Schools and **five** Sisters of St. Maur.

The departure, fixed at first for 17th November was delayed for some days, to wait for favourable weather. They did not actually set sail until December 6th. Mother de Faudoas had accompanied them from Paris which they left on 3rd December for Anvers and Mother St. Dorothy (Doderet) had joined her, as two of the departing Sisters were from Bailleul Community. While awaiting the final farewells, Mother General and her Sisters were hospitably received by the Sisters of Charity of Anvers.

It was there that a fresh anxiety assailed Mother de Faudoas: Mother St. Pauline seemed to have little strength for this long journey. When she considered the young Superior for her remarkable qualities, she had at the same time wondered if her health would be equal to the heavy task confided to her. When the doctors were consulted, they assured her that the sea air would strengthen her and so her departure was decided on.

Nevertheless, at the last moment the Mother General thought that Mother St. Dorothy, Superior of Bailleul, since she was there could be chosen in the place of Mother St. Pauline, but she could not impose such an unforeseen act of obedience which would have such serious consequences. Besides, Mother St.

Pauline assured her that her fatigue was only a passing thing and so, compelled by all the circumstances, the Superior General had to leave things as they had been arranged at first. She cast her children into the arms of God in giving them her last blessing, Saturday, December 6th 1851, but she could not dispel an inexpressible anxiety when she saw “La Julie” leave the quay and disappear slowly between the banks of the “Escant.”

On Board “La Julie

“La Julie” seemed reluctant to leave Europe. On 9th December it was only five or six leagues from Anvers. A strong wind from the East prevented its progress. Physical and moral sufferings made themselves felt from the first hours of the voyage. As soon as they had parted with Mother de Faudoas, the Sisters went to install themselves in their cabins, and before all else, they placed over their beds the image of their crucified King so that the sight of Him might console, encourage and bless them. It was a good inspiration and seemed like a prediction of trials which they would have to bear. Not far from their cabins was that of Monsieur Beurel which was soon reserved exclusively for the celebration of Holy Mass.

The first day’s sailing passed without incident. The Sisters’ hearts were filled with generosity and good desires. Not reckoning with seasickness and with no experience of life on board, they had made five projects for prayers and study which yielded nothing to those which could be followed on land and in a peaceful convent.

Here is the order of the day marked out by the travellers on the day following their departure:

5:00	Rising
5:30	Meditation
6:00	First Mass
6:30	Second Mass and Communion
7:00	Third Mass – Thanksgiving

7:30 Little Hours on deck
 8:00 Breakfast
 8:30 Gospel Reading and English exercise
 10:30 Recreation on deck.
 Free time for writing until 11:45
 11:45 Particular Examen
 12:00 Malayan Lesson
 1:00 Reading. Malayan study and exercises
 3:00 Vespers
 4:00 Tea
 4:30 Recreation on deck
 5:00 Study
 6:00 Meditation
 6:30 Matins and Lauds
 7:00 Dinner
 7:30 Recreation
 8:00 Night Prayer

and retiring to all who know how a prolonged sea voyage can cause mental fatigue and physical weakening, especially when one is attacked by sea-sickness, it will appear that several points of the above regulation were the fruit of generous illusions and not of an exact knowledge of facts, but the courage and good will of the Missioners become only more evident when we learn that practically never was the study of languages abandoned – the Malay lesson sometimes lasted two hours – that prayers and assistance at Mass were never neglected. Regularly, every Saturday, the travellers went to Confession to Father Beurel and during Lent as we shall see, the practice of mortification was not forgotten either.

Illness Of Mother St. Pauline

The one thing which prevented this voyage from ending happily was the grave state of health of Mother St. Pauline. Alarming symptoms soon showed themselves. She could no longer eat, and with the addition of seasickness and a chronic

illness, it became only too evident that her life was threatened. However, during the first days, the others refused to believe it. Father Beurel and his companions began a Novena of Masses to obtain her cure and other fervent prayers were offered for the same intention. But later on, letters from Father Beurel and Sr. St. Euthyme to Mother de Fautoas brought news that the invalid could not last long. On Fr. Beurel was laid the sad duty of warning and preparing her for death. It could not be concealed that she might die at any moment.

On Friday, March 5th – the First Friday of the month – she received Holy Viaticum for the fourth time. Her painful agony was prolonged for several days further until the evening of Saturday 13th when she calmly breathed her last. Having been dressed once more in her Religious Habit, the deceased was carried to the deck where a suitable place was prepared to receive her. She seemed to enjoy a sweet sleep while a respectful silence reigned throughout the entire ship. All sympathised with the Sisters in their sorrow.

The night passed solemnly and silently. It was an imposing as well as a touching spectacle to see that pious victim, a martyr of devotedness, laid out to face a magnificent star-studded sky. Already she seemed to radiate the joy of heaven. The Sisters, the Missioners and the Brothers shared the watched of the night at her side. There were also several sailors who, on their knees, with heads uncovered, prayed fervently for many hours. At 5.30 am the next morning, first Mass was followed by the poignant scene of the burial in the vast abyss of the ocean of all that remained here below of the first Missionary of St. Maur to be called to the Tribunal of God. Those who gazed for the last time at the lifeless body of her who had been their Mother seemed to see St. Francis Xavier expiring on a deserted shore within sight of Chine, the object of his desires. At the moment when the abyss opened to receive the precious burden confided to it, the sound of cannon saluted the remains reserved for a glorious resurrection.

Sr. St. Euthyme, in concluding the account of their great sacrifice, adds these words full of faith: “the greatness of our sorrow makes us look up to heaven with still greater confidence. He for Whom we have left all will not abandon us.”

Thus died the first daughter of Fr. Barre called to the Missions, thus was sown in tears the seed which would one day be so fruitful. God, Who knows all things, had found Mother St. Pauline sufficiently pure and faithful to fulfill the holy and necessary role of a victim.

Her memory remained sacred to all who had known her in France or on board, and when Fr. Beurel wished, some months later, to start at last a foundation in Singapore, he wrote to Mother de Faudoas and begged her to choose another Superior who might resemble Mother St. Pauline in her qualities of mind and heart. To quote a few words from his letter as follows:

“She was already ripe for Heaven. She was the humble violet which hides itself, but which is sometimes betrayed by its sweet perfume. I have never seen her to resist a grace or to lose an opportunity of becoming more like Jesus, our Divine Model. She ever worked to make herself a worthy Sister of the Infant Jesus. I have no doubt of her happiness, for according to the Gospel her judgement will be easy since she herself was so kind and gentle towards others.”

CHAPTER 9

ARRIVAL AT SINGAPORE – FRESH DIFFICULTIES

Continuation Of The Journal

From 15th March, the sorrow of Mother St. Pauline’s death, land began to be sighted announcing our approach to Singapore which the dying Superior had so longed to see. The first thing which met the eyes of the passengers was “Christmas Island” – a short distance from Java. Next, the port of Java itself called “the head of Java.” To the great joy of all, they could soon distinguish vegetation, rocks and strange trees, among others coconut and banana trees and some from whose branches hung magnificent red fruits.

The following little account from the journal will not fail to be of interest:

” Soon, at the entrance of the Sunda Strait, we found ourselves between Prince Island and the coast of Java. What a pleasure for us all, to find ourselves so close to land since for so long we had not seen it or its smiling verdure! The sunset was splendid.

A Halt In Sight Of Java

On March 17th we found ourselves facing the Island of Sumatra and the Island of “Krakakon.” As the wind became contrary, it was decided to lower anchor and the boat seemed to be then in a superb lake, surrounded by the luxuriant and charming foliage of the coasts of Java. The overwhelming heat lessened our pleasure considerably, yet each one felt that joy was uppermost at seeing land so close once more. Seven other sailing boats were sighted in the distance, waiting like “La Julie” for a favourable wind. At about nine o’clock in the morning, an embarkation set out towards our boat. The barque approached the boat – I shall not try to reproduce my feelings on seeing it for

the first time. Their makeshift canoe carried on board some birds, monkeys and a quantity of oceanic fruits. We looked at all that curiously. Some bought from these poor people birds, hens and fruit. When the first embarkation was a considerable distance out, another followed from which the passengers likewise bought some goods, coconuts and fish which had just been caught. On our part, we gave pleasure by contributing some little pieces of cloth which our friends in France had given us. These poor people were quite overjoyed at acquiring a piece of material.

One of the embarkations commanded by the Chief on the coast of Java had been very happy hearing Fr. Beurel speaking Malay. We had been invited to come and see him while the ship had been at anchor. The request had first been addressed to the Commandant on board, who scarcely bothered to give the wished-for authorisation. But later, thinking that the wind would not change until nightfall, he allowed all the passengers who wished, to go ashore. All the gentlemen except three descended into a launch of "La Julie", accompanied by the second and fourth rowing sailors. In the evening, when the hour fixed for their return had come a favourable wind arose; but the others looked in vain for the returning crew of which they could see no trace. There was a moment of anxiety; each one had secret fears as to what might happen to the priests and brothers in this unknown and hostile land.

Finally, they were seen returning and as soon as they were on board, they were overwhelmed with questions about their journey. They were enchanted with everything; with the manner in which they were received by the inhabitants, the magnificent sights and the richness of the country; in a word, with all they had seen. They had brought branches of colossal trees, flowers of an extraordinary kind and various kinds of fruits. Fr. Beurel and one of the gentlemen returned soaked as a result of a fall among the rocks by the seaside, a little misadventure sufficiently light to remain laughable."

Sunday night was terrifying. The account of it in the Journal again deserves to be quoted.

"At half-past eleven in the night, thunder began to boom more and more loudly, flashes of lighting succeeded each other with frightening rapidity; they illumined our whole cabin.

We were afraid, but we said nothing each fearing to wake the other, until a huge gust of wind caused the boat to shake in all her members and drew from us an exclamation of terror. A second gust immediately succeeded the first; this one seemed to have rent open the flanks of the vessel and we did not know how to explain the horrible cracking sounds that followed it. It was frightening to hear the cries of the sailors replying to the commands which followed each other with a rapidity equal to thought.

We lit a candle and gave ourselves up to prayer. Each one, fearing that flight might be obligatory, went in search of her clothes. The most frightened was Sr. St. Eudoxie, who on her knees in the middle of the cabin turned over the pages of her prayer book and called on all the Saints of Paradise in turn. She was pale and frozen with terror and a moment later, not quite knowing what she did, she arrived in her night attire in the dining room where all the brothers and priests were assembled, more or less frightened. The good Fr. Chagot came and went, giving all the help possible and reassuring troubled spirits.

Fear continued to reign amongst us until Sr. St. Eudoxie came to tell us that the danger was past: a gust of wind had knocked off the summit of the big mast which had made great noise as it fell. One would have thought that the boat had struck a sandbank or some of the submerged rocks which are so numerous in these seas. The Strait of Banka, which we are crossing, is so shallow that it is necessary to sound its depths more than ten times a day. A second danger is that the surroundings are infested by pirates. It was these which caused

Sr. St. Eudoxie great consternation, while Sr. St. Euthyme was more concerned about the banks and rocks. In the midst of these fears, the latter thought of Our Lady of Rocamadour, so venerated in her country. She advised the others to invoke her and they promised a Novena of Masses in her honour if the remainder of the voyage should be happily achieved. In the instant which followed the fall of the large mast, all the sails had been carried off by the wind and this was likewise accompanied by atrocious noise; the huge chains and ropes fell heavily on the deck. That, together with the noise of the rapid manoeuvres of the sailors, with that of the thunder ever groaning and crashing, with the cracking of the vessel as it tossed wildly in the wind, had filled all hearts with terror. No assurance could be felt until they heard the heavy chain of the huge anchor being cast into the sea.

The following day, March 23rd, the danger, if of a different nature, was not less. They had to advance in the midst of reefs and take the depth every minute. The surrounding islands were inhabited by pirates engaged in attacking and looting boats in distress. Orders were given to load the cannons and to arrange arms on deck. Happily, these precautions were unnecessary. Navigation was continued under the same conditions during the following days.

On Friday, March 16th, Holy Mass was celebrated on board for the last time and the entire boat had to be cleaned for the first arrival at Singapore. The long-awaited port had to be reached by the Strait of Drions.

On 28th March, only sixteen days after the death of Mother St. Pauline, there were only four hours to the end of the voyage. An embarkation having come from Singapore to meet "La Julie". Fr. Beurel, in his impatience to see his beloved mission once more, asked and obtained the permission to leave by this barque with his two companions, an Irish Brother and a Swiss passenger.

The Arrival At Singapore

Finally, on 29th March, Monday in Passion Week, the boat raised anchor at three o'clock in the morning. It was only seven more miles to Singapore. During the morning, a little barque approached it. It sported the Belgian flag and it brought a short letter to the Sisters from Father Beurel, announcing to them that he had arrived safely at five o'clock the previous evening.

After all had been put in order on board, at last the town of Singapore, strange and charming in all the splendour of its equatorial vegetation showed itself to the eyes of those who had looked for it so many times!

"The Brothers departed with the embarkation which came to fetch the passengers and we, about half an hour later, left "La Julie" under the care of Fr. Beurel who came to meet us with Fr. Barbe a Missionary from Penang. He also brought us letters from our beloved Mother General (which had come by the shorter route of Alexandria, Suez and the Red Sea, the desert and the isthmus were crossed by caravan). Further, he announced that Fr. Boncho awaited us in Penang! What pain for us to leave, just on arrival, this much-loved mission of Singapore. But since our departure, we were disposed to have no other will, no other desires, than those of our Superiors."

Reception Of The Religious By The Christians

Fr. Beurel had made arrangements for lodging with an Irish Catholic lady who received us perfectly. At six in the evening a procession of people came to accompany us to Church where, after Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, a solemn "Te Deum" was sung.

We were then conducted back to our hostess where a large number of Christians, especially women and children were come

to greet us and to kiss our hands, which seems to be the custom here for all persons whom they respect.

A New Sorrow

The English Sister on whom seemed to rest the success of the projected foundation in a country where her language predominated, and which was that of the Government, became, on the contrary, a cause of disillusionment. She could not remain in company with the other Sisters, nor vow herself to the works for which she had come to Malaya. Cost as it did, this separation was effected from the first day of the arrival at Singapore. The trial was a cruel one for the three Sisters already deprived of a Superior. To aggravate the difficulties, they had to set sail again at once for Penang. The wishes of Monseigneur Boucho would not allow any delay, and in whatever concerned Fr. Beurel, they took the form of positive orders.

Father Beurel Is Not Discouraged

Before following the afflicted Missioners to Penang, some preliminary details will make clearer what new difficulties were going to meet their goodwill allied to their inexperience. Until the arrival of a new Superior, they were advised directly by the Bishop and by the Missioners of Penang. Monseigneur Boucho, at the period of which we are speaking, was a fine and kind old man who had been working with zeal and success in Malaya for thirty years. Though he had sent Fr. Beurel to Europe in order to establish schools in Singapore, he now demanded, in his wish to please everybody, that Penang should first be supplied, thus yielding to the insistence of those around him and especially to his pro-Vicar, Fr. Brigandet. This last, a man of great talent, a pious and zealous priest became, shortly afterwards, bishop of Burma. All who knew him and particularly the Religious of St. Maur remembered him as being full of warm-hearted devotedness.

But neither one or other of these Missioners had been in direct contact with Religious Communities before their departure for the Missions. From that fact arose understandable ignorance concerning several practices of religious life. Moreover, the young Sisters, now left alone in the Mission, had not a sufficiently clear idea – the fault of inexperience – of certain points of the Rule which cannot be relaxed without the religious spirit itself being affected, in fine, at the beginning of an establishment in a foreign country where the customs, nationalities and climate are all different to what one has known in one's native country, there is inevitable groping before arriving at a true conception of all things

Crossing The Straits Of Malacca

After these necessary remarks, let us transport ourselves to Sunday, 4th April 1852. It was the day when, with sorrow-stricken hearts and physical forces compromised by their interminable and painful crossing from Anvers to Singapore, Sr. St. Euthyme, Sr. St. Eudoxie and Sr. Rosalie had to set sail, once more, for Penang.

In the morning, during Benediction and the Procession of Palms, the Catholics had testified more sympathy than ever, which seemed to increase their regrets at being obliged to leave in such circumstances this Christianity as yet scarcely seen but already deeply loved.

They embarked at six in the evening on a miserable little English boat of three hundred tons, called "L'Edward Marquard" in the company of Fr. Berbue and three Brothers whom Fr. Beurel had likewise ceded to Penang. This excellent Fr. Beurel came to accompany them on board with several people from Singapore. He gave them his blessing and joined to it his best wishes for their success. The poor Sisters had a moment of great sorrow when they found themselves alone on this boat in a dirty, disorderly cabin.

At eight o'clock they left the harbour of Singapore but did not close their eyes the whole night and in the morning found themselves overcome with fatigue and sadness. Having no bed, they had to lie on a mattress thrown on a plank, without sheets or blankets.

On the next Monday, while trying to arrange themselves more comfortably, the affliction in which they were plunged drove them to take an extreme measure which was shortly afterwards to prove harmful to the health of Sr. St. Euthyme. They resolved to shut themselves up in their cabin, not wishing to leave it even at mealtimes. They managed to have the meal brought to them in this narrow and uncomfortable place. Scarcely could Fr. Barbue induce them to come on deck for a breath of air at the close of the day. Having said their Rosary, they retired as early as possible to the suffocating atmosphere of their cabin and did not wish to speak to anybody.

The bad weather added to their tribulations. A combination of dead calm and violent storms rendered this crossing of the Strait of Malacca long and painful for the little boat. "But," remarks our Sister, "our fear was not great, for it would not have cost us much then to make the sacrifice of our life!" Once during the night, the wind so tossed the frail boat that it was on the point of capsizing. One of its sails was carried off with a frightful noise.

Thus passed Holy week, a week of inexpressible trouble for our travellers. Added to all their sacrifices was that of being deprived of the Offices of the Church during the week so truly holy for all. Fr. Barbue had not brought the requisites for celebrating the Holy sacrifices. Even, if he had, it would not have been possible to say Mass under such unfavourable conditions.

Likewise the great day of Easter itself passed in interior and exterior desolation. Actually, by steamship scarcely twenty-four hours are taken to cross from Singapore to Penang. But despite such sensible trials, the travellers found courage to repeat

the words of St. Francis Xavier: "still more, O Lord, still more! If such be Your Holy Will!"

CHAPTER 10

THE FOUNDATION OF PENANG

Arrival And Installation At Penang

On Easter Monday, the weather was magnificent and the hills of Penang showed themselves adorned with rich vegetation when the whole island came in view. The Missionaries rounded it that day and at six in the evening the sailing boat entered the harbour. As night comes early and almost suddenly in these countries near the Equator, the Sisters could not land, not knowing whether their future dwelling was prepared to receive them. Fr. Barbue alone went ashore to announce their arrival. He promised to come back to fetch them at sunrise the following day.

Sure enough, at about 5.30 a.m. the Sisters saw a little embarkation approaching. Fr. Bigandet accompanied by Fr. Barbue led the Sisters to the Church where already a large number of the faithful has gathered. Monseigneur Boucho celebrated Holy Mass, after which he intoned the "Te Deum."

On coming out of the Church, the travellers from overseas were presented to His Highness who received them with touching kindness. His address to them was like balm to their deeply afflicted hearts.

After this first interview with the bishop of their new mission, the Sisters were conducted to the house prepared for them.

About twenty orphans with their native Mistresses occupied a part of it. The Sisters installed themselves there provisionally while waiting for the house which was being built where they were to open a Boarding School. The site of it had been well chosen – the garden was planted with coconuts and beautiful trees of the tropical region. The sea was quite close, at certain hours it sent

inland its refreshing breeze. Finally, the proximity of the Catholic Church completed the advantages of the situation of the establishment.

During the first days, the sympathy with which the newly arrived were surrounded, the solicitude that was shown them, could have made them believe that all was going to contribute to the rapid prosperity of work just begun. But alas! The hour of tribulation had not yet passed!

Serious Illness Of Sr. St. Euthyme

Very soon after her arrival, Sr. St. Euthyme, upset even physically by the hardship of the voyage and by the last trial in Singapore, over-excited by the extreme heat of Penang and by the restraint which she had imposed on herself during the crossing of the Straits, by remaining night and day in a suffocating cabin – she who had already made the best impression by her amiability and her talents – was stricken by a frightful cerebral fever, peculiar to tropical latitudes, as dangerous by their suddenness as by their violence.

Soon the poor Sister was at death's door. The Bishop, the missionaries and the Christians united in ardent supplication for the cure of her who was at the moment the greatest hope of their enterprise, but who was already in her agony. However, after much anguish, the invalid seemed to return to life! But her convalescence was very slow and her health was so badly affected that it was felt she would never fully recover.

Scarcely nine years were to elapse before the young Sister would succumb, having endured almost constantly the most cruel sufferings which nevertheless did not prevent her from working courageously until her last breath, for the good of her numerous pupils.

Harmful Consequences Of This Malady

One of the regrettable consequences of Sr. St. Euthyme's grave malady was that, in order to safeguard her existence and that of the other Sisters who were threatened by the change of climate, they fell into certain fears and exaggerated precautions.

For example, without waiting to submit the case to Rev. Mother de Faudoas, great modifications were made in the regular observances, the time for Meditation was considerably shortened, the Office of the Blessed Virgin was recited in the garden. The Sisters had entered by then in to the new house where they had enough space to install themselves comfortably. They had also the happiness of possessing the Blessed Sacrament in a little improvised chapel where about 10 persons could find place. However, it seemed too congested and too hot to stay there for a long time. Hence the advice and even the order was given the Sister to perform some of their exercises of piety in the garden.

They had also to modify their costume, not as regards the colour but as regards the material of which it was composed – the serge was replaced by a sort of muslin and the black taffeta of the coiffe and collar by a veil of the cream colour but light and transparent. Finally, they were told that, in order to combat the bad effects of the high temperature, they must, every day, at the favourable time – shortly before sunset, take a drive in a carriage outside the Convent enclosure.

It did not enter the heads of any of them that so many precautions and relaxations could, when prolonged, ruin hopelessly the regular observances and the Religious life itself. But the Sisters were the first to find out, that it is very much easier to descend the hill, than to remount it by the sweat of one's brow in order to attain to the highest summits and to keep oneself there.

Another greivous result of Sr. St. Euthyme's illness was that she was likely to have a relapse at any time and that she

remained very weak. However, she alone knew English and could direct the Boarding School just opened, this work whose need made itself keenly felt and was on that account so dear to the heart of Monseigneur Boucho.

Indeed, apart from the Hindu and Chinese orphans amongst whom the Sisters began to work on their arrival (their number today reaches several thousands and is still growing) there were at Penang daughters of naval officers and merchants of different beautiful plantations.

These children spoke scarcely any but the language of their mothers, Malay. Everything had to be done for them; education and instruction. The little English which they knew, had been learned in a little Protestant boarding school where their faith, alas, was in great danger.

One can easily understand then how long it seemed to the Missioners and likewise to the sincere Catholic parents until they saw the school for which the Religious had been asked to come, open and prosper.

That explains also the sentiments of enthusiasm and gratitude with which the Christians received the Sisters of St. Maur and the great interest which from the start they have not ceased to take in their Establishment of which they are proud.

But, scarcely was the school opened when Sr. St. Euthyme became incapable of fulfilling her task. As Sr. St. Eudoxie was occupied with the orphans she could give little help with the other pupils. As for Sr. Rosalie, she was engaged solely in the material service of the little community.

It is clear then that Monseigneur Boucho and Fr. Bigonde were in a most embarrassing situation. The carrying out of their work was seriously compromised. They thought, however, to find the solution of the agonising problem by imposing provisionally on

the Sisters the collaboration of an English layperson of respectable behaviour but whose place should never have been in the Community.

At the same time, Sr. St. Euthyme and Sr. St. Eudoxie found it impossible to oppose the measure adopted by the Bishop. But, in the little Convent, in the mutual intercourse of everyday life the uneasiness grew greater and it was with impatience easy to understand that the Sisters awaited the decision of their beloved Mother General.

Mother De Faudoas Receives The Sad News Of The Crossing

Now we must return to France and see how Mother General received the sad news of her Sisters, which was brought to her at different intervals. With what a vehement desire did she wait for those letters! It was with much anxiety she had seen her dear daughters' depart despite the greatness of her love for God and her hopes for the future mission'.

That first cruel news that she got was that of the death of Mother St. Pauline. That affliction, great as it was, had its consoling side, for it seemed like a proof that God, having demanded such a sacrifice from the first Missioners, would bless the work thereafter.

Moreover, the accents of Mother de Faudoas' sorrow, while revealing profound anguish, are full of a holy pride. In a circular addressed from Paris, June 15th, 1852, to the Superiors of the institute, she wrote: "Our beloved and ever venerated Mother St. Pauline, after three months on the sea, died on March 13th 1851 in the odour of sanctity. Her patience and other virtues were admired by everyone. She was so kind! Her judgement was so perfect! It was just what was needed for our Mission, but God will have pity on us ..."

While she was still plunged in the great grief of that loss, thinking out means of sending a Superior promptly to her daughters now left without a guide, the news of their arrival at Singapore came to add to her sorrow, showing her how the youngest Missioners were abandoned to a dangerous isolation.

Measures Taken To Resolve The Difficulties

Valiant as always, nevertheless, she did not remain disarmed by the trial and she wrote at once to Monseigneur Boucho urgently demanding of him every protection for her poor children.

She added: "No doubt I shall have new obstacles to overcome in assuming an enterprise which the present circumstances make so difficult. Far from allowing myself to be beaten, I am more and more desirous to continue a work which I believe to be of God. The very difficulties urge me ---not to abandon it. I count on your holy prayers, Monseigneur, never have I such great need of them."

Scarcely had she dispatched this post when she received the first painful news of Sr. St. Euthyme's serious illness and a little while afterwards, announcement of the step which the Bishop had been led to take through force of circumstances i.e. to join to the Sisters a lay Instructress scarcely worthy of such a confidence and to entrust her almost entirely with direction of the classes.

Everything made the situation singularly complicated. To the firmness demanded of the Superior to face so many combined dangers, she had to join delicacy towards those to whom her daughters were confided and on whom depended in part the success of the work.

Nevertheless, aided by God, Mother de Faudoas avoided any imprudent step. Her faith was greater even than the trial and triumphed over it through force of circumstances, courage and

patience. She wrote again to Monseigneur Boucho in appropriate terms, while modestly claiming the exercise of her office as the first Superior in her Congregation. She asked him first of all to send away the lay-Instructress whom for good reasons she did not think should live with her daughters.

Necessity Of A New Departure.- Another Journey

It was unnecessary to emulate the great desire which Mother de Faudoas had to re-construct on other bases the great undertaking which the malice of the demon and involuntary human ignorance had almost entirely destroyed. She well understood also the necessity of hastening as much as possible the arrival of the second colony of Sisters. With this end in view, she decided on a more difficult but shorter voyage; that of passing through the Mediterranean, the Red sea and the Indian ocean, the crossing of the desert from Alexandria to Suez being made by coaches, whose route was almost the same as the present Suez Canal.

Further, Mother General ensured help and protection for the new Missioners by obtaining from the Seminary of the Foreign Missions the promise that Fr. Perrot, destined for the Apostolate of Cochin China, would make the journey with them.

The most important question was not however, the route to be taken; but it was supremely desirable to choose with great discernment the new apostles; they must be Sisters of solid virtues and common sense. We may guess how Mother de Faudoas ardently begged the Lord to enlighten her especially when she prayed before the Blessed Sacrament until late at night.

Choice Of Personnel For The Second Colony Of Missionary Religious

Mother General had indeed in the Novitiate in Paris, two young English postulants from London, of whom one especially

was a future hope of the Institute (Sophie Wathworth, later Sr. St. Zacharia) but she understood better than ever the necessity of solidly forming the young Sisters to religious life before sending them afar to encounter dangers as yet but little known.

The only person whom she could offer as a Mistress speaking the English language was an Irish novice of twenty-one years of age, Sr. St. Gregory Connolly. In her case there was less to fear for her youth, her strong native faith keeping her sheltered from many temptations. Further, her family was one of that excellent Christian stock deeply rooted in the soil of Ireland and whose virtues are rendered still more solid by long persecutions endured to defend their religious beliefs. On such roots grow generous shoots in abundance. Love of the apostolate is one of these blessed palms. Sr. St. Gregory was to meet in Malaya one of her brothers, led to the same vocation as herself, a son of St. John Baptist de la Salle and assigned to the boys' school by Fr. Beurel. One could believe then, the young Sister, encouraged by this example, would not suffer in anyway from her premature departure.

And indeed, she did serve God faithfully in the Missions of Malaya and Japan. Thirty years later at Yokohama, she piously completed her earthly life on 18th September 1885.

The choice of Rev. Mother de Faudoas fell secondly on a Sr. St. Testerride, who, while nearing the thirties, already counted several years of Profession. An excellent religious, in character cool and poised, she was to render great services in all the posts she occupied and particularly during ten years as Superior in Penang. Death at her young age, the result of excessive fatigues in her apostolate under a severe climate, took her all too soon from the beautiful works which she accomplished with zeal and success. We shall say later in what circumstances she died.

To the sacrifices and dangers of this new departure, the Superior called still another Sister of ardent and generous heart, gifted with virile virtues, of a rare and charming frankness, of a

lovable and peaceable character. She was called Sr. St. Damian de Jean and was twenty-nine years of age. Less than two years later, she was to receive the difficult and delicate charge of the Superiorship of Penang, a task of which she acquitted herself with admirable tact and success, this being the fruit of God's blessing on her. Her short missionary life of eleven years consumed itself in the practice of a rare perfection and was crowned by a heroic end.

Despite the exceptional qualities of Sr. St. Appolinaire and Sr. St. Damien, Rev. Mother de Faudoas felt that something still more was needed for her on whom would fall the rude task of re-establishing all things in a desirable state at Penang, and to push forward at last this Mission of Asia retarded by the preceding difficulties.

The Superior General had thought at first of confiding this difficult but holy work to the Superior of Bailleul, Mother St. Dorothy, who was full of ardour for the work of the Missions and the same who, having accompanied the first Sisters to Anvers had already escaped being designated to replace Mother St. Pauline. But, as in those circumstances Mother de Faudoas could not decide to impose on Mother St. Dorothy such an extraordinary obedience, so now, in those first days of Sept. 1852 she called her to Paris in order to make a definite decision. She would accept resolutely and without afterthought, the difficult work to be accomplished.

The call of Mother St. Dorothy to the Motherhouse had been sudden. In truth, time was pressing for the next departure had to take place from Southampton on the 18th September. And, a little disconcerted by the unexpectedness and urgency of what was asked of her, the good Superior allowed to escape from her some regrets over the disappointment which her sudden departure would cause the Sisters of her Community, although certainly she would not hesitate to sacrifice this considerations

and every other if obedience had spoken clearly. But her very hesitations made Mother de Faudoas herself undecided.

It was then by an inspiration clearly providential that Mother General remembered that religious of eminent virtue who for some years was of the Community of Cette and who there gave the example of most beautiful virtues, to the great edification of the Sisters and pupils. It was Sr. St. Mathilde – “the compatriot of Joan of Arc as she was virile courage and destined to accomplish admirable works of zeal”. We already know her from her youth and from her first seventeen years of religious life, now it remains to tell of her call to the Missions and of the saintly life which she led there.

CHAPTER 11

THE CALL

Desire To Form Part Of The First Voyage

We have said how, some time previously all Sr. Mathilde's desires for Missionary life were vehemently awakened and it was just at that moment that the rumours of the new foundation abroad began to circulate in the Congregation. From then on, in her zeal, Sr. Mathilde begged of God, with all her strength and in all her prayers, to be designated one of the first for this work offered to the generosity of the daughters of the humble Fr. Barre. She desired and asked this grace in order to suffer and work more. With the purpose of disposing herself for it while waiting, she added to her already severe penances, that of accustoming herself to bear without relief great heat. During the burning summer of Cette, she denied herself any relaxation or refreshment. Then she slept with the window closed and covered with heavy woollen clothes! What must her suffering not have been during this heroic "training in"?

Further, with the permission of her Superior and with the intention again of being ready for the call, should it come, the aspirant to the martyrdom of the distant Apostolate began to learn English. She did it with the energetic application which she brought to each of her undertakings. Without taking anything from her duties, she profited by every free moment for her English. "I had even written in pencil" she relates, "on the door opposite the chapel, a difficult word which I repeated each time that I entered the holy place."

Sacrifice Of English

"But soon I had remorse for this and, having rubbed out the word, I put aside all my English books, abandoning myself absolutely to the Will of God. Never, I thought, shall I be chosen

to be a Missionary, I am not worthy of it." This sacrifice hurt her to the extreme, perhaps it was the last act of generosity which merited for her the longed for call.

But all that was still hidden from her eyes and despite the generosity of her submission, Sr. St Mathilde shed many tears in secret when the first Sisters embarked for Singapore.

However, she did not allow herself to be overcome by this sorrow, however praiseworthy it may have been. She placed her trust in God and put all her heart once more into her ordinary work.

A Consoling Dream

As if to recompense her for it and make her practise patience, Heaven permitted that the future should in a manner be opened before her: she had an extraordinary dream in which she saw herself, with several companions, in a large and beautiful vessel passing by a strange town. She did not know then that there was a boat service for the Indies by the Mediterranean route. At the same time she heard a voice which said to her "you will pass by this way and your voyage will be less long than that of your forerunners."

Unexpected Call Of Mother De Faudoas

It was only a short time after this celestial warning that Mother General had Sr. St. Mathilde brought to Paris: "Leave all and come." Nothing had as yet transpired of a second departure for the new Missions of the Congregation, so that the call of her first Superior was for the holy Religious of Cette, quite unforeseen. Neither did she know of the causes which made another voyage necessary. Obedient to the letter, she, who on the morning of the day that she received this order, was preparing her pupils' prizes left all as she was asked. She left that very evening for Paris where she arrived on 15th September during the

morning. On the way, she had seen nothing, heard nothing; she was absorbed in continual prayer where she offered herself to God, to accomplish His Holy Will whatever it was, but her heart was moved by the presentiment of a second vocation.

Providential Circumstances Of The Nomination Of Sr. St. Mathilde As Superior Of Penang

The day that she arrived in Paris, Rev. Mother de Faudoas had to go out, very probably because of the last preparation for the departure of her missionary daughters. In any case, struck by the air of sanctity and of mortification stamped on the features of Sr. St. Mathilde whom she had not seen for a long time, but not yet decided on her rather than the Superior of Bailleul for the great work in Malaya, she simply said to her: "My daughter, go to the Chapel and pray. I shall call you on my return." And Mother General went out... and so long were the affairs she had to deal with that she did not return to the Mother House until several hours later. The first person whom she saw in the Chapel when on her return she went to salute the Blessed Sacrament, was Sr. St. Mathilde, kneeling on the ground, motionless, absorbed in the fervour of her prayer, in the same place where she had left her hours before... the generous sister believed herself to be obeying in that the desires of the Superior, though that was far from the intention of the latter.

So great a spirit of prayer and obedience was a source of light for Rev. Mother de Faudoas. "There," she said to herself, "is the person that is needed. I can have in her absolute confidence and God will help her in all things because she knows how to run to Him by a prayer full of fervour and of the mortification of the Saints,"

In the Council meeting which followed without delay, the Superior General and her Assistants named therefore without any hesitation, Sr. St. Mathilde Raclot, Superior of Penang, with the mission to guide the little "caravan" which, in less than three days, was to set sail. They had entire confidence that this virtuous

Religious would know how to re-establish all things in the desired order in the distant House where the first missionaries were vegetating.

She had just shown herself great, simple and generous in a way which revealed to her Superior-General a succession of graces on the part of God and a chain of heroic acts on her own part. The apostle had been divinely prepared; she could now depart.

Sentiments Of Mother St. Mathilde At The News Of Her Nomination

It remains to add with what sentiments she received the order of obedience. During that long prayer of several hours when she had prostrated herself before her Sovereign Lord, the cry of her soul had been "My God, Thy will be done. I do not ask for anything, do with me what You will!" When, on emerging from this conversation with God, she learnt that she was destined for the Missions the most lively spiritual joy flooded her soul... But, alas! The voice of obedience added that she would be Superior and, a great anxiety succeeded her first joy. To be a Missionary in order to suffer and immolate herself further, yes, that had been the ambition of her generous heart, but to be obliged to accept a formidable responsibility made more heavy by being distant and unknown - was for her a terrible blow. She threw herself on her knees before Monseigneur Surat (then Ecclesiastical Superior of the Mother House) and Mother General, begging of one and the other not to impose on her the burden, beyond her strength – the trials of the first foundation in the Indies. A soul less strong than hers would indeed have been disconcerted before the difficulties of her task. However, the first painful moment over, she resumed courage, She bowed her head and accepted the chalice which Her Divine Master presented to her. Monseigneur Surat showed himself extremely good to her; helping her to regain her strength with words full of faith and charity which she remembered all her life! She affirms this herself in her narrative.

Before allowing her to take up in her own narrative, let us remark with what simplicity she practised charity, to a heroic degree, on leaving France. That Community where she had spent ten years and which she loved so much, she had left without any delay at the call. Having arrived at Paris on 15th September, she left it two days later and on 18th September left from Southampton... forever! She required but three days to accept and prepare for such a great and perilous voyage. She was going, moreover to a country totally unknown to her, and, at the age of nearly forty she had to learn its languages, customs and habits, very different from those of her fatherland; to bear, without rest, the devouring climate. She had still in France beloved persons, her brother and sister but she left them like the rest, without a word to reveal her sacrifice.

Her Own Narrative

It is truly fortunate that, yielding to friendly and filial insistence, the venerated Superior should have consented many years later to write her souvenirs of the voyage. Her alert pen, her simple and clear style, her intelligence, her good sense, her good humour and her generous heart which reveal themselves at every moment in these accounts make the reading of them attractive in the extreme.

Nothing could be better or more instructive as a means of knowing her than to let her speak for herself as often as possible. The "historian" must confine herself then to completing the salient facts where they are abridged or omitted and above all where the humility of the virtuous missionary forced her to silence.

CHAPTER 12

THE SECOND VOYAGE

The Missioners Leave For Southampton

On 17th September 1852, Mother St. Mathilde left Paris with her three companions who were selected by that year's Chapter – Sr. St. Damien de Jean, Sr. St. Appolinaire and Sr. St. Gregory Connolly who was still a novice. Mother General and the Mistress of Novices, Mother St. Appoline, accompanied them as far as Southampton. A young English postulant about whom we will hear a lot in the future came to accompany the Superiors back to the Mother House and to serve as their interpreter as neither knew any English. (She was called Sophie Wathworth). The excitement of the previous days proved too much for Mother St. Mathilde. What was more, the Feast of Our Lady of Dolours fell that year on 18th September and its vigil was kept as a day of strict fast. Mother St. Mathilde would not allow herself to ask for a dispensation. Consequently, she was very seasick between Le Havre and Southampton. All those who have ever experienced that terrible crossing will understand her condition. However, Rev. Mother de Faudoas had no sympathy for the sick Sister. On the contrary she was surprised at her and said "Really! Have you no courage at all? How can you give such example to your Sisters?" The poor sufferer did not reply, but thought within herself "let us wait until the end" with that streak of innocent fun which was hidden beneath her serious character and austere virtue.

Her suffering eased on their arrival at Southampton, and the first anxiety of the pious travellers, before night fell, was where to find a Catholic Church. They found one, very small and shabby, the faithful being in very small numbers there in the great English port.

Holy Mass

The following morning, they came to be nourished with the bread of the strong and to place their long voyage under the protection of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours. On coming out after this delay at the feet of their Divine Master, they received a most gracious welcome from Dr. Cox, the priest in charge of this humble portion of the great Catholic family. His poverty, combined with his amiable hospitality deeply touched them and they always remembered him.

Benevolence Of A Sailor

At Southampton they made another acquaintance whom they never forgot. A sailor spied them on the deck and seeing their religious habit, he explained that formerly, in France, he had been cared for by the Sisters of Charity. He had kept such a vivid remembrance of their goodness, that out of gratitude, he wished to render these French nuns all the services possible. He was, moreover, a Catholic. Mother St. Mathilde asked him to get a few English Catechisms and the good man went himself to make the purchase, refusing to accept repayment. Such charity touches the heart of God as well as those of his friends.

Rev. Fr. Bernot

The new missionaries found that the priest from the Society of Foreign Missions, Rev. Fr. Bernot, had already arrived at Southampton. Rev. Mother de Faudoas had requested his Superiors for such a guide to protect the Sisters until their arrival at Penang. He had all the requisite qualities to perform worthily his mission of tact and charity.

The journey made with Mother St. Mathilde and what he later learnt of her at Penang filled him with such esteem for her that he made himself her defender and help in all her difficulties. When he was later recalled to Paris as Director of the Seminary of

Foreign Missions, he kept up communication with the holy nun and obtained important help from the "Institute of the Holy Infancy" for her orphans in Malaya and Japan.

"The Bentick"

"The boat which was to carry us" writes Mother St. Mathilde in her story "was the Bentick", a fine boat for that time, and making its first voyage. It was painted in light green and gold; the dining room was perfumed with flowers, and a group of musicians travelling to India made the vessel resound with music little in harmony with the sentiments of our hearts – all this gave an air of magnificence and of superficial gaiety.

Our cabin was so large that it easily contained the four of us together. Our Mother General in her emotion and lack of knowledge of sea travel said, "you have no cause for complaint, my children. You are going to be like queens in your veritable palaces."

Rev. Mother De Faudoas' Good-Bye

"While our mothers remained with us we had still some part of France left, but now they were about to leave us – for ever! Return for us seemed impossible. Mother General with her eyes full of tears blessed and embraced us affectionately, Mother St. Appoline was equally moved. Both of them with their young postulant left the boat and went across the gangway on to a slight mound from which they could see us for a little while longer. Then came the last signs of adieu – the boat swerved to the right and we saw them no more."

The Missionaries First Impression

"At that moment we experienced an inexplicable heartbreak. We went down to our cabins to hide our emotions and our tears. For a while they flowed in silence, but very soon

throwing ourselves into one another's arms we vowed one to another our inviolable attachment. At the same time the joy of sacrifice began to make itself felt and gradually the tears were dried."

The First Stage Of The Journey

"We answered the gong that called us to our first meal on board and found that we were placed beside Father Bernot. The meal began gaily. "The Bentick" was just beginning to sense the vigorous breeze of the open sea. Soon it began to rock to left and right. So much so that one by one the passengers left the table (ourselves included) and went directly to their cabins.

Father Bernot and another passenger were the only two on board that did not have to retire. Fr. Bernot was in fact astonished at our reactions and on that day, as well as all the rest, never experienced an instant of seasickness. A rare privilege."

Meanwhile the waves rose higher and higher. "The Bentick" balanced herself majestically. From afar it must have been a magnificent spectacle but being on board was rather hard to bear. For six days the sea was so rough that we had to remain continually in bed almost as if we were dead. We had scarce enough strength to whisper "My God, I offer it to You". We were exhausted.

Rev. Mother de Faudoas fared no better on her return journey to France. She suffered so much on the boat that she then understood to what point sea-sickness reduces one and how powerless are flowers, music and beautiful furnishing to cure such sickness. Filled with compassion at the thought of what we might have to suffer, not only for a few hours but also for days on end, she repeated incessantly "Oh! how I pity our poor sisters!"

Happily, on the sea as elsewhere days succeed each other and are never all the same. On approaching the coast of Spain

the sea became calmer. The air was pure, the sky clear and a flock of pretty birds flew around the ship. We were nearing Gibraltar. Already the great rock which hides the town was in sight. We were quite well then, alert and happy. We were able to go ashore and visit a Church and the few hours which we passed there before Our Lord made us soon forget all we had previously suffered.

Then followed the journey from Gibraltar to Malta. We made further acquaintance with Fr. Bernot who was delighted to find that we were not in the least inclined to despondency. He admitted later that he was terrified at the thought of having to travel with people thus afflicted by the sacrifice of their country, but saw before long that our spirit was quite otherwise. Established in a quiet corner of the deck, we could pray, read or converse quite at our ease, in a word, follow out Rule. We also set ourselves as much as possible to study English and at the hour of recreation we amused each other by gentle and religious gaiety.

Algiers

Before arriving at Malta, we cruised near the coast of Africa and one day we saw Algiers in the distance. One of our companions, our dear Sr. St. Damien, had relations there; her widowed mother, with a younger son and a daughter who also wished to follow her elder sister and give herself to God. She did so later. Sr. St. Damien wondered with filial tenderness whether her good mother had received the farewell letter of her beloved daughter, and what impression her unexpected departure had made. We shared in her emotion. The coast was so near that we could see the houses and the smoke from the chimneys. Which was her mother's? We did not know, but looked closely at one after another until they had all faded from view."

It was then also that Mother St. Mathilde recalled, not without emotion, a mysterious dream which she now saw fulfilled.

She had seen herself, with several companions, sailing in a beautiful boat past an unknown town. She recognized this town to be Algiers, even though she had never seen it before in reality. Plunged in silent and grateful wonder, her heart beating with understandable emotion, she asked herself again whose voice had spoken to her in these distinct words “You will pass this way and you will achieve your goal before you predecessors.” She hid the emotion which she then felt, but later on, in all simplicity, she often spoke to her daughters of this occasion on which she had received supernatural encouragement. Finding herself in the same latitude as Cette, she also saluted that beloved house which she had left scarcely 8 days before and whose members little suspected that she was passing so near. “Goodbye, Ms. Mere, goodbye my dear Sisters and pupils” murmured the holy missionary. “Goodbye, goodbye, we will meet in Heaven.”

Malta

“On 28th September at noon, the “Bentick” entered the port of Malta. We had time to go down and visit parts of the town so full of glorious souvenirs. Our longest stay was at a Church, how sweet it is to pray in silence at the feet of him for Whom one is leaving all. How near one feels to Him and how happy!

After that we saw the Palace of the Chevaliers. (It was then called the Palace of the Queen of England). We were shown their armour of every kind, swords, and helmets made for giants, metal engravings and portraits by the great Masters. Our guide who was a Protestant showed us with particular emphasis the portrait of Catherine Bord. The face of that poor creature spoke well of the remorse of her soul.

The Cathedral, dedicated to St. John, is a magnificent building. Its vaults contain the dust of many famous people and declare eloquently the nothingness of the glory of this world.”

Mother St. Mathilde, quick to see the bright side of things, tells gaily how, on their departure from Malta, on the following morning, a laughable occurrence took place with regard to one of the English passengers. This gentleman had already been a source of diversion for his fellow travellers on more than one occasion. Certainly he was not possessed of the full use of his senses. He always posed as a great Lord and when he was in his cabin, he seemed to be commanding an army of invisible servants. So to the great amusement of those who stopped to listen, his voice could be heard in a solemn and imperative tone giving orders to his imaginary servants. “Boy,” he would say, “Brush my coat! Polish my shoes!” And then he would imitate the humble response “Yes, my Lord; with pleasure, sir.” Without doubt, he counted too much on the services of this fictional retinue to inform him of the time that the boat would leave. The “Bentick” left the port without having taken him on board, and from the deck, the unfortunate passenger could be seen gesticulating on the shore vainly trying to stop the boat. It is unnecessary to add that such a spectacle caused General hilarity. The “Bentick” went on her way, and the badly-informed “Lord” was forced to wait at Malta for another boat.

“During this time,” the story continues, “we were approaching Egypt and the memories of sacred and profane history came to our minds. Picture us near the island of Pharoah, formerly renowned for its “Light-house” one of the seven wonders of the world. Then we came to Alexandria, this famous city, so powerful and such a centre of learning in ancient times, now the rendezvous of so many nations.

The costumes and the faces of the Negroes, which we saw on the shore, told us clearly that we had said goodbye to Europe and that we were about to land on completely foreign soil. It was Rosary Sunday, 1st October, and we greatly wished to hear Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion – a happiness which we were deprived of for twelve days. Fr. Bernot’s desire was just as ardent as ours but he could not celebrate Mass on board so we went

ashore to look for a Catholic Church. This was not an easy task as the different rites complicated matter very much. All his searching seemed to be in vain and the morning was already well advanced. It was almost mid-day and the Sisters were tired and losing hope. Not seeing Fr. Bernot returning they totally abandoned the idea of hearing Holy Mass and took some food but they had hardly done so when the priest returned. After having knocked in vain at several doors, he at last discovered Fr. Lazarist's residence where he was given every facility to celebrate Mass. This was the only Mass we heard during our long voyage of **thirty-nine** days and I was the only one able to receive Holy Communion.

Some hours after that we were on the Egyptian Government boat which was to take us through the Nile to Cairo which is one hundred and seventy kilometres from Alexandria.

This time we had no "palace" like that on the "Bentick." The passengers and the shops were all mixed up on the gangway. In the sole cabin reserved for ladies there were only a few large bamboo seats on which it was impossible to sleep.

On the following day we saw to our great interest the two great banks of the river Nile, the fertile rice and cereal fields which it watered, shaded by palms, sycamores, nut-trees and shrubs. The inhabitants seemed on the whole rather small.

Coming on to Cairo we saw from afar off the famous Egyptian Pyramids, the building of which took so many long years, around which so many bitter tears of the descendants of Jacob were shed, as they cried out for their deliverance and the Saviour Whom we now know.

In the evening we had a close view of Cairo and its numerous towers but did not land until nighttime, in the middle of heavy, rough sailors. There awaited us on the shore a crowd of Arabs, Egyptians and Negroes. Some of them with torches the

light from which reflected on their white teeth and tanned skin. Others had carriages to take us to the different hotels. The confusion was verily a spectacle. We were pushed from side to side and literally dazed. We first took notice of the order to be observed during the journey across the desert from Cairo to Suez. We knew we were to form part of the second Caravan which was to start at midnight. In the meantime, we went to wait in a huge hotel situated on a magnificent site. We prayed a while there and slept on long couches.

Crossing The Desert

At midnight the coaches arrived. We climbed into ours, accompanied by Fr. Bernot and a shy young French woman who was going to seek her fortune in India. Once in the desert, we saw nothing else except the moon, which was full, the stars which shone overhead and the sand over which our vehicle rolled.

At the second relay, we had a most unexpected meeting with the Pro-Vicar of Malaya, Monseigneur Bigandet, who was coming from Penang to France to hasten our departure.

"Are these then the travellers for Penang?" he exclaimed, on approaching our carriage.

"Yes," Fr. Bernot replied immediately. "There are **four** Sisters".

"Are they English?"

I had already put my head out the door to assure him of our willingness to learn English, but he did not hear.

"I will go on my way" he said; with a most significant gesture, portraying his complete disappointment.

We remained speechless. A thorn had pierced my heart. Later, Monseigneur Bigandet often recalled to me that meeting in

the middle of the desert. He sincerely regretted it, for he had a kind heart. On our part, we had long since discarded our first impression of him. We often joked about it, though, above all when I mimicked for Mgr. Bigandet the gesture with which he left us. During the rest of the night we slept little. For myself, I thought much and suffered much too. About 6 a.m. looking out to the right, we were greatly surprised to perceive the sea at no great distance. "Imagine," we said, "We receded constantly, according as we advanced, or rather, it moved with us." It was the effect of the mirage which had completely taken us in.

About 4 p.m. as we had been told, we saw the real sea and Suez sitting miserably beside it. There were no Churches there – only a few wretched houses, most of which seemed roofless, and a hotel to receive travellers going to India or Europe. These of the first Caravan had already arrived. We were shown into a bedroom with two beds. It was all they could give us. They were very respectable, however, and capable of holding two each, at a good distance from one another. There was no question of either sheets or counter panes – just a rug and two pillows. No more was needed in the climate in which we found ourselves. It was a night of commotion. All the time, luggage was arriving on camels' backs, the merchandise from the "Bentick" and the coaches bringing travellers.

On Board The "Indostan"

At 2 p.m. on the following day all was ready to conduct us in a little steamboat to the 'Indostan' which was too big to go right into the port, even to Suez.

This was then the way we got from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. It was only some years later that the route from Alexandria to Suez via Cairo was established. Since then all voyages have been made from Marseilles direct to the East. The "Indostan" was larger than the "Bentick" but older and not so

beautiful. From its lack of modern amenities, it was easy to see that it had been sailing for many years.

On one of the first evenings on board the "Indostan", Sr. St. Gregory retired early to her cabin but to our surprise returned hastily to the deck. She told us excitedly that she had seen a strange black beast fluttering to and fro down in our room. We calmed her as well as we could, and bed time having arrived, without the slightest apprehension we lay down to sleep. But our dear little Sr. St. Gregory was only half-assured. She had her ear "cocked" and her eyes strained opened for anything that might happen around her. Suddenly she made a bound from her bed and throwing herself on her knees beat the ground vigorously. At the same time she cried out triumphantly – "Oh my Mother, you need no longer be afraid and I, I have killed him. I must have given him a great blow!" and she pointed magnificently to her victim, which was only an unfortunate cockroach – a sort of a flying, black insect, about two or three centimetres long which infests boats and houses in warm countries but which are nevertheless harmless. Her vigorous blow destroyed the "monster" completely, but if Sr. St. Gregory thought she could exterminate all such pests on the "Indostan" she would not want to have much more to do during the entire voyage. We could not do anything but praise the entire personnel on the new boat. The Captain in particular was an extremely polite and well-bred man and showed himself full of deference towards us. He never failed to salute us every morning and evening.

The Red Sea at this particular period of the year is always terribly warm. The boat glided on the waters as on a bed of oil, and during this calm period we could recall the famous prodigies which were accomplished in these regions. This was the very sea that had divided before the Hebrews and had drowned the Egyptians army in its immense waves. Further on, the horizon enlarged and we were facing Mt. Horeb and Mount Sinai. It was there in the middle of thunder and lightning God spoke to his people – there, the law of the eternal Decalogue was written on

tables of stone. Five more days of the Red Sea and then Aden which struck us as being magnificent from the distant view we had of its bare, towering rocks. It reminded us too of what the vestibule of Hell might resemble. We had only a short stop there and did not even land. From Aden to Ceylon – an eight hour journey in which we could see nothing but sky and water.”

Here we see from Mother St. Mathilde’s own account their meeting with a rich American who spoke only a few words of French and who since the first days after their departure from Southampton showed extreme respect and amiability towards the Sisters even though he had never even seen the costume before. He was returning to Penang where he had made important and fruitful negotiations in previous years. Mother St. Mathilde had noticed that he wanted very much to speak to her ever since they had left Gibraltar.

Monsieur Cassette

He examined attentively the black habits of the Sisters and all that they did. Finally, not daring through discretion to directly open a conversation with them, he had asked Fr. Bernot during the journey across the Mediterranean what motive had determined these ladies to leave their native country and travel so far. The good priest had tried his best to explain, but “he could not understand.” What complicated matters was, that though he understood French fairly well, he could speak very little of it, which gave his speech a quaint and most original turn.

To go from France to Malaya in order to devote oneself freely to the salvation of souls had never entered his head. It was quite new to him.

One day, plucking up his courage, he spoke to Mother St. Mathilde herself. After a most respectful salutation, he asked her permission to ask a question. On being answered in the affirmative by a polite word he expressed himself thus, “You,

French ladies, with very gay, amiable faces, have mourning clothes. Why? Why not be like other women, with pretty, bright clothes?”

Mother St. Mathilde then explained to him in her own convincing, ardent way, why she and her Sisters had left the world, their families, their country and what they hoped to do in Malaya.

In spite of the difficulty caused by difference in language, without any doubt she knew how to be eloquent and persuasive. Mr. Cassette - that was the name of the rich American- listened to the end with the greatest attention, a pensive air and his eyes wide open. Then when she had finished, he went away without saying anything, but, this time, he understood.” Till the end of the voyage he continued to observe the holy passengers with wonderful respect and to show them his esteem. He showed several instances of delicate forethought in their regard. On 1st October which was his birthday, he celebrated with his friends and showed particular attention to the nuns. In return they offered him a medal of Our Lady which he promised to keep.

During the rest of the voyage from Aden to Ceylon one could see that Mr. Cassette was a good and serious-minded man. Fr. Bernot’s and the Sisters’ good example caused him to reflect much. He would have wished to talk about religion a few times and he said to Mother St. Mathilde in his own peculiar French “Si, vous pouvis mi’eclairer, moi, verite embrasser’ (if you could enlighten me I would embrace the truth). The Sisters then amused themselves by calling him “Mr. Pouvis” among themselves.

To reply as soon as possible to his good desires, Mother St. Mathilde offered him one of the English Catechisms which she owed to the generosity of the Southampton sailor. Mr. Cassette did not disdain this simple imposition of Religion. From it, among other things, he got some knowledge of the Blessed Virgin and even the beginning of devotion to her. It surely was a pledge of

pre-destination. He learnt from it the “Ave Maria” which he often recited afterwards.

Besides the hours holily employed in enlightening a soul in quest of the truth, there were the recreation hours for the travellers. More than once, Mr. Cassette contributed his share in breaking the monotony of the long voyage by his extraordinary attempts at French.

One morning, he came up on deck still quite dazed and began to relate to the missionaries the great danger, which according to him, the boat had experienced during the night. “Oh, very grave, very serious last night.” He had gone to sleep while reading in his bed and the lamp had burnt his nightcap. It could have set the boat on fire.

Ceylon:

“On 20th October” continues Mother St. Mathilde, “we saw land again. To the right of the ship, under a brilliant sky, were outlined verdant mountains, coconut and banana forests and all the tropical vegetation. Towards mid-day Ceylon was before us and on the height which dominates the town “Point de Galles” we could distinguish the modest Catholic Chapel, replaced since then by a beautiful church. It beckoned us to come and pray. The speed of the boat diminished and we were soon surrounded by piers and ships of all sorts, some manned by solemn English men, others Indians with beautiful dark skin and remarkable dexterity.

An hour later, we climbed the hill, our hopes high, expecting to find Jesus in the Tabernacle there. But alas! The chapel was closed, the Blessed Sacrament never being reserved there. Holy Mass was only celebrated at rare intervals by a priest who came over from Colombo. We went down to the hotel sad at heart.”

“The Singapore”

That same evening we boarded a little traveller “the Singapore” – narrow for its length, it sailed beautifully. The voyage was, for us, like days of Retreat. On this new boat, as on the last one, the captain was full of regard for us. At table he placed us opposite him, with Fr. Bernot at his right, regardless of possible criticism from the Protestants aboard, and even though there were other ladies there, it was to “Madame la Mere” that he offered his arm on going into dinner, an honour which she would willingly have evaded.

Soon the high hills of Penang appeared. Our good friend, Mr. Cassette, hastened to point them out to us as soon as they came into sight. All these landscapes were familiar to him, for his business obliged him to make frequent journeys to these lands.

Penang! A little longer and we were there; here is our new homeland. It is to the children of this land that God sends us. It is henceforth to them we will give our energy and our love! May their Angel guardians help us!

Arrival At Penang 28th October 1852

At six o'clock on the evening of 28th October 1852, the Feast of the Apostles Sts. Simon and Jude, we came into port. Fr. Berbe, a missionary delegated by Monseigneur Boucho was there to receive us. Our American friend said good-bye and promised to visit us while he was in Malaya. Srs. St. Euthyme, Eudoxie and Sr. Rosalie were eagerly awaiting us.

Our emotion was beyond expression. On the morrow Monseigneur came to say Mass for us in the little Chapel which was barely large enough to contain the **seven** of us. The good Bishop gave us a most paternal welcome and re-assured us regarding our not being English and gave us the hope that it would not be long until we could speak Malay and English fluently.

He had even the goodness to offer to teach us some Malay which he spoke perfectly himself.

Our little home was by no means large but it was convenient for the moment. It was situated in the midst of cocoanut groves and near enough to the sea to get the grand sea breeze which fact makes a sojourn there now very pleasant. Afterwards we had only to enlarge this first building.”

This, then, is how Mother St. Mathilde came to Malaya – to this town of Penang to which we have already accompanied the first band of missionaries... where she remained. The new arrivals greatly admired the majestic aspect of their new Island. The climate is healthy, its situation magnificent but its proximity to the Equator made it terribly warm and uncomfortable to bear for foreigners. The violent storms would often frighten the Sisters and fill them with an involuntary trembling.

Mother St. Mathilde often recalled in her old age those strange, agonized feelings which she experienced during her first days in Penang when the heavenly bodies seemed to have been let loose on the little island.

Such was the violence of these floodwaters that it seemed as if they must break the barriers which guard the moving island and carry it off at uncontrollable pace to innumerable distances. But those were sufferings relatively small and easy to bear.

Other sufferings, of a different nature and much greater, were to compose the sorrowful diadem with which Our Lord wished to adorn the brow of his courageous apostle.

CHAPTER 13

STRUGGLE AND VICTORY

The Struggle Sustained By Mother St Mathilde

It is appropriate here to cast a retrospective glance on the long and painful voyage from France to Malaya, accomplished by Mother St. Mathilde and her companions. It was all that one would expect it to be, guided by her whose exceptional fervour and courage we know. About the inconveniences of the journey, about the undeniable sufferings – physical and mental which they met with here and there – not a complaint issued on the part of Mother St. Mathilde or her companions. They employed their time holily and usefully. Faithful to their Rule, they divided their days between prayer and study, as much as circumstance allowed. Finally, we have seen them scatter edification around, and passing their last days on board in almost complete retreat.

Also, in the soul of Mother St. Mathilde, did not the intense desire of perfect immolation grow, and communicating her faith and generosity to her companions, she knew how to penetrate them with her own spirit. Hence, it is just to say that in her person she was a living Rule. She brought to Penang a love of sacrifice urged even to heroism.

This much made clear, it is easier to understand how much sorrow and surprise it brought her to have to struggle to lead and make those around her lead that life of complete renunciation of which she had dreamed, having come so far to work for the glory of her Divine Master. In her story, she manifested this trial by a discreet and delicate phrase: “Since our first days at Penang” she says, “we had to defend ourselves against: a too natural interest.”

This is what we read between the lines. Monseigneur Boucho and all his missionaries, even the pro-Vicar Fr. Bigandet when he returned from Europe, all spoke in the same strain.

Because of their experience of the climate and country and the danger run by Sr. St. Euthyme, whose health appeared to have been permanently ruined, under cover of their great goodwill and solicitude for the future collaboration of their work, they never ceased to repeat to Rev. Mother what they had said to the first arrivals – “here, you must make more modification in your religious observances. If you wish to resist the weakening effect of the climate in order to do lasting work, you must change your habit. Choose white and lighter material. At the very least if you keep the black colour, change the material for light silk. Do not make long meditations. Do not recite your Office in choir, but walking in the garden. Finally, a drive is necessary for you every day, when the sun is coolest. A little refreshment revives spent forces.” This talk had many appearances of truth. How to resist those who advised it in the name of their authority, their experience and their interest in the nuns and their work? But the work of God had reasons which reason understands not. The mitigations demanded of Mother St. Mathilde “little corresponded” she says “with the life of pain and privation and sacrifice which they had been prepared to lead on the Missions.”

The faithful nun was, moreover, convinced that God did not want these modifications. So, respectfully and firmly, she began to struggle, exteriorly and interiorly, to diffuse her ideas of generous renunciation. She displayed in this trial, in an extraordinary manner, all her courage and religious spirit.

The Cause Is Taken Before The Superior General

The Missionary priests being unable to explain such energy believed themselves obliged to have recourse to Rev. Mother de Faudoas to ask her decision on the debate. Above all they insisted on the fact that, in such a hot country, two meditations daily only served to encourage cerebral fevers and perhaps total paralysis.

Mother St. Mathilde on her side also wrote to her first Superior and her heart full of agony and tears, imposed her reasons that nothing essential should be changed in the regular observance and in the holy habit. Then, she waited.

Agony And Suffering

But, at that time, boats did not travel as quickly as nowadays; replies were slow to come and the courageous Mother had plenty of time to savour at leisure the bitterness of her chalice. She said to someone still living that during her painful wait, her nights were sleepless. Then, she would steal into the garden, not wishing to disturb by her tears the repose of her Sisters.

The sorrow was crushing, for with the supernatural sense with which she was endowed, she understood quite well that it was a matter of life or death with the Mission in Malaya. Choking back her sobs, she walked up and down gazing at the sky and raising to Our Lord a heartfelt prayer. “O God,” she murmured “Your Will be done – with every kind of suffering that will please You. But do not expect me to accomplish the task received from Your hand, without prayer around me. I cannot exact the necessary sacrifice, I cannot hope that they will be integrally accomplished if my Sisters and I have not the all-powerful help of prayer.” And she added, “I have decided to ask Mother General to accept my resignation, that is, I would have renounced the pursuit of the work commenced if Rev. Mother General, yielding to the advice of the Missionaries, would have ordered what they desired.”

Happily, Mother General was so well versed in the things of God that she noticed that these proposals made with the best intentions and apparently with excellent reasons were but another manoeuvre of the devil to sap the base of the edifice scarcely begun and destined to attain one day such great proportions.

Rev. Mother De Faudoas Forbids The Attempted Modifications

She replied saying she would prefer not to go against the wishes of the Penang Superior. She wished Monseigneur Boucho to give in to Mother St. Mathilde's wishes. Without wholly abandoning the idea of change she preferred to wait for a while to see what effect the climate would have on the Sisters' health. In a word to see if the exact observance could be maintained. She ordered that the Sisters' clothes should be of lighter material but still within full limits of the Rule. She also gave permission for walks, without making it a compulsory obligation.

Great Success Without Modification

"The years that have gone by have proved what we hoped they would," wrote Mother St. Mathilde. "Just as you do in France we are able to make our full meditation. What could a community without prayer come to and who would want to govern it? We have preserved our holy habit in shape and colour. It unites us still with our Sisters in France, and the light sacrifice makes it still more dear to us. Little by little the walks became less of a necessity and dwindled to a rarity. The interior life, without which a religious is as nothing, was victorious and health did not suffer in the least on its account. It was universally held by all the Missioners who knew Mother St. Mathilde that, through a somewhat holy vengeance, she had demanded of God to give a visible sign of His good pleasure, at having the costume and entire observance retained, by not allowing any of the Sisters over whom she ruled for 20 years to lose their health, despite the strict observance of the convent and the particularly hard life which they led.

And her prayer was granted to the full. During her twenty years of office not even one Sister died, but scarcely had she left the house to go permanently to Japan than three Sisters went to their eternity.

To conclude, let us realise that Mother St. Mathilde had the last word in this muddle for the better. The cause for which she worked so hard was almost completely victorious. And it was a truly great victory because at the bottom of it lay the triumph of generosity over slightly exaggerated care of the body. It was a decisive victory also because it led on magnificently the other House of St. Maur in Asia to the complete religious life, vivified by prayer and immolation.

The Happy Effects Of Mother St. Mathilde's Work

Such example had its effect even outside. Many saw that such a grand spirit of prayer and mortification was not incompatible with reasonable care of oneself. One fact among many others shows us to what extent the outlook of the missionaries of Penang was influenced by the example of Mother St. Mathilde. From one of Monseigneur Boucho's letters in 1863 to Rev. Mother de Faudoas when Sr. St. Appolinaire was nominated Superior of Penang after Mother St. Damien's death, it is seen that he was troubled about the relaxations of the new Superior. Mother St. Damien who was extremely mortified in her own regard had authorised frequent walks for the Sisters' and children's health. This good Bishop was now defending the cause which Mother St. Mathilde guarded so zealously on her arrival in Penang! He even declared that the prescription of the Rule should be followed scrupulously under pain of opening the door to relaxation.

So as not to omit anything which might add to the merits of this Mission foundress, it is only right to mention another trial which was the result of the over-zealous interest of Monseigneur Bigandet in certain degenerate persons. There are often characters which are so straightforward in themselves that they cannot see deceit in others. The Vicar's belief in these protégés was too loyal.

He had brought from France a young English teacher whom he had found at the Irish College in Paris. While waiting for the time when Mother St. Mathilde and her Sisters could speak English, the newly arrived was given almost the whole direction of the classes. But those whom she should have helped, she vexed in a thousand small ways. She made compliments to Monseigneur Bigandet who did not see through her deceit for a long time.

She was not even able to give her lessons properly and this fact disturbed the Superior and Sisters very much. They sensed also the urgent need of making themselves more familiar with the children and the parents, which fact stimulated their zeal still more in the study of the language, especially English.

Difficulty In Learning The Language

They studied with undying perseverance, and desirous of having the best pronunciation they took lessons from an Irish Catholic, Mr. MacNamee. "But this good man was slower in learning French than we were English." This fact did not favour the progress of his laborious pupils, zealous though they were, to arrive quickly at their goal. Besides, it is a fact that even if conditions are highly favourable, a foreign language always takes a lot of time to learn especially if one wants to speak it fluently, unless of course that one is particularly gifted in that way.

Mother St. Mathilde was then forty years of age which made the question still more complicated. At this age the mind cannot apply itself very easily to a foreign language. Intelligent though she was, she did not seem to have a natural aptitude for foreign tongues – which talent is composed of a special alacrity and delicate tuning of the ear – indispensable for sound and grammar. But her indomitable courage was such that when she had learned to speak it for a little while she did not rest until she could read and write it perfectly. She spoke it with a touch of a foreign accent which did not make a lot of difference in her work, as she did not have to teach it.

She learned Malay quickly (a much easier language). It was indispensable for her at that period.

One could not over-estimate the extraordinary courage which is to be supposed from the following passage which Mother St. Mathilde herself relates to us:

"The only Sister (Sr. St. Euthyme) who had learnt English before coming to Malaya was almost always sick. I shall never forget how much it cost me at the beginning to be obliged to teach Catechism in her place, and how hard it was to pronounce those words which I hardly understood." That she did so, however, is almost incredible. All who have undergone such an experience can attest this.

"Happily, our boarders accepted our English without making fun or laughing at our mistakes, as our own French people would certainly have done."

CHAPTER 14

THE FOUNDATION IN SINGAPORE

Third Group Of Missionaries

On 2nd December 1852, three new Sisters left France – Sr. St. Gaetan Gervais, Sr. St. Patrice Devaiere, and Sr. St. Leonard Gerbal. Like their predecessors they had passed through the desert by the Red Sea and happily arrived at Penang six weeks after their departure. This reinforcement encouraged hopes of a foundation at Singapore. It was expressly for this end that Rev. Mother de Faudoas, urged by the zeal of Fr. Beurel, had authorised this third departure.

Voyage And Sojourn Of Mother St. Mathilde At Singapore

In the month of September 1853, Mother St. Mathilde had, among other things, made the acquaintance of Fr. Beurel and Singapore. This is her own account of it:

“I was obliged to go to Singapore about repairs to be made in the house we were occupying.”

Conversion And Generosity Of Mr. Cassette

“On my arrival, I had a consolation which I never again expected. Our friend, Mr. Cassette, who had gone to Singapore six weeks previously had just been baptized a Catholic by Rev. Fr. Beurel to whom, six months beforehand, he had refused to accept a letter of introduction from Fr. Bernot. Actually, our dear Mr. Cassette had entirely changed his sentiments shortly after his arrival at Penang. First of all he had come to visit us, as he had promised on the journey, and had offered us his services with the same interest as before. He ardently desired to become a Catholic, but his stay at Penang about this time completely changed his ideas. The good inspirations which God had given

him were obliterated by contact with Protestant friends, who probably jeered at his resolve.

He even wished to return the Miraculous Medal which he had received from us formerly with such respect. We insisted, however, that he keep it in remembrance of the voyage. His condescension on this point had happy results for him and we shall see how grace triumphed in his soul at Singapore.

At the hotel where he stayed, the American had met Captain Wilson, led to the faith by his virtuous and charming wife. He loved to meet the Captain and his wife every evening, both being models of piety besides being well-educated. He then remembered the holy desires which he had had in our company on board the ship, but his heart was full of struggles, objections and resistance.

One evening, after a long discussion, Mrs. Wilson had said to him, “Monsieur, if you really wish to be enlightened, ask God for light with a humble heart. He alone can give it. Let us kneel down and pray together this evening.” The empire of virtue coupled with such positive words, permitted no reply from the one addressed. He abased himself before God and knelt down for the first time in his life and the Most High, who is never outdone in generosity, immediately bent down to him.

Mr. Cassette retired to his room pre-occupied with salutary thoughts. As he was sleeping, he was suddenly awakened by the sound of a little bell, which immediately reminded him of the Elevation Bell which he had heard; one day, in a Catholic Church. His room was filled with a light whose source he could not discern.

Surprised and moved almost to tears, he got out of bed, threw himself on his knees and remained a long time in that posture, praying more from his heart than with his lips. When he got up, like another Ratisbon, he was convinced. He understood everything.

In the morning, Mr. Cassette related to his friends, the Wilsons, all that had occurred. Together they went to find Fr. Beurel who did not delay in pouring the holy waters of Baptism over the forehead of the convert whom the Lord Himself had prepared and instructed. Mr. Cassette was still in the full joy of his spiritual regeneration when he came to see me two days after my arrival in Singapore.

He wished to interest himself actively in our new foundation in this town. The house bought by Fr. Beurel was not large enough. We wanted another one which was situated near it and which would cost 8,000 francs, our friend came to inspect it with us – he was not satisfied with it. In his amusing mixture of French and English, he said to us, “You, to take this small house! You will have a large one. I’ll see to it.” A few days afterwards he came and told me excitedly that he had found another which was much more suitable, it was situated by the sea on another street with its garden a continuation from ours and the site was 170 metres by 40 metres. It would cost 20,000 francs in all. ‘You must take this one’ said Mr. Cassette so we could not but accept his generous charity. It rests as a duty on the Singapore House and indeed on the whole Institute never to forget this excellent benefactor and to beg the blessing of the Most High on himself and his family.” Later on the Cassette family went to live in India and the St. Maur nuns lost all traces of them. Nevertheless they did not cease to ask God’s blessing on them.

“ I had only a fifteen-day sojourn in Singapore, passing most of my time there in the Church – the good Father Beurel having given me the key. At that time the Church was never open to the public except for Mass. All alone at the foot of the Altar, I asked God to bless this poor town in which so few souls even thought of their salvation. It has been discovered that almost every day of her fifteen days in Singapore, Mother St. Mathilde partook of only one or two bananas at midday.

Her Painful Return To Penang

“I set out for Penang in a little boat which afforded me quite a few occasions of mortification to offer to the good Lord – a very rough sea – a dirty boat, full of those dreadful flying pests whose kind Sr. St. Gregory tried to exterminate on the “Indostan”. They crawled and flew about everywhere and left their infectious odour on everything they touched. They did not leave me a moment’s sleep in that dreadful cabin constructed on the most elementary lines. Unfortunately, I had not my little Sr. St. Gregory with me to chase them away and deal them her ‘great’ blows.

Trials

If Mother St. Mathilde’s return journey was disagreeable on account of the dreadful sailing conditions, it was as nothing in comparison with the trials of her last few months as Superior in Penang.

Let us recall that at that time full justice had not been rendered by all to the great work of perfection undertaken by Mother St. Mathilde in her community. A few, still critical of her methods, of arriving at the goal made complaint to Mother General. In November 1853, she received an urgent command from the Superior General to leave Penang as soon as possible and take up residence in the Singapore foundation. The virtuous Mother understood that her Superior had judged her adversely for some reason and that her presence in the Penang House – for which she had so heroically struggled – resulted in harm in some way.

This trial was the hardest she had experienced up to now but Sr. St Damien’s letter to Mother de Faudoas shows us that the virtuous Missionary Superior endured this cross in Penang with the same patient silence with which she had always armed herself in former trials.

Affection And Delicacy Of Mother St. Damien

This dear Sister, Sr. St. Damien, who on the 2nd November 1853 had received with a great shock the news of her nomination as future Superior, and who was to take over charge when Mother St. Mathilde departed for Singapore, defended her excellent Superior before Mother General with her characteristic charming frankness. Some passages from her letters testify to this:

My beloved Mother General,

You recommend to me, in the exercise of the charge which is about to fall on me, calmness, patience and kindness. These means have been employed to a great extent by our dear Mother. I have already had occasion to say so to you, our virtuous Rev. Mother fears too much to give anyone trouble. She takes too many tasks on herself. Would she have obtained better results? I think not and I add if with her experience, her prudence, her union with God, her virtue, her very sanctity, our good Mother had found it so difficult to do any good – who would flatter herself that she could do more and better?”

Then referring to unfavourable reports of which she had heard rumours, Sr. St. Damien continues, “6,000 leagues away, it is very difficult to judge things, especially when one only hears the echo. Certainly the sound it has produced has not always been just. The position of our dear Mother was very delicate, very painful. May the merits which she must have acquired from all these draw down the blessing of God on what is to follow. Even though I suffer, our courageous Mother must be suffering more. What a complement to what she has already endured.

“I have never hidden my feelings, neither from you, ‘ma Mere, or from others, and every time I had occasion to do so, I have declared how much I approved the methods of our good Mother. Today I say it more than ever. I will force myself to walk in her footsteps.”

This candid Sr. St. Damien did not content herself with thus nobly and filially taking the part of her Superior. She also wished to take responsibility for delaying somewhat the departure for Singapore, interpreting wisely and reasonably the intentions of the Superior General.

The latter had, indeed, before receiving the above-mentioned letter, repeated her order about the immediate foundation of Singapore without waiting for the arrival of the three Sisters expected from France – and this because she believed more than ever, that, on both sides, the situation in the Penang community was too awkward, further complicated by the known nomination of Sr. St. Damien as future Superior.

But in reality, no situation of the kind existed. Sr. St. Damien was only too happy to possess for another while her holy Mother and she, who of the first arrivals had least appreciated the character and virtue of Mother St. Mathilde, was at this very moment animated with quite opposite sentiments.

Besides, the house in Singapore was not ready. The workers took their time at the necessary repairs and finally the sisters from France not having as yet arrived, the Penang House found itself burdened with those Sisters who were to follow the Foundress to Singapore.

Meanwhile, as the second message of the Superior General was urgent, Mother St. Mathilde wished to set out in spite of everything, “for”, she said, “obedience should be blind.” Sr. St. Damien insisted, however, on going with her to consult Fr. Bigandet “for” she writes to Mother General, “It took endless trouble to persuade our Mother that if you knew the actual position at Penang and Singapore, you would not give further orders for an immediate departure.” This happened in December 1853.

All that could be obtained from Mother St. Mathilde was that she would await the arrival of the Sisters whose departure from France was fixed for the 23rd of the same month.

They had hardly landed when, on 2nd February, 1854, the Holy Foundress embarked with Sr. St. Appolinaire, Sr. St. Gaetan Gervais, one of the new arrivals, and Sr. St. Gregory who had become professed since her stay at Penang.

Departure For Singapore

Let us listen to the courageous Mother herself telling us the story of the foundation of the second establishment in Malaya.

“I was so intent on obeying without delay the pressing instructions of Mother General that on 2nd February, 1854, at 6 a.m. I set out with Srs. St. Appolinaire, St. Gaetan and St. Gregory on the first boat leaving, an Indian one, good enough and named “Jigiboy.” During the day, an accident to one of the engines caused her to stop in the open sea. On the morrow, Penang was still in sight. Happily a kindly trawler from the Detroit Government happened to pass close by. It suddenly stopped and we saw one of its boats coming towards the “Jigiboy”. The good Captain and Colonel Cameron knew that we were on board and they sent the second-mate to ask us to make the journey on their boat. We accepted without delay, full of gratitude for this offer, as courteous as it was disinterested. We were received with every mark of respect, the Captain even going so far as to offer us his own cabin.

Truly Providence had shown itself to be our succour in this circumstance as further events will show. Halfway between Penang and Singapore, the ship stopped for some hours at Malacca. We profited thereby by descending from the ship to touch the earth famous since the apostolate of St. Francis Xavier and we visited the Blessed Sacrament in a Church which was then being built.

The good missionary charged with this part of Christianity, then far removed from its ancient prosperous state, spoke to us some words which frightened us a little. “You are going to

Singapore, Sisters?” he asked. “Well, I will ask for you a double and triple vocation. You will have need of it in order not to lose courage.”

This wish was a prophecy. He announced a task hard to accomplish. It was all that, indeed, during the first year.

Arrival And Reception

Soon afterwards, our boat having resumed her journey, we drew near to Singapore. Nothing is more magnificent than the entrance to the harbour of this city. To the right, the sea is dotted with little islands covered with perpetual verdure and between which one may see the European ships and Malayan boats. To the left, amid gigantic trees can be seen the sumptuous and comfortable homes of the rich English.

It was 5th February, Sunday morning at 10 o'clock, thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of Singapore. Fr. Beurel, who was expecting us, heard, as he was going up into the pulpit, the cannon announcing the arrival of the boat. He invited all the Christians present to come to meet the dear Sisters.

And, indeed, about 11 a.m. we saw the jetty being covered with a long line of carriages and several boats approaching us. In the first were Fr. Beurel and his co-workers, the dignitaries and some Catholic ladies. In the seconds, came the Brothers of the Christian Schools established nearly 10 years in Singapore and almost all their pupils. The crowd was waiting on shore and received us with affection. Then, all the carriages made for the Church, ours last.

We went in there where one of the principal Catholics came to meet us and conduct us to the places which had been prepared for us before the altar-rails, opposite the altar.

The nave was covered with flowers, under which we supposed were several thorns. The tones of the organ were joyful; it was almost a triumph. Finally, the "Te Deum" was intoned, during which we shed many tears, and were moved by various sentiments.

From the Church, we were conducted to the house bought by Mr. Cassette, the other being in the process of rebuilding. We were happy then to find ourselves alone.

There was one thing which nobody had thought about, we were still fasting! Nobody invited us to dine and we were discreet enough to ask for nothing until supper, which a good lady had asked as a favour to prepare herself. This offer was gladly accepted – because we were at the end of our tether. The songs, the flowers, the compliments, all that is doubtless very beautiful, but not too substantial.

The meal was happy and amiable, full of gentle gaiety. We yielded to friendly arguments and discussions "to lose the peace of our souls." We had only one bed between the 4 of us, and it was a case of who would have the worst couch to sleep on. Next morning, the Catholic newspaper of Singapore thanked in well-chosen terms Colonel Cameron and the Captain of our boat whose courtesy had spared us the trial of more than six days journey on our "Jigiboy". Then the paper related with joy our arrival, the happiness of all the Catholics, but, in the Governor's house, the sentiments were quite otherwise, two Protestant ladies (the Governor's wife and sister) deplored it from the depth of their hearts, sighing that the arrival of the Sisters was a calamity for the city.

If to work for the salvation of souls, inspire them with the fear and love of God, rescue or preserve them from error was "the calamity" which they foresaw, they had reason, indeed, to sigh and groan, for such was certainly our desire, each one's ambition, our only goal. However, the Governor received us with great

politeness and these ladies knew how to dissimulate their distress. They even returned our visit.

Trials And Poverty Of The Foundation

Our household must have surprised them and perhaps edified them, for it was by no means luxurious. When the tenants who had preceded us had removed all their furniture, we were left with two mats to sleep on, two chairs and two tambourines.

On leaving the 'Jigiboy' we had been obliged to leave on it almost all our meagre luggage, which only reached us twelve days later. Such being the case, our furnishings were of the simplest. The house itself was in fairly good condition but all the adjoining buildings, kitchen, etc., were in a state of complete disorder and almost in ruins. Nothing remained of the door. The three children whom we had brought with us from Penang had nothing to prepare their meals and ours except two utensils: a pan to cook the rice in and a little pot which was used successively for coffee, tea and curry.

Blessing Of The Foundation Stone Of The Chapel

On 2nd July 1854, the first stone of our Chapel was solemnly blessed. It was plentifully watered with tears. Such a ceremony which should have filled us with joy, was, on the contrary, a cause of great pain for us because of the circumstances which accompanied it and a want of sympathy from those who should have consoled us."

Here Mother St. Mathilde alludes to a sorrow which can only be explained by one of those divine permissions which, except very rarely, always surprise souls in the beginning. To find suffering where one does not expect to meet it!

Without any doubt it was the kind and devoted Fr. Beurel who first inflicted this unexpected wound. In his joy at seeing laid

the foundation of the House of God in the School which he had desired so much, he completely forgot, during the whole day, those through whom this consolation and growing hope had come. He had invited all the Catholics to come and assist at the ceremony, which was accompanied by all the pomp possible but during which the Superior and her daughters were left to one side, almost as if they did not exist. One would have said that the feast was not for their house, founded amid tears, sacrifice and multiple suffering, but for other people. They were scarcely looked at or spoken to the whole day, a most strange and inexplicable thing if we do not see in it the Hand of God, skilled in sanctifying by some touch of the cross our very joys even.

Mother St. Mathilde carried her difficulties alone and the trouble with the children was not the least of them. But she had to defend her daughters against discouragement and, for that reason they could not even suspect, her own personal fears at the beginning. For a long time it was the little number of children that worried these zealous missionaries. Was it for these few children that they had crossed the seas and endured great sacrifices? In the dark hours which they must have known sooner or later under some form when working for a good cause, the valiant Foundress hid her own worries and raised up her companions' hopes. But she needed a word of hope and reassurance many a time herself. One day, a little while after that sorrowful episode of the blessing of the foundation stone of the Chapel, God sent her a helper in the person of the saintly Bishop of China, who had just returned from Rome. "He came to visit us and console us about our small number of children and about their being so unresponsive to the good the Sisters were doing for them. He spoke to us with such kindness and encouraged us with such powerful words – even prophetic ones, that a delicious balm flowed over our souls. We needed it.

First Communion Day

Towards the end of this first year *twelve* of our children of Holy Communion age were prepared for the Sacrament. What pain this preparation caused. We did not yet know enough of the language in which we were to instruct them. We had not the English or Malayan expressions. We had to look them up continually, so that which was later to us a consolation, a veritable blessing, was then terrible suffering and an extremely laborious task.

A First Communion ceremony was never before seen in Singapore. Fr. Beurel wanted it to be celebrated with all possible solemnity. We could do but little, but we did all we could to respond to the priest's desires. His end was to procure the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour. The children's simple dress, their modest and recollected bearing gave an excellent impression. The better-disposed Christians of the town came to tell us of their satisfaction.

Unfortunately, eight days after this lovely event, one of the young girls left hurriedly and without permissions to marry a male harlot to whom her parents had promised her. To please her husband, she renounced Catholicism and a little while afterwards died miserably without being reconciled to God, as he whom she had married would not give her permission. Her father and mother did not remain long after her and their fate was as miserable as hers. The unfortunate girl's companions profited by such a terrible example. They were horrified at her conduct and all the rest kept the promises they had made to God before the altar.

After the first year's holidays we judged it time to open a boarding school. The three pupils who presented themselves were exteriorly charming and we found it hard to understand how their parents could part with such amiable children. But we found out that their sacrifice was not as great as we thought. One of the new pupils was exceptionally bold, the other, full of childish folly bit her tongue and often tried to kill herself. One day she escaped our supervision and someone arrived just in time to pull her out of

a hole, happily not very deep into which she had thrown herself! The third was little better than the other two.

However, as compensation for the trouble they gave us, the grandmother of one of them, in gratitude for the care which we lavished on her granddaughter did all she could for us. She was an excellent person and a good Christian. When one of us fell sick, she did not know what to leave undone, or what not to send us. On her death, this good lady left her granddaughter, who did not out-live her for long, some land in the country which afterwards became ours.

Our Chapel was soon finished (1856) and the happiness of taking possession of it consoled us for the tears shed on its first stone. How happy we were when the God of the Eucharist came to dwell with us under our humble roof. The privation of His Presence had been so long.

Little by little, all changed around us also. Our pupils got the habit of prayer, they became attached to the house and to their duty. They also became more numerous. The tree so laboriously planted had taken root. Henceforth, it was to grow and bear fruit.

Fourth Arrival Of Missionary Sisters

Four new Sisters were then sent from France. They left on 28th February 1856. They were Sr. St. Zachary Wathworth (the young postulant who had accompanied Mother de Faudoas to France when Mother St. Mathilde was leaving by Southampton), Sr. St. Denis Wathworth (sister of the former), Sr. St. Gabriel Cooteverte and Sr. St. Wilfrid Bernard. Sr. St. Zachary and her sister were English. Sr. St. Zachary was possessed of an extraordinary capacity for her youth. They were both destined for Penang. Srs. St. Gabriel and St. Wilfrid were for Singapore.

Before continuing the history of this latter House, let us relate what had occurred at Penang since the departure of Mother St. Mathilde.

CHAPTER 15

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSE AT PENANG

Mother St. Damien

While Mother St. Mathilde struggled and laboured in Singapore to establish her work there solidly, the house in Penang progressed, on its side, under the direction of Mother St. Damien. To speak in the first place of the latter's virtues is to give another proof of God's blessing on the enterprises of the Foundress of the Missions, for Mother St. Damien has herself testified in her letters that her ambition was to resemble as much as possible her virtuous Superior, whom she had loved and venerated since she had first known her.

After her example, she had learnt, first of all, admirable abnegation and a mortification which, it could be believed, shortened her life here below, but at the same time, assured her of a more abundant heavenly recompense due to her generosity in the service of the Lord.

To begin, let us study with edification with what sentiments Mother St. Damien received the news of her nomination as Superior.

Her Consternation At Being Named Superior

One could not exaggerate the stupefaction and consternation of this excellent Sister at the first suspicions of Rev. Mother General's intentions with regard to her. Her teaching and naïve humility rendered her style almost incoherent, but it is a praiseworthy incoherence, whose impressions must be read in order to be edified at the virtue of this direct and generous soul.

She Writes To Rev. Mother General

1st October 1853.

My honourable and beloved Mother,

I was afraid as I understood the import of your last letter – I read it – I did not wish to believe that my fears were founded.

“May your calmness be your strength” you write to me. But it is impossible to give you an idea of my agitation. Oh, why, my Mother, have you such thoughts . . . Ordinarily, I tell you all but to describe what now passes in my head and heart is impossible.

Understand it, divine it. You are certainly able to do so better than I could explain it myself. I have always promised that in me you will have a submissive child; I do not retract my word, but my Mere, what are you doing? To suffer personally ... Yes ... it seems to me that the cry of my soul to God has never ceased to be this “All that Thou desires, provided that I do not offend Thee!” but to suffer and lose myself, to make others suffer and be lost, to undo the work of God instead of working for His glory, I cannot allow that. Discouragement, want of confidence in God is not my dominant fault. Thus your reflection has gone to my heart. “If the Good God is with you, what have you to fear?” I have so meditated on these words that it better suits my inmost sentiment.

But I must add that I am inclined towards presumption by self-love and pride. You do not yet know to what point it is embedded in me. However, I am not unaware of the fact that God does not seem to want for His work that which, in the eyes of men, would be most suitable. On the contrary, I know that He uses instruments that seem completely incapable of attaining His End. The proofs of this have been evident in our Mission. Yet, there must be a certain depth of virtue in this instrument – and God knows about it. There are also the accompanying graces and I am grateful for them. But I am capable of forcing God to withdraw them. But be careful! Be careful.

My heart breaks at the thought of my Mother not being here any longer (she is speaking of Mother St. Mathilde). And a thousand times each day the same painful thought comes to me. It is there even at night – if you could but know my dreams! So far away from everyone and all alone. God will not leave you, says a voice. Then my soul becomes calm. But I think of Mother leaving – my heart goes with her.

The dear Missions – how they are marked again and again with the Cross. Yet it prospers despite all. I wonder if I have said too much today, my dearly-loved Mother. Happily I have written my other letters before I began this one. It has stripped me of all ideas, or rather it has filled me with them.

For God, my dearly-loved Mother, yes, for God – to suffer for Him as much as He wishes. But to lose my soul – never. Would it be worth crossing the seas?

Bless and embrace you, submissive child,
Sr. St. Damien.

(The nun who wrote those beautiful and sincere lines was only thirty-one years old.)

The first moments of stupefaction having passed, she looked upon the cross that her Divine Master had sent more peacefully. In the letters which followed, the cries of humility and holy fear at the thought of the responsibilities which she must bear were always evident. In December 1853, she writes:

“No, ma Mere, the terrible burden which God, through you, propose to me, is not yet placed on my feeble shoulders. The reasons which should have twelve days ago caused the departure of our holy and beloved Mother St. Mathilde, useless for Singapore and dangerous for Penang, still exist. Why must our Mother leave us so soon, so soon? My God, what an exchange. Ma mere, what have you done? After all that my mere, deep down

on the depths of my heart I say – it is true that the less resource there will be in me, the more glory for my Divine Master. I have not asked Him to put me in this position. It is His business. He has done it all Himself and it is He who will always work. I am only the poor instrument. But the depth of my heart from which these thoughts issue is so far from other thoughts which encumber the passage in between. May the Good God do with me what He will, accept what the painter does with the piece of charcoal with which He has traced a masterpiece. It is not personal suffering that I fear in undertaking this charge, but, to interfere with the work of God, to prevent it! Perhaps to destroy it! This thought kills me and I have need to repeat quickly “My God, it is Your affair, Your business!”

You say to me, ma Mere, “love your sisters in proportion to their feebleness and misery”. Oh! When I examine myself and see how people put up with me and how I hold the esteem and affection of my Sisters, I see that it would be very wrong not to love and not to be peaceable.

I think I can also say with confidence and sincerity that I am ready to do everything for their advancement and will devote all my energy to the task. I do not add – you can count on me, ma Mere, but I say to myself – count on your infinitely good Master. He knows that I am ready to spend myself completely for His glory and the salvation of souls. (We shall see how this heroic resolution was executed to the last letter). He is content with the disposition of the heart – to them He gives movement and action. And you, ma Mere, give your poor little child your blessings and prayers,”

Divine Blessings On Her Work

To begin her charge of Superior with such admirable disposition was a certain assurance of the Divine benevolence.

And also, because a charge of Superior facilitated some desirable modifications in the conduct of some people who did not wish to avow that the Sisters were useful before her through whom light had come to them, and also because Mother St. Damien certainly did merit special assistance from God, this charge – the very thought of which terrified her, was, in reality a consolation.

She reaped the fruit of the virtues and suffering of Mother St. Mathilde, as well as the reward of her own generosity. Soon, she felt that she could rely on the confidence and affection of those who surrounded her, which permitted her to give a great impetus to the infant works of the House. Not only did the number of boarders and orphans increase daily, but the Sisters exercised a salutary and growing influence on the Catholics of Penang. Besides, they did not recoil from visiting the poor and sick even outside the town, when they knew they would find souls to instruct and save.

Virtues Of Mother St. Damien

This zeal for souls which Mother St. Mathilde knew how to inculcate in all with whom she came in contact, was not inactive among the Penang Sisters or their amiable and ardent Superior. She was full of candour, fire and the vigour of Mediterranean natures – precious gifts when they are perfected by grace and the practice of the religious virtues. To this she joined perfect mortification in every circumstance, which enabled her to lead others after her.

She was never held up, never sick, even though all the other Sisters had to pay more or less, their tribute to the strange climate. It was only discovered on her death-bed that her complete abnegation was the principal cause of her apparent invulnerability and that she had “spent herself to the end” (often her resolution), treating herself with such perfect self-forgetfulness.

The First Religious Vocations Among Her Pupils

Another proof of the blessings showered on the works of Mother St. Damien was that religious vocations were not slow to appear among the older girls of the School. There were postulants both for the choir and lay Sisterhood.

Habit Of The Lay Sisters

As to the shape of this last habit, Mother St. Damien who did nothing of importance without consulting Mother St. Mathilde, was for adopting the colour and shape of the habit of the lay Sisters in France. The Superior of Singapore even made a voyage to Penang on account of this subject, being received with all the welcome and veneration that she merited. But, we do not quite know why, she did not share the views of Mother St. Damien. This was not without causing some displeasure to the young Superior. All the same, with her good spirit and her habitual graciousness, when she saw that Mother St. Mathilde held to her first choice, she did not insist. The habit adopted was a black dress much the same as that of the Lay-Sisters in France, the white fichu being replaced by a black woollen cape and a white bonnet surmounted by a light veil in black muslin.

Later events, however, showed the Superior of Penang to be right. It was realized that a fichu and white bonnet was more suitable in Malaya, as in France. The first regular mission visit made in 1896 by Mother St. Henri Deruelle then Counsellor (afterwards Assistant – General, after filled the former office in the Institute of St. Maur for twelve years) decided that it was time for the change in habit for the Lay Sisters. They received both in Malaya and Japan the same habit as the Sisters in France.

Arrival Of Sr. St. Zachary And Sr. St. Denis

In the middle of these first consolations the necessity of native English Mistresses began to make itself felt acutely. So

Penang received with great joy two Sisters who, as we have said, left France on 28th February, 1856. Sr. St. Zachary and Sr. St. Denis, sisters by blood and by religion, both full of ardour and goodwill were born in London. They spoke English excellently and the former was exceptionally devoted to every demand made on her. They were very young converts but were solidly grounded in the Catholic faith and well formed during the four years of Religious Life.

Sr. St. Zachary's Zeal For The Progress Of The Boarding School

Sr. St. Zachary who was placed in the Boarding School from the time she came, showed the greatest zeal possible, educated and intelligent as she was, for the advancement of the studies. Perhaps she even surpassed the measure of work without regarding her strength. Besides, she was badly repaid for her efforts. The pupils who undoubtedly had not forgotten Miss Aloysia's study system, so agreeable to the lazy ones, resisted as much as they could the industrious methods employed by their young Mistress, to aid their own natural apathy.

The end of the 1855 School Year (being also the end of the civil year – holidays being given in January) was particularly trying for Sr. St. Zachary. Even on Prize-Day her pupils made her suffer much by their disobedience and the violence of their characters.

Her Sudden Illness (December, 1857)

The dear young Sister was almost distracted at the thought of the rigorous discipline she would have to impose to master such children who were yet too imperfect. She looked forward eagerly to the holidays and the Annual Retreat which would begin for all the Sisters on the following Sunday, 20th December.

But the designs of God are impenetrable. It was to an eternal retreat to which He called her. He gave to her then, the recompense for the generosity and sacrifice of the religious life

and of the 20 months she had just spent on the Mission-field. The impression made by her death was so deep that it was felt in Penang for long years afterwards. But, let us leave the account to Mother St. Damien; more affected than anyone else by this sudden death.

Here is the letter which she wrote to Rev. Mother de Faudoas on 7th January, 1858:

Ma tres honoree and dearly loved Mother,

You are probably worried on account of having received nothing from Penang for the last circular. But my silence can only be explained by my desire to send you a long and detailed account by the last boat. Prize-giving and the Retreat claimed all my time. Then came the terrible blow. My dear Mother, you have now only **six** daughters in Penang (Mother St. Damien, and Sr. St. Leonard, Sr. St. Euthyme, Sr. St. Eudoxie, Sr. St. Denis and Sr. St. Patricia.) And which of them has our Good Master called away? You will surely say Sr. St. Euthyme (delicate ever since she got her attack of brain fever). No, my Mother, no. Oh! Do not feel ill – it is our poor Sr. St. Zachary. She, the strongest of us all, who was never even sick since her arrival was swept away from us by fever in six days.

My God, I, who thought myself so strong and hard, am crushed to the depths of my soul and I feel (I dare not say it) all the pain of the world on embracing this rugged cross. It is such a poignant sorrow, which is felt still more here in Malaya on account of our great distance from France.

Nevertheless, I want to accept it in all its rigidity and bitterness. Who knows but it maybe my sins that have brought this trouble on poor Penang. Yet another thought which obsesses and crushes me. Chastise me, my God, make me alone suffer all, but spare our dear Mission.

I find only one consolation in my thoughts and that is that the Good Lord must love our poor Mission very much. He must have destined it to do much good considering that He tries it in so many ways. Look back and see it formed solely by crosses – the sea had its victim and on land see too what the Good Master has chosen. Be merciful, oh my God! I am firmly convinced that our poor little friend is pleasing Him. Her soul was truly beautiful. I know even at what point she desired to become a truly fervent religious. I could judge quite easily her efforts and victories. The dear child was so simple and open. Several times, when I had to make a sign or say a word to her, she said with that naivete which I loved so in her “Oh, my Mother, do not be angry. I assure you that if Godmother (Rev. Mother de Faudoas) saw me, she wouldn't know me at all, so good have I become,”

Those who knew her in the Novitiate remember some of her sayings. Already so generous at Paris, she became even more so at Penang, so much so that our Sisters even said amongst themselves – “she is unrecognisable. She is no longer the same person.”

My poor daughter! How soon the good God has rewarded her for her efforts. And He must also have taken count of all the good she wished to do. She was fully disposed to profit by her Retreat. The morning we were to commence, she came and said to me – “I have great need to talk to you. I will do so during these days. You will have time, won't you?” Dear child. She has gone to talk to God. May she recommend to Him her poor Mother of Penang – tell Him her wants, her miseries and obtain from Him the grace of bearing this blow generously.

I know, ma Mere, that you will want details of the too short malady of our poor Sister. But, could I do so right to the end? My eyes continually fill up with tears.

On Sunday, 20th December, our good Sr. St. Zachary had a sort of nervous attack after High Mass. She complained of a

violent headache and pains in all her limbs. “Rub me” she said. It seemed to her that it would relieve her. I attributed this weakness to the fatigue of the vigil and the end of the year rush. Soon, she seemed to recover and the following day passed without incident.

On Tuesday, she felt unwell and vomited several times during the morning. She was, nevertheless, able to follow the Retreat Exercises and in the afternoon went to Confession with all of us.

On Wednesday the vomiting recurred. I was anxious and sent for the doctor who diagnosed high fever and feared it might be serious.

On his visit on Sunday, 27th December he said he wished to call in a colleague to have a consultation. It was long. At the end, I asked their opinion, each one individually. One said to me “your invalid will recover” and the other said “I have very great fears.” These are the two best English doctors in Penang.

As for myself, I was extremely uneasy without, however, communicating this to our dear patient. I asked her if she would not feel more at ease to have Confession. She replied that she greatly desired it and did so in the afternoon. If you knew, ma Mere, how happy she was about it! The poor child did not know how to thank me. “How good you are” she said “to have thought of procuring this consolation for me. It is so recently since I had Confession that I did not like to ask you today, and see how you have thought of it. Oh, thank you, ma Mere.”

Our dear Sr. St. Eudoxie spoke to her of God, with her fervent way. Poor Sr. St. Zachary was so happy to hear such words. We had decided that she would receive Holy Communion the following morning, but not Viaticum. I did not cease to think of this Divine Visit. She longed for it so ardently. “Help me,” she implored, “help me to prepare myself. I cannot pray. Ask the Holy

Angels to prepare my soul." Before Confession, she had been anxious about the Holy Communion she omitted through her own fault since her arrival at Penang. But this scruple did not trouble her any more afterwards.

The doctor returned in the evening and found her worse. "The intestines are beginning to be affected" he said and he made another order. "Use this medicine" he said "tomorrow we will see the effect. But be attentive to her, for tonight she may be delirious." Up to this she had been so. I stayed beside her during the night, coming and going from my own room, where I was writing, to hers. I passed long periods with her and we spoke of God. Soon, she said to me "I am too weak. I feel that I cannot wait until morning to drink. My God! What a disappointment. I was so anxious to receive Him spiritually and tomorrow we will see what to do." She made the sacrifice generously, but felt it keenly. Shortly afterwards, I perceived that the delirium commenced. It was full of sentiments of piety and fervour. I did not hear her speak another word other than prayers and bursts of love of God. Every minute she repeated "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I love you – I give you my heart, my soul, my life" and other aspirations which she daily repeats. Then in a firm voice, she cried out "A single word, a single word and the world was redeemed" and other similar ejaculations. At intervals the delirium stopped and then I forced myself to sustain her fervour by suggesting pious thoughts to her."

Her Holy Death

"Towards 1 a.m. I gave her some medicine which seemed to relieve her so that she was quite tranquil afterwards. About an hour afterwards, she seemed to be asleep but the poor thing must have begun her agony, for from that on she spoke no more. In the morning I called the doctor, who, on seeing her said 'It is the end'.

Then I sent for Rev. Fr. Jourdain, our chaplain, who gave her Extreme Unction and applied to her the Indulgences for a

happy death. The poor child did not speak but certainly heard, for, often during her long agony which lasted until 2 p.m. on Monday, 28th December, I asked her 'do you hear me? Would you like to have someone speak to you of the good God?' and she, by a feeble movement of her eyelids and lips would reply 'Yes'.

I finished the preparations for Monseigneur Boucho's coming and when someone announced that he had come, Sister made a slight movement and opened her eyes as if to see him. The Monseigneur could not say a single word. He was crying like a child. We recited around her bedside the prayers for the dying and several times I helped her to make the sacrifice of her life for the intentions of zeal and for you also, venerable Mother. Oh yes, I spoke much to her about her darling Mother and I hope that her sacrifice was pleasing to God. She will help us much from heaven because she knew well the needs of the Mission.

Troubled as I am at the thought of her not receiving Viaticum, I see in it yet another providential happening. If we realized that this Communion was to be the end of everything on this earth, who knows but that her soul might have become less beautiful, being disturbed by some trouble or other? She was highly impressionable and would very likely be worried about her Sisters in France and her dear Sr. St. Damien (then in the Penang Community). Instead of this, through God's mercy, she only thought of Him and how to make her soul worthy of Him. Nothing, absolutely nothing, showed that she had any other pre-occupation. Even during her delirium there was no word of France or her Sisters. She fell asleep quietly in the arms of the Lord to awaken in Eternity. Dear little friend! How the Lord must have loved her.

Now, my Mother, we are only six. And it has been said already that we will get no more English Sisters, which is not quite correct. Because a new one is necessary for us as well as a Sister for piano lessons. I am representing to you all the difficulties in

which we find ourselves. Believe me but they are extreme. Do for us what the Good God and your Mother's heart inspires you.

Sr. St. Euthyme is stronger than I even dare to hope at the moment, but I can hardly count on her – on her strength, I mean, as her courage consoles me as much as that of all my other devoted daughters.”

Help was not wanting from Heaven to a house so cruelly tried and Rev. Mother de Faudoas sent reinforcements as soon as possible. According to the wish expressed by Mother St. Damien, Sr. St. Zachary certainly prayed for the Mission which she had only glimpsed but which nevertheless she had time to love so generously.

Prosperity Despite Trials

All the works undertaken progressed, but it was not without new sufferings and difficulties. For heavenly harvests even more than those of the earth must follow the inevitable law of being sown in tears. The correspondence of Mother St. Damien always so interesting during the years that followed testifies to this truth. A consoling one, nevertheless, since the toils and sorrows of the servants of God are an indication of their future eternal glory.

One of the most pre-occupying enterprises of the foundation of the Penang House, was the necessity of continually extending the building, as the number of pupils grew daily. Very soon their resources were not equal to their needs. This is proved in the following phrase from a circular which Rev. Mother de Faudoas sent out on 4th January, 1860.

“The Penang House which shelters over a hundred orphans must assuredly be enlarged. Many died last year, from maladies caused by want of air in the dormitories or other places.”

And to excite still more the generosity of her daughters in France, the Superior added:- “The mission of Malacca is also offered to us and how many souls are there to be saved! The inhabitants live like wild things, in a frightful state. The missionaries can scarcely remedy this except by the co-operation of generous souls who will devote themselves to children and youth.”

To learn how this new House at Malacca was established, it is time to return to Singapore and follow its history from 1856 where we interrupted it.

The departure of the Missionary Sisters whom Mother de Faudoas had sent on the death of Sr. St. Zachary took place on 20th March, 1859. It was the fifth expedition and consisted of four Choir-Sisters, Sr. St. Sabina de la Sabliere, Sr. St. Françoise Abadie, both destined for Penang; Sr. St. Anselm Borneque (formerly Superior of Pontarlier) and Sr. St. Theophile Puletien were sent to Singapore

CHAPTER 16

PROGRESS OF SINGAPORE – FOUNDATION OF MALACCA

Signs Of Providential Assistance

Mother St. Mathilde had shared a large part of the sorrow of Penang over the death of Sr. St. Zachary. Twenty-five years after this painful occurrence, she spoke thus of it in her story:-

“The great joy caused by the arrival of fresh Sisters was, however, soon mingled with sorrow. Sr. St. Zachary, a young nun of extra-ordinary capacity died shortly afterwards most unexpectedly. God, in taking her from this world, wished to show once again that ‘His thoughts are not ours’ and that, to accomplish His work He has no need of the talents which He has bestowed on His creatures.”

Mother St. Mathilde herself could not rejoice for long in the help she got from the two Sisters of the Fourth voyage which was destined for Singapore. Sr. St. Winifred who would have given much satisfaction died later in Japan and the other, Sr. St. Gabriel, was not even able to render as much service as her companion. One would think that she was very suitable for Mission-life with her aptitude for the work, but her health had been over-looked. After her first few months in Malaya, it became evident that she could not remain there. Despite the terrible need of her and the expenses of a long voyage home, she had to be sent back to France.

“On this occasion,” says Mother St. Mathilde, “I had a touching and sensible proof of the care which God takes of us. At the moment when the boat was about to leave, I was informed that as well as the sum spent on the voyage, I would have to pay 225 more francs, partly for the journey across Egypt. But I had not got them and consequently found myself in an embarrassing position, not having time to borrow the money. Suddenly a

commissioner appeared with the required sum. He came from one of our benefactors to settle an account already acquitted. I accepted the money and the excuses which accompanied it, raising my eyes to Heaven, for we had barely time to get to the boat. When I later told kind Mr. Magellan how he had been the instrument of Providence in sending this money, which he did not owe me at all, he would not consent to have it back, declaring himself only too happy to have unconsciously played such a touching role. Many other times besides this I experienced this goodness of God to those who abandon themselves to Him.

We had come to Malaya without any funds, for the 125 francs I had received on my departure from France could hardly be taken account of, to start a house. However, I can say that we never lacked what was necessary and it often arrived at the required moment, in an altogether unexpected manner.

One day in Singapore, I was in need of 2 francs to pay the baker. However, I had made this text of Scripture my law “the labourer is worthy of his hire.” Preoccupied with this deficit, however trifling it may have been, I went to Chapel and having exposed it to Our Lord, I tried not to think of it any more, full of confidence that the Divine Goodness would help me in some way.

I had scarcely genuflected to begin my prayer when I saw a child coming towards me and offering me in his open hand money I needed to settle my account. He was one of the Brothers’ pupils and had come to buy a box of plums for them. This providential sign moved me to tears and I have never forgotten it.

Sr. St. Joseph Spooner’s Vocation

Sr. St. Gabriel had only just left for France when God sent to the Singapore Mission a precious helper in the very remarkable and providential vocation of a young American, Miss Spooner. She came of a fanatically Protestant family. She had two sisters

and a brother – the latter being in commercial business for some years in Hong Kong.

In her youth, Miss Spooner lived with her family in America. She was one of those noble and upright souls on whom God looks with complacency and is pleased to enlighten. The young girl had noticed that one of their servants – a poor, Irish Catholic was always more faithful and honest in her duties than any of the others employed in her home. She spoke a few times to her and asked her questions about the Catholic religion. The humble servant girl had spoken to her young mistress of Our Blessed Lady and had even taught her how to say the ‘Hail Mary’. Without understanding all it really meant, Miss Spooner had an instinctive predilection for this sweet prayer. She repeated it often and became more interested every day in the wise yet simple answers that this poor servant made to her interested questions. Questions to which intelligent and generous souls always want a response, which were those great problems of our origin, beliefs and eternal destiny. Miss Spooner did not doubt that the Irish servant armed solely by the science of the Catechism knew what the ‘wise’ ignored in their august questionings.

Frank as she was, the young girl did not hide her spiritual discoveries. She ran to her mother and asked her, full of surprise, why she had never heard such words spoken in their Protestant churches. She then questioned closely and objected strongly to the reformed religion. Her mother quite mixed up with all this only said ‘be good and obedient, my child, and as for the rest, don’t be bothering me’.

The day on which she understood from whom her daughter’s vehement arguments against the Protestant religion had come, she dismissed the poor servant. But such words or actions could not cool Miss Spooner’s persevering spirit. She continued to recite the Hail Mary and to read the Catechism as well as the two or three other good books that the faithful servant had given to her when leaving. The day soon came when the true

light of faith shone bright and clear in the soul of the young American.

From that moment, filled with the courage and independence of her race nothing could daunt her. She saw that she must become a Catholic so she resolved to become one despite all obstacles. But God alone knows what this entailed. Her parents and sisters were fully determined to prevent her. This excellent Sr. St. Joseph (which was the religious name she afterwards took) had among many other qualities a wonderful gaiety and would often laugh when speaking of the persecution she had to endure during her conversion. However it is true that under this joyous tone was hidden the mal-treatment which she endured without faltering. It is well known that her mother and sisters beat her severely besides mentioning many other bitter experiences which they heaped upon her.

Though her soul remained staunch under such sufferings, her physical strength deteriorated. Her fidelity to God was never broken down but not so with her health. The material and moral persecution proved too much for her and she fell seriously ill. It was at this time that she told her parents how much she wanted to be baptized, but it was not till some time afterwards she got her wish. She came within inches of death itself. Exteriously she lost all powers of recognition but she remained quite conscious. In this state she had a mysterious dream in which she felt herself being taken on a long journey across the Ocean. She even felt the motion of the waves balancing the boat. What she saw after that we would know later. God gave her to understand clearly that she should not die in America but in a place which He would show her in advance. She was eventually cured. Her mother and sisters deeply regretted their conduct towards her, but not to the extent of leaving her in the peaceful possession of her faith. The result was that her brother who had become permanently resident in Hong Kong through his marriage and his business invited his sister to spend some time with him in his new home.

The young convert accepted his offer and came to Hong Kong to spend there a most edifying life. She became acquainted with the Bishop, the missionaries and the nuns of the town and practised acts of charity to such an extent that her name was soon on everyone's lips and the Bishop was thinking of appointing her as Foundress of a new Congregation of local nuns. But Miss Spooner's prudent spirit came to her again in this circumstance. She realized that she could not possibly command as she did not even know what religious obedience meant. Secretly, so as not to hurt the Bishop more than was necessary, she applied for admission to several neighbouring Convents as she felt that God wanted her entirely for Himself. As she wanted to enter a teaching order, she wrote to the House of St. Maur in Singapore and to the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in Shanghai.

Mother St. Mathilde was very puzzled on receiving Miss Spooner's letter - who was this young girl? What was her vocation worth?

At the time the Bishop of Hong Kong was passing by Singapore on his way to Italy. He visited the convent and Mother St. Mathilde spoke to him about this unknown young girl. She wanted to know why the aspirant to the religious life did not think of entering with the Sisters of St. Paul of Charity in Hong Kong - which would be a very natural thing to do. The Bishop gave ample reason for Miss Spooner's choice and being too upright a character to oppose her desires any longer, he gave an excellent account of her life to the Superior.

After this visit, Mother St. Mathilde decided to reply to Miss Spooner but she did so in measured terms and with much care. She did not hide any of the sacrifices which awaited her and she concluded by saying "On your part, if you are ready to shoulder Our Lord's Cross and wear His crown of thorns, come. A Mother and sisters are waiting for you."

Miss Spooner later said that such an austere reply had somewhat terrified her. At the same time she had received another from the Superior of the Congregation of St. Vincent de Paul which was full of the sentiments of sweet and amiable charity.

Which of the two would she choose? Here again the future postulant's wise reasoning helped her. "I will go", she said, "where the Cross appears to be more surely and more rude. I am more sure of finding Jesus there." And her destination was thus fixed.

In entering into the Convent of St. Maur, Miss Spooner had a new difficulty to surmount. No one knows why, but some people who did not know much about the Sisters of the Malayan Convents told her that the habit was scarcely religious and their mode of living almost "modern". Rev. Fr. Lobois, Procurator of the Society of Foreign Missions in Hong Kong to whom she went to find out the truth of this statement quickly reassured her about the costume, the spirit and the customs of her future companions.

Her resolution being fully formed she came to Malaya. She was trembling violently and cold as death as she came into the House. The signs of kindness and of affection which were showered on her assured her little by little. Still, when we brought her to the Chapel, she was on the point of fainting. Whence came such emotion? She let nobody know of it that day, but later, she related that in her recent and extraordinary dream, after having felt herself being carried over the seas, she saw herself in a strange land surrounded by people dressed in a costume she had never seen before, and she found herself then in a coffin in a Chapel which she now recognized to be ours. And that was actually the scene which took place later in the Chapel in Singapore. Dear Mother St. Joseph Spooner, for several months Mistress of Novices, would be carried, in her coffin, before the altar in July, 1883, following her saintly death.

Having related the story of this providential vocation, Mother St. Mathilde adds "God is wonderful in His ways. I have often blessed Him for the way in which He has guided both my poor pen and that beautiful soul."

That does not mean that the new postulant found no difficulty in settling into her new life. Though she was really called, all was very new to her in some respects.

Obedience in little things seemed strange to her. Thus she did not consider it suitable to break a visit or some work at the sound of the bell occasionally, and when asked the reason she replied "I did not feel inclined to do it." From that out she had to learn to be always inclined to obey. It cost her great efforts, but she became a model of perfect obedience.

Used to being waited on, she was astonished the first days when nobody made her bed for her. After a week, she took it on herself to come to Mother St. Mathilde and say "Who in this house, is going to be my chamber-maid?" She only received an evasive answer and was very surprised that evening to find on her bed a feather-duster and a pretty little brand-new brush with these words "First present from a Mother to her daughter." The lesson was perfectly understood and very well received. After that she put her hand not only on cleaning her room but to all that she saw to be done around her. Not trained in the least to manual work, she put her whole soul in it, after the example of her fellow-Sisters who were all scrupulous of losing a minute.

Charitable Work Of Mother St. Mathilde

For some time, about this period, the hats and veils had been disappearing from the Orphanage. Those who wished to wear them had to be able to pay at least for their food and clothing. Gradually, with the passing of time, they formed a second boarding-school.

Their good spirit showed itself particularly when they saw their Mistresses working to be able to rear poor little children, receiving all orphans who were given to them, seeing after their wants and those of the numerous staff of the house, the altar-linen of the mission Churches and the decoration of the altars. Filled with holy ardour, the pupils of every class wished to unite their efforts with those of the Sisters and contribute as far as they could to these works. It was a question of who would work the most and the best, above all when there was talk of a foundation at Malacca.

Foundation At Malacca

This new foundation was ardently desired by Monseigneur Boucho and the zealous missionaries of that town. Without a school, the Christian education of children was impossible, most of the parents being incapable of teaching them even their religion. The causes of such a sad state have been explained at the beginning of this History of the Missions of St. Maur.

The enterprise was then particularly difficult and the district excessively poor. On the other hand, Mother St. Mathilde could not yet come to the assistance of this penury and she was also wanting in subjects until the arrival of the Sisters from France. They were, therefore, forced to wait for a while.

In this interval, Miss Spooner received the Holy Habit and the name of Sr. St. Joseph on 30th August, 1858. At the same time, another young person, born in Malacca, also received it, she was Sr. St. Marie. Both made their first vows in 1860.

Finally, the Sisters of the *fifth* expedition happily arrived at the beginning of May, 1859. Then Mother St. Mathilde seriously thought of Malacca. However, there were still some delays over which she had no control. She wished to buy a convenient piece of ground which she had in mind, but she could not obtain this as the Government took it over to build barracks.

During this time, Rev. Mother de Faudoas, not realizing from the distance, the motives for the delay, with an apostolic energy which did not easily accept opposition to things, urged the Superior of Singapore to conform with the wishes of Monseigneur Boucho.

Thus in September, 1859, Mother St. Mathilde resolved to depart for Malacca and leave to God the care of solving the last difficulties. She set out with two companions, Sr. St. Appolinaire and Sr. St. Gregory. A third nun, Sr. St. Leonard, was to come from Penang later to form the new community.

The travellers left Singapore with hearts full of joy, animated one could say with the fervour of angels. Remembering that they were on the seas crossed so many times by St. Francis Xavier and that they were going towards the wretched town, now so neglected, where formerly he had done so much good and accomplished so many wonders. Thus, they forced themselves to be penetrated with the sentiments of the great apostle of the Indies. Also, they did not cease repeating during their journey of a day and a half, one of the bursts of love which the Saint had almost always on his lips "Oh, Most Holy Trinity."

They arrived in Malacca to the great astonishment of Rev. Fr. Allard, who in spite of desiring them so much, did not expect them any longer. Nothing was prepared to receive them. Until they got a house the good priest gave them his and went to sleep in the shed. It was not very comfortable but in a land where only plank and a mat are necessary to sleep, it little matters where one finds them.

"From that day on", says Mother St. Mathilde, "Divine Providence responded to the confidence which we had placed in it. To our astonishment, a house which the proprietor had often before refused to sell, was now offered to us. The price was little over 10,000 francs, and its proximity to the sea, charming little garden, full of coconut and fruit trees rendered it very convenient.

The bargain was soon settled and we entered it on 15th October, Feast of St. Teresa (1859).

Eight children, the first pupils of this foundation, spent the night with us. But we had not counted on unexpected guests. We did not realize that people who lived by the sea and had a garden attached had no lizards to pester them, but had something else instead. We soon realized that the place was infested with rats that had come up from the edge of the sea. They gnawed at our feet, our hands and our ears. They tore our coiffes off us by night. Sr. St. Appolinaire who was terrified of them let a shrill scream out of her every time one of them attacked her.

Sr. St. Gregory and I laughed heartily as we chased them off. Their dancing ceased after that but only for a little while. It began soon again. Thus we passed our first night.

On the following day we laid our troubles at the feet of our Divine Master who was exposed in the little oratory we had made, poor, yes, but it was our best and there the Lord lived with us. The hours went quickly by in His presence. We had several requests to present to Him – a thickly populated town where there were hardly a 1,000 faithful Christians, more than 7,000 of the others being mostly, plunged in ignorance, or debauched and degraded. They were descendents of Portuguese who came down from the ancient conquerors who followed Vasca de Gama. (Recall the description of the state of Malacca given in Chapter 2).

To counteract this, the soul must necessarily be fervent, filled with sorrow and good desires, this is exactly what we found out.

Before long, thirty poor children of different ages were presented for admission. On account of the long distance to their home we had to keep them as boarders. The neighbouring children around the school soon joined them. This increased the numbers in the classes but not the revenue. In founding Malacca we well knew that we would have to provide everything ourselves.

Trials Still

When Monseigneur Boucho learnt that one of his most ardent desires had become a reality, he wrote to Mother St. Mathilde expressing his happiness and gratitude. Thus she was greatly surprised on receiving shortly afterwards, a letter from the Superior General, very different from those in which she had urged the immediate foundation of Malacca. On the contrary, this one reproached the virtuous Superior of Singapore for having, in going to Malacca, opposed the wishes of the Bishop with an independence worthy of severe blame. What then had happened? What false spirit had believed itself in a position to judge matters and present them in an incorrect light to Mother de Fautoas? Why these reproaches of hers to Mother St. Mathilde?

In speaking of this new proof of the errors into which even the best can be led, she who had already been so often accused unjustly gaily recalled the vigorous and holy indignation of the Superior General. "How is it" she wrote "that at a time when so many people are revolting against the authority of the Pope (Victor Emmanuel was at the time beginning to persecute Pius IX.) you also give this example of independence towards the Catholic hierarchy? Go immediately to Penang and humbly ask pardon. Go on your knees to Monseigneur Boucho for the pain which you have caused him." 'I was very careful, adds the incriminated, smiling, not to execute this order, for I knew the Malacca project had caused him such satisfaction. I was content to wait patiently until light would shine on our dear Mother General, which was not for long.'

If thirty years later, the Foundress made light of this singular misunderstanding, it must have been very painful to her at the time, but nevertheless she took it in good part.

Delighted at being able to found a third House in Japan, Mother St. Mathilde was quite ready to pay for this joy of soul by sufferings and this time was no exception. The soil was again

blessed by the Cross which under one form or another marked the enterprises of this venerable Foundress' zeal to render them fruitful.

The First Development Of The Work: Mother St. Appolinaire Is Nominated Superior

While the work progressed steadily in the new foundation, the mistresses and pupils of Singapore redoubled their efforts to clear the debt of the house in Malacca, to alleviate the needs of the Sisters and their little orphans.

When the number of children increased, Sr. St. Wilfrid of the Singapore Community was sent to Malacca – Penang not being then able to give the Sister who was expected. A little English class was opened, then Sr. St. Appolinaire was appointed Superior.

Rev. Fr. Allard who was in charge of the Christian population of Malacca – a truly apostolic missionary-always did his best to show the people the good the Sisters were doing for the children, the women especially being ignorant of the strayed souls that the Sisters were leading towards the right path and of their several works of charity.

Mother St. Mathilde's Illness

About this time Mother St. Mathilde became seriously ill. Her courage was indomitable, her energy extreme under all the moral and physical sorrow which she had endured but her health was not impenetrable. Despite her temperament of steel, the day came when she fell down exhausted. The sickness became worse rapidly, it became extremely grave and acute anxiety spread throughout the town where the virtuous Superior was as well loved as she was venerated. Soon the rumour got around that she was nearing her end. She even spoke of her approaching end filled with the ardent desire of seeing her terrestrial exile over. But

God had reserved still greater merit for her. When her last breath was being waited for, suddenly she came back to life and the danger disappeared in an extraordinary way.

The joy of the Singapore Community and of the Christians of the town was a striking contrast to the holy missionary's own sentiments. She had almost reached the port, only to see it receding before her eyes at the longed-for moment when she would possess her God wholly and without measure.

However the Master's will was dearer to her than all else. She began the war of self-immolation once again, still more resolved to consecrate every moment to her neighbour's salvation.

New Arrivals In 1860

Two new Sisters were sent from France in 1860 – Sr. St. Jeanne Fabriques for Penang and Sr. St. Maroienne Danis for Singapore. There was also a third Sister with them but she had to return soon again as the Malayan climate was injurious to her health. Their voyage was particularly dangerous. The boat belonged to the French Transport Company and sprang a leak in the Indian Ocean. It had dreadful trouble in gaining port without serious accidents, and its arrival in Singapore was several days behind schedule which fact caused Mother St. Mathilde great anxiety. Yet this was soon forgotten in the joy of reunion.

Soon the works multiplied rapidly, being multiplied by God's hand and the humble and ardent co-operation of His servant.

CHAPTER 17

VICISSITUDES AT PENANG AND MALACCA

Death Of Sr. St. Euthyme

Death, which had spared Mother St. Mathilde at Singapore, did not cease to strike at the Community of Penang. We have already seen it snatch Sr. St. Zachary at the flower of her youth and in 1861 it came to choose another victim, in the person of Sr. St. Euthyme.

We have already told of her wavering health since her arrival in Malaya. Finally, her long suffering drew to a close. Several times the doctors had given her to understand that her bad health was due to the tropical climate and that a return to France would cure her. Courageously, she wished to stay at her post, to leave only at death.

It was Mother St. Damien again who herself sent the touching details of her last moments to Rev. Mother de Faudoas.

Penang, 8th July, 1861.

"My beloved and honoured Mother,

With what anxiety do you not await my letter? Here it is, bringing to you, alas, the sorrowful certainty. It was on the eve of the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul that our dear Sr. St. Euthyme finished her nine years of suffering here below, in the midst of, and in spite of which God made her find courage and energy to work very much for our dear children. Besides the void which she leaves in my heart, that which she leaves elsewhere is immense. I must embrace the Cross and re-animate all my faith to say "Oh, my good Master, You have taken – Be thou blessed. But you have the wherewith to give and come to my aid."

The doctor saw nothing more alarming in this crisis than in others, but it appeared that the poor Sister was more sick. She prepared her soul as if she were not to return. She also wished to make some arrangements about her temporal affairs, but on the evening on which she spoke of these to me in a more positive manner, she suffered more and we postponed it to the following day. Alas, on the morrow her head and whole nervous system were affected in the strangest way and that continued right to the end.

The European doctors despaired of saving her and I summoned an old Siamese who gave me a ray of hope. It was in vain and after three days of continual delirium, our poor friend fell asleep in the Lord.

It would have been a great consolation to me to see her remain conscious. God had not wished it, doubtless to spare her further suffering, but like a good Father, He had given her a presentiment of the danger of this fresh crisis when others saw in it nothing alarming in order that she might be able to prepare herself.”

Thus, at the age of thirty-three, she, who had in the days of her youth left all to serve God, at the cost of many dangers and privations in a far, foreign land, died as a result of fidelity to her vocation.

Without any doubt the Lord repaid her for all that and welcomed her warmly, after having given her the grace of recovering all her first fervour.

Mother St. Damien had treated this soul with extraordinary and gentle charity. By her goodness and good example more than by any other means, not only had she set her again completely on the right way, but at a moment when overburdened with suffering Sr. St. Euthyme had almost yielded to the thought of returning to France, her prudent Superior had not blamed her. She had not

opposed her departure. She contented herself with speaking to her of the love of God and the beauty of sacrifice made for Him. Shortly afterwards the Sister had made her irrevocable choice. Rather than abandon her post of honour by her own will, she had resolved to die and she kept her word.

The amiable Superior whose tact and virtues exercised a powerful and sweet influence on those around, was herself ripe for the heavenly recompense. However, nobody could foresee her premature end; she herself less than anyone else. She had persuaded herself, indeed, that her strength was without limit and she spent herself without measure, her self-renunciation preventing her from listening to any demand of nature.

Sad Illness Of Mother St. Damien

A year and some months passed after the death of Sr. St. Euthyme. It was Spring in the year 1863 – a season always particularly hot and painful in the island of Penang. Often epidemics broke out at this time, and besides, such climates are often the cause of violent and dangerous maladies. It was in the last weeks of Lent. Every Friday, the whole staff of the Convent went to the Parish Church to follow piously the Way of the Cross there.

The Friday before Palm Sunday, Sr. St. Jeanne surprised at not seeing her good Superior in her ordinary place in the long procession of Mistresses and pupils going to the Chapel, returned and found Mother St. Damien sitting in her room; she had her veil and gloves on as if going out and her right arm on her desk, supporting her head.

More and more surprised at such an attitude in one whom she was used to seeing at her post at the required moment, she said, “Ma Mere, what is wrong,” “Nothing,” replied Mother St. Damien, “nothing at all, doubtless.” She replied with her usual contempt of self “but when I was about to join you, I felt a violent

headache which obliged me to retrace my steps. I cannot go with you now. I will go to the Church later if this sickness passes.” Scarcely had she spoken when she vomited up bile – she thought that would relieve her. However, she was no better and continued to suffer during the night.

The following morning she rose with the Community. However, despite her courage, she could not stay for Mass. The vomiting recurred accompanied by very bad headaches and growing sickness. She had to admit that her bed and a doctor were necessary for her. The latter immediately discovered alarming symptoms. The fever did not delay in declaring itself and two days later it was noticed that a redness was creeping gradually over her face and body. And to the great sorrow of the whole House they perceived that their beloved Mother had contracted smallpox!

The presence of this cruel malady had actually been signalled in the town for some time, which fact had much preoccupied Mother St. Damien during the preceding days, not for herself but for the occupants of the Convent.

The dear Mother was quickly isolated in a small room away from everyone and access to her was forbidden except for Srs. St. Jeanne and St. Eudoxie who were only too glad to be allowed show their devotion in such dangerous circumstances.

From the beginning the case seemed most complicated and serious so much so that the two European doctors were doubtful about continuing to give the usual medicine. They consulted a celebrated Siamese doctor about the treatment of this dangerous malady. He came to the patient and did not hide the fact that her state was highly critical. Meanwhile he took over the care of the patient completely and even gave a slight ray of hope.

Mother St. Damien submitted herself to the Divine Will with the most admirable sentiments and realizing well what could

easily happen, she asked for all the helps of her religion for “her good Master’s coming.”

“At midnight she received Holy Communion and renewed the entire offering of herself to God. Sr. St. Eudoxie and I heard her say distinctly ‘Oh. my God, I offer myself to You. Give to me alone the sufferings and spare the Convent. I beg of You that I may be the sole victim. It is not for myself that I fear this illness. I beg of You that it may not go beyond this little room. Thy will be Done, my God! I neither know nor can I say any more’. She added to this prayer the desire that the sacrifice of her life would stop the disease in the town and for this reason she desired more her death.”

Her Predestined End

“On Wednesday our dear Mother’s face became exceptionally swollen and became so covered with lumps and horrible sores that it was impossible to recognize her human features any longer. Her eyes bulged out and closed and she did not open them again till a few hours before her death. The Siamese doctor told me that she must be enduring martyrdom.

Having asked her if she suffered much, as she never complained, she answered ‘Not as much as Our Lord’. And then she said to me ‘What have I done for the good Lord that I should ever merit His recognition like this and unite my sufferings to His? He suffered far more for me – who am nothing. Ah! How could anyone ever complain? If my little suffering, united to the Saviours could obtain for us a foundation in Buriya or Cochin China, would they not be well rewarded?’ Monseigneur Bigandet had for a long time wanted the Sisters of St. Maur to go to Rangoon and at that time they were almost on the point to getting there.

‘Pray much’ she added. We must remember the leper family that Sr. St. Patricia and yourself went to look for in Sabran.

I hope that all their souls will one day belong to God. (the father was a pagan and had three children under his care, left to him by his sister when she was dying.) He had already given us two of the little children and wanted to become a Christian himself. All his flesh was falling off in large lumps, reddened and made hideous by leprosy. ‘And my Sister, must not we pay for the consolation of our four converts? Anna, one of the servant who died two days after her baptism, Banquis who was also converted before death, the Hindu that one of the children had baptized by drawing water from a puddle and the poor Chinese – not to mention the five little infants that Francine had baptized as they lay dying of smallpox. (This account shows that the people were the subject of the Sisters’ occupation and good works at that time, as they are today).

‘Is it not by suffering and sacrifice that we must pay for all this? How else did Our Lord merit the salvation of men?’ She could never endure enough suffering according to herself. Her medicines were always too much. ‘Truly,’ she said, when allowing me to fix her up a little, ‘I am deceiving those who think I am making sacrifices’. She died as she lived – without noise or complaint, without even a word that could give the slightest sign of her extreme sufferings.

News of this perfect virtue spread afterwards and inspired Monseigneur Manlot to write in a paper some time later. “Good makes no noise and noise does no good.” She often repeated this to me on her deathbed during her last days.

And how well she put it into practice! In this she showed herself to be the true daughter of St. Francis of Paula and of venerable Father Barré – the most humble man. No sign of her pain and sufferings were ever seen on her face. She never gave but a reassuring answer when we asked her about her health. As if proud of her vigour she said to us ‘But I have always been strong. During the ten years I spent at Toulouse I was never sick

and even now I still feel that I have not lost an ounce of my French blood.’

This was easily believed in seeing her courage and energy. But, alas, it was her abnegation that deceived her. She had worn herself to the end by mortification at every instant.

“Everyone” continues Sr. St. Jeanne “was influenced in a smaller or greater degree by the climate except our dear Mother who seemed to be invulnerable. Never, never any fever, not even those little ailment by which her daughters paid their tribute to the tropical heat. She became very thin but always remained strong and robust, so that her appearance deceived us. Then she was so severe on herself that it was impossible to detect even a sign of fatigue. Night and day she gave herself to others – never a mention of herself. On the Saturday that she first retired to bed from which she would never again rise she consulted Dr. Anderson not for herself but for me!

As she came very close to her last moments she assured us that she had no pain, that it seemed to her as if someone else was taking her place. Why she did not know but she did not feel the violence of her malady. It is quite possible that God had recompensed her generosity by extraordinary help, since she had avowed that she would suffer like her Lord.

She was in the hands of the European doctors until Palm Sunday – 30th March, yet after that they came to see her every day, through kindness and courtesy to find out how she was and to follow the course of her illness.

They also trusted the efficiency of the Siamese doctor, who appeared very learned, to judge by the way he treated our dear Mother. In undertaking to care for her, he told us that her cure would be very difficult. However, he began with hopes of success and that gave us a little confidence, for generally, these doctors say what they think straight out. When they see no chance of

success as for example with our poor Sr. St. Euthyme they are content to say 'I will try' and no more.

Our Siamese doctor could not believe that this was our good Mother's first illness, she was so wasted interiorly. He said, 'she is someone who must have worked very hard and beyond her strength'. (He was not wrong). 'She is worn away by a painful and excessive fatigue. Her bones are thin, almost worn through and her blood has no strength'.

His astonishment ceased when he watched our Mother all through her horrible torments. 'Yes, it is thus that she endures such agony' he murmured, 'I now understand that she must have reached it by a similar state of exhaustion without anyone suspecting it.'

Poor pagan, he was deeply touched, impressed at seeing her bear such great misfortune with such patience and resignation. Through zeal and gratitude for the trouble he had gone to for her, our Mother continually offered her sufferings for this unfortunate infidel. She never thought the pain too acute and every time she was asked if she suffered very much she replied 'Not enough yet to bear some resemblance to Our Lord.'

What can be added to such a picture. What could heighten its beauty? Mother St. Damien showed herself in a death horrible to nature, like she had always been, that is, wonderfully submissive to the Holy Will of God, whatever it might be. Her mortification was extraordinary and bordered on the courage of the martyrs. She was occupied solely with her love of God whose adorable Name was incessantly in her heart and on her lips and her love of souls for whom she offered all her sufferings. Scarcely 40 years old, far from regretting life, she sacrificed it joyously for her Sisters, the dear children who were the objects of her zeal and the whole town to which she had consecrated her apostolate. As well as this, nobody doubted that the reputation she had merited was that of a saint.

Her death was humble and calm like her life. The morning of the ninth day of her illness, as the bouts seemed to be growing less, the Siamese doctor had recovered some hope of saving her if she could resist for twenty-four more hours. She had been able to re-open her eyes and kept the same admirable sentiments with full consciousness.

But what was foreseen happened. Her mouth, her throat, her stomach, all her internal organs had been affected by the frightful eruption and when the poison penetrated within, they were not able to resist it. Already weak, a general poisoning resulted. She succumbed after some minutes of very gentle agony, at the moment when this sad corruption of her blood by the ravages of the disease took place.

It was Holy Saturday, 30th March, 1863, about 10 a.m.

The Catholics Of Penang Mourn Her Loss

Not to speak of the desolation into which her death plunged the Community of Penang, she was unanimously mourned in the town. Because of her goodness and virtue, everyone, without distinction of religion or nationality, esteemed and loved her. All the Catholics of Penang wished to wear mourning because of her death.

Her body was placed on the threshold of the Chapel which she had just got erected. These last details we owe to Mother St. Mathilde who rushed from Singapore to Penang to console the desolate Community. She remained there until Mother St. Appolinaire, formerly Superior of Malacca, came to replace Mother St. Damien.

In France such a great loss drew tears from Rev. Mother de Faudoas. She wished to share her grief with the whole

Congregation and thus she expresses her self (Circular 28th May, 1863).

My dear Sisters,

I kiss the sorrowful cross which God has been pleased to send us. I adore His impenetrable designs which have taken from the Penang House she who was its soul and at the same time a perfect model of the religious virtues and of apostolic zeal.

How many blessings did God not shower on the devotedness of our regretted Sr. St. Damien Dejean.

In spite of the violence and rapidity of her disease, she had the consolation of receiving all the succours of Holy Religion with the liveliest sentiments of faith and piety and thus she gave back her beautiful soul to God. Her community, greatly afflicted at such a loss, is at the same time strongly encouraged by the virtuous example she constantly gave them. I specially ask your prayers, my very dear Sisters, to ask God that it may please Him to enlighten me in my choice of replacing her and that He may deign to lead towards our dear Institute souls animated by that zeal and good spirit which filled our deeply regretted Sister.”

Mother St. Appolinaire – Third Superior

Rev. Mother de Faudoas' choice fell on Mother St. Appolinaire, as we have seen above. She had been Superior of Malacca since its foundation. Four months after the death of Mother St. Damien, she arrived at Penang. They by no means forgot her predecessor, who had filled such a large place in all their hearts, but she worthily filled her position for more than twelve years.

Her departure from Malacca was unfortunate for the poor, little growing House and was the occasion of long difficulties and trials for Mother St. Mathilde, as the Superior who replaced

Mother St. Appolinaire at Malacca was very unhealthy – the consequences were disastrous.

Her Replacement At Malacca

Sr. St. Leonard was chosen to direct the House of Malacca. Up to this she had acquitted every duty satisfactorily. Before being appointed Superior, her last post was in Penang. The first weeks of her office passed without any notable happenings, but soon Mother St. Mathilde began to receive accounts from Malacca that at first surprised her and soon began to worry her. The new Superior wanted to change everything, to reverse all former management in the little house which was progressing so steadily up to now. She wanted to sell this lovely house, so favourably situated, so appropriate for all their works, under the imaginary pretext that it was too small. She wanted to dismantle it completely and was looking for the necessary money to buy another.

Sad News For The Foundress

What astounded Mother St. Mathilde most of all was the formal order which she received from Paris to cease occupying herself with Malacca. “Every house must live on its own resources,” said the authority. She immediately left it on its own as she was told, but after a while the Superior of Malacca's error became more evident each day. Mother St. Mathilde began to suspect the existence of a sad fact which she would try to confirm.

While waiting, as she fully realized that the Superior General's intention was by no means that the Sisters and pupils of Malacca should die of hunger, and that she did not know of the extremes, she considered only the known moral wishes of Mother General and put that above every other consideration

For this reason she decided to continue to occupy herself with Malacca and to send to it the necessary rice and money for

the upkeep of the occupants, realizing that the sixty francs which was each pupil's contribution could not possibly suffice.

Little by little, the letters from the Sisters of the little Community became more and more alarming and left no doubt that the profound trouble could only result from the unfortunate Superior's lack of proper mental adjustment. Her unfortunate malady became more serious as time went on. This explained everything that had happened and Rev. Mother de Faudoas had only given just judgement to the conceptions which arose from a diseased mind, as outwardly the Superior of Malacca seemed to have been right.

She had to be sent back to Singapore immediately. She took on an attitude of one who was being persecuted. This is why in all her letters to the Superior General she continually made bitter complaints against the Foundress of the Missions. While some reason still remained to her, she gave full proof of her sorrow to Mother St. Mathilde whom she had never ceased to respect and admire despite the straying of her reason. "My Mother," she said, her eyes filled with tears, "forgive me for having denounced you before the Tribunal." Mother St. Mathilde, full of compassion for the poor Sister reassured and calmed her as best she could, not fearing this imagining in the least, but it explained the troubles which had resulted from the letters of the poor Superior. Mother St. Appolinaire who was recalled to Paris for business about the House in Penang was ordered to bring the unfortunate Sister St. Leonard with her.

Even at the height of her insanity, her extreme mortification was a subject of General edification, both at mealtimes and between meals when she never took a drink. Those who have travelled over the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea know moreover to what extent one can suffer from thirst there.

We also know with what violence nature demands its rights and its evil instincts when intelligence, reason and will are not

capable of commanding them. On the boat, it was remarked that this nun must formerly have attained great virtue, since even in her present state she practised such mortification.

And truly this judgement was right. This painful voyage took place in 1865.

Closing Of The First House At Malacca

What was still more sorrowful was that as a result of this trial the House at Malacca had to be closed. The necessity of assuring the smooth running of the other establishments did not allow the replacing of Mother St. Leonard.

As the Convent at Singapore had just been enlarged by magnificent new buildings, the nuns of Malacca and their twenty-seven orphans easily found room there.

"But it was not without deep regret" writes Mother St. Mathilde, "that I saw this poor town abandoned and deprived of the only Catholic classes that it possessed. We had to sell at a low price the pretty little house that we had so loved." (The same house that our Sisters occupy again today and which had to be re-bought for a high price twelve years later).

On the contrary, Singapore steadily grew in importance. The time was past when the small number of pupils was a daily trial, deeply felt. Instead, ingenious means had to be devised to provide more accommodation.

Shortly after the closing of the house of Malacca, the holy Superior of Singapore was somewhat consoled for it by the acquisition of three neighbouring houses which she had long desired. The bargain was scarcely concluded when a large sum was offered to her for it; this, however, did not tempt her at all, so well did the realised enlargements answer the urgent necessity for the good organization of her House.

Some time later, in the month of May, 1867, the zealous Missionary retraced for the first time the route to France. It was fifteen years since she had left it, and already her work in Malaya was immense.

Rev. Mother de Faudoas desired to see her and she herself had important questions to submit to her with urgency.

CHAPTER 18

VOYAGE TO FRANCE – RETURN AND LIFE AT SINGAPORE

Voyage Of Mother St. Mathilde To France

Mother St. Mathilde informed us later that her voyage from Singapore to Marseilles was painful enough, but she did not tell us why.

Happily, in easy conversations later remembered by some of her daughters, she was more explicit.

It appears that the boat on which she was to travel was over-loaded with passengers, and this, coupled with intolerable heat, more than once transformed the long hours of the journey into real agony. It is easy to understand that amidst the inconveniences which everyone has more or less to submit to, Mother St. Mathilde did not choose the better part. On the contrary, she chose one of the most defective cabins, and as for nourishment, she and her companion Sr. St. Esperance Rampont, who was returning with her to France, after several years on the Missions, her health not being able to stand the tropical heat, accepted the least and what was at the last table. The passengers were so numerous that there had to be several relays of every meal. The servants on board were overworked and fatigued.

Great Act Of Charity During The Voyage

While thinking little of her own sufferings, she was attentive to those around her to see if she could not diminish theirs. This occasion was given to her. She discovered, thrown on a mat, in a corner of the deck, an unfortunate man, a Belgian, who was enduring cruel pain while nobody had the leisure to care for him, or even wished to be bothered with him. The crew was also too busy to allow them give him special attention. Consumed by a high fever, he had not even a little water always within his reach to

quench his thirst. His trouble was a frightful abscess between the shoulders. The crisis had passed, but a deep wound remained, horrible to look at and terribly painful. No one even dressed it.

Drawn to him by his moans, the charitable passenger had soon asked him, by some words and signs, the cause of his pain. By an extraordinary chance, he could not express himself either in English or in French. The first act of his improvised nurse was to give the patient all the relief possible by cleansing and dressing his wound. Later she procured other alleviations for him and obtained a better bed and special ointment for him. Every day she looked after him, gently dressing his wound which she continued to do as long as it was necessary. The gratitude of the poor man would be difficult to describe. He could hardly believe that he was so attentively cared for, he who up to now had been treated almost as a repulsive animal. Thus he turned towards Mother St. Mathilde, eyes wet with tears, and using a few words of French which he knew said "Madame, you ... good. Your ... heart ... very good. Thank you."

"Madame" very quickly began, we do not quite know how, to have a short conversation with him. She profited by them, as usual, to speak of God, the soul and eternity. The sermon of example and requisite charity having preceded a vocal one, the doors to his mind and soul were quite open to her words. The invalid, who was a Catholic, but a poor one until then, promised his courageous nurse to see about the great and unique business of his salvation, at the termination of the voyage. It was later learnt that he kept his word.

Her heart dilated by the accomplishment of this beautiful work, Mother St. Mathilde saw her journey's end approaching. This alone is what her humility wished to recall in her story.

"After eight days of a painful enough journey, we heard the passengers on deck exclaim joyously, 'Notre Dame de la Garde'. It was France! We quickly left our cabins with emotion and we

saluted, from the distance, Mary's holy Sanctuary, with tears. Some hours afterwards we were in port and I put my foot once again on the earth of my native land, which I had left over twelve years before."

At Marseilles, where the Congregation of St. Maur had recently opened a House, their reception was cordial and joyous, but the travellers left the following day for Paris. They were anxious to see the Mother and the cradle of their religious life. On route, they experienced feelings which can well be understood after having lived for long years in an infidel land. They counted, with tears of joy, the numerous Catholic Church spires which on all sides were to be seen. How different from Malaya, home of superstition. Here the True God had long since taken possession of the land we gaze on, the sight of another temple to idols does not afflict our hearts. O France, keep your faith, it is your glory! If you could only realise it!

"It was midnight when we knocked at the door of the Mother- House. I will not try to record my emotion in entering once again this dear house of St. Maur and seeing again our Very Rev. Mother General de Faudoas and prostrating myself before the Altar where I was consecrated to God. The pen is incapable of expressing such sentiments."

Respect Accorded To The Missionary On All Sides

The arrival of the venerable traveller in the Community of Paris was a remarkable event. Their remembrance of her before she left for the Missions – the reputation for sanctity which she had acquired there – her edifying presence, even though austere – her sallow complexion owing to the climate and her hard life of abnegation, all contributed to making her the object of everyone's gaze, gazes in which sentiments of secret veneration and pious curiosity were aroused. She came from such a distance! She had so many interesting stories to tell. It was a question of who would

have the opportunities to approach her, to speak to her, above all, to listen to her.

Also, they knew that she would not go away alone. Who then would be chosen for this wonderful Mission? Mother General did not delay in appointing 2 professed nuns and two novices (Sr. St. Norbert Liverque, Sr. St. Ephrem Colin, Sr. St. Gelase Grespin, novice and Sr. St. Antoine Mouly, novice) to form part of the future expedition, and she entrusted them in advance to the Missionary Mother. From then on, the latter forced herself to prepare and form them for the future, not hesitating to sacrifice a good part of her time to teach them the language of the country which would soon be their adopted fatherland. The first lessons in this kind of study are always dry, but the young Sisters drew the best of encouragement from contact with one who “breathed forth virtue.”

In the refectory, they received another form of instruction. At this time the Missionary Community began to eat the Malay food which was still difficult for the Sisters who had come from France. It was, therefore, wise to accustom the young Sisters destined for mission life, in advance. The zealous Foundress was not lacking in this charge. From time to time she would prepare a meal for her future collaborators herself, made up of special dishes used in the warm countries. For example, a good spicy soup or some delicious curry sauce. It was so strong and piquant that sometimes it brought tears to their eyes while the smile remained on their lips. Thus they waited for the departure which was fixed for 19th October, 1867.

Mother St. Mathilde, during her stay in France, discussed with the Superior General all the matters which she foresaw might present themselves in the near future. It was then that she spoke of the possibility of a foundation in Japan, and this was a happy precaution which favoured some years afterwards the departure of the ardent missionary for that land which wished to possess her faith.

“During these long and filial conversation,” notes Mother St. Mathilde, “several times I discerned on the face of Mother General a sort of impression of regret and confusion, at the same time a sentiment of deep maternal affection. Sometimes she even tried to draw up explanations for what had caused me pain in the past, whether at Penang or Malacca, as a result of misunderstandings created by certain letters. But I always avoided the subject and behaved as if I had not understood what our dear Mother wished to say. “ Mother General de Faudoas, at the time of departure, declared her unbounded confidence in her henceforth, in spite of all possible letters, if a thorough examination did not precede the grievances brought before her Tribunal. The venerable Superior General from that on, absolutely convinced of the exceptional merit as well as the intelligence and good sense of the Superior of Singapore, made her “right-hand man” on the Missions and always considered her as the real Foundress of the establishment of the Congregation in Asia. The Superior Generals who succeeded her thought likewise and followed the same line of conduct.

Return To Malaya

When the holy Missionary set out again, accompanied by the four Sisters mentioned above, the same ardour animated her as at her first departure, but the agony of the latter had disappeared. She was perfectly calm and tranquil, like experience which has seen and which knows perfectly where it goes. (Manuscript of Rev. Fr. Frigneul).

The travellers were scarcely aboard when the study of languages recommenced with more assiduousness and tenacity than before. Rev. Mother was then in the prime of life and was positively indefatigable. Prayer and study, study and prayer. That was the work of their days on board.

However, she knew how to procure suitable relaxation for her young companions. Every time that the occasion presented

itself, she made them go ashore to take a little rest and to satisfy their piety again together.

At that time the voyage from Alexandria to Suez was by rail. It did not go down the Nile by boat – instead one travelled beside the majestic river through landscapes of incomparable richness.

When the voyage ended on 30th December, 1867, the Mistress and her pupils had been so well employed despite distractions and fatigue, that on their arrival at Singapore, they immediately rendered themselves useful.

Life In Singapore

Soon they were fully accustomed to their new life and admired the way of life of the Singapore Community in all its religious greatness, where every Sister was full of the sense of duty and virtue. They had first of all these dignified Daughters of Fr. Barré, remarkable personalities in every way. Among them was Sr. St. Joseph (Spooner) whose providential vocation we have recounted. She had become the most obedient and solidly-grounded Sister in virtue that one could see.

But she who guided these great souls in the way of religion and in the practice of perfection while sanctifying herself to an extraordinary degree was none other than the eminent Superior whose outward characteristics remain to be studied at this time of her life.

It was not in her Community alone that Mother St. Mathilde was the occasion of exercising virtue. She was often engaged in severe combats in trying to protect souls from vice and safeguard their liberty. One could write of innumerable traits by which she was known.

Magnificent Signs Of Her Love For Her Neighbour

Here is an incident which will surely be interesting to read.

A miserable European Captain of a little commercial boat, while carrying on his apparent transaction, degraded himself even to the level of taking slaves.

An honest Frenchman who had a position in the Police Force found him one day trying to sell about ten young Chinese girls that the terrible man had imprisoned in his boat. He would not close his eyes to this indignity as others before him had done. He searched the boat until he found nine unfortunate victims. He freed them and brought them to the Police. He placed them under their safe guardianship while he looked for a home for them. He came and told us the story. We wrote to the magistrate and had no trouble in obtaining the unfortunate girls. The authorities handed over the seven youngest of them to us with perfect trust.

For the first few weeks they gave terrible trouble. They screamed when one of us had to approach them. Happily we had a Chinese in the house who understood their dialect. Little by little she succeeded in reassuring them that they would be happy with us, that nobody would beat them any longer and that they could eat as much as they wished. Their fears regarding most things had come from lies that someone had told them in order that they might not try to escape.

After a while they learnt the Malay language and soon became solid and fervent Christians. Established in Singapore, they gave the best example. Later we educated their children and soon drew several of their nation to our classes. They often brought little abandoned babies to us that we might baptize them.

At this time four little Cochin Chinese were brought to us. They had been abused also by their infamous parents. One of them did not respond to our care and ran away, but the police, recognizing the uniform of our Orphanage which she wore,

brought her back to us after having reprimanded her severely. Yet she did not change. We did our best for her but nevertheless she had a sad ending. Her companions on the contrary were a credit to the faith.

Another time, a little girl seven or eight years old escaped to return to the dwelling of an individual who said he was her father and from whom the Police had taken her to confide her to the Convent. Happily for her, she was seen at the time of the escapade. Immediately Mother St. Mathilde flew towards a cab and said peremptorily to the driver "I wish to catch up with that child who is running away from me. Follow her." At the same time, a group of children from the Brothers' School, seeing what had happened, ran before like streaks of lightning and saw the fugitive enter a house before which they lined up. Rev. Mother arrived and they all cried out to her "Miss Berca is there". The fearless Mother mounted the steps with haste and went in to the great astonishment of the people there. Without saying a word, she seized the child and left, leaving behind her veil and a piece of her habit. She went down even quicker than she went up. Her improvised bodyguard, who were waiting for her, pushed her into the carriage along with the young fugitive, her conquest. Then they drove the horse at three times his usual gallop, and the carriage arrived at the Convent. Once again the servant of God and of souls had carried off the victory.

Several times she disputed with Satan for her poor children in court and she has declared "I cannot say how much it cost me to go before the Judges to defend the cause of justice and virtue, above all else before the English language became familiar to me. We always had to deal with Protestant and English juries before whom we had to appear. The judges always received us with the greatest respect possible, coming down from their chairs to seat us beside them, listening to us with the most perfect condescension on all occasions, and all gave verdicts in favour of our cause as being that of God and of morality.

One of these, the good Mr. McCausland, did not fear to make our eulogy in public. He often came to see us, calling me in his peculiar French 'Mon vieux Amie' (my old friend).

Once it was against a Protestant Pastor that the Superior had to defend herself. She had three children in the House whose parents, not being fervent Catholic, had entered the service of this erroneous minister. He had soon "converted" them by suspicious methods and "his zeal" and, not stopping at the parents, he used every means in his power to withdraw the children from the Sisters' hands.

His private ruses not having succeeded, he called us before the Court. But he was greatly humiliated there. The judge and witnesses poked fun gently at him while he related the famous conversion of which he was so proud. They ended by threatening to send him to prison in Bombay if he tried to perform the least action against the liberty of these children or against us.

As he desired to speak again, the judge ended the hearing while he looked at the accuser contemptuously, and he came to offer me his arm to conduct me to the carriage which awaited my companion and me.

Mr. McCausland to whom this favourable judgement was due, being shortly afterwards obliged to return to England, the Minister at once hoped to win his cause with the successor of the just magistrate. In order to influence him more he came before this new judge at Malacca, impatient to submit his grievances and his projects to him – "but he carried both before the Tribunal of God where he unwillingly appeared the very night which preceded the arrival of the successor of Mr. McCausland."

This greatly impressed several people, among them two renegades. Soon they wished to return to the true fold, repented of their apostasy and once absolved they came to thank us for our kindness to their children. We had already happily married the

eldest. The other sisters returned to their parents two years later and always remained good Catholics.

At other times they helped unfortunate people of a different kind, for the charitable Rev. Mother never refused a good work. She exercised her zeal in favour of the ignorant, the needy, the abandoned, the sick, in a word towards all to whom she could render any service. She had in the vast establishment of Singapore (with time it had become like a little village) a residence destined to shelter as many poor and sick women as the resources of the House permitted her to receive. One day such a one was led in, in such a state of decomposition that she exhaled an unbearable odour, and the daughters of this saintly Mother who were usually courageous, this time recoiled horrified.

But what did the servant of the wretched one do? She was the first to approach the poor creature whom there was question of sending to the distant hospital. Filled with ardent zeal like a valiant captain on the day of battle, she so excited the courage of the Sisters that they vied with each other as to who would help most, not hesitating any longer in disgust.

Thus they worked for the salvation of their neighbour. The venerable Mother was ready for all. Neither repugnance, pain or expense ever daunted her. How much money did she not give for the ransom of unfortunate creatures of God, handed over to evil, exposed to everlasting perdition. How many sacrifices, trials and struggles God alone knows! She gave without measure what the first years of her youth and her religious life had promised.

Special Character Of The Virtue Of Mother St. Mathilde

To the truly eminent virtues into which we had an insight in France, she had added a special promise of sanctity which grew from the year 1859 onwards. She revealed herself with wonderful simplicity to one of her daughters during the Annual Retreat of 1910, her last in this world. Ordinarily, she never allowed anybody to glimpse the secret of her soul. Her personal confidences were

rare, but on this occasion, she said to her, "it is more than 50 years since I asked God to bless a special little rule (naturally in conformity with the Rules and Constitutions) which I would not transgress – a particular covenant between God and myself. To do everything with order, never to relinquish this resolution, to show myself always the same, without enthusiasm, true to myself, without hurry, to control an impulsive, ardent nature, and all to save souls." She added with a jest that showed precisely the significance of the subject "This is not a great thing and yet it is enough." (From the manuscript of Rev. Fr. Ligneul).

Rev. Mother's characteristics were founded on this energetic calm, which was more or less her outstanding virtue. In seeing her photograph at sixty years of age, while she was still quite vigorous, ripened by long experience, one would regard it as a strong statue, inspiring deep thoughts. The calmness is absolute, but what energy is not concentrated under this reserved attitude. (Fr. Ligneul's manuscript). Without doubt it was from this concentrated energy that the virtuous Rev. Mother adopted and followed her changeless rule of life at Singapore. She understood immediately when she arrived there, that it was only from her own self that she would draw the necessary strength for the undertakings that her apostolic soul had dreamed of. She even said aloud on one occasion – "The 125 francs I possessed on arriving at Malaya could not take me very far."

In a General way, the Mother House and other Houses of the Institute showed themselves always generous towards helping the Missions in a hundred and one ways. But it is nevertheless true that the Superior of Singapore could not rely on this source for the carrying out of her works and her daily expenses. She relied on God and herself. Industrious, skilful and very gifted she set herself to work at wonderful embroidery and handwork, for which she easily found a place among the ladies of the European colony and even among the Chinese. Many tiny little slippers of satin, gold and pearl, issued from the Singapore workroom for the dainty feet of the wives of the rich merchants of the Chinese

empire, drawn into the neighbouring island through business affairs. Mother St. Mathilde inspired her daughters with this ardour and became their instructress in the fine arts which she had acquired thanks to her lively spirit and tireless work. As the town of Singapore was then destitute of such objects as resulted from the work of so many skilful fingers, those of the Superior, the Sisters and some of the children who offered themselves as voluntary workers – never, were they ever able to produce enough to satisfy popular demand.

Yet, on account of this class, their duty towards the children was never neglected. On the other hand, the daily recreations were very short.

How She Caused Everything To Prosper Around Her

Where then did the courageous Superior and her daughters find time to amass the pious treasures destined to transform themselves into means of saving multitudes of souls. That is a wonderful and touching mystery which lasted for twenty years and which it is here necessary to explain. Unanimously, the Superior and Sisters had imposed on themselves extra work which they were not obliged to do. At 9 p.m. Matins and Lauds having been recited, instead of taking a well-earned repose after the hard work of the day under the burning Malayan sun, the generous Superior and her daughters returned to the Community Room and worked without relaxation until midnight at these crafts, which could be called “precious” in many ways.

“How many sweet delights” writes Mother St. Mathilde in her story, “sprang from this sweet work. Classes once over, the evening hours passed swiftly and agreeably, our eyes fixed on our work, our ears open to holy reading which inflamed our hearts and formed the subject of our conversations. The thought of saving souls - her constant refrain, her fixed idea - easily made us forget fatigue and sleep.” The companions of such a Mother always

remembered those beautiful years of their religious life at Singapore.

“Oh!” writes one of them, “what joy, what impulse to work and above all to practise virtue. We never felt tired, for our dear Mother knew how to mingle edifying conversations and charming relaxations with our work.” These sustained and excited the zeal of her fortunate daughters. “The remembrance of these happy years is ever in our souls like an exquisite perfume, which one always delights to breathe.”

When the young Sisters, lately arrived from France, sometimes disturbed this uniform gravity, it was enough for them to look at their Superior and her first daughters, so calm and recollected, to quickly unite themselves with the latter. And it was this deep yet tranquil joy which formed the foundation of this edifying Community. This explains itself, for, let us not tire of repeating it, God is never outdone in generosity. The life of these Sisters was extremely meritorious, for it was one of self-renunciation by the intense and continual work which they imposed on themselves. Other great mortifications were added to this.

Not only were the walks, considered indispensable on their arrival in Penang, not then the custom, but the Sisters were scarcely ever seen outside the Convent, except when they went to the Parish Church opposite the Convent.

Added to this, the Foundress had adopted the national food for her Community and if it was sufficient as regards quantity, it was not always palatable to European taste, above all to those who had just arrived. But Rev. Mother led them all after her own example by imposing on herself many more mortifications than she asked of the others.

Her Fasts And Other Mortifications

Her rule was as follows. In the morning she went to the refectory with the rest of the Community, the first meal being at 9 a.m. as was the custom in the country. But she only partook of a simple spiritual repast with which she nourished her soul by making Spiritual Reading aloud. She waited until noon to break her fast, and took only a light collation in the evening. It was the same all through the twenty years she spent at Singapore.

Apart from that we have certain proofs that she daily practised another sort of corporal penance whose use she permitted reservedly in the Community. She constantly used these penances herself until her poor, calloused hands and limbs attacked by chronic rheumatism used up her strength. Until then she had a humble sense of the revolts of a proud nature which will only die with us. As the holy Cure d'Ars once said, "When the burden of age begins to be felt, the penance of their infirmities will replace the discipline."

Finally, considering all this, is it astonishing that all progressed around her" "When the captain is courageous the soldiers will not be cowardly" – Japanese proverb. Thus Justine hidden under the religious habit of Mother St. Mathilde could well be happy. She had indeed realized the ideal she had dreamt of in the woods of Surianville. "The Fathers of the Desert" would easily have recognized her as a soul formed in their own school. The perfume of such virtue spread abroad and one of the old missionary priests who at that time lived in Malaya and who has written such interesting memoirs on his apostolic labours, did not hide the deep admiration of which the Foundress was everywhere the object. Among other things he said that the Superior and Sisters of Singapore led a really heroic life. Nobody could doubt it after having read the preceding pages.

Before going any farther, one remark is necessary. This mode of life was not prescribed by the Rule of the Congregation to

which Mother St. Mathilde belonged. How then could she have taken on herself these extra practices and make them a sort of moral obligation for her Sisters, she who was so jealous of regular observance without any singularity?

God Shows Himself To Have Been The Inspiration Of This Extraordinary Path

To this we may reply that, when these things occurred, it was at the time of "heroic" foundations in Asia. For an exceptional situation exceptional means had to be employed also, and if this extraordinary initiative had not been given, the Houses and works now so flourishing would never have developed. What the Foundress did in these first years can be considered as one of the special inspirations of which examples are often found in the lives of the Saints. While admirable, they are not always imitable. Above all, they cannot be made the General rule.

But, in the present case, it can be believed that God showed, by several signs, that He was the Author of these resolutions.

First of all. The superior of this holy nun left her free for a long time to follow some practices of voluntary mortification which she had accepted for herself and her Community. Also, God evidently blessed this manner of life abundantly. One is astonished at the sight of the works and the number of Houses that resulted from the work of this humble daughter of Fr. Barré, left to her own resources. She could also have said, "I have planted, I have watered but it is God who gave the increase." And because He gave the increase in such large measure, the Sovereign Lord of all showed that He was satisfied with the means employed to sow the seed and water it.

Finally, He was witness that the holy excesses of the valiant Mother and her daughters pleased Him, since, in a most surprising manner He preserved their strength and life. We have

already read this saying of Mother St. Mathilde “one zealous thought can easily make us forget fatigue and sleep” but it is not so if one considers things from a natural viewpoint. On the contrary, it is a General rule that pious excesses of zeal however great or holy they may be, consume one’s physical strength. Therefore, when we see that for twenty years, neither the Superior nor any of her daughters had died as a result of this severe life, it must be supposed that they had Divine protection, powerful enough to be called miraculous. A last proof that Mother St. Mathilde was guided by the spirit of God in embracing these austere practices of zeal and penance is, that when her Superior warned her to lay them aside she did not resist but returned to the simple practice of the common rule. For example, not only did she abandon her daily fasts but she changed the usual Community menu when she realized that “it was for the better.” In Malaya, as later in Japan, European dishes were served as far as the necessity of the climate and the country’s resources would permit. These modifications and transformation were still more meritorious and the evident proof of her perfect obedience, because they were contrary to her ideal of an extraordinary life and religious immolation.

It was about the time that she left Singapore forever to go to Japan that she also renounced her perpetual fasts. Thenceforward, she followed the common life as prescribed by her rule.

One of the sisters remembers having seen her with tears in her eyes one Friday in Lent – the Feast of the seven Dolours of Our Lady, she was then eighty years old, because someone had begged her on account of her age and infirmities not to fast that day. She in her turn, with touching words implored “the favour” of imposing on herself this desired privation. She finally yielded however but with such deep regret that even her daughters shared it. She loved the Blessed Virgin so much! And she had always been happy to offer her on this Feast some sufferings in remembrance and in union with those endured by Our Blessed

Mother at the foot of the Cross. Can we not doubt that her mortification was particularly meritorious on this occasion? This happened in Japan where we are soon to follow our tireless apostle of “Good Tidings.”