

## PAULINE JARICOT AND THE ROSARY

RESEARCH made in connection with the impending canonisation of Pauline Jaricot, the French girl who is perhaps best known as the foundress of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, has brought to light an interesting chapter in the history of the practice of saying the rosary. A little more than a century ago the seventeen-year-old daughter of a Lyons silk-merchant was inspired to start an association which would promote prayer and almsgiving for the conversion of the heathen. The humble effort which begun among her father's work-girls spread rapidly thanks to the zeal and organizing ability of this would-be missionary. Her system was simplicity itself: a short prayer each day and alms of a *sou* a week, the members to be grouped in *dizaines*, *centaines* and *milles*; and the widespread success did much to rehabilitate the fortunes of the French missionary societies who had been reduced to inactivity by the upheavals of the revolution and the Empire.

In due course the Association became too cumbersome for the original simple constitution and a National Council was created under influential auspices to distribute the alms to all missions. After some hesitancy Mlle. Jaricot severed her connection with the association which was destined to take root in every nation of the old world. It is noteworthy that Dr. Poynter, then Vicar-General of the London District, sponsored the first effort in England in 1825. But England's position in those days was not unlike that of the newer mission countries to-day, her contribution to the A.P.F. was offset by the advances made by the Council to her; indeed it was not until 1928 that the total sum was equalled by our contributions, and in that year Cardinal Bourne, following the lead of the Pope, set aside the Sunday preceding the feast of Christ the King as Mission Sunday—a day of prayer and co-operation with the organisation that has become the principal mission-aid society and whose direction had recently been transferred to Rome.

At the time of her generous self-effacement Pauline Jaricot was still a young woman in her middle twenties. From her childhood she had wanted to set out and convert the benighted heathen. "I will nurse the sick and teach the children their catechism," she had said, thereby anticipating the devoted work of the thousands of nuns who were later to be enabled to start work by her foundation. In her day there were few Sisters in the missions, so it was decided that she should abandon active works for a time and try to find a way of bringing about her long-meditated project. After a period of recollection, during which the idea of setting out was abandoned on the advice of her director, her intensely practical mind turned to the question of encouraging the habit of prayer in the home. Her anxiety about the break-up of family life, about the encroachment of large-scale industry upon craftsmanship and about the pervasive effect of the cheap press have earned her the deserved title of "precursor of jocisme," but her first step to counteract these evils was the re-introduction of the habit of saying the Rosary.

"I had been puzzling how to get the frivolous French mind to adopt the Rosary—a form of prayer and meditation that was looked upon as out of fashion and relegated to the ignorant. There seemed no hope that these languid souls who had lost all sense of sin and any wish to remedy it would adopt a method of doing so which was so unattractive to those who do not know its sweetness."

Having been approached with a request for books and other devotional objects Pauline bethought herself once more of joining prayer to good works. Like her previous enterprise this was to be simple, practical, and easily extended. Since the habit had fallen into desuetude she would not ask for much at a time, so she required the associates of "the Living Rosary" to group themselves in fifteens each to say one decade a day and meditate on a different mystery. The original inscription cards show a daguerrotype picture of Our Lady surrounded by a chain of hearts with room for the names of the associates; these were kept in touch with one another by circulars and made a small monthly

## BLACKFRIARS

contribution towards the fund for books, pictures and rosaries.

Once more the work girls in the silk factories were the first to join and once more the work spread across France, but not without meeting with disapproval. The Master-General of the Order of Preachers, misled by hearsay information addressed the originator of the movement a letter in which he taxed her with attempting to stamp out the devotion of the Rosary by an imprudent innovation. This accusation was deeply felt by Pauline, but she wrote to Rome, modestly explaining that the association could in no way injure the devotion since all it did was to extend a practice which had practically died out.<sup>1</sup> Later the Living Rosary was affiliated to the Order and now shares the spiritual advantages of the other Rosary confraternities. In the interval the association had met with the approval of the French hierarchy and spread everywhere both in Europe and later, the missions. In France alone there were more than a million members, and by the time of her death seventy-five years ago it had reached the eight-figure mark. Its adoption in the missions was to give special satisfaction to the broken woman whose last years were spent in great misery.

This was brought about by her determination to improve the material conditions as well as the spiritual life of her working-class friends. After a cure at the shrine of St. Philomena, which was admitted as a miracle and led to the canonisation of the child-martyr of the Catacombs Pauline Jaricot dedicated her new lease of life to social work. She had inherited a modest fortune and hoped to persuade some of her friends to finance a model industrial community in which the co-operative system was to be tried out; but because she rightly saw that any lasting result must be based on spontaneous effort she appealed to the poorer people to take their share in the venture.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is borne out by the contemporary success of the association, details of which are obtainable from the head office, at 104 rue Bugeuad, Lyon. Père Quénau, O.P., the present promoter, recommends it as a method for *penetration* into workshops, clubs, and schools where priests are not allowed to set foot.

Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century she anticipated most of the social doctrine which has since become commonplace among Catholics, indeed her words might have been used by Pope Leo XIII as a draft for *Rerum Novarum*. "The Christian workman has never found it so hard to persevere in the profession of his faith . . . It is useless to try to make the masses moral by appealing to their heads, the cries of suffering or of hatred stifle the most eloquent of voices . . . The first thing to do is to restore to the working man his dignity of man, by freeing him from the slavery of ceaseless toil; his dignity of father by enabling him to taste the joys of family life; his dignity of Christian by procuring him, together with his household joys the consolation and comfort of religion."

Support was soon forthcoming from the humblest people, for the repute of the promoter stood high, moreover the iron foundry chosen as the site of the experiment was in good working order, and there was nothing obviously defective in the scheme. So the order for purchase was given and title deeds were exchanged, but when the time came to take delivery it was found that a fraudulent agent had embezzled the vast sums entrusted to him and committed the purchasers to further disbursements. The loss of the promoter's fortune was outweighed by her concern for the savings of the poor which had been entrusted to her. Every effort she made to right the unhappy enterprise was unsuccessful so she began an immense begging campaign which occupied the last years of her life, for she had determined to repay every penny. Friends in every part of Europe endeavoured to help. Cardinal Wiseman, Newman, Fr. Ignatius Spencer in this country were moved to sympathy, but the sums collected were inadequate. Living the life of a pauper she made a small income by opening a passage across her garden and charging a small toll-fee, which she paid over to her creditors.

The zealous soul who had founded two flourishing associations, and whose success with a third was only prevented by the base treachery of rogues, now was an object of pity and sometimes of scorn: all of which she met with

BLACKFRIARS

perfect resignation. The opening words of her spiritual testament indicate something of the spirit which sustained her in her trials and is likely to hasten her early elevation to the honours of the altar.

“My hope is in Jesus. My only treasure is His Cross. The lot which has befallen me is excellent and my heritage most precious. May the most just, the most high, the most holy will of God be fulfilled in all things. It matters little, O all powerful will of my Saviour, if my earthly goods, my reputation, honour, health and life itself be taken from me . . . if I may at length offer Thee my holocaust and consume myself entirely in love for Thee and for souls . . . if in thus dying for Thy holy will and for my brethren I can say: It is for this I was born. My task is done.”

HERBERT KILDANY.