

the way of spiritual childhood, which consists essentially in a great purity consequent upon that detachment from things of earth which characterises a child, and a loving attachment to God coupled with complete abandonment to his love, his power, his will—the ego nothing, he all in all. “Father into thy hands I commend my spirit”—there we have the consummation of the way of spiritual childhood. For, as S. Thomas says—“Adoptive sonship is a certain likeness of eternal sonship; just as all that takes place in time, has a certain likeness of what has been from eternity” (III, 23, a2 ad3). Our relations with our heavenly Father are a sharing in those of his only-begotten Son. God is our Father in the supernatural order only because the human birth of the Eternal Son has made possible our spiritual rebirth by water and the Holy Spirit, and our approach to the Father by and with and in him who is the “First born of many brethren”. “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus”, says S. Paul, and the outstanding characteristic of that Mind was love for the Eternal Father. This perhaps reveals the secret of Mother Julian’s conception of the Motherhood of God; we are adopted children of a Father who is also Mother.

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## MADAME ACARIE (II)

By

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In a sketch of this nature much must be passed over. Pierre Acarie’s banishment from Paris, the extreme want to which his family was reduced, and the valiant and continued efforts—finally successful—made by his wife for the complete restoration of the family fortunes and the return of her husband, can be but mentioned. Gladly she endured poverty, many insults, and much suffering, so that she might redeem her husband’s good name and property. Yet from the time of Pierre’s return his temper seems to have become sharper. It has been pointed out by some biographers that this change occurred in Pierre Acarie in direct proportion to his wife’s increase in holiness. Without going so far it may be said, perhaps, that Pierre’s increasing ill-humour, caused to a certain extent, no doubt, by his many reverses, the triumph of all that he abhorred, and the upset of his dearest political plans, was used by God in the sanctification of his wife.

Women who sanctify themselves in marriage, as Barbe Acarie did, give to those they love a love which is extremely pure for it is deprived of all element of self. They love, perhaps, no more than other wives, but surely they love better. For, to be able to live “in one flesh”, without that life becoming a veritable prison for the soul requires harmony of spirit. And such

harmony is not attained without sacrifice. Barbe loved her husband, and the pursuit of perfection in no wise decreased her love. On the contrary.

'She felt very strongly the banishment of my father on account of the League' was the testimony of Barbe's eldest daughter at the process of beatification. When Pierre was allowed to reside at Luzarches, seven leagues from Paris, Barbe went often to visit him. On one occasion in getting down from the coach she broke her thigh. It made little difference. For, apart from the enforced lying up, she continued her many efforts on her husband's behalf, and found time to put to rights and in great part re-furnish with her needle, the sacristy of the neighbouring Capuchin church.

From 1596 onwards, little by little, things were better for the exiles. But twice after that first accident Barbe fell and broke her thigh again. From the time of the last fracture, writes Dom Sans, General of the Feuillants, 'elle ne cogneut plus son mari'. Such a physical privation, it is necessary to point out, says Père Bruno, was added to the terrible series of trials undergone by Barbe Acarie, those trials described by St. Teresa so vividly in the sixth Mansion. In a letter written at this time to Dom Beau cousin, Vicar of the Paris Charterhouse, Barbe speaks of the interior trials and sufferings of her soul; she felt, she says, as if God had completely abandoned her. Only thus was she prepared for the work she had yet to do.

On St. Matthew's day, 1604, a curious cortège could be seen trundling along the plain known as Les Landes in the south of France. Two Carmelite friars and some French priests on horse-back acted as escort to a couple of cumbrous coaches filled with Spanish nuns and some French ladies of position. More curious still the Spanish nuns were leaning out of the windows holding out their rosaries and crucifixes. For they had been told of the fierceness of the heretics against all Catholics, of the persecution in England, and the religious wars of France; thus, they hoped, they courted martyrdom. These daughters of St. Teresa followed their holy mother's example: as Crashaw sings of her

Since 'tis not to be had at home  
She'll travel for a martyrdom,  
No home for her confesses she,  
But where she may a martyr be.

The dangers of the journey and its hasards had already made the Carmelite provincial of Castille exclaim that the nuns had been brought away to be killed, not to make a foundation. The French ecclesiastics included M. de Bérulle, the future Cardinal and founder of the French Oratory. The Carmelite nuns had at their head the venerable Anne of Jesus, who had been clothed

by St Teresa, and blessed Anne of St Bartholomew in whose arms she had died.

The events leading up to this Carmelite invasion of France in the autumn of 1604 have their genesis partly in the devotion of a nobleman of Rouen, Jean de Quintadoine, for all connected with the Carmelite Order, and partly in the work of Madame Acarie. It is her part that concerns us here.

Now Jean de Quintadoine had translated the works of St Teresa and they were published in 1601. Somewhat unwillingly Madame Acarie had been persuaded to read them or, as some authorities insist, the life of the Saint by Ribera (it is not impossible that she read both). Whether it was the works or the life that she read, Madame Acarie had a vision of St Teresa in which the saint admonished her to introduce the Carmelites into France. She laid the matter before Dom Beaucousin her confessor who called together a meeting of theologians to decide what was to be done: Duval, Gallemant, de Quintadoine and de Bérulle were there. On account of the great difficulties of such an undertaking it was decided to do nothing.

Seven months went by. But it was unlike St Teresa to let matters rest in so unsatisfactory a state. She appeared to Madame Acarie again and once more urged upon her the establishment of the Discalced nuns in France. She who had written of the grief and bitterness the miseries of France had caused her when on earth (*Way of Perfection*, 1, 2) did not forget that country when she was in heaven.

As a result of this second vision a further conference was called at the Charterhouse. St Francis de Sales is added to the number of the counsellors and Madame Acarie makes a speech to the assembled theologians. It is decided to make a foundation, and St Francis de Sales wrote to the Pope asking for a Brief authorizing Spanish nuns to come to France.

The first convent was founded at Paris on the site of an old Benedictine Priory known as Notre Dame des Champs, in the Faubourg St Jacques. Here, according to legend, St Denis first preached to the Parisians, and in the church was venerated an ancient picture of our Lady attributed to St Luke. Soon, many convents sprang from this first foundation—Amiens, Pontoise, Dijon, Rouen and Tours. In just over sixty years some sixty convents were founded.

The care that was taken to obtain nuns from Spain, nuns moreover who had been especially near to St Teresa, proves the desire of the founders for the pure Teresian tradition. That adequate measures were not taken to safeguard this tradition in later years lessens in no whit the merit of the work of Madame Acarie. Nor, if in later years the Carmel of France became less Teresian and more and more Berullian, should the initial work

of Madame Acarie on that account be minimized. For so much of the beginnings came from her: not only the choosing of the site, and a great part of its purchase money but even the training of the first postulants, and their selection from the hosts of young and older women who applied for admission. Others who came after her must be held responsible for the partial undoing of her work. While she lived she was ever faithful to the spirit of St Teresa. On one occasion, when she had been professed as a laysister in the Carmel she had founded she yet withstood to the face Cardinal de Bérulle, her ecclesiastical superior, in the matter of an innovation, an addition to the Constitutions, to such effect that the innovation was withdrawn.

All Madame Acarie's work at this time was not entirely concerned with the Carmelites, though it formed the greater part of her exterior activities. She helped with the reformation of many abbeys, and had a part in the establishment of the Oratory and of the Ursulines in France.

Nor did all this work in any way upset her life as a wife and a mother, nor yet her life of prayer. Often must she do herself violence lest she fall into ecstasy. And what of her husband at this time? Dom Sans again gives testimony: 'She had so great a submission to him that when she went to Communion she went always first to ask his permission to absent herself'. Once, coming back from the Faubourg St Jacques, she hurried home on foot because her carriage had broken down. It was a long way, and more unusual for great ladies to hurry about the streets than it is now. 'As she was of a gay disposition (Pierre Acarie) used to say that as his wife must become a saint it was his business to mortify her to help her on her way, and that in so doing he did his duty'. Madame de Breauté speaks in much the same way: 'I am witness', she says, 'of the great care she always had of him and more especially when he was ill . . . she would leave this care to no one else on any consideration'.

Monsieur de Marillac relates how on one occasion Pierre Acarie tried to get a religious, a famous preacher, to talk to his wife and make her give up some of her good works.

When the monk had questioned her he came to quite another conclusion for he told her that her deference to her husband was excessive, and commanded her strongly to be restrained in this matter; and more. For a whole month she was to act extremely coldly towards her husband. Whatever we may think of this advice, it is Madame Acarie's re-action to it that is of interest. 'It was pitiful to see this holy woman,' continues de Marillac, 'in so sorry a state: for the great and singular love she had for her husband made her do all those little things for him that she was accustomed to do, without thinking.' That month was a sore trial to her.

Pierre Acarie died in 1613. When all her children were settled—her three daughters became Carmelites; Nicholas married, Pierre was ordained priest and finished up as vicar general of Rouen, Jean was a soldier, and married in Germany—and her affairs in order, Madame Acarie became a lay sister not in the important Carmel of Paris but in the comparatively unknown one at Amiens. She was clothed there by André Duval on Low Sunday 1613, taking the name of Mary of the Incarnation, being then forty-eight years old. From that date until her death in 1618 she was occupied with the humble duties of the house, either at Amiens or Pontoise, where she was sent two years afterwards. Her lot henceforward was a humble one: to pick and wash the vegetables of the community's scanty diet, to clean the lamps and sweep the passages, such was the greater part of her life as a Carmelite lay-sister.

As a religious her concern for her children, especially for her sons in the world, did not cease. In the few letters we have she is continually urging the necessity of prayer on their behalf.

After edifying all by her holy life she died at the Carmel of Pontoise on April 18, 1618. It is as blessed Mary of the Incarnation that she is honoured in the prayers of the Church, but it is as Madame Acarie that she remains in many hearts in France to-day as a patron of marriage sanctified.

Marie de Tudert, Madame Acarie's near relative and friend, says of the Acarie marriage that it could be proposed as a very model of conjugal perfection. St Teresa, in a well-known passage in the *Interior Castle* writes: 'Though but a homely comparison yet I can find nothing better to express my meaning than the sacrament of matrimony, although the two things are very different. In divine union everything is spiritual and far removed from anything corporal, all the joys our Lord gives, and the mutual delight felt in it being celestial are very unlike human marriage, which it excels a thousand times. Here all is love united to love; its operations are more pure, refined and sweet than can be described, though Our Lord knows how to make the soul sensible of them'.<sup>(1)</sup> There is, of course, a great gulf between the life of grace and the life of nature, though this last is yet transformed and raised up by grace. But the comparison from the Canticles is used times without number by the mystics. They use it because marriage, in St Paul's words, is a great mystery . . . there also is love united to love.

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(1) *Interior Castle*. Stanbrook edition. Chap. iv, page 123. The following comment is from Père Bruno, *op. cit.* p. 122.