

what he learns interiorly is from me, if it is useful to others and not opposed to the Scriptures."

In her life there is no tension, no incongruity between the heavenly world and her earthly surroundings, which, on the contrary, seem to interpenetrate each other, and the rich brocades and precious stones in which her visions and allegories abound, are as perfectly suited to this monastic mysticism as to the tender Virgins and Saints of a Fra Angelico. Nature and supernature are blended into a harmonious whole in the soul of this Benedictine nun, to whom our Lord said that he uses sensible things to make men understand the supra-sensible mysteries, "therefore no one should esteem spiritual things less because they are hidden under corporal images."

Does this teaching contradict St. John of the Cross, who constantly warns beginners to distrust visions and locutions? The great Doctor of mysticism knew well that these experiences have their legitimate place in the contemplative life, and are sources of danger only when they are coveted for their own sake, for the satisfaction of pride and from "spiritual gluttony", not when they are humbly received as marks of undeserved Divine favour and means of instruction used in the service of charity and submitted to authority. For though the "gratiae gratum facientes" are the only ones we are allowed to desire for ourselves, yet it would be ungrateful, indeed, to belittle those "gratiae gratis datae", given to the Saints to strengthen our faith and inflame our love. They, like all other graces, flow from the inexhaustible source of grace, the Divine Heart, which our Lord showed to St. Gertrude under the image of a burning lamp: "Behold, I present to the eyes of your soul my loving Heart, the organ of the Holy Trinity, that it may accomplish in you all the good that you cannot perform yourself."

MADAME ACARIE

By

LANCELOT C. SHEPPARD

After a painful illness of nearly three months there died, at the age of fifty-two, on the Wednesday in Easter week (April 18, 1618), in the Carmelite convent of the reform of St. Teresa at Pontoise, soeur Marie de l'Incarnation, a lay sister, five years professed. Dr. André Duval, who wrote her life, has left some account of the manner of her death. "I arrived at Pontoise," he says, "at about half-past five in the morning . . . when I got to the courtyard I met the turn sister looking for the chaplain to come and give extreme unction . . . they told the prioress that I had arrived, and she sent me at once a surplice and a stole; I went straightway to the infirmary . . . the doctor told me that it was advisable to anoint her and thereupon I began it; as I was doing

so she breathed her last. The doctor having informed me that she was dead I ceased the anointing and began the anthem *Sub-venite* with the prayers which follow . . .

This matter of fact account by the grave doctor of the Sorbonne hides the great reverence he had for her at whose death-bed he was present. Indeed we may wonder why he should trouble to journey through the night from Paris to minister to a lay sister in a provincial convent, even though he was one of the ecclesiastical superiors of that and all the other Carmelite convents in France. For he shows us in his book a little of himself—how he loved solitude and study, his books and his room on the top of the hill of St. Geneviève in Paris. Yet not only on her death-bed, but even before she was a nun would he frequently leave what he loved, to go and see her—to study at firsthand, may be, those mystic states about which he read in his silent study.

Yet she who thus died a lay sister was in great part the foundress of the houses of St. Teresa's reform in France. Of her crowded life it is impossible to relate all the details here. We can but establish a framework and sketch in, occasionally, a characteristic incident. Nor must the lessons of this 'admirable life' be pointed out: they are sufficiently obvious for all who would heed what she teaches¹.

Barbe, daughter of Nicholas Avrillot, Lord of Champlatreux, *maître des comptes* of the Parliament of Paris, and his wife Marie Lhuillier, was born in the rue Mauvais Garçons in Paris in 1565. We know little of her early childhood save that she was confirmed at the age of seven and made her first communion when she was twelve, and that for three years she was a pupil at the Franciscan Abbaye de Longchamps where her aunt was a nun. But of the manner of her life in what must have been the rather gloomy *hôtel* in the rue Mauvais Garçons we have no information. One little incident of her early childhood has survived.

It happened when Barbe was five years old. On an early autumn afternoon Madame Avrillot and her small daughter were to be seen coming out of the extern chapel of the Paris Charterhouse which was situated in the Faubourg St. Jacques. The little girl was dressed all in white, for the Avrillots had so far been unsuccessful in bringing up any of their children, and before Barbe's birth Madame Avrillot had consecrated her coming child to Our Lady, promising in token of her vow that her child should

¹ Of the wealth of literature, almost all in French, readers who desire to learn more of Madame Acarie should read above all André Duval: *La vie admirable de . . . Mlle Acarie*, 8vo, Paris, 1621: the latest edition, Paris, 1893. An excellent modern sketch is that by Père Bruno de J.-M., O.C.D., *Epouse et mystique*, Paris n.d. (it appeared originally in *Etudes Carmelitaines*, 1936, vol. i, pp 203-33). The Abbé Brémond has some lively pages on Madame Acarie in his *History of Religious Thought in France* (especially volume ii, pp 145 seq English translation: London, 1930).

wear white until she was seven years old.

We do not know the purpose of the visit to the Charterhouse chapel. It may have been to consult one of the monks, for the Carthusians, in spite of their retirement, had considerable effect on the spiritual life of the Paris of those days. Or it may have been just a pleasant walk for an autumn afternoon; indeed, this quarter of Paris could provide the devout with many a pious pilgrimage. Besides the Charterhouse there was the abbey of Val de Grace, famous in later years as the seat of the reforming influence of the holy abbess Margaret d'Arbouze.

As mother and daughter emerged from the chapel they stopped to speak for a moment with a youth who was passing, a certain Jacques Galleman, a student of the Sorbonne. Many years afterwards he described this meeting and told of its tremendous effect upon him: how the future sanctity of the little girl, her many good works and his own part in them were then and there revealed to him. So did he testify in the process of beatification of her whom he met now for the first time.

Barbe early sought mortification, but there seems not to have been any priggishness in her. In after years she told Michel de Marillac how, as a little girl, she would go out into the rain and stand beneath the gutters so that she might become used to a wetting. While she was a pupil at Longchamps she would go to Jeanne de Mailly, her mistress, to accuse herself of her faults and ask for punishment. Jeanne taught her the Little Office of Our Lady, and imbued her with a great love for the song and ceremonies of the Church.

Madame Avrillot seems to have had some inkling of the way things were going, for in 1578, abruptly, she removed her daughter from the convent and brought her home. Barbe, for all that, was convinced that she was called to the religious life. When the plague broke out in Paris—*Courent force rougeoles et petites véroles mesme aux grandes personnes*, says l'Estoile of this time—she besought her mother to let her go and be a nun at the Hôtel Dieu. We must imagine the terms of Madame Avrillot's refusal.

She feared principally that her daughter's 'devotion' would prove an obstacle to her making a suitable marriage, and decided to try by greater severity a cure of this inconvenient habit. So, in the cold winter of 1581-2 she deprives Barbe of access to the fire with the result that she develops chilblains on her feet. The chilblains festered and eventually some of the toes had to be amputated. Lameness, one might imagine, is a greater blemish than prayerful habits.

Barbe's desire to leave the world cannot but have been strengthened by much that she saw around her, and still more by what she must have heard of the doings of the court. For Henri III and his boon companions seemed to be ruining Paris for the

sake of their pleasures, and few of the many stories told of them can have been unknown in the Avrillot household. True, the king occasionally got fits of devotion, but Parisians were not deceived. L'Estoile, again, tells how Henri and one or two of his favourites

alloit à pied par les églises, tenant à sa main de grosses patenostres qu'il alloit disant et marmonnant par les rues. On disoit que ce faisait-il . . . afin de faire croire au peuple de Paris qu'il estoit fort devotien, catholique, apostolique et rommain et lui donner courage de fouler plus librement à la bourse.

Madame Avrillot, however, had made up her mind: Barbe must marry and marry well; and by 1582 she was successful in finding a husband for her daughter, who was now sixteen and a half years old. Barbe Avrillot, by obedience, married Pierre Acarie, a young man of her own age who held a post similar to that of her father. He was young therefore, rich and good-looking, and, Duval tells, greatly in love with his young wife.

For the next thirty years or more the religious life seems to haunt Barbe Acarie—her inclinations, sometimes her very life, seem to point to it. Yet she was not one of those strange creatures, the 'spoiled nun', out of place in the world, unhappy in her life, and a trial to all about her. On the contrary she had embraced marriage as her real vocation, and she found in it grace, not only to bring up her six children and undergo much suffering, to rescue indeed her husband's fortunes at a critical moment, and to be his enduring support and encouragement, but also to enter the seventh Mansion so clearly described by St. Teresa.

Madame Acarie lived with her husband at the *hôtel Acarie* in the rue des Juifs. Pierre Acarie loved his wife. He was proud of her and showed her off in the salons: he made her dress fashionably, though it seems to have gone against the grain—on one occasion she actually painted her eyebrows. Cause for sorrow in later years!

Those first years at the Hotel Acarie were thus times of gaiety. A son Nicholas was born in 1584, and on July 5, 1585 a daughter Marie. At nineteen, Barbe is the mother of two children. It was in this year, too, that another event of paramount importance in the life of the Acarie family occurred, for it was then that Pierre Acarie became one of the Sixteen, a member, that is, of the Catholic League.

This anti-Huguenot league, first organised at Peronne in June, 1576, had lain dormant from the peace of Bergerac until the death of the duke of Anjou (1584). At that date it became active again, for it was felt that Henri III favoured Henri de Navarre the Protestant (the future Henri IV) rather than Henri de Guise the Catholic. On November 11, 1584, the king, becoming

anxious, issued a declaration against all those who entered into a league against him (*declaration contre ceux qui font ligue, enrroolemens, et pratiques contre l'etat*). In spite of this the *enroolemens* went on. One result of the declaration was the composition of posters depicting the fate of the English Catholics under a Protestant monarch, a warning of what the French might expect should they be governed by a Protestant. A broadsheet "Warning of the Catholics of England to the Catholics of France" was passed round, but it was really the work of a lawyer of Orleans.

Pierre Acarie, indeed, had ever a devotion to the exiles for the faith from England, and encouraged by the holy priest Roussel² he helped them frequently with alms. Madame Acarie, of course, is taken up with other matters. Nicholas and Marie require much of her time. No longer can she play on the spinet—at which she excelled—and the fine clothes her mother-in-law and her husband expect her to wear seem more and more out of place to her. She tries to mortify herself at table. But she is not yet entirely free, for she is much addicted to the reading of the then fashionable romantic novels. One thinks instinctively of St. Teresa and the box in her mother's room.

On the counsel of Roussel, Pierre Acarie obtained works of piety which he substituted for *Amadis de Gaule* and the others on his wife's table. From this simple stratagem Barbe undoubtedly profitted. In reading these books one sentence struck her with such force that it is hardly too much to say that it changed the whole course of her life. It was a quotation from St. Augustine: 'He is a miser indeed to whom God is not enough.' (Tract. 8 in. Ep. Joan). 'She told us', says her eldest daughter, 'that this sentence made so sudden a change in her that she was detached from all earthly affections.'

(*To be concluded*).

² 'We and other students seeing him pass,' relates Duval, 'used to exclaim "there goes that holy priest".' (cf. Brémond *op.cit.* volume ii, p.4).

A TREATISE ON THE INEFFABLE MYSTERY OF OUR REDEMPTION

BY

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(*Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook*).

CHAPTER VI (*cont.*).

3.

The reasons for Christ's superabundant satisfaction and most copious Redemption of the human race.

Let us now see what moved this Lord to suffer such exquisite torture, and whether there was any self-interest in it. In reply I will quote a notable saying of Avicena Moro referred to by