Unless a Wheat Grain Dies...

Claudine Thévenet (Mother Mary St. Ignatius)
A photograph of the painting by Elizabeth Mayet
done by the Dutch artist Peter Mulder

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Nihil obstat
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Laurentine Chiasson, R.J.M.

UNLESS A WHEAT GRAIN DIES . . .

Claudine Thévenet 1774-1837

(Mother Mary St. Ignatius)

Foundress of the Congregation of the
Religious of Jesus and Mary

Translated by Evangeline Flynn, R.J.M.

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Prologue

Anyone leaving the Basilica of Our Lady of Fourvière will note, on the house just opposite, a marble slab on which is engraved the name of Claudine Thévenet. How often I have seen pilgrims, tourists, people from Lyons itself and visitors, stop to read the text! It evidently was a revelation to them. They had heard vaguely of Pauline Marie Jaricot, the Foundress of the Propagation of the Faith and of the Living Rosary, so closely associated with the life of the residents on the Fourvière hill and in the city of Lyons itself. They had no doubt heard of the mission of the Church in the nineteenth century and now they were learning that

"Claudine Thévenet, Foundress of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, bought this house on November the 18th, 1820, as the cradle of her Congregation. She herself lived seventeen years in this house and died here on February 3rd, 1837."

The Church throughout the ages has been an unfailing source of sanctity! In Lyons, during the French Revolution, a young girl witnessed the assassination of two of her brothers by soldiers who were punishing the city for its independence and its deep-rooted faith. For years afterwards, this young girl cared lovingly for her aged mother. Yet, open to the world and to love of neighbour, she was present to the suffering around her and she gathered, at

Pierres-Plantées to begin with, many poor, abandoned children. Several young girls sharing her desire to serve Christ in His suffering members, joined her and thus a community was formed. Soon there was need of more spacious lodgings. Claudine and her Sisters transferred the young Congregation to the house on Place Fourvière, identified by the marble tablet.

The memorial plaque has its importance yet its message does not suffice to satisfy the legitimate curiosity of passers-by, particularly of the pilgrims of Lyons who are always interested in the Christian history of their "cité". This history is brought to life again quite vividly in Sister Laurentine Chiasson's book: "Si le grain ne meurt . . ."

One cannot but congratulate a daughter of Claudine Thévenet for her book in which she presents the Foundress of the Congregation to which she belongs to all those who know, or do not know, that Claudine Thévenet, a true daughter of Lyons, will soon be beatified by Pope John Paul II. Saintly she was in her deep-rooted faith and her openness to fraternal love, particularly for the poorest among the poor.

The Sisters of Jesus and Mary still occupy the house of M. St. Ignatius and pray in her chapel. And there are Sisters of the Congregation who continue to spread the Word of God and teach the young in France, in Italy, in America and other countries. True religious by their availability and their modesty, they bear witness to their consecration to God and their fidelity to the Church! May this testimony and this volume constitute an appeal for religious vocations! The world and the Church stand in such great need of them!

Cardinal A. RENARD
Archbishop of Lyons

April 20, 1981

HER SPIRIT, AN APPEAL TO WHAT IS BEST IN ME!
(Positio, p. 705)

"Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest". These words spoken by the Lord may, at first, sound very austere, yet they hold the promise of a new life – a far richer life since it has its source in a love which animates everything. In this sense, they may aptly be applied to the humble Foundress of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary.

Even a brief summary of the life and work of Claudine Thévenet leads us to conclude that she was ever docile to God's action and open to the outpouring of His merciful love.

Claudine Thévenet lived in Lyons from 1774 to 1837. She thus belonged to both the tormented times of the French Revolution and the long period of social and religious restoration known as post-revolutionary France. Her personality was marked by deep sensitivity and great strength of character. During the horrors of the Revolution, she was to experience the moral force that lies in pardon, the courage of faith and the audacity of hope, in an all-embracing charity. And because Claudine, in complete selflessness, lived entirely for

God and for souls, from the small seed confided to the soil one memorable October night in 1818, there rose a congregation whose members have now spread the world over.

A quick glance at the life of Claudine Thévenet will reveal that no cost is too great in order that the seed may produce fruit . . .

A Peaceful Childhood

On Holy Thursday, March 31st 1774, from the church of St. Nizier, in the centre of Lyons, the bells pealed forth their joyous music in a greeting of welcome to a new member born the day before on Rue Neuve and baptized Claudine – soon to be shortened to Glady. What were the mysterious designs of the Father upon this marvel, the soul of a child, as He took possession of it? The parents Philibert and Marie-Antoinette (Guyot de Pravieux) Thévenet, in their joy and gratitude, lovingly accepted in faith the inscrutable designs of God.

Claudine was the second in a family of seven: Louis-Antoine, born the preceding year, Francois-Marie, Elizabeth, Francoise, Jean-Louis and Eléonore. Three boys and four girls, each one considered as a gift, were to complete the family circle between the years 1773 and 1782 and all grew up under the vigilant care of the Christian couple.

Very little is known of the childhood days of Glady, but it is certain that she grew "in age and in wisdom" in one of the highly respectable families of Lyons where the Christian faith remained firm even in this troubled period

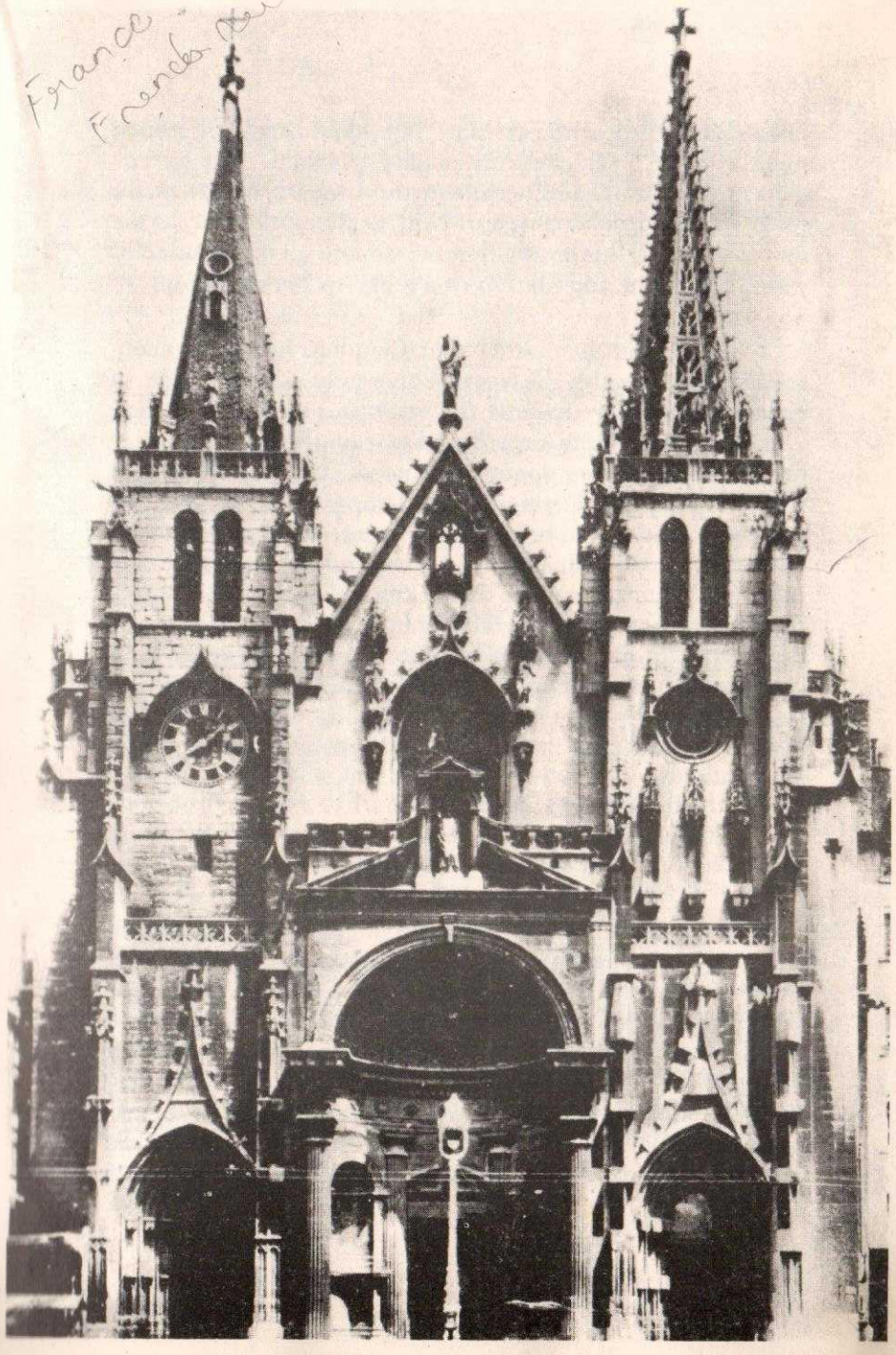
of French history. However, the first twelve years of Glady's life correspond to a peaceful period in Lyons: they were the first years of the reign of Louis XVI. Mr. and Mrs. Thévenet could concentrate all their efforts upon the education of their children without too many difficulties. The family, it is true, moved to Rue Griffon less than a year after Claudine's birth and to Rue Royale four years later to meet the needs of the growing family.

While they were at Rue Griffon Mrs. Thévenet gave birth to her second son, Francois-Marie. Thus Glady was the little one between the two brothers who readily accepted the leadership of their precocious little sister. Less than two years later, another daughter brought happiness to the family. One can easily picture Glady dancing with joy around Babeth's cradle and playing mother by the many little things she could do to help. Babeth was to become in later years her best friend with whom she intimately shared the joys and sorrows of the family. Four children and the hope of more to come were sufficient reasons to seek more spacious quarters and to justify the move to Rue Royale. This house still exists.

Births and christenings in the immediate family or among relatives, a marriage bringing a new aunt within the family group, were all ordinary events, yet, for the Thévenet children, each was an occasion for great rejoicings and there was no monotony in their young lives.

Thus, in happy surroundings, under the loving care of her father and mother and the affection bestowed by grandparents, uncles and aunts, upon her and her brothers and sisters, Glady lived a carefree, normal childhood. Her wonder grew with each religious truth that was taught to her: Heaven where a Father called God and a Mother, Mary, watched over her with a love of predilection! In this knowledge which brought so much joy to the child one could perhaps discover the imperceptible murmur of the

The church of St. Nizier where Claudine was baptized →



Lord's call? But who, at that time, could have discerned such a call? Yet, one can readily presume that in the suffering which Claudine felt at the thought of the many souls who had never heard of God, nor experienced, as she did, His loving kindness, lies the source of that audacity which led to the foundation of a religious congregation.

It was from her father that Claudine learned, unconsciously, no doubt, but very concretely, the practice of charity, especially towards the weak and the poor. In fact, Philibert Thévenet always found a way of helping those in distress. He was ever open to the needs, the difficulties and the suffering of others in an attempt to alleviate them, even at a time when, because of his excessive confidence in his debtors, he went beyond the bounds of prudence and suffered material losses. It is known that in 1783 the financial situation of the Thévenet family was such that a division of property was advisable and Mrs. Thévenet took up business in her own name. Till then, the family had enjoyed a comfortable standard of living; they were now obliged to live more modestly. Apparently the change had no traumatic effects on the children and it in no way lessened the family's spirit of charity. It was not long before Mrs. Thévenet succeeded in re-establishing the family fortunes for the benefit of the children.

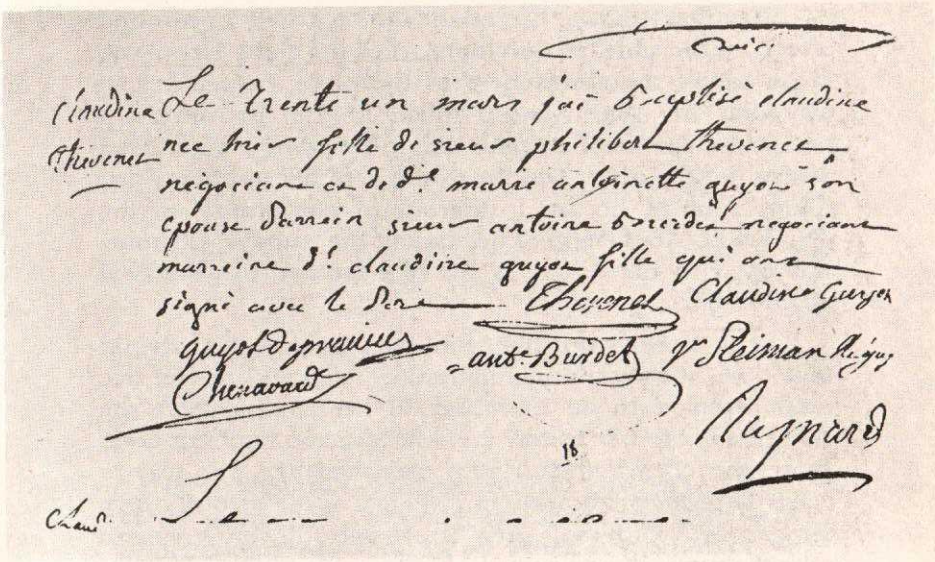
From her mother, Claudine inherited the practical traits of a resolute and energetic character. Mrs. Thévenet was a convinced Christian and she was totally concerned with the education of her family. Because of her great serenity, her intense faith easily found its way from her loving soul to that of her little girl. Good social conditions, the influence of both father and mother and the loving atmosphere of the home, all combined to form the atmosphere wherein the personality of Claudine developed harmoniously.

In 1782, with the birth, in October, of Eléonore, the family circle was complete. Glady had now three brothers and three sisters to love and care for. For the past few years, she had shown aptitudes in various household tasks and, unknown to her, young as she was, she exercised a certain ascendancy: the six others accepted, instinctively, as it were, her unassuming authority.

Entirely free from ostentation, her unassuming presence led the family to call her the "little violet"; she was the angel of the house, whose delicate influence was felt as a fragrant perfume. She thus grew up in the united and peaceful atmosphere of the home. The portrait left by the few details we have of Claudine's childhood years is that of a little girl who was "deeply loved because she was truly humble and good". The Thévenets had a summer cottage at Chaponost and Claudine soon learned to admire and love the beauties of nature. In her, we find verified the words of Paul VI when speaking of children: "They are deeply receptive, with a capacity for wonder, for trust and for spontaneous giving."

Deeply concerned with the education of their children, Mr. and Mrs. Thévenet decided to confide Claudine who was then nine to the *Dames Bénédictines de l'Abbaye de Saint-Pierre*, Place des Terreaux, not far from their home, with whom the Guyot de Pravieux entertained excellent relations. These religious, "les Dames Chanoinesses de Saint-Pierre", received at that time a small number of students as boarders and Claudine became one of the privileged few. It was there that the formation received at home was happily continued and that Claudine prepared for her First Communion and for Confirmation, usually received at the age of twelve. Nothing is known of the religious emotions of the little girl at that time but one

Baptismal Font in the Church of St. Nizier



Baptismal certificate of Claudine Thévenet

may suppose that she heartily desired these sacraments which would be a source of strength in the tribulations awaiting her.

It was the custom at the *Abbaye* to place each child in the care of one of the religious whose task it was to see to her intellectual and social formation. Besides the courses in history, literature and grammar, Claudine also developed her femininity by classes in sewing, embroidery and lace-work. Special stress was laid in forming habits of order and the care of things, qualities considered as very important for an accomplished housewife and precious likewise for the work God wished her to undertake in the future. Claudine was to recall with much appreciation and gratitude the six or seven years spent at the *Abbaye* and even at the end of her life, she still spoke with veneration and affection of the wisdom of her teacher.

Needless to say, life at the *Abbaye* had a profound effect on the spiritual development of the child. Her piety, favoured by the atmosphere of the place, helped her to overcome her sensitiveness, rudely shaken by the sharp transition from family life to that of boarding school. Even during these years, it was the example of her mother which found root in her soul desirous of conformity to the divine will. At the end of her stay at the *Abbaye,* Claudine was open to the teachings she received and to what God asked of her.

It is rather surprising, however, to note that she, at that time, showed no inclination for religious life. Her one desire seemed to be to return to her family where she could lavish to her heart's content love and kindness upon those she cherished and who cherished her. She was to leave the *Abbaye* abruptly in 1789 just as the revolutionary tempest broke. She was then fifteen and still very young to take the path of suffering which opened before her!

Lyons in the throes of the Revolution

The financial worries which Philibert Thévenet suffered during the years that saw his family grow were as nothing compared to the storm which broke upon France and was to cost so many lives. The shadow of the great political and social changes which were happening penetrated even the most peaceful homes. Claudine, with her precocious intellect and seriousness, was able to follow, even during her stay at the *Abbaye,* the evolution of ideas in France and she quickly sensed the anxiety of her loved ones.

In 1789, the Revolution broke out. During ten consecutive years, the country was alarmingly shaken in all sectors. One of the most bloody chapters in the history of the times was that of the revolt of Lyons, then the second city in the kingdom of France. There was no city, not even Paris, where social contrast was so evident as in this industrial capital, the seat of the silk industry. On the one hand stood the proletarian working-class, and on the other, the royalist and capitalist-minded industrialists — a soil from which were to rise the most fanatical and bloody conflicts.

The population of Lyons, influenced by the propaganda of philosophers and economists, looked upon 1789 as the dawn of long-promised and eagerly-awaited reforms and improvements. However, the excesses of the revolutionary crisis and the danger of losing the principles and institutions at the basis of all social order, soon became evident to all. "Lyons was no longer the opulent and peaceful city that compelled the admiration of visitors". It had become the scene of the most degrading impiety. Fanaticism was to be uprooted from the minds of people and replaced by Reason. To achieve this, war was waged upon all that concerned religion. Since exterior cult was useless, all religious symbols were to be destroyed. With the greatest disrespect, *masquerades* were organized and donkeys, decked in sacred ornaments, were made to parade in the streets. Even unbelievers were shocked by such ignoble manifestations.

Dissensions between Girondins and Montagnards increased. Religious liberty was more and more threatened; famine was keenly felt; prisons and cellars of the Town Hall were filled; each man became a suspect for his neighbour. Chalier, the leader of the Montagnards, had a guillotine set up at Place des Terreaux as a threat to all those who refused to submit to the new régime. Citizens who had always been respectful of order and liberty became uncontrollably aggressive because of the uncertainty in which they lived. A deep terror invaded the city. The situation reached a climax on May 29th 1793 when the revolt broke out to the cries of "down with oppression!" After a twenty-four-hour struggle, the town was taken, Chalier and his accomplices were arrested and the administration of the municipality was handed over to a committee for public safety.

Delegates who had been sent to Paris to explain the reaction of the people of Lyons met with a cold reception.

The Convention, in fact, considered the uprising as an attack against their own power. Lyons was condemned as a rebel city and an army under Dubois-Crancé was sent to besiege the town. During the month of June, Lyons set up a resistance movement under the leadership of General de Précy. In order to strengthen their position, the rulers of Lyons started proceedings against Chalier and on July 16th condemned him as the first victim of his own guillotine, under particularly atrocious circumstances, because the machine did not work properly. On August 7th, a proclamation announced that Lyons was ready to resist the oppression. The following day, General Kellerman with his troops reached the walls of the city and on the 9th, the town was besieged.

It is impossible to describe the horrors of that two-month siege. Paris was surprised at the prolonged resistance of the people of Lyons. Judging that Kellerman lacked energy and drive, the Convention sent a commission to Lyons directed by Couthon, and Dubois-Crancé was asked to lead the attack. The struggle increased in intensity. Each day, bombardments were renewed and shelling destroyed numerous houses. There came a day when, with the lack of food, even the most resolute lost heart, and it was hunger, rather than the enemy, which conquered them.

On October 9th, after a courageous resistance of two months, under the most appalling conditions, the besieged city realized that surrender was inevitable. General de Précy succeeded in reaching Switzerland with eighty of his followers and the defenceless city was left at the mercy of the besiegers. Three days later, the Convention, in Paris, adopted a decree to the effect that the second city of France was to be completely annihilated. According to the ordinance, an extraordinary commission was to inflict immediate military punishment upon the counter-revolutionaries; the inhabitants were to be disarmed; the town

reduced to a heap of ruins and the name of Lyons effaced from the list of cities in the Republic. These were the appalling terms which Collot d'Herbois and Fouché were directed to implement. And there was no one who dared oppose the proposition even though it was considered senseless.

Members of the Convention itself were losing courage as those who favoured a more merciful attitude were immediately threatened with the guillotine. In Lyons, the two proconsuls took the orders given them in earnest and executed them faithfully. The *Règne de la Terreur* spread everywhere and the terror was proportional to the peril in which the revolt of the city had placed the Republic. Lyons was submitted to the worst acts of violence and humiliation. Houses were destroyed, entire sections overthrown; worse still were the accusations, the hastily-rendered judgments, the proscriptions and massive executions. In a few weeks, the tribunal condemned to death more than two thousand inhabitants of Lyons. The alarm sounded constantly. From morning till night, the guillotine performed its ghastly task, yet not rapidly enough to satisfy the ultra-revolutionaries and machine guns were set up. Fear spread throughout the city as each day saw the disappearance of entire streets, and deep pits were dug in the Brotteaux where bodies of the victims were thrown. The condemned, chained two by two, were led to the spot, sometimes as many as a hundred, in a mass of human despair. Lined up a few feet from the cannons, the victims faced their horrible fate. Any survivor of the cannonade found death under blows of sabre and rifle butts. Such were the scenes of horror which Lyons witnessed!

In all homes, rich or poor, hearts were torn with anxiety and anguish. The Thévenet family was not to escape this relentless wave of vengeance.

Claudine during the "Terror"

A deep faith may assure a certain amount of interior peace under a threatening peril, but it cannot dispel the feeling of insecurity, particularly in the heart of a father or a mother. The Thévenet family suffered cruelly during the "Terror". The danger was so close that Mr. Thévenet, as was the case in many other families, sought to protect his youngest children by bringing them to his sister in a neighbouring town. On his return, however, he found the gates of Lyons closed: the siege had begun. This was a very hard blow. What would become of his wife and three other children? Would he ever see them again? How would they escape from the perilous situation, if ever they did escape? The security he had found for the younger children did not lessen his anxiety for the rest of the family.

At Rue Royale where the Thévenet family had been living for the past few years, apprehension gave place to anxiety as the hours sped by and Mr. Thévenet did not return. It became evident that he had not been able to avoid the siege or that he had been the victim of the revolutionary turmoil – a possibility they dared not face. Would he ever come back to them, they wondered. There was need of courage and faith in a situation where husband and father was so sorely missed.

The two older brothers, Louis-Antoine, twenty, and Francois-Marie, eighteen, both ardent patriots at heart, could not remain quietly at home while their city and liberty were being savagely attacked. Along with a large number of their friends, they answered General de Précy's call for volunteers. In their enthusiasm, did they measure the seriousness of the risk taken? Did they consider the possibility of a fatal issue? If so, the urgency of defending their old "cité" prevailed over all danger and they remained faithful to their duty as citizens to the very end. In fact "nothing is given unless all is given". Both boys were to experience the truth of this statement at the cost of their lives.

When Glady returned from the *Abbaye* she had become an adolescent whose sensitiveness and maturity were exceptional for her age and she quickly sensed the anxiety of her parents.

And now, she found herself alone with her mother, sharing with her a threefold fear: uncertainty concerning her father and the youngest members of the family; anxiety as to the fate of her uncle Louis Guyot who, with his two daughters, was held up in occupied territory and, worse still, the danger in which her brothers found themselves. She who was known as "the angel of the house" was conscious of her responsibility as the sole comfort and help of her mother. Under these circumstances, Claudine, then only nineteen, showed remarkable strength and courage. In fact, she lived through one of the most exacting of human experiences – that of feeling called upon to give more than she, to her knowledge, possessed. Was she not there to sustain her mother's courage when she herself saw everything foundering around her? Was it possible to speak of faith in those hours of unbroken darkness and strive to inspire confidence when the future appeared void of hope?

Because she placed all her confidence in God, Claudine was able to live through the experience serenely. It was the slow maturation which prepared her for a special vocation, a total gift of self, the depth of which she could not then appreciate.

One day, there was terrific fighting at Quai de Retz, not far from the Thévenet's. It was the supreme effort of the *résistance* and both camps witnessed desperate fighting. Families were tortured with anxiety. From afar, wives and mothers watched the battlefield, waiting, praying and hoping that their loved ones would be spared. Claudine and her mother were among those who waited, for they knew that Louis and Francois were with the combatants. When the firing ended, the place was covered with fallen bodies. Glady, realizing her mother's distress, courageously set out, accompanied by an old servant, for the scene of carnage, a scene marked by so much heroism and brutality. It is easy to surmise the prayer of supplication, of faith and of submission that rose to God from Claudine's heart in such a tragic hour. What if she discovered her brothers among the fallen! The two women walked towards the quai in deathly silence. It would seem, under such circumstances, that words might shatter the last straw of human endurance. Deeply troubled by the scene, respectful of the many young lives ruthlessly taken, Claudine sought her brothers among the bodies which night was slowly enfolding. They were not there. Shaken with mingled apprehension and hope, she returned home, wondering whether Louis and Francois had managed to escape. If they were prisoners, all was over for them: only their death could satisfy the enemy's thirst for vengeance. What news could be sent to the waiting father? The oppressive silence of night only added to these dreadful thoughts, when suddenly the boys entered the house. Having fought through the battle without a wound, they had found a hiding-place in a friendly house and,

under cover of night, they advanced over the roof-tops to their home to reassure their mother and Glady.

But their joy was short-lived. The Convention had decreed that Lyons would be destroyed. The uprising of the city was to be paid for dearly. Terror now spread with deadly relentlessness. All those who had participated, even indirectly, in the defence of the town could fear the worst. Louis and Francois did not escape. They were betrayed and thrown into prison to await the firing squad.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Thévenet's anguish was lessened by the return of her husband who had left the youngest children at Belley. It was a great consolation to be reunited after a two months' separation. But this respite was overshadowed by the danger which menaced the absent boys. Shortly afterwards, Louis Guyot, a brother-in-law, shared the same fate. Needless to say, Philibert Thévenet did everything in his power to secure the release of his sons. The latter knew of his endeavours but they had no illusions as to the result of such efforts. They relied on Glady to comfort their parents and also hoped that she would find means of visiting them. They were not deceived on this point, yet what strength of character was demanded of Glady! She had to pay dearly for the joy of seeing her brothers.

> "During the anxious days of her brothers' imprisonment, Glady seemed a consoling angel; with the help of a disguise she managed to get into the prison and was able to visit her brothers and bring food and clothing – both very necessary as it was the middle of winter.
>
> One day, the courageous girl, again disguised as a servant, braved both gatekeeper and jailor and asked if she could see the prisoners. The guard, as if to find out what sort of person she was, filled a glass and said

> roughly: 'Come, citizeness, drink with us to the Republic!' With these words, the Jacobin drank half the glass, then, with his filthy hands, gave her the rest. Glady could feel her cheeks burning and her indignation was about to give her away, when she remembered her captive brothers and checked her emotion. She seized the hateful glass and emptied it in one gulp. That was the price she had to pay to see her brothers on that occasion."[2]

She was never to regret this gesture which allowed her to see her brothers for a last time. Louis and Francois had stretched out their hand for *la chaine,* a scene of horror when the prisoners whose names were read out moved silently from their cell to the town hall to receive judgment.

After this terrible experience, Glady did not, in spite of many efforts, see her brothers again. Day after day, with feelings of apprehension and of hope she watched the tragic march of the condemned men. On the morning of January 5th 1794, she met the sad procession. Suddenly her heart stood still: she recognized Louis and Francois chained together. Their looks met and she stood for a moment petrified, then a long sob shook her as she trembled in horror. Resolving to follow to the bitter end, she regained her composure. One can imagine that in her soul, as a flash, passed the remembrance of the Virgin Mary accompanying her Son to the foot of the cross. Filled with renewed courage she managed to reach her brothers. Louis risked making a sign to the servant accompanying Claudine and spoke in a low voice: "Bend as though to pick up something and take the letter for our Mother from my shoe". The servant, in his distress, spoke a few words of sympathy when he was abruptly silenced by one of them: "Hush, or you will be lost". The old man understood, bent down discreetly and took the letter which he handed to Claudine while Louis murmured: "Glady, forgive as we forgive". Holding the paper in her cold hands, Claudine

followed the sad convoy, her thoughts no doubt on the first Way of the Cross: the meeting of the Saviour with the holy women and His Mother, and hearing the words of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them . . ." Only such a reality could bring light and comfort to her bruised heart in hours of such intense suffering.

The most painful moment was yet to come. After a short walk, each step of which required additional strength, the group reached the Brotteaux where the execution was to take place. The condemned men were lined up along the ditches. The young girl, white-lipped and breathless, with hands tightly clasped, repeated in her heart, as a supreme appeal, her brothers' last words: "Forgive as we forgive . . ." and those of Christ on the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". Then she heard the fatal order and the quick firing. The victims fell. A few minutes later, Claudine was among those whose courage led them to their dear ones as a last proof of their love. Suddenly a sinister noise attracted her attention; she raised her eyes only to lower them hastily, stifling a cry of horror. With sabres and rifle butts, soldiers were mercilessly giving the death blow to the survivors among whom she saw Louis and Francois. The sight was too much for her overwrought nerves and for the rest of her life, Claudine was to experience periods of nervous trembling of the head, migraine and a suffocating sensation which she referred to as her "terror". It is not surprising that so brutal a scene should have left an indelible mark on the heart of a young girl not yet twenty!

And now Claudine walked slowly towards Rue Royale, giving herself time to recover from the severe shock and seeking how best to share the cruel news with her parents. Respecting her intense suffering, her companion walked silently beside her. In her heart of hearts,

Claudine accepted her brothers' words of loving forgiveness while her clasped hands still clutched the precious letter which she would soon read with her parents. This farewell message written by Louis and Francois only a few hours before being led to execution was certainly a balm upon bruised hearts for it bore witness to their deep faith. One cannot read without emotion this farewell to life so simply expressed. They both wrote and in addition to signing their own, they signed each other's letters.

Louis' letter began:

> "16th Nivose, Year II of the Republic, 7 a.m.
>
> Father, mother, sisters, cousins and friends, Good-bye! Good-bye for the last time. Good-bye, my dear, good father, good-bye. You did all you could to save us, but to no avail. Our fate was decided! My greatest sorrow is having involved my brother; if it had not been for me, his age would have saved him. Do not reproach anybody with my death; I alone am guilty – if anyone is. Do not grieve too much. Nor you, my poor mother. You carry us in your heart as once you carried us in your womb. Thinking of you brings tears to my eyes and momentarily shakes that confidence born of innocence. May God console you in your great sorrow.
>
> Good-bye, my dear sisters, good-bye. Good-bye, poor Glady; how it will hurt you, you who are so sensitive. Take care of yourself for my sake.
>
> Good-bye Fanny. Good-bye, Jean-Louis; remember that from now on you are the only son. Act accordingly and look after the family.
>
> Do not think that I am forgetting Babet and Eléonore; fortunately they are at Belley. Break the news gently to them.
>
> Good-bye, dear aunts and you, dear cousin. This leave-taking is so painful I cannot hold back the tears. Good-bye. I hope you will soon have a loving wife to help you bear life's burden. Say 'Good-bye and thank you' for me.
>
> Good-bye poor cousins, now orphans.

Good-bye, citizeness B. . . Good-bye, dear friends, citizeness Billet and your daughter. Good-bye to all my friends and relations. Good-bye all you that take an interest in me. I am not as unfortunate as you are. Good-bye forever. Be comforted and please comfort my family. Think of us sometimes.

I have done all I could for my brother; I have written twice to the judges but I do not know if they got my letters.

We have only four hours left to live; we are going to try and make good use of them."

Thévenet, senior
Thévenet, junior

Francois' letter begins along the same lines as Louis':

7 a.m.

"Before going into God's presence, I must do my duty. Good-bye mother, good-bye father, good-bye forever. You will need all the help that religion can give you to bear bravely the death of two of your sons to whom, until now, you have given maternal and paternal care.

Good-bye, my dear, good, loving sister, Glady. It is you, my dearest sister, who will have the painful task of consoling our mother. I know the news of our death will be a terrible blow to her. Comfort her. Remind her that she still has five children and that she must look after herself for their sake.

One thing is certain, we are better off than you are; within four or five hours, we shall be in the presence of God, our Father. Tell her that this son, before he died, repented of all his sins. Yes, I feel that religion is a great support and enables me to face death with indifference and serenity.

Good-bye, Jean-Louis, my dear brother, good-bye. Always follow the path of virtue and honour and you will receive your reward. Remember that one day you will have the care of our mother. Prepare yourself to look after our parents in their old age.

Good-bye Fanny, good-bye Babet, good-bye Eléonore. Knowing how upset you will be, I advise you to seek consolation in your religion. Good-bye my dear little

friends. One day we will be reunited in heaven. Good-bye. Pray to God for us. Once again good-bye father, mother, sisters, brother, aunts, uncle and cousins, friends and neighbours.

We are going to God, our Father, whom we have often offended, but we trust in His mercy.

Good-bye my worthy cousin . . . Good-bye to the two poor Guyot orphans.

In three or four hours we go to be executed; we shall go in peace, knowing that we are blameless."

Francois Thévenet, junior

"In closing, I wish to say that the sentiments expressed by my brother are mine also."

Thèvenet, senior.[3]

The family derived much consolation from these letters wherein no one was forgotten and which gave proof of the confidence in the merciful Father which the condemned boys experienced after receiving absolution from a priest, crippled and ill, who shared their prison and condemnation.

Her brothers' last will and testament left Claudine more fully conscious of her responsibility towards her parents and she was determined to respect their last wish. From then on, she became more than ever the consoling angel, finding the loving word and appropriate gesture for each one. Forgetful of self, she courageously helped her parents overcome this new grief which had been preceded by the tragic death, before the firing squad, of Louis Guyot, Mrs. Thévenet's brother.

All her life, the supreme recommendation of her two brothers re-echoed as a constant appeal: "Forgive as we forgive". The day came when the political situation changed and revenge became the order of the day in Lyons. The Thévenets knew who had betrayed the brothers, yet Claudine and the family refused to denounce the informer. The ultimate appeal to forgiveness was thus respected.

First apostolic endeavours

The seething years of the close of the eighteenth century left the entire country – and this was especially true of the city of Lyons – in ruins. The Terror was over and the tremendous task of restoration had begun. Courageous attempts were made to establish a normal way of living in a period which was still marked by much agitation. After the Convention came the Directory with its coup d'état, its moral corruption, its financial disaster and insecurity. The Consulate followed, with Napoleon Bonaparte who wished to efface from the minds of the people the memory of the deplorable régimes of which France had been victim. The Concordat was signed on July 17th, 1801 and promulgated on April 24th, 1802. The church bells once more rang out their appeal to the people.

For Claudine Thévenet who had been so deeply affected by the scenes of horror she had witnessed and the exacting demands of heroic forgiveness, the years that followed constituted a long period of profound recollection allied to an active participation in apostolic works, all too discreet, perhaps. In later years, when her nephew Claude Mayet was asked to relate facts of the life of his aunt who was also his godmother, he wrote, after searching through his memories: "But she never spoke of herself!"

One of the areas most seriously compromised by the Revolution was the education of children. The young, in France, were sadly neglected. An inspector, Jacques Sellier, thus described the situation:

> "The young no longer considered any moral code and they lived in utter dissoluteness. Children insulted honest men and old people . . . They would learn nothing and accepted no discipline whatsoever . . . the girls, not knowing how to work, spent their time in suburban eating-houses with soldiers; they blasphemed and used such obscene language as would have caused the grenadiers of my time to blush . . . Unless prompt remedies were applied to such evils, the future of the nation was truly in peril. This sorry state of affairs was caused by the unrestrained liberty in which children were allowed to grow up without any education whatsoever".[4]

And one of Bonaparte's ministers expressed himself in much the same way:

> "For the past ten years, education has been entirely neglected; religion lies at the base of all good education. Children are victims of the most dangerous idleness and given to alarming delinquency. They have no idea of God, no notion of what is just or unjust – hence wild and barbarous customs and a lawless people. If one compares education today with what it really should be, one cannot but be apprehensive for the present and future generations".[5]

Why should the innocent be made to suffer for the guilty? And when the innocent is the nation of tomorrow personified in the young, how much more serious the situation is! It had become urgent to heal the wounds of the past years. The absence of priests and religious was keenly felt – these men and women who "almost to fanaticism, devoted themselves generously to the education of the young of both sexes and of all social classes". The times were favourable to souls of good will. Misery under its

many forms, particularly moral misery, was an irresistible appeal to Claudine Thévenet's zeal intensified by suffering.

The Thévenet family was now together again, the father having returned with the four youngest children. Yet, nothing could fill the void left by the tragic death of the two eldest. Mrs. Thévenet whose health had been shaken by the cruel bereavement, found strength in the magnanimity of the pardon given and she resolutely took the family affairs in hand once more. Towards the end of 1794, the family rather reluctantly left Rue Royale where they had lived the most telling events of their lives, to take up residence on Rue Masson in the safer and quieter district of la Croix-Rousse.

A new stage in Glady's life was beginning – that important period between twenty and thirty in the life of every young girl. It was the season when a new seed fell into her well-prepared heart. The forgiveness so totally granted freed her soul for an experience of God's kindly presence and of the demands of His love. Claudine herself was not conscious of the Divine Sower's gesture which was followed by the fruitful silence of maturation but she was ever attentive to interior inspirations. During these years, two sentiments grew within her: the desire of sharing the knowledge of the Lord's goodness which she herself experienced so profoundly and the anguish she felt at the thought of the great misfortune of those who did not know God. Thus Glady's pardon became love: love of God and love of neighbour.

She considered it her first duty to give genuine consolation to her parents and to help them educate her young brother and sisters, and she took an active part in the family life. One day, the Thévenets gave hospitality to a fugitive who had just escaped from a rioting crowd. The presence of this *émigré* from Périgueux was illegal, but a

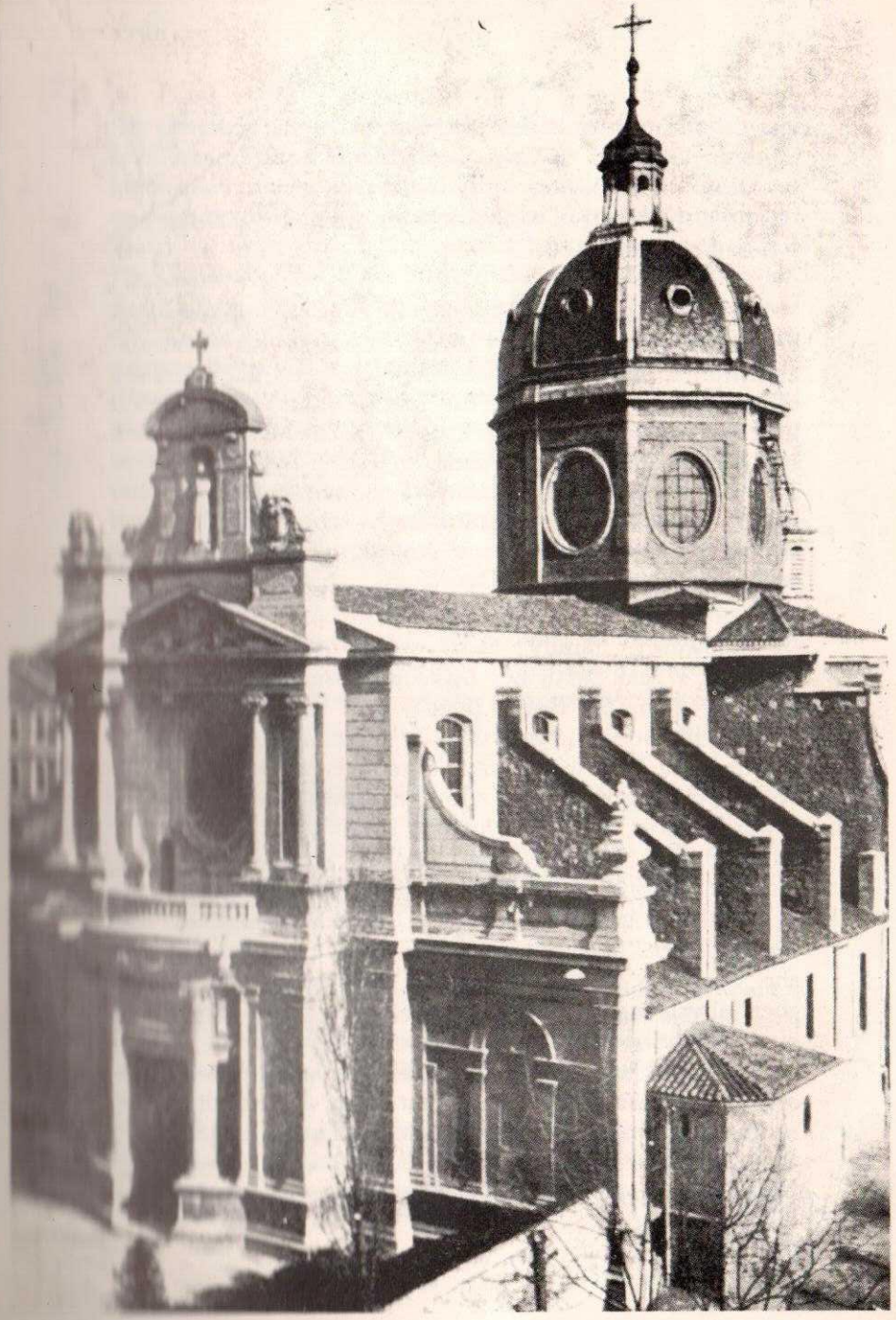
motive of charity overruled the risk. Jean Baptiste Mayet soon impressed the family with his good manners, his education and his strong religious sense. His charming qualities endeared him to the family and most particularly to Elizabeth who on June 9th 1802 became Madame Mayet. The newlyweds settled in the neighbourhood, not far from the Thévenet house. This new home was blessed with seven children and Claudine had the joy of being godmother to the fifth, Claude, who later became a Marist priest. Aunt Glady was particularly interested in this nephew whom she had consecrated to the Blessed Virgin on the very day of his baptism. Claude Mayet always considered this consecration as a very special grace and he often mentioned it in his correspondence:

> "It is always with gratitude that I recall what Aunt Glady did for me after I was christened."[6]

and elsewhere we read:

> "As far as I am concerned, I learned that when I was baptized . . . she offered me to Our Blessed Mother, consecrated me to Her, probably at her altar. I have often thought that I owed to this gesture of hers all the graces I have received from the power and mercy of the Blessed Virgin — blessings for which I shall be grateful throughout eternity . . . It is my belief that many children would be saved if immediately after their baptism, they were consecrated to the Blessed Mother, at her altar. She is a Mother . . . and she remembers everything."[7]

It was certainly not without a pang that Glady saw Babeth, her confidant, leave home.[8] It was the first normal break in the family circle and not the last. Shortly afterwards, Jean-Louis' business took him to Valence; Francoise and Eléonore answered God's call and became nuns, the former entering the Filles de Saint-Thomas and the latter joining the Sisters of the Nativity. Once again, Claudine



Church of St. Bruno, La Croix-Rousse

was called upon to console her parents in the generous gift of their daughters to God. She admired and respected the vocation of her sisters and would never have considered raising any objection to that mysterious call which she herself had not yet heard.

Now that she had done her part in the education of her brother and sisters, Claudine gave all her time and attention to her parents who were aged and ill. In the joy of successive baptisms as in the days of mourning, she never failed to surround her dear ones with her love and understanding. When her father died, on March 16th, 1815, Mrs. Thévenet's grief found comfort in the security of her daughter's presence – a presence in which she discerned strength, firmness and moral stature, qualities with their source in faith tried by suffering.

However, family tasks were not sufficient for Claudine's zeal. With her usual selflessness, she gave her services at the St. Bruno parish, gave a great deal of her time to the poor and occasionally helped in the instruction of the young. It was always extremely painful to her to witness young people left to themselves and exposed to evil influences, without schooling or any form of education. "The thought of the fate awaiting thousands of poor children deprived of the world's material goods and destined to grow up without any knowledge of God terrified her." She always found great consolation when she was able to help the poor, particularly children, in their physical and moral needs. She would never refuse to give alms. She preferred an excess of charity to caution which might leave someone without help. As time passed and experience deepened in her heart and rendered her more and more loving in her ministrations, she saw clearly that ignorance of God was one of the leading causes of the revolutionary violence. "Claudine Thévenet had suffered

too much for her to seek consolation anywhere but in God."

It was in prayer that Claudine sought, in the first place, to help those in need of spiritual assistance. When the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart was founded in her parish, her name was among the first twelve members; in the course of time, the names of her relatives and friends appeared on the list. It would seem that the discreet influence which Glady had had as a child over her brothers and sisters had now become a persuasive force over all who came in contact with her. At the outset, the activities of the Confraternity were concerned with spiritual matters, with acts of adoration and of reparation before the Blessed Sacrament. Claudine found in these practices a deepening of her zeal and a love which led her to an active apostolate among the poor. Works of charity were felt as an imperious need, for she considered it an injustice to keep for herself the happiness that was hers. Her desire was to render others aware of God's presence, of His personal love for each soul and His merciful goodness to all. Very soon to prayer she added charitable activities. What brought her most satisfaction, after meeting with the Lord in prayer, was precisely her apostolate among the destitute. Her strength, her time, her fortune, all were given for this task. At first, she undertook this work on her own initiative but soon other persons who shared her ideal were attracted by her zeal:

> "Together with some of her friends, she looked for a solution to this great misfortune (ignorance of God) and tried to find a way to rescue at least some of these young girls and train them to Christian lives".[9]

All, attracted by Claudine's example, wished to follow her in her desire to love God and do good. From their mutual aspirations, a deep friendship was to develop.

After visiting the poor, they met to share their experiences, knowing full well that their individual efforts could be pooled for more satisfying results. Glady was older than most of her companions; she had wider experience, a better knowledge of the families of the neighbourhood and greater qualities of leadership. Quite naturally, though unconsciously, she became the centre of the group. Together, they earnestly begged God to enlighten them as to the best means of helping the unfortunate. The sight of famished, ill-clad children who blasphemed and insulted passers-by, whose greatest poverty was ignorance of God, became a pressing appeal. God who knows the moment and the circumstances could not but answer such devotedness and zeal. In these hearts, prepared by His grace, the seed could grow. The sun's rays which cause the bud to open were about to break through the cloud. Two miserable little girls were to serve as instruments of Divine Providence.

One winter afternoon in 1815, a young priest, missionnaire des Chartreux and newly-appointed curate at St. Bruno's, was passing by St. Nizier church when he saw shadows under the porch and heard stifled sobs. On approaching, he found two ragged little girls, half-dying of hunger and cold, who had sought shelter from the bitter wind in a recess. Petrified with fear, the children did not, at first, dare lift their eyes. A few kindly-spoken questions and Father Coindre learned that they had been abandoned by their parents. What was he to do with two children of three and four? He was deeply moved by the confident, pleading eyes now turned to him. Means must be found to relieve such misery: he could not leave those innocent victims to die there. Do we not read in the Book of Tobias: "Never turn your gaze from the poor and God will not turn His from you"? Placing his trust in Divine Providence, he took the smaller one in his arms and her sister by the

hand, still wondering what to do with them. He went to the parish priest to relate his adventure and seek advice. Father Gagneur, who knew his parish well, did not hesitate to suggest that he knock at 6 Rue Masson and explain the situation to Mademoiselle Thévenet, "a person in comfortable circumstances who had the heart of a mother and who was behind all the good works of the parish". Already Glady's devotedness and charity, though offered in silence, were known.

No one appealed to Claudine in vain. She was moved to tears, not only by the sight of the pitiful children but also at the joy she felt in being able to help them, and she received the little waifs as a gift from God. With the tenderness of a mother, she dressed them and gave them all the care and attention they should have received from their own mother.

Father Coindre's approach had been successful and doubly so since it afforded him the occasion to discover Mademoiselle Thévenet's rich personality and her ardent zeal. Intuitively he felt that God had special designs for her; he, according to a witness, "soon recognized Claudine Thévenet's outstanding qualities; this discerning, intelligent man secretly admired her inner energy, her greatness of heart, her perfect tact, her total honesty, her firm determination, her living faith and her uncalculating generosity — in a word, the totality of gifts Heaven had taken pleasure in bestowing upon her". This first meeting between two zealous souls was surely willed by God to orientate Glady's life definitively. She herself, as well as the parish priest and the young missionary, looked upon the event as an indication of the divine will.

Claudine quickly realized that she could not impose the care of these children upon her aged mother, and

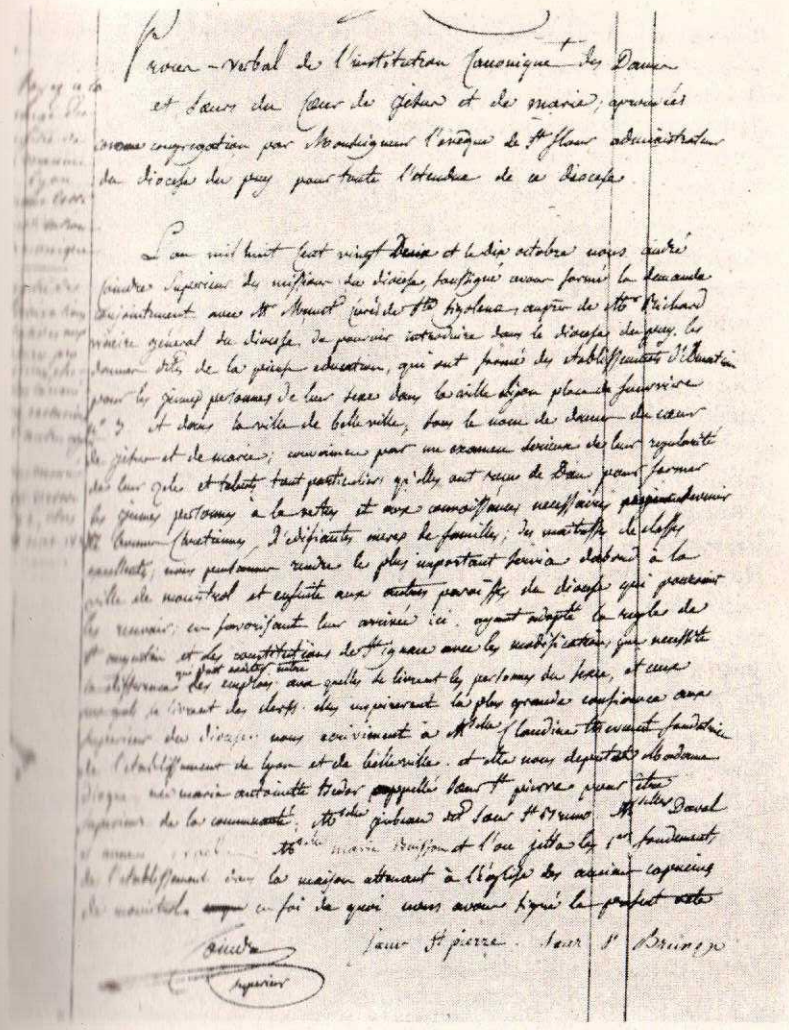
Father André Coindre 1787–1826

besides, the house was over-crowded because of the presence of soldiers. She then thought of the friends who with her were seeking more efficacious ways of relieving the misery they met every day. She set off for Marie Chirat's to discuss the matter with her. The solution was quickly found: the children would live with Marie who did not hesitate to make a floor of her house available for the two little girls and the five others who were to join them a few days later. The designs of the Lord were making themselves clear. Why not open a *Providence,* that is, one of those charitable institutions (some still exist) where poor, abandoned or orphaned children are taken in, educated as Christians and given training which will enable them to earn their living later on.

Miss Chirat's house thus became *la Providence du Sacré-Coeur,* with Claudine as directress. However, this arrangement could at best be temporary. Larger, independent quarters had to be found and money was also needed to carry on the work. Claudine and her companions often met to study the situation and to determine each one's share of their apostolic activities: visits to the poor and the sick, catechism lessons, material aid to the needy. Father Coindre, who had become Claudine's spiritual director, sometimes presided at the meetings. Noting the zeal and generous spirit of self-sacrifice of the members, he realized the necessity of forming an organization with someone in charge who could, with gentleness and tact, direct and coordinate the efforts of all. He spoke of this to Claudine and with her began to work out a rule. The latter's long experience, often under trying circumstances, her charity and prudence, her maturity and intuition, together with her intimate knowledge of her companions and of the parish, were factors which justified Father Coindre's implicit confidence in her. He eventually left her almost entire responsibility for the undertaking.

In July, Father Coindre judged that all was ready. Claudine and her eight companions met in the *chapelle des Retraites* at St. Bruno's for a few days' spiritual preparation. The motives which led these women, some still in all the enthusiasm of their youth, and others, like Claudine and Marie Chirat, mature women, to such an enterprise, could be none other than love of God, zeal for His glory, their personal sanctification and that of souls. Responsive to the Lord's call, they accepted the counsels given by Father Coindre as he presented the rule, the aim and spirit of the apostolate awaiting them. "When several people", he said, "desire to unite in order to achieve their own sanctification and that of others, they are worthy of the highest praise." Then, as a good spiritual director, the priest explained that the rule was not to be considered as a heavy, inconvenient burden but as a means of making greater progress in virtue and of working for the glory of God, since "he who lives by the rule, lives with God". The rule, he added, was also the means of giving stability to the Association, since order, a necessity everywhere, becomes an essential factor in a society destined to increase in numbers.

On July 31st, 1816, on the feast of St. Ignatius, the *Pieuse Union du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus* was founded and placed under the special protection of Mary and of St. Louis de Gonzague. The principal aim of the Association was the sanctification of its members by the practice of Christian virtues and the evangelical counsels, together with the exercise of charitable works. The Pious Union was to give a new and deeper apostolic impulse to the activities of Claudine and her companions. Individual efforts thus centralized acquired greater strength and fruitfulness. The Union was an answer to the crying needs of the times: the evangelization of the young and the re-christianization of society, aid for the needy and the for-



Writing of Father André Coindre

mation of a Christian élite. The Association was not a religious congregation but it did contain the first seed of the future Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. From the Pious Union came, quite naturally, as from the germ of wheat buried in the earth, this Congregation which has now spread to all five continents.

When the members proceeded to the election of a president for the Association, all thoughts turned spontaneously to Claudine. She was taken by surprise and at first felt troubled. She had always aspired to an unobtrusive role and to great discretion in her work. But she had just accepted, in the fifth chapter of the rule, the following article: "No one will refuse a dignity without legitimate reasons . . . each one will consider it a duty to accept a responsibility, and to give as a reason for refusing the fact that one is less capable than others will not be accepted. Humble acceptance is pleasing to God, obstinate refusal only points to pride". After a moment of recollection, and, like the Blessed Virgin, docile to the action of the Spirit, Claudine accepts the charge in a spirit of service and of confidence in Divine Providence. Each year, she is requested to keep the post, which is indeed significant. It may be presumed that the paragraph listing the qualities required in a president corresponds to the moral portrait of Claudine:

> "The president, more than any one else, needs an upright spirit, a strong character, deep humility, great gentleness and a universal charity towards all the Associates. She shall not be arbitrary in her commands but will order only what is allowed by the rules of the Society, what has been decided by the Congregation's written resolutions or what has been advised by the Director of the Society. She shall keep a watchful eye on the behaviour of the various members. She shall observe the rules and accepted customs and see that they are respected by the Associates. She shall be impartial in her treatment of the Associates, listening attentively to their requests and their complaints. She shall interview those who have to be given duties or who have to be relieved of them. She shall allot employments according to the strength and talents of each, forestall any hint of dissension or any threat of abuse. She shall see that the spirit of the rule is known and followed by all, for the greater glory of God.
>
> Her task is a hard one, but she can rely with confidence on the help of God who has called her through her companions. They, for their part, shall assist her with their prayers and make her duty easier by exact and complete submission".[10]

Loyalty and humility, strength of character and meekness, charity and prudence, respect for others and zeal for the greater glory of God, such were the qualities that gave the spiritual and psychological equilibrium that was to characterize the president of the Association, Claudine Thévenet.

The second chapter of the rule entitled "Spirit of the Congregation" is worthy of note: "Each Associate will seek in faith to perform all her actions in view of pleasing God. A joyous heart and freedom of spirit, confidence and generosity are the marks of a true servant of Mary". Claudine's personal influence may be detected here: these words reveal her interior aspirations just as do the words of the Master chosen as motto: "Learn from me that I am meek and humble of heart".

The young Association spread in a quiet yet astonishing manner. It is difficult to understand how the president succeeded in maintaining so many different occupations and being so attentive to the members themselves. Within two years after the foundation, sixteen new members had

joined the initial group, among whom was Pauline Marie Jaricot, universally known today as the foundress of the far-reaching Propagation of the Faith. Because of this special call, Mademoiselle Jaricot left the Pious Union but she remained very grateful to Claudine whom she admired and whose friendship she valued. Throughout the years, she showed great interest in Claudine's life work.

Meanwhile, what was becoming of the *Providence du Sacré-Coeur,* still at Mademoiselle Chirat's, who herself had joined the Pious Union? Claudine, "whose heart ever burned with love for her God", remained superior and directress of this apostolic activity. It was deemed urgent to find more spacious lodgings if the work was to prosper. In 1821, the Association found a place in the Carthusian Cloister. It had become evident that none of the Associates could give all their time to this work. Claudine, therefore, proposed that they confide the administration to the Sisters of St. Joseph. At that time, she had in hand only fifteen francs for her *Providence!* To pursue the undertaking in such financial straits seemed indeed foolhardy. It was faith and not temerity which inspired Claudine's decision. She placed entire confidence in God who would not abandon a project undertaken solely to please Him and to save children in peril. "None are deceived who count upon God." Claudine was to experience this once again. The Lord justified her confidence: alms came to meet the needs as though measured out by a father's hand. With very little means, through a succession of ups and downs, the work was maintained for the great benefit of the young. All the members of the Association showed great interest in the undertaking by visiting the place and by taking part in the various tasks according to circumstances.

In 1825, however, because of the financial situation, but still more owing to certain difficulties with the Sisters,

the Association decided to turn over all rights to the house and the apostolate to the parish priest of St. Bruno's and the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Claudine had given much of her time and energy during the eight years she had been directress of this, her first *Providence* and it was not without a pang that she consented to pass it on to other hands, judging the change beneficial to all. In later years, with true magnanimity of soul, she rejoiced sincerely that, under the care of the Sisters of St. Joseph, the establishment was to progress happily and give rise to several such institutions, kept by the same Sisters, in different areas of the town of Lyons. This seed, fallen in good soil, continues to give fruit more than a century and a half later.

While giving herself with great zeal to exterior apostolic works, Claudine was conscious of her duty towards her mother who, with the years, was becoming more possessive and demanding in her attachment to the only daughter now left to her. Mrs. Thévenet had excellent care, but she did miss "the loving attentions which Glady had for her and the moments of intimate conversation with this daughter who had always been her dearest consolation". Claudine was often pained at the evident distress of her mother who imagined herself abandoned and having, as it were, lost the affection of her daughter. She admired and loved her mother dearly. She had remained close to her as solitude invaded the family circle with the death of the father, the departure of the children, each one to follow the path indicated by Divine Providence. How could she make her mother understand that, even if she was not always with her, her love was ever the same? It was painful to be the cause of such distress. She tried to make up for her prolonged absences by a great deal of filial tenderness. She sometimes spoke to her of her apostolic work. Mrs.

Thévenet, a true Christian at heart, wished to accept the situation, yet there were times when her mother's words of reproach went straight to Claudine's heart. She would have found it much easier to remain at home and lavish constant care upon her mother. If only she could find a way of saying, 'I keep thinking of you,' while her activities required her presence elsewhere! She could not expect her mother to reason out the situation. It was up to her, then, to accept a double suffering; that which came from her own filial piety and that which her mother found so difficult to accept. It was truly the struggle between nature and grace which was taking place, for in the depth of her soul Claudine felt another sorrow at the thought of the loving kindness of God which she herself experienced and which she so wished to make known to others who had never heard of God. Interiorly, she heard a persistent call which, however, remained vague. When and how would the appeal become clear? The designs of God are inscrutable!

If one were to analyze Mrs. Thévenet's sentiments, at that time, it would probably be to discern that her motherly intuition led her to see God's action in the soul of her daughter and it was precisely this which was a threat to the security she found in Glady's presence. She feared that one day the Lord would ask of Glady what He had asked of her younger sisters, that she leave home to follow in His footsteps. It sometimes happens that a soul feels threatened by the exacting demands of God. The fear experienced by Mrs. Thévenet was no doubt willed by God who was, in fact, to invite Claudine to a total self-giving. It was a preparatory grace granted to one who had already given so much. God, in his loving tenderness, does not take souls by surprise.

God's plan made clearer

Two years went by during which the zeal of the Pious Union in no way diminished. Under the wise direction of Claudine and with the advice of Father Coindre the members grew in love of God. They stimulated one another in the practice of virtue and their interior life gained in depth. In Claudine herself a more communicative dynamism was felt. Of the initial members, two left the Association to consecrate themselves to God in the religious life; others, among whom were Claudine's two nieces, married and founded exemplary homes; others still answered a special call, as in the case of one of Claudine's best friends, Pauline Marie Jaricot, the foundress of the Propagation of the Faith.

Father Coindre, who had followed as closely as possible the development of the group, could rejoice at the progress accomplished. Yet he felt that the Pious Union was meant for something more and that a few of the members were called to a life more fully given to God. Could not an Association which fostered such noble aspirations be itself the answer to such aspirations? Until now, the Pious Union was a sphere where some, while participating generously in the apostolic work, remained women of the world, while

others were undoubtedly attracted to a more exacting vocation. The ardent missionary priest repeatedly begged God to make His will known. The supernatural energy, the solidity of character and moral superiority which he discovered in Claudine were assuredly, he thought, destined for a wider apostolate. He shared his preoccupation with Claudine and invited her to remain attentive to the signs of the times and the manifestations of the Spirit. In prayer, a project took form little by little.

Father Coindre kept to himself the plan thus ripened in prayer until what he considered the appropriate moment, the second yearly reunion of the Association. The members prepared for this event scheduled for July 31st, feast of St. Ignatius, in a spirit of thanksgiving. No one had the slightest idea of the very special item on the agenda. Had Claudine been consulted? It would seem that she knew something of the plan, but not all. In the forenoon, Father Coindre celebrated the Eucharist for the group and spoke to them of "the virtues and spiritual life of St. Ignatius, their model in their apostolic life". Mass was followed by a business session and lunch, a meal partaken of in an atmosphere of fraternal joy, when happy memories were recalled and experiences shared. The members marvelled at the mysterious ways of God in the realizing of His plan. In the afternoon, Father Coindre judged that it was time to reveal his secret. He himself called a dozen of those present to a special meeting, saying that he wished to speak to them on an important matter touching the glory of God. While waiting for him in *la chapelle des Retraites,* the members surrounded Claudine who, by her humility, inspired confidence in every one. The twelve women stopped their lively conversation when the priest entered. The latter, an energetic man, direct and experienced, greeted them briefly and, going straight to the point, "with that authority and decisiveness which indicates divine inspiration", declared with conviction the

intentions of God on the group: "You must, without any hesitation or delay, form yourselves into a community". The astonishment was general! Without giving them time to comment, as though urged by a prophetic inspiration, he referred to his notes, and went on to explain the general outline of his project, which was to be based on the Rule of St. Augustine and the summary of the Constitutions of St. Ignatius. Then he concluded:

> "Later I will try and incorporate the religious practices best suited to your needs into a set of complete rules. But rules are not everything. First, we must be well acquainted with the inspiration behind them; then it is possible to act accordingly. Laws and precepts can only become definitive after practice and experience have led to an understanding of what is to be done and what is to be avoided.
>
> The primary aim which you must henceforth strive to attain for the greater glory of God, is your own sanctification and the Christian education of girls from all social classes".[11]

"To form souls for heaven by a truly Christian education" was henceforth to be the aim they would pursue together, under the same banner and the same direction. The women listened attentively to these words as though they came directly from God. Such was their emotion and amazement that, when the Father stopped talking, an astonished silence fell upon the group. Without waiting for them to get over their surprise, he immediately presented Claudine as the one chosen by Heaven to realize this mission: "God has prepared the way and has designated Claudine Thévenet to take charge of the enterprise".

Once again, Claudine was faced with a very special task. Did she in any way expect this? Perhaps, but she never stopped to consider the matter. Certain realities exist which one does not care to face beforehand. Suffice it to consider them at a given moment, with the help of faith.

Awestruck and painfully conscious of her limitations, like the Virgin Mary troubled at the words of the angel, Claudine temporarily lost her composure and fell to her knees, overwhelmed. The priest, unmoved by her reaction, spoke to her kindly, yet firmly: "Heaven has chosen you, do not fail to respond to the divine call". Each of these words penetrated to the depth of Claudine's soul.

At that moment, her friends came to her, helped her rise and embraced her as a sign of their respectful affection and entire submission. Each word and each silence, each gesture and each look had, for Claudine, a significance that was almost prophetic! And, like Mary, she questioned how! Interiorly, a world of happenings passed before her eyes. How could this have come to pass? Questions and objections came quickly to her mind. But Father Coindre, her spiritual director for the past two years, in whom she recognized a profound wisdom, was adamant: "Heaven has chosen you . . ." Convinced that the will of God is never a caprice and that nothing is impossible for God, she acquiesced. Her fears, apprehensions, and human arguments gave place to abandonment before the will of God. This was a turning point in Glady's life when the tiny seed confided to the soil was to become a tree with ramifications extending to all continents. Claudine's "yes" uttered in faith, was to enrich the Church with a new religious family, the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. July 31st 1818 would henceforth be a significant date for "Jesus and Mary". Claudine Thévenet, the foundress was forty-four years old.

Without losing any time, the Associates considered their future apostolate. The Providence opened in 1816 was doing well; it could be left to the care of the Sisters of St. Joseph, working under the authority of the parish priest. Claudine's preferences were always for the poor and

it was decided to orientate their work in that direction. It was also admitted, that, of all the charitable activities undertaken so far, education seemed to be what God requested for the moment. It was agreed to open a second Providence, equipped with a work-room for silk-weaving, the leading industry in Lyons. Poor and abandoned children would be given preference; they would receive a Christian education and an adequate preparation for the future. The first preoccupation was to look for a suitable building. This they soon found: a two-storey house situated at Pierres-Plantées, in the popular area of la Croix-Rousse, would answer the purpose. It was rented, a loom was installed, a twenty-year-old silk-weaver engaged and one orphan taken in. Thus was constituted the cornerstone of the project: one loom, one orphan, one weaver. Could any beginning be more modest? Claude Mayet, Claudine's nephew and godson, was to relate, some sixty years later, how deeply impressed he had been when he had visited his aunt at Pierres-Plantées; he was then seven or eight, an age when the imagination registers without analyzing them events or situations which only with time can be understood and appreciated:

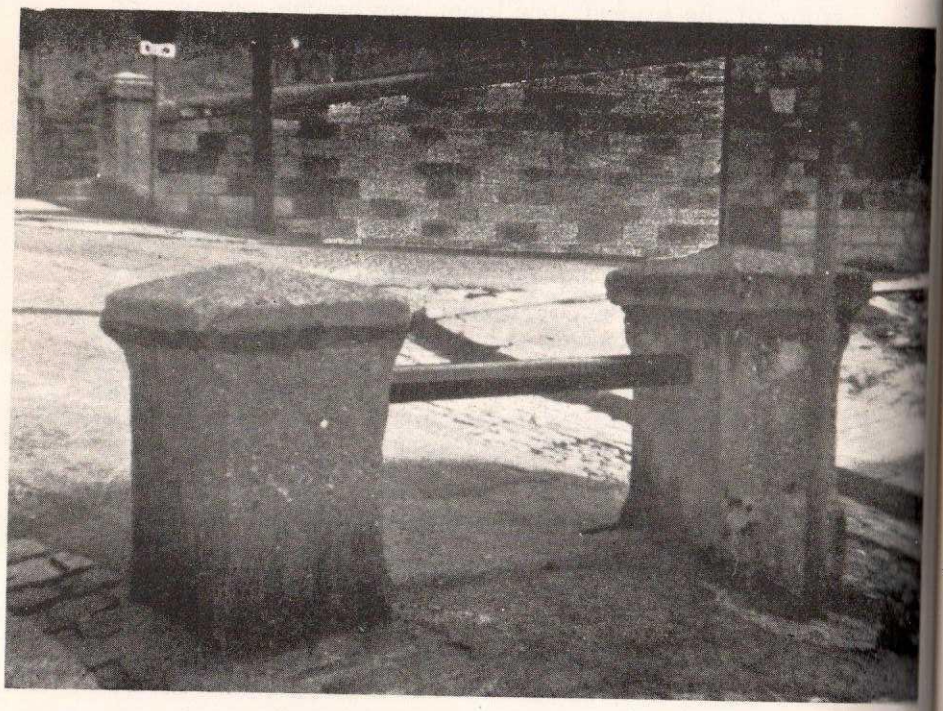
> "One day, the heedless nephew saw his aunt established in a small, poorly-furnished room . . . there was a very ordinary-looking person with her . . . It was all poor, extremely poor. I didn't understand anything . . . Later on, I understood . . . that the work had been built on nothingness, on poverty which is a true and necessary foundation of all work undertaken for God".[12]

The new project, based on confidence in God, as on a rock, could not fail!

Neither Claudine, nor any of her companions, was ready to move to Pierres-Plantées just then. Meanwhile, they visited the lodgings each day until such time as they

could settle down definitely and form a community. During those many months, Claudine had to use all her tact, prudence and charity to prepare her family, especially her mother, for a permanent separation. Having to leave her family was one, and not the least, of the consequences of her generous acceptance. She knew her departure would be a sad blow for her mother and this knowledge only increased her own suffering. Little by little, she sought to prepare her by an evasive yet truthful dialogue:[13]

Stones which gave the name "Pierres Plantées"



"Mother, I'm very happy!"

"Why, what has happened?"

"I've found a good weaver, a woman who wants to help me . . ."

"I am pleased! Like that you can take things more slowly and not get so tired."

"Do you know, Mother, I've finally found a house where the girls can go and live with Jeanne Burty. At the moment, they are spread out in different families."

"Is it very far?"

"Oh, no, very near. It is in the garden behind No 1, Rue Pierres-Plantées. The entrance is on the corner of the Rue Masson."

"That is good news."

"Where have you been, Glady, you look so tired?"

"Oh . . . this will go on until the tenants leave the house, then things will be a lot easier, you'll see. Those poor girls will be much better looked after. And the house is so near!"

In these efforts, she sought the help of her sister Elizabeth and her brother-in-law, Jean-Baptiste Mayet. In the evening, after his work, the latter often dropped in to spend a few minutes with the Thévenets. He would greet Claudine: "Bon soir, Madame l'Abbesse!" Claudine, detecting even in this expression of their agreement, a touch of gentle irony, would smile, blush and become absorbed in her lace-making, as she sat quietly near her mother.

The comments of the neighbours regarding Mademoiselle Thévenet were not lacking. Claude Mayet, when referring to this period, wrote:

> "I presume she must have had to put up with a lot of teasing at home, and with many similar, but less pleasant remarks, outside; remarks which would humiliate and hurt, which my father's never did.
>
> I imagine that people were scornful at the thought of this little woman (tall as she was in stature), Mademoiselle Glady Thévenet, wanting to become the foundress of a congregation!
>
> Tongues must have wagged in the neighbourhood. Such an enterprise is not embarked on without incurring criticism and ridicule. What a good beginning!"[14]

It was the beginning of a structure which, during more than one hundred and sixty years, has withstood the difficulties associated with growth and progress.

During those weeks of preparation, Claudine neglected neither the Association nor the Providence and consequently her absences from home were longer and more frequent. Madame Thévenet suffered and complained: "What attraction causes you to leave your old mother for those children at Pierres-Plantées?" It was night in Claudine's soul. October was near and still very few of the group reunited on the feast of St. Ignatius were ready to go and live at Pierres-Plantées. Victoire Ramié who had succeeded in settling all her difficulties had been sent by Claudine herself to the Sisters of the Nativity, in Vienne, so as to acquire some experience of the life and discipline in community, in view of the formation of future candidates. The others were still delayed by various circumstances and a few had even reached the conclusion that God was calling them to another life.

Claudine found herself more and more alone. Some considered her presumptuous, others thought her foolhardy. As time passed, the sacrifice of leaving her mother appeared unbearable. Doubts assailed and troubled the confidence and availability of the soul whom Father Coindre had declared "chosen". Many questions rose to the surface: her vocation was not to join a congregation already existing but to lay the foundations of an apostolate whose aim was still ill-defined. Was Father Coindre's confidence in her justified? Was his vision a true one? What if it were those who judged her foolhardy who were right? Even Elizabeth and Jean-Baptiste were sceptical. Was it not her first duty to remain at home or should she not, at least, wait until her mother no longer needed her care? If the project were to fail, how much criticism and irony would she not have to bear? All these doubts which came and went never troubled the deep peace which was the fruit of faith in the call of God as manifested to her by his priest, Father Coindre. Convinced that she was accomplishing the will of God, Claudine took the decisive step – a step in faith, requiring courage; a step in confidence which would cause the seed to bear the fruit of future harvests.

On the afternoon of October 5th 1818, after Vespers which had been sung at St. Bruno's in honour of the saint, Claudine said to her mother: "Mother, there is a great deal of work to be done at Pierres-Plantées and as it will be very late when we finish, I'm going to spend the night there."

(Was Claudine seeking courage in making herself believe that she would simply sleep there occasionally?) "All alone?" "Oh, no! Besides Jeanne Burty and the young girl, Françoise Blanc will be there tonight. Goodbye, Mother. I shall see you tomorrow. Sleep well."

Claudine walked resolutely to the house which was to become the foundation of her work. The distance between home and Pierres-Plantées was short yet Claudine had the impression that she was undertaking a long journey. She needed all her determination to keep walking and she dared not cast a look backward lest her courage fail her. The widow Ferrand (Francoise Blanc) was already there with Jeanne Burty and her loom, a few pieces of furniture, very few, and one orphan. Not even one of the Associates present on July 31st was with her in this her hour of sacrifice. Claudine was never to forget that first night away from home! Such hours of desolation and anguish often accompany the most serious decisions and important tasks undertaken in the following of Christ. Claudine always referred to them as the most dreadful she had ever known. Coming from one who had seen her two brothers executed, these words are very significant.

> "It seemed to me that I had entered upon a foolish and presumptuous undertaking which offered no guarantee of success but which, on the contrary, taking everything into consideration, must end in failure."[15]

And for this she had abandoned her mother, her sister and all she loved so dearly? Only because of her great love of God and her obedience, given in faith, could she have endured the agony of that night.

Thus, in the shadow of faith, Claudine greeted the dawn of the feast of St. Bruno, patron of the parish, the day which the Congregation henceforth regarded as the date of its foundation. After Mass in the parish church, Claudine went to see her mother to reassure her. Another instance in which she felt herself called to give more than, according to her, she possessed: how could she speak of confidence when she herself scarcely saw the light? "Everything is going well, Mother. I'm now going to try and complete the necessary arrangements so that the eleven children I have scattered all over Croix-Rousse can come to Pierres-Plantées. Poor little things! They're just longing to move in." "When are you coming back?" "I don't know, Mother. But do not worry. I am very near. If you want anything, just send me a message and I'll be with you in ten minutes. Good-bye!". "God bless you, daughter."

Was Mrs. Thévenet beginning to understand what was going on? Or rather, did she now accept the inevitable? And was Claudine fully conscious that she had reached a point of no return? There are times when it takes great courage to keep on believing.

For Claudine, the ordeal was an exacting one. Her family had warned her of possible difficulties, of the sacrifices she would be called upon to accept. People had criticized her and disapproved of her. All these thoughts came back now and the devil took advantage of them to disturb her peace of mind. She had but one refuge, the Heart of her Divine Master. She begged Him to restore her inner tranquillity, to give her proof that He willed the venture she was taking solely for Him. Little by little, as an answer to faith, peace returned to her soul and she undertook the task with renewed courage.

Claudine's companions who had recognized in Father Coindre's appeal the call of God joined her whenever it became possible for them to do so. The first orphan was soon surrounded by children who, in the climate of kindness in which they found themselves, recovered the spontaneous laughter of their age. At the end of October, that is three weeks after the memorable night, what does one find at Pierres-Plantées? The weaver, Jeanne Burty, a brave

pioneer, five candidates for the religious life, twelve orphans, two looms, a few pieces of furniture and an abundance of faith, hope and charity. And, animating all this, a presence, that of Claudine, whose persuasive kindness and reassuring strength won all hearts.

Father Coindre, who had been the first instrument of Divine Providence in establishing the project, could only follow the progress from afar because of his numerous occupations. Claudine was left with the responsibility of organizing the institution and directing its development. Since the night of October 5th, she divided her time, her attention, her concern and her heart between the Association, the Providence of St. Bruno, that of Pierres-Plantées and Rue Masson. These were the furrows in which she sowed generous seed, but Pierres-Plantées lay closest to her heart and in this she followed the advice of Father Coindre in conformity with the interior voice of God. Her companions also showed great zeal and admirable self-giving qualities apt to render fruitful the least fertile soil.

The orphans were treated with a tenderness that more favoured children might have envied. They were taught to earn their own living and given a sound moral formation. There were lessons in sewing, cutting out, lace-making, and the older girls were initiated into the art of silk-weaving. This programme was carried out with a two-fold aim: to prepare the orphans to be self-supporting on leaving the Providence and to assure a small income for the new establishment. Besides practical training, the children were given primary instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic, and, most important of all, they were taught the truths of faith. These girls whom suffering had already touched soon experienced the happiness of knowing, through the example of Claudine and her companions, the goodness of the Father in His personal love for them. Each one came to realize

that she was appreciated, and to experience, through the devoted solicitude with which she was cared for, the liberating reality of the words "You are precious in my eyes . . . and I love you". In this kindly atmosphere, the poor little ones grew and developed marvellously and the proofs of love given them opened them gradually to love of God and to spiritual graces. Jeanne Burty, whom Claudine had so wisely left in charge until such time as she herself could come, now found time for silk-weaving, thus adding to the revenue of the house. The five aspirants, along with their apostolic work, began a community life: regular prayer at fixed hours, mutual aid and pious practices which fostered the desire for perfection. Gradually, they were preparing to become nuns, "should God be pleased to bestow this grace upon them".

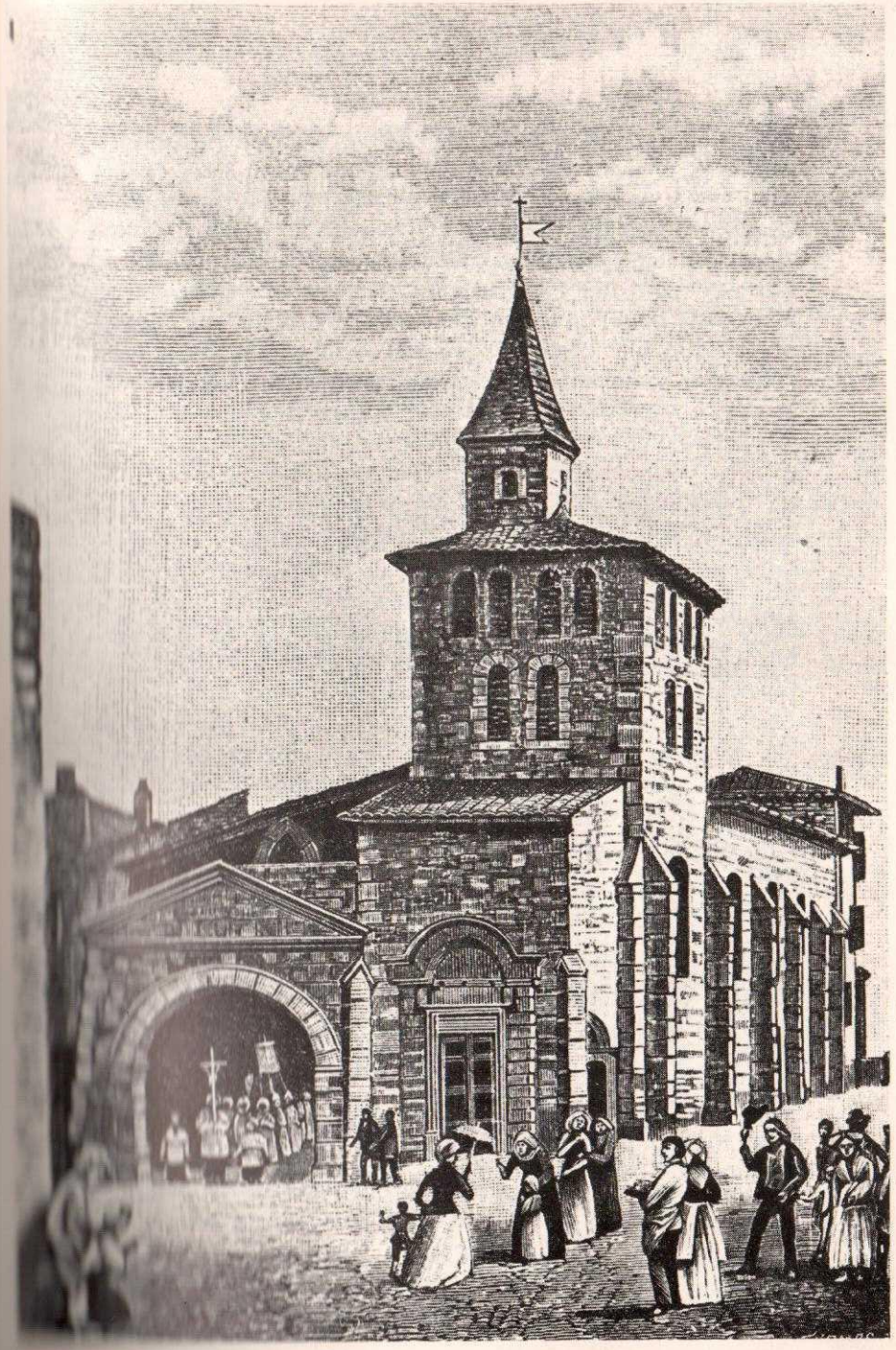
The satisfaction which came from the successful growth of the institution and the happy atmosphere of the group had its reverse side. The small community did not always meet with kindness. The enterprise was criticized and the superior held up to ridicule. As they walked along the street, the orphans and their teachers were exposed to disagreeable remarks, insults and even violence. Street urchins threw stones at them when they went to church. Claudine who knew the cost and value of forgiveness by having practised it under far more trying circumstances, never failed to urge the others to "meet insult with patience and reply with humility and kindness". As to Father Coindre, all he said by way of consolation was "That's a good sign, my daughters, that's a good sign".

Claudine saw in these happenings the sign of the cross and it was in faith that she accepted them, remembering that "if a wheat grain falls . . . and dies, it yields a rich

harvest". Gradually, the attitude of people around them changed. Good, accomplished in silence, speaks more loudly than evil tongues. After two years, the work begun in such precarious circumstances had grown to the extent that Claudine now had twelve companions and thirty-three little girls. Work at the looms progressed and the orders placed by the population increased because of the quality of the silk, so that the results were above all expectations. As their work developed, living space became a problem. With thirty-seven persons in eight rooms, it became impossible to admit either candidates or orphans and the project was condemned to stagnation unless new lodgings were found.

Claudine began inquiries in Croix-Rousse. It did not occur to her that she might look elsewhere. Here, she knew the people, realized how much good there was to do and the distress still to be relieved. Moreover, the community was known and respected now and their project looked upon with sympathy. Because of her apostolate, family ties and her own spiritual life, Claudine felt strong ties with St. Bruno's. Her zeal, great as it was, did not look beyond the needs of the sector where she lived. She had no idea where the call of the Lord could take her. In her humility, she could not imagine that, one day, her daughters would do their share of evangelizing on the four other continents. Divine Providence was preparing the way. In spite of her efforts and her confidence, Claudine could find nothing suitable in the neighbourhood.

She had progressed no further when, suddenly, without any warning that the end was near, Marie-Antoinette Thévenet died on May 28th, 1820 at the age of



Sanctuary of Fourvière at the time of Claudine Thévenet

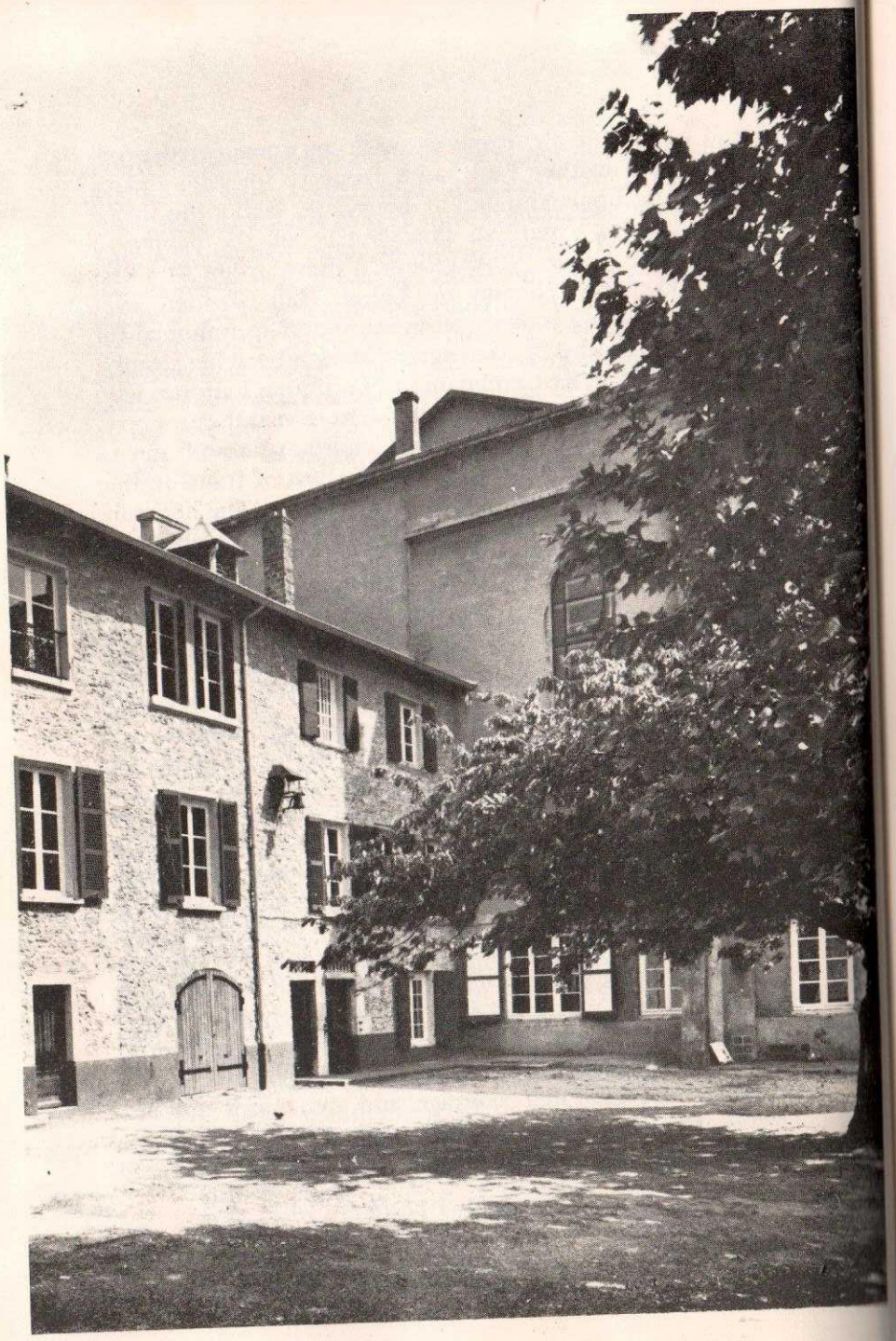
seventy-four. Claudine felt the loss of her mother keenly; a link had broken which until then had bound her to the area where she lived. Was it pure coincidence that this bereavement should come at this particular time? Claudine now realized that she could give herself more entirely to her poor and her community. After her mother's death, she had another proof of her family's boundless affection and confidence when her brother and sisters unanimously asked her to assume the responsibility of sharing out their mother's effects. Evidently the discreet leadership of the "angel of the house" was still felt.

Resolutely, Claudine turned once more to the daily realities: it had become imperative to find larger and more appropriate quarters. Did Claudine, at this point, think of searching outside la Croix-Rousse? If so, she did not dare follow the idea blindly. She turned to prayer and besought St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the patron of youth and one of the patrons of the Pious Union, to intercede on their behalf. She asked the parish priest to say Mass for this intention at the altar of St. Aloysius, but, as the chapel was being repaired, the mass was celebrated in the adjoining chapel dedicated to Our Lady. Claudine, far from being disappointed, rejoiced at the change and found therein a new cause for hope. This heavenly Mother on whom she had always counted, who had proved the efficacy of her intercession at Cana and in whom God had wrought the impossible, was undoubtedly the Mediatrix through whom He still wished to grant the greatest favours. "Our Lady does not wish anything to be done without her", she commented, and then said the following prayer: "St. Aloysius Gonzaga, you who are so near the throne of Mary, and her motherly heart, please intercede on our behalf."

Confidence in Mary is never misplaced. The answer to her prayer came quickly. Pauline Jaricot, always a close

friend of Claudine's, came up with an unexpected proposition. Her brother Paul had a property for sale, a place called l'Angélique, situated at Fourvière, facing the shrine of the Blessed Virgin, so cherished by all the people of Lyons. The name "L'Angélique" came from the first owner, President Nicolas de Lange. Had Claudine ever dreamed of living so close to the shrine? This unhoped-for joy and the motherly attention of Mary moved her deeply. With one of her first companions, Catherine Laporte, who was willing to pay half the cost, she went to visit the property. With her usual foresight, she realized that, in addition to the purchase price, there would be the cost of transforming and adapting the buildings to their future use. The decision, however, was quickly made: immediate occupancy, adequate space, buildings sufficiently large and, above all, the advantage of being so close to the Blessed Virgin! Relying on the support and collaboration of her companions and counting on Divine Providence which had already granted more than was hoped for, Claudine signed the contract on July 12, 1820.

The most urgent renovations were begun in August and by the end of October, the house was ready to take in the community, even though everything was not finished. Between the 2nd and the 11th of November, the establishment at Pierres-Plantées moved to Fourvière. The gratitude with which they took possession of more spacious quarters did not prevent the feelings of regret and heartache at leaving the spot where the first seed had been sown. Glady was surely the one who felt the break with the past most keenly but the conviction that Divine Providence knows what is best gave her courage and dynamism and her enthusiasm won all hearts. The will of God is never a caprice. Each one, deep at heart, knew this and accepted it.



New Horizons

Soon life as it had been lived at Pierres-Plantées became a memory of hidden sacrifices, of joyful devotedness and of humble abandonment. The grace of God, accepted in faith and charity, had transformed these into hopeful apostolic zeal. The Father lovingly offered this grace, day after day, no matter where they were. Claudine felt sure that in Fourvière, as in Pierres-Plantées, they would be favoured with special graces. Before moving into their new home, Claudine and her companions paid a visit to Our Lady in her modest chapel of Fourvière. There, they received Holy Communion, renewed their consecration and their sacrifice and confided to their heavenly Mother the growth of their work. They were fully confident that should the need arise, Mary would repeat to her Son, on their behalf, "They have no more wine!"

We have mentioned that l'Angélique was ready to receive the community of Pierres-Plantées. To a certain extent, it was. In fact what was most appreciated was the marvellous site: the spacious grounds overlooking the city, where the children could play in the pure, bracing air. Indoors, the situation called for much adaptation. The furniture was not sufficient for the number of people and the rooms were in a sad state of disrepair. However, Claudine, with her talent as organizer, her spirit of detach-

L'Angélique as seen from the garden

ment and self-forgetfulness, knew how to make the best of things. Wishing to serve God in the first place, she chose the most convenient room for the chapel and all hoped to have the Eucharist celebrated there very soon. Then her thoughts turned to her dear orphans: the largest rooms were for the dormitory, the workrooms and the refectory. The community took the small, inadequate rooms that remained. As there was a shortage of beds, they slept on mattresses, or paillasses placed on the floor. Following the example of Claudine, who nevertheless would have desired more for her daughters, the Sisters gave little thought to themselves; they were happy to resemble in this aspect Him who, rich as He was, had nowhere to lay His head. They also knew that the poorer one is in all things, the richer one can be in God and in God alone. "As long as our little ones are comfortable", they repeated among themselves.

Claudine used great tact in her appeal to the talents of her companions; she readily obtained the cooperation of each one for the different tasks: teachers for religious and other subjects, supervisors for the workrooms, the recreation periods and for the general maintenance of the house. Claudine and her companions had great joy as they listened to the happy shouts, laughter and songs of the children at play in the spacious garden. Most of the girls came from poor backgrounds – some had even known utter destitution. Suddenly they found themselves in a kind of paradise where they felt protected and loved. To Claudine and the community nothing could be more consoling, nor more promising, than the sight of a group of happy, exuberant children whom they could confide to the hands of the Divine Artisan! They were like the living hope hidden under the snow and in the buds in spring time.

The austere poverty of the first weeks undoubtedly drew down blessings from Heaven and the institute ex-

panded. The orphans daily increased in numbers and, as Claudine could not possibly turn any one away, it became necessary to provide extra space. Claudine wisely decided to add a storey to the house and to build an annex where a chapel less unworthy of the Lord could be set up. The work was begun without delay.

A larger house gave further opportunities for the development of the community. From the day they arrived at Fourvière, Claudine, ever attentive to the signs of the times, had heard another appeal – or rather a new development of the initial call. In dealings with God, there is no end to His demands, particularly when zeal is spurred on by faith, love and hope. So far, the aim of the group "to form children for Heaven by a Christian education" had been realized in favour of the materially poor and needy. Claudine knew that the children of the wealthier class were not better off from the religious point of view than those of the working-class. The former would not have sent their children to Pierres-Plantées but they would have no objection to seeking admission at Fourvière. In fact, the people had discovered the small group. They had great admiration for Mademoiselle Thévenet and the parents had but one wish: to confide their young daughters to her. The community saw no reason why they should not give part of their efforts and zeal to evangelising the wealthier classes, taking into consideration the social position of the students in the manner of their education. There were, among the teachers, persons who were well qualified for such a programme of studies.

After serious reflection, it was decided that girls of bourgeois families would be admitted. Claudine foresaw that this new field in their apostolate would give stability to the *Providence* by the material aid it would bring, and she hoped that, with time, this development would foster

Care

Le bon dieu t'a assiyé, pour un temps, apresent
il t'a donné une petite fille, qui fait ton
bonheur et ta consolation, et qui te fait
oublier tes peines passées, elle te sourit déja
elle te connait, voila je te sens de grande
jouissance pour une mere qui aime ses enfans
avec tant de tendresse que toi, on en dit des
merveilles, j'espere que nous ferons connoissance
ensemble ce printemps, et qu'elle pensera par la
suite, comme la petite marie a la tante Religieuse.
Nous sommes toujours dans la même incertitude
pour notre maison on ne sait rien de
positif, a l'egard des fortifications, on a adressé
plusieurs petitions a la chambre, pour
demander qu'on ne fit pas de fort a fourvier
il n'y a point encore de reponse, je
n'espere que dans la protection de la St Vierge
et dans les prieres des bonnes ames
Je ne peux pas te dire des choses bien satisfaisantes
sur la petite deschant, elle avoit près de
douze ans lorsque nous l'avons reçu et jusqu'à
cet epoque, elle passoit une partie de la
journée dans la rue de Villefranche
elle faisoit le coup de poing avec les petits
polissons, il y en a un qui un jour
lui a mis la figure tout en sang, sa
maniere d'etre dans les commencement repondant
bien a sa pre education, elle a bien changé
mais il lui reste encore bien a faire, j'espere

Writing of Claudine Thévenet

qu'avec l'aide de dieu nous en pourrons faire
quelque chose, mais il y a encore tout
a faire, un jour elle va bien, le lendemain
mal, si une fois elle tournoit bien je crois
qu'elle pourroit faire un bon sujet, elle belle
et bonne ouvriere, pour son age, mais quand
elle veut, et elle ne veut pas toujours, elle
se porte bien
Je t'en ai bien dit long sur cette petite je finis
Je te prie de presenter mes vœux a ton
mari et de me recommander a ses ferventes
prieres, j'embrasse ta petite marie, et desire bien
faire connoissance avec elle, et toi mes bien
chere Emma recois ici l'assurance de la
tendre amitié de ta tante, et sincere amie

Marie Ignace

interest in their work and even bring new members to the group of valiant pioneers. A boarding school was opened and a new activity took root: a secondary school as the first step in the task of education. This was to be continued on all five continents. It was not long, however, before experience proved that the growing number of students in each section and the variety of their needs made it imperative to separate the two groups, the secondary school and the weaving department. Claudine, seeing the will of God in this turn of events, undertook, towards the end of 1821, the construction of a new, four-storey building, not for the boarding school, however, but for the *Providence,* that is for the little orphans.

All these material improvements represented large sums of money and the revenues were scarcely sufficient for the upkeep of the property and the needs of the children and the community. Was the Foundress a good business woman, one could ask? In reality, she knew something of the world of business, knowledge she had acquired by experience in her own family, but before all, she was a woman of faith and trust in Divine Providence, remembering that "he who gives to the poor lends to God". However, the almost continual struggle with financial problems was always a source of suffering for her, as she had not known any such difficulties in her family. Once again, she counted on the generosity of Catherine Laporte who had promised to help her. In this she met with what was a severe disappointment to both. Catherine faced such categorical opposition on the part of her family that, not only was it impossible for her to help in the actual project, but she was even made to recall the sums already provided. Once more, the Foundress was to experience that the work of God rests on poverty, on nothingness. She saw clearly that she was not to build the work undertaken under the

inspiration of the Holy Spirit merely by human means. Events willed by Divine Providence did not allow her to forget this truth.

There could be no question of abandoning the project: the work was well under way and considerable sums were already involved. In prayer, Claudine realized that there was but one thing to do in order to save the situation: to place all her trust in God who would not fail her. Fortified by her faith, she resolved to seek a second loan. Her business agent, impressed by her faith and confidence, reassured the hesitant money-lenders: "Gentlemen, do not fear. In a business deal of this kind, God Himself stands security". The loan was arranged and the community found itself burdened with a debt of 90,000 francs. Extra activity, looms constantly working, expenses reduced and, more especially, increased confidence in God; gradually the debt was paid off.

Now that the material organization had, in spite of limited resources, been assured, the apostolate made an important step forward. Claudine saw more clearly the designs of God and she became more and more conscious of her mission as foundress of a congregation. She longed to see her group recognised as a religious institute with ecclesiastical approval. The situation in the diocese of Lyons presented a serious difficulty. The Archbishop, Cardinal Fesch, still exiled in Rome, had not sent in his resignation and the vicars-general who administered the diocese hesitated to approve a new congregation. The Sisters, however, derived much consolation from the permission to have Mass celebrated in their chapel and to keep the Blessed Sacrament in reserve. The presence of the Lord in their midst was a source of great joy and comfort.

On the other hand, nothing prevented them from observing a rule, from living an intense spiritual life, from wearing a simple, uniform dress and from choosing a special protector whose name they would adopt in religion. All were eager to follow Claudine's suggestion on this point as it corresponded to their own personal aspirations. The Foundress, still animated by the spirit given by Father Coindre at the outset, would henceforth be called Mother St. Ignatius in honour of the founder of the Jesuits, to whom she had a personal devotion. The title "Mother" was meant to convey the nature of the mission which the community wished to exercise towards the children: they would endeavour to give them a good education, worthy of the best homes. One of the recommendations which M. St. Ignatius often repeated to her daughters was the following: "Be true mothers . . . both of their souls and their bodies". This advice has become a spiritual heritage in the Congregation.

While awaiting the hoped-for authorization, Mother St. Ignatius, besides seeing to the *Providence* and the boarding school, worked in collaboration with Father Coindre at the drawing-up of the rules they wished to present for the approval of the Church. She also prepared her daughters for religious profession, the date of which was still God's secret. It was during this period that Claudine's spiritual personality was further revealed. Interiorly, she was always disposed to "accomplish everything with the aim of pleasing God and from the promptings of Faith". Ever mindful of Christ's words: "I am come to cast fire on the earth. And what will I but that it be kindled?", she tried to kindle the fire in all hearts, having first become inflamed by love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As a woman, she was gifted with great qualities, with a strong personality and fine sensitivity, yet she showed great simplicity in all she did as well as in the spirituality

she strove to develop in her daughters: each daily task accomplished as fervently as possible, simply to please God, was one of the basic elements of the formation she wished to give. She would often say:

> "All these little points, these minutiae are unimportant in themselves; the world at large treats them as follies and is only too quick to laugh at them. But in the eyes of God, what a great and beautiful thing it is to accomplish all these trivial acts faithfully and conscientiously. In this way we might hear Our Lord say to us the beautiful words from the Song of Songs: 'Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart with one hair of thy neck' ".[16]

Allied to this simplicity, there was in Mother St. Ignatius a constant attention to the will of God and to the action of the Holy Spirit, to whom she had a special devotion. From this close attention to the inner voice, there followed quite naturally a ready docility born of her love of God, which marked her relations with her spiritual directors. An exhortation of hers reveals this attitude: "Let us be sure of one thing: only through obedience shall we achieve success; once this bond is broken, even structures which appear strongest collapse. God ordinarily grants more graces to our submission than to any other means we might use to attain success". Mother St. Ignatius' inner availability was likewise revealed in her apostolate by her zeal to have Jesus and Mary known and loved, and in all interpersonal relationships by her desire to render others happy. Mother St. Ignatius was kind to everybody yet one must admit that she had a marked preference for the poor and the needy; it was a preference which no one dared blame. She had no ambitious plans for herself, not even for the development of her Congregation. She loved God and did all the good she could to those whom the Lord put in her path, respecting, all the while, the action

of grace in souls. Humble of heart, she knew that the true artist is the Holy Spirit; her task lay in offering souls to Him. This programme she passed on to her companions who with her aspired to a total consecration to God.

Father Coindre's interest in the growing congregation never diminished. Even though his numerous occupations did not allow frequent visits to Fourvière, he managed to preside over a meeting of the community occasionally. "His words kindled in our hearts a great love for our vocation," commented one of the group. To the novices, he spoke with special urgency and tenderness and they were never to forget the prophetic words spoken one day as he gave them his blessing: "Grow and multiply little flock and you will become true daughters of the Heart of Jesus!"

In truth, the seed sown on the hill of Fourvière grew so vigorously that new ramifications soon appeared. We might be inclined to say that the Blessed Mother had her views in drawing the group so close to her shrine. The development of the community was remarkable: during the first eight years of its existence, one hundred and forty-eight requests for admission were received. Mother St. Ignatius, with an eye to quality and a rare spirit of discernment, accepted one third of the number. The reputation of the boarding school spread rapidly and one day only a few months after the opening of classes, two ladies presented themselves at Fourvière and proposed to Mother St. Ignatius that she take over the boarding school and free school which they themselves directed in the small town of Belleville, some forty kilometres from Lyons. The Fourvière community eagerly welcomed this opportunity to educate children in the knowledge and love of Jesus and Mary.

After Christmas, Mother St. Ignatius sent two of her companions to take charge of the new mission; they also opened a class for poorer children. The Foundress put all her heart into this new venture which at first developed happily, to the satisfaction of the population and the authorities. In the autumn of 1823, the community counted seven professed religious, eight novices and two postulants. The school numbered one hundred and ten students, eighty of whom were received free. In 1826 a new property was bought to meet the needs of the growing institution. The apostolate at Belleville, in spite of promising beginnings, was of short duration. Eight years later, another religious congregation came to this small town to take up work of a similar nature. Mother St. Ignatius, in her great humility, decided that "for peace and charity" she would recall her Sisters and leave the apostolate to the newcomers. This event was the occasion of a second renunciation for the Foundress who had already given up the first *Providence* at St. Bruno, but she lost nothing of her serenity and she abandoned herself to Divine Providence in a spirit of faith. What truly mattered to her was that good was being done and that souls were brought to the knowledge of the goodness of God.

A year after the foundation at Belleville, another branch spread out. In the summer of 1822, Father Coindre, at the request of Mgr de Salamon, Bishop of St-Flour and apostolic administrator of the diocese of le Puy, had agreed to organize and direct a society of diocesan missionaries at Le Puy, as there existed one at St-Flour. Did Father Coindre, in his desire to obtain the official recognition of the Fourvière community, see, in this request, a possibility of achieving his aim? One may presume so, if one considers his usual foresight. At the end of the summer of 1822, the zealous priest was in Monistrol to initiate the project confided to him by Mgr de Salamon. Shortly after-

wards, he requested of the Vicar general permission to introduce into the diocese, at Monistrol, the "Dames des Saints Coeurs de Jésus et de Marie", de Fourvière. His idea was to obtain, eventually, the erection of the group into a canonical institution, an impossibility in the diocese of Lyons at the time. In wording his request, Father Coindre gave the following appreciation of the group:

> "Being convinced, after mature examination, that their discipline, their zeal and their special God-given talents have enabled them to educate young people in the practice of virtue and to give them the necessary knowledge to become good Christians, exemplary mothers and excellent teachers, we believe that by encouraging their establishment here we shall be rendering the greatest service, first to the town of Monistrol, and then to the other parishes in the diocese which may wish to receive them.
>
> Having adopted the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of St. Ignatius, they inspire the greatest confidence in the superiors of the diocese.[17]"

The permission was granted and, as early as January 6th, 1823, a new detachment, including three future religious, left Fourvière to sow the seed in another diocese. Without delay, Father Coindre asked the Bishop for approval of the Congregation for the whole of the diocese of le Puy. On February 4th, 1823, from Paris where he was at the time, Mgr de Salamon replied with great kindness:

> "I congratulate you on your recent foundation. I appoint you superior and I have no doubt that the enterprise will prosper under your direction. I approve this society and constitute it, to the full extent of my power, a congregation for the diocese of Le Puy. I authorize you, therefore, to receive the simple vows of those who present themselves"[18]

Father Coindre lost no time in passing on the good news to Mother St. Ignatius:

> "You have crossed the Red Sea, my daughter. You and your companions have had your years of wandering in the desert! Rejoice and be glad for God has shortened your sojourn in the wilderness and after four years of trials, hopes and longings, He is opening the gates to the Promised Land of the Religious Life. Your aspirations are about to be realized.
>
> I shall meet you in the Cenacle, at the preparatory exercises; meanwhile, I implore the Holy Spirit to fill you with the plenitude of His gifts!"[19]

This letter reached Fourvière on Saturday, February 15th, Our Lady's Day. At last, they would be able to pronounce officially the solemn words of religious profession! Preparations were seen to immediately and Mother St. Ignatius, with five companions, set out happily for Monistrol where they arrived on February 18th. The following day, they began their retreat, prayerful days during which each one, before God, prepared for the total gift of self. On February the 25th, in what is now the chapel of the Sacred Heart Missionaries, with the happiness known only to those who are called, five Sisters made their simple, perpetual vows of obedience, poverty, chastity and stability in the Congregation. Father Coindre, their director, received their vows in the name of the Church. This was to be an unforgettable date for all, but more so for Mother St. Ignatius who saw the Congregation she had founded take root officially in the Church. It was to become a memorable date for all those who through the years, were to have the happiness of belonging to the Congregation of Claudine Thévenet. Less than a month later, three others were to make their vows and still others before the year was over. On each occasion there was general rejoicing at the "day which the Lord has made" and deep gratitude for the hopes thus realized.

The day following the first profession, the Congregation, now canonically erected, held its first General Chapter, presided over by Father Coindre. Elections were held and Mother St. Ignatius was unanimously chosen as Superior General. Her assistants were M. St. Xavier, M. St. Borgia and M. St. Pierre; after the second ceremony of profession, M. St. André was elected to complete the number of assistants.

These important events surely brought renewed fervour in the Congregation. The Foundress experienced the prodigality of God and she invited her daughters to respond to so many blessings by an unfailing fidelity:

> "I think that all the graces which Our Lord has granted us during this year must have produced some fruit in our souls and that each one has eagerly responded to the blessings that God has showered upon us by continually striving to serve Him more faithfully and to love Him more dearly . . ."[20]

At the end of that year, there were already seventeen nuns, ten novices and thirty postulants. When, in her prayerful thoughts, she retraced the providential chain of events which had led her to this day, and when she considered the generous souls who had joined her and the children placed in their care, Mother St. Ignatius was filled with gratitude and with admiration for what the Master of the impossible had achieved! These sentiments found spontaneous expression in the words she was to repeat on her death-bed: "How good God is!"

Another happy event was to mark the year 1823 when Mgr de Bonald was named to the episcopal see of Le Puy left vacant since 1793. The new Bishop, wishing to become acquainted with his diocese, undertook a visit of all the territory confided to him. The Sisters in Monistrol,

who had heard of the Prelate's severity, rather feared his coming, yet, in their deep faith, they received him as a father. The Bishop was pleased with the community, the mode of life and the education given to those young diocesans of his. Shortly after his return to his episcopal city, Mgr de Bonald proposed to Mother St. Ignatius that the community be transferred from Monistrol to Le Puy. This desire, coming from one who was said to have affirmed, "I wish for my diocese only such as will be good and useful", is indicative of his satisfaction.

Mother St. Ignatius was greatly comforted by this request as she had always attached much importance to the spiritual lives of her daughters and to the education given both in the boarding school and in the *Providence* and the school for the poor in Belleville. In the desire of the Bishop she saw an indication of the Lord's will to which she immediately responded. During the holidays of 1825, the community moved to Le Puy, a picturesque town of 15,000 inhabitants where the Blessed Virgin was honoured almost as at Fourvière. That her communities should settle close to a Marian shrine was symbolic to Mother Foundress. In October of that same year, a postulant took the habit in Le Puy. The new establishment prospered rapidly and the reputation of the school soon spread. Numerous families confided their children to the religious and nine years later, as in Lyons, it was necessary to build again.

Not long after the appointment of Mgr de Bonald as Bishop of Le Puy, the Holy See found a solution to the situation of the archdiocese of Lyons. Cardinal Fesch was still in Rome and he refused to resign. Mgr de Pins, then Bishop of Limoges, was named apostolic administrator of the archdiocese and invested with extended powers. On February 18, 1824, he made his solemn entry into the diocese. This nomination was another hour of grace for

Mother St. Ignatius who had been waiting all these years for the approbation of the Congregation by the ecclesiastical authorities of Lyons. She now had new hopes of obtaining what she desired. Both she and Father Coindre presented themselves without delay to the new Delegate and solicited the long-hoped-for approbation. Mgr de Pins wished to examine the statutes of the Congregation. Meanwhile, he gave permission for two clothing ceremonies and two professions – the first to take place in Lyons – on March 2nd. Mgr de Pins seemed favourably disposed and the founders saw in these permissions new hope of obtaining the approbation. On July 18th, 1825, the decree of approbation arrived. It was a day of intense joy for Mother St. Ignatius and her community. Mgr de Pins was to prove a faithful father and protector for the Foundress and her Congregation. The canonical situation was now firmly established and the Congregation could turn trustfully to Rome for final approbation.

The Harvest Begins

Leaving aside the chronological order of events, let us see how the personality of M. St. Ignatius manifested itself in the numerous activities of the apostolic mission. In Fourvière, there already existed two distinct establishments: a boarding school for girls of wealthier families and the newly-built *Providence*. After the ceremony of profession, that of February 25, 1823, M. St. Ignatius' chief concern was to organize the new wing and to settle the children in the bright, roomy quarters. There was no doubt that the Mother's interest embraced all the institutions: Fourvière, Belleville, Monistrol and Le Puy, but she did have a marked preference for the *Providence*. Her love for the "little ones", as she lovingly called them, and the care she showed for their well-being, were evident. The best of her time and of her heart were for them, and it seemed that she could never do enough for them. The children received at the *Providence* came mostly from the streets. They often arrived in a pitiful state and, in many cases, admission at Fourvière meant survival.

One day, the portress, in distress, brought the Mother a ten-year-old who had landed, no one knew how, on the doorstep; she was extremely thin, ill-clad and dirty, almost repugnant, in fact. "What can we do with this, Reverend

Mother?" M. St. Ignatius looked at the poor little waif with affection and drew her closer as though to make up for the Sister's remark, and she answered gaily: "Do not worry, Sister, at eighteen, she will be a pretty girl. Just wait and see!" Beyond such sordid appearances, the Mother could discover the heart of the child in which a spark of hope still burned. She took the child and cared for her herself; she washed her and combed the tangled hair, gave her neat clothes and shoes, all the while telling her in simple language about the *Providence.* The child was completely transformed, not only exteriorly, but also morally. Already she had lost her look of mistrust and fear and could meet with confidence the kindly eyes of this woman who smiled so lovingly. Had the child ever known affection and interest before? Those who had seen her on her arrival doubted that this was the same child. Incidents of this nature occurred repeatedly.

Mother St. Ignatius did not easily leave to others the privilege of attending to the most urgent needs of the children taken in at Fourvière. She seldom refused to admit a child, her kind heart finding room for all. When the house was full and money scarce, she would receive them, saying with confidence: "God will provide". And God always did! There were instances when her trust was rewarded in a miraculous fashion. On one occasion, to choose one out of many, the sister in charge of the food stores came in anguish to the Superior: "Mother, there is but one loaf of bread for the community and the orphans and we have no flour left". The Mother knew only too well that there was no money to buy more. She did not hesitate one minute. Had not the Lord Himself said: "Do not worry . . ." and yet again: "Your Father in Heaven knows what you have need of"? With great serenity, she called the religious to chapel and together they made

known to the Heavenly Father their urgent need by reciting the "Litanies of Divine Providence". Then, fearlessly, she requested that the last loaf of bread be cut and distributed. To the amazement of all present, the bread lasted three days. But they were still without flour or money. Faith coming once more to her rescue, M. St. Ignatius went back to chapel and kneeling close to the Tabernacle, she reminded the Lord of His promise: "Ask and you shall receive". A few minutes later, came a knock at the door.

"I have a load of flour for you."

"There must be some mistake, Sir, we have ordered nothing."

"This merchandise is really for you, Ladies", the man rejoined pleasantly, "let me unload."

M. St. Ignatius having been notified hastened to the door:

"But where does this flour come from? Who sent it? We cannot pay for this." The man replied smilingly,

"Do not worry, Madam, all is paid for."

The Foundress saw that the children of the *Providence* received a sound Christian education along with the rudiments of grammar and arithmetic, and particularly a trade which would enable them to earn their living. The children were admitted at the age of seven and kept until they were twenty or twenty-one to make sure that, on leaving, they were prepared to meet the difficulties of life. She encouraged her religious to neglect nothing in order to train these young people to virtue, and with them, she sought to discover the aptitudes and aspirations of each child so that each one could develop and give the best of herself in the mission which would be hers.

"Above all, let us so train these girls that they are able to deal with every domestic situation and will be regarded as blessings in the homes they may one day found".[21]

She insisted on the necessity of teaching them how to sew and specially how to mend. So much disorder can thus be avoided.

"When I visited the poor in their homes I was often saddened to see piles of unmended stockings rotting away in some corner of the hovel, simply because, as children, not one of the womenfolk had been taught to darn. At that time I thought to myself that if ever I had children in my charge I would teach them to look after their things and mend them in time."[22]

To stimulate the children on this point, mending and sewing were prerequisites to admission to work on the looms, the latter being the girls' greatest ambition. M. St. Ignatius did everything possible to develop among the students love of work well done, no matter at what level. The quality of the silk produced at Fourvière was such that merchants when placing an order insisted that the weaving be done at the "Sisters of the Sacred Hearts, at Fourvière".

At the looms, the final step in the training given, the Mother's sense of organization was evident. She invented an ingenious plan to foster application, good management and a sense of thrift. Each girl was assigned a daily quota of work. When that was accomplished, she was allowed to employ the remainder of her time for supplementary weaving which was carefully noted and paid for. The Sisters placed the money thus earned in the bank and the amount grew little by little so that, when at the age of twenty-one they left the *Providence,* the young girls were in possession of a considerable sum, besides the trousseau which they had succeeded in preparing for themselves. School savings

banks are not an innovation of our twentieth century! With these material advantages, the girls brought with them a heritage more precious still: an enlightened faith, sufficient schooling and the qualities that would make of them good wives and mothers. They were thus well prepared to meet the problems of life and this was the dearest wish of their teachers.

Every morning, M. St. Ignatius visited the orphans of the *Providence.* Gaily, with her pockets crammed with sweets, she went from workroom to workroom, distributing rewards to the most deserving, rewards which were valued because of the giver. A word of special approval for one, of encouragement for another, of advice, if need be, all were given with a mother's love and kindness, and the children reacted with the spontaneous desire of doing better. These girls, we must remember, were not angels, far from it. There were bad habits to correct and characters to be developed. To the teachers who, at times, complained that their efforts were in vain, the Mother would say encouragingly: "Patience! Results will come." She had confidence in the seed sown so selflessly. For each one of the orphans and sisters, she found the right word, the appropriate question and encouragement. With a true mother's instinct, she noted each one's need. The children knew they were loved, and how dearly they loved the Mother in return! The most severe punishment that could be inflicted for some misdeed was the threat of telling the Reverend Mother. It was not fear which caused their distress, in such circumstances, but sadness at having pained the Mother they loved. They took great joy in planning small surprises to please her. It was even necessary to limit their generosity. The "Calvary" which still stands in the garden of the Mother House was a gift of the orphans to their beloved Mother.

The Mother did all she could to provide the children with hygienic living conditions: good lodgings, comfortable beds, tasty food, neat clothes. Moreover, she knew how to break the monotony of the working day by organizing entertainments: a party, a special dinner, games, outings. She herself took part in these activities and found great satisfaction as she witnessed the exuberant joy of her charges. If an orphan were ill, she was cared for at the *Providence,* as if she had been the Mother's own daughter.

The hours which M. St. Ignatius spent at the *Providence* were among the happiest of her apostolate. She would forget all worries and give herself entirely to her "little ones". These contacts were a daily tonic for her and when she returned from visiting the orphans, the nuns often remarked: "Our Reverend Mother gets younger every day when she visits the *Providence*!".

Her concern for the welfare of her protégées did not end with their departure from Fourvière. Before they left, she tried to find good positions for them where they would not be exploited, and where the milieu would help them live good Christian lives. From afar, she watched over them, prayed for them and tried to help them in every way. The following letter is a proof of her interest:

> "This letter will be given to you by the little Pelletier girl who is leaving our *Providence.* Her father, who is from Belleville, has written that he has found a place for her in Villefranche, I do not know exactly where . . . I waited a few days as I wanted to make inquiries concerning the house where the child is to go. But now her father has written a second time and I dare delay no further. I shall send her to the Melinous diligence, as the father indicated, and put her in charge of the conductor who is an honest man. But I would like to know where this girl is going to be placed and whether the people are good Catholics and will look after her. She is only nine-

Crucifix given to M. St. Ignatius
by the orphans

teen and has no experience. I have earnestly advised her to go and see the parish priest, Father Donay. Do recommend her to this priest. There is nobody else to help the poor child and at her age they have such little judgment, especially this one as she is still very immature and her character is not yet formed.

I would be very grateful if you could tell me something about the household she is going to. If, from time to time, you find it possible to give her a piece of good advice you will be performing an act of charity which is sure to please God and which will afford me great comfort. . . . I am so anxious that these girls should behave well when they leave the house, but unfortunately, this is not always the case."[23]

Another letter written about the same time expresses the same concern:

"I can't tell you anything very satisfactory about the little girl . . . before she came to us, she spent most of her time on the streets of Villefranche fighting with urchins. One day, one of them hit her face so violently that it became covered in blood . . . I hope that, with God's help, we shall be able to do something with her. If she could only make up her mind to do right, then I think she would turn out well. She is an attractive child and works well for her age . . . but only when she wants to, which is by no means always."[24]

These extracts reveal the loving care which extended from the beginning to the end of the formative period and even beyond. The orphans came back willingly to Fourvière to experience once again the interest and devotedness of the Sisters and to express their gratitude for all they had received.

We have seen M. St. Ignatius at work in her *Providence* where her fondest interests lay. However, one must not conclude that she, in any way, neglected the boarding schools. Their expansion and reputation was a proof to the

contrary. She had wanted them, in the first place, and wished to keep them. They opened a new field to her zeal and desire of making Jesus and Mary known and loved. In accordance with recommendations laid down in school laws, she and five of her companions took the examinations to obtain the required qualifications, that of boarding school mistresses. She spared nothing in her efforts to give the young girls of the wealthier classes a solid education which would enable them to found Christian homes where faith would be maintained or rekindled. In this, we note M. St. Ignatius' practical sense and spirit of discipline. Moreover, her method in education was inspired by her motherly heart and her great prudence. She demanded of her religious an active yet kindly vigilance – in other words a preventive approach in a climate of joy:

"By an attentive vigilance, seek to forestall the faults and shortcomings of the pupils so as not to have to punish them. The best leader is not the one who punishes most often but the one who knows how to prevent the greatest number of faults. It is the surest method to maintain order, do good and render the children happy."[25]

This conception of education is well in advance of our modern principles. By word and example, M. St. Ignatius led the teachers to develop a mother's love for each child and she encouraged them to create in the group that family spirit which was to become characteristic of our boarding schools. She loved to repeat: "We must be true mothers for these children, both of their soul and of their body".

Though M. St. Ignatius gave herself heart and soul to the apostolic work she had undertaken for the glory of God, she was equally concerned with the spiritual formation of her religious to whom she was both a mother and a

model. She devoted the best of her time and energy to the spirit and structures of her community, for she knew full well that on these would depend the future growth of the Congregation. In everything her actions spoke more eloquently than her words and gave the latter great power of persuasion. Her companions kept her recommendations as maxims to be respected and passed on to future generations as the sap nourishing the growing tree.

M. St. Ignatius was a woman whose strong personality inspired respect and veneration. Under an appearance of simplicity, charm and kindness, one felt the impact of a keen intelligence, confirmed prudence and a tenacious will. She was quick at discerning traits of character and possibilities in others. Her capacity for relating to others, helped by her faith and union with God, led her to use methods well in advance of our modern psychology, particularly in training for the spiritual life.

She demanded a great deal of herself and of her religious, especially of those whom she thought destined to hold a post of authority or whom she considered as called to a greater degree of sanctity. She was firm, yet always straightforward, prudent and kind. In the diversity of temperaments and characters, she sought to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and cordiality. In her exhortations, she often repeated: ". . . let charity be as the apple of your eye . . . Be disposed to suffer anything at the hands of others and to cause suffering to no one; be constantly attentive so as to avoid hurting any one". She could also be very indulgent. A Sister who complained of a companion would be invited to tolerance and forgiveness: "Bah, Rome was not built in one day! Patience, I shall speak to her". She knew very well that one cannot go faster than grace.

The Foundress recommended a loving vigilance to preserve the religious spirit, and fidelity to the Rule. She herself was exemplary on this point. She knew that love is both maintained and shown by constant attention "to simple, ordinary tasks accomplished as perfectly as possible, solely to please God". Her spirituality was that of daily duty, willed by God, day after day, in all its simplicity. She was mistrustful of excessive austerities and of inclinations towards extraordinary things: "observe all the rules conscientiously, mortify your tastes and particularly your will and fancies", was advice frequently given.

Constant attention to God requires of the religious the capacity for irrevocable self-giving. This explains the control she exercised over the admission of candidates. Her first concern was quality and not quantity; she did not believe in mass recruitment nor did she admit without discrimination all who presented themselves. Her preoccupation before receiving a candidate in the novitiate or at profession time was to discern whether she had a true vocation to the religious life. Once the aspirant had been admitted, the Mother patiently respected the rhythm of growth of each one.

One of the points on which she insisted most was that of obedience, for she wished it to be a characteristic of her Congregation. "We must be convinced that it is only through obedience that we can succeed." This submission, she thought, must consist first of all in an unfailing fidelity to the Church and a filial love for the Holy Father. In the regulations of the Pious Association, Claudine had stressed the necessity of a "deep attachment to the Church, death being preferable to the abandonment of one's faith". Till the end of her life, she had at heart the desire of having her Congregation recognized by competent ecclesiastical

authority. This indefectible loyalty is still a tradition in the Congregation today.

The work of the Mother Foundress, from the first *Providence* through the different stages of the development of the Congregation, was marked by great poverty – a poverty which was accepted and lived in the spirit of the beatitudes. "My daughters, . . . be very faithful to the practice of the virtue of poverty" was another of her recommendations. She even went further in the application of the evangelical maxim: "Blessed are the poor". Her love of predilection for the destitute led her to say: "The only preferences allowed are for the poorest, the most unfortunate, for those children who have the most faults or the fewest good qualities. These, you must love very much!"

Only souls given to silence and prayer can assume joyfully so exacting a life-pattern. Mother St. Ignatius knew this:

> "In religious houses, fervour cannot be maintained without silence . . . We must frequently turn our thoughts to God and speak with Him, especially as our work causes us to talk often with His creatures"[26]

She herself gave the example of an intense spiritual life. In the intimacy of prayer, she experienced the loving goodness of God, which she felt urged to communicate, and which for her became a source of fecundity capable of spreading into space and time.

The Cross of Christ

M. St. Ignatius, whose character had, from adolescence, been moulded by suffering, attained a remarkable spiritual maturity in the midst of many trials. Since Christ died for our salvation, the cross has always been the starting-point of all spiritual growth. M. St. Ignatius was fully convinced of this, yet, because of her sensitive nature, she felt the difficulties encountered very keenly. Besides the ordinary trials of community life, she had her own particular crosses. We shall now follow her along the up-hill road she travelled.

Just as M. St. Ignatius felt unable to guide the community without spiritual aid, the Lord indicated clearly that He was the one and only Shepherd. From the beginning, the Foundress had turned to Father Coindre for advice and support. It was a blow to her when the priest, in obedience to what he considered the will of God, accepted a transfer to the diocese of Blois, at the pressing invitation of Mgr Sauzon. Neither she nor her community raised any opposition but his going left a void, though he assured them of his interest and promised to keep in touch with them. He did write, in spite of numerous apostolic duties, and there is one letter in particular, considered as his spiritual testament, which is an inspiration to the nuns to this day.

Father Coindre took up his new tasks with his usual dedication but soon his health gave way and towards the end of May 1826 he was suddenly taken ill and the doctors diagnosed a cerebral fever which proved fatal. On May 30th, he entered eternal rest – that rest of which he had written shortly before: "Rest is not of this world; work and strife are . . . The joys of victory and peace belong to the next life." Father Coindre was but thirty-nine years and three months when he died.

It would seem that the Foundress had received a mysterious warning of impending tragedy. One evening, at recreation, the sisters remarked that she looked extremely tired and distressed, her features were drawn and altered. One of them expressed her solicitude: "Reverend Mother, what has happened? Are you not feeling well?" She replied very simply, "I do not know. I have a premonition of a great misfortune. I shall take note of the date". Three days later, came the sad news of the Father's death. The grief of the sisters was great but it was the Foundress who felt the loss most deeply. Something of the anguish of the first night at Pierres-Plantées came back to her and she experienced her incapacity and her solitude as the cross was placed on her shoulders. She even wondered if the Congregation could live on, especially as, at that time, it was threatened by projects of fusion with another congregation. She soon recovered her composure and once more abandoned herself completely into the hands of God. This was the occasion of a renewal of faith which enabled her to enter with courage and even with joy into a series of trials which were to last to the end of her life.

Not long after the death of Father Coindre, M. St. Ignatius and two other sisters were taken seriously ill. There was fear for the Mother but her hour had not yet come. She recovered while the two others who were much

younger died at a few months' interval. These were the first deaths to be recorded in the Congregation. M. St. Xavier and M. St. Borromeo were two of the Mother's most valued collaborators. The first, aged thirty-three, was among the early companions at Pierres-Plantées. She was in charge of the Providence and was assistant general; the second was one of the best teachers at the boarding school, where she was loved because of her vivacity and gentleness. The Foundress had considered these two sisters as pillars of the institute.[27] "When the three of us were taken ill", she wrote later, "who would have imagined that I would pull through and that my two daughters would die?" All human support seemed to be taken from her. Was this a sign that her work was doomed to annihilation? It was difficult to prevent such a doubt from assailing her. As in past circumstances, M. St. Ignatius found courage and serenity in moments of intimacy with the Lord. She understood that He Himself was the corner-stone of the work she was building.

Illness and death, however, were not the most painful trials which she faced at this time. Not so apparent, but much more crucifying, was the problem which attacked the very existence of the congregation. In 1826, a new vicar-general, Simon Cattet, was appointed in Lyons. He was a gifted man but at times could impose his personal views without discrimination upon those over whom he had some authority. In his opinion, there existed too many new congregations and he decided that those with similar aims should be amalgamated. Father Coindre had had to struggle against the impulsive determination of the vicar-general. And now it was the Congregation of M. St. Ignatius which he wanted merged with "les Dames du Sacré-Coeur" of Madeleine Sophie Barat. This situation caused much worry to the Foundress who was always very respectful of

lawful authority. She could not see in the project an expression of the will of God, hence a constant inner conflict. She showed entire deference to the vicar-general: he was her superior and she never allowed herself the slightest negative criticism. Unknown to her community, she bore this conflict to her dying day, for the vicar-general never gave up his project entirely. Each of his interventions added to the Mother's distress as she considered it her duty to resist. Many admired the virtue of M. St. Ignatius during this struggle, particularly her strength and courage, her humility and prudence.

Besides the difficulties within the community there were the alarming events of the outside world. In 1830, a second Revolution broke out in France. In Lyons, it did not take on the bloody, antireligious traits of the first Revolution, but minds were greatly agitated. Distressing memories came back vividly to the Foundress. Interiorly, she relived the anguish of the 1790's when she lost her beloved brothers. Placing her trust in God, she remained firm and calm, inspired courage in those around her and saw that the community and the girls lacked nothing.

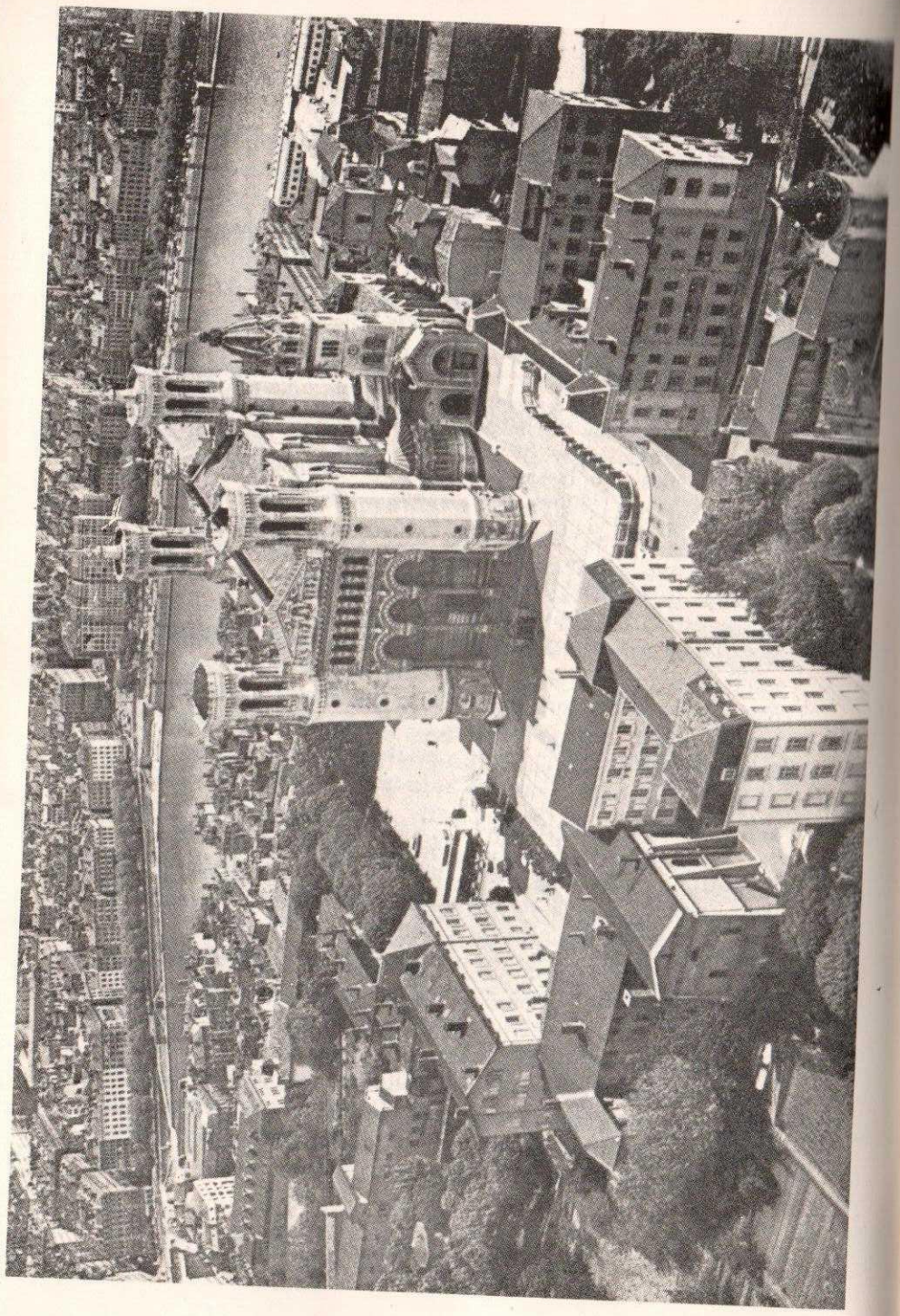
Scarcely had peace come again when a cholera epidemic swept the country. In a few hours, or at most a few days, the disease claimed thousands of victims throughout Europe. In April alone, 1832, the city of Paris registered twelve thousand seven hundred deaths. The epidemic soon reached the gates of Lyons and the inhabitants feared the worst. The anguish felt by all became an ardent prayer of supplication. Humanly speaking, there was no hope of escape. Faith revived in all hearts: it is in desperate hours that God intervenes. With confidence, they implored the intercession of Our Lady and each day saw an unbroken line of pilgrims climbing to her sanctuary. M. St. Ignatius and her household joined them in fervent prayer. The

Blessed Mother once again protected her city and, contrary to all human probability, Lyons was spared. The people, wishing to perpetuate the memory of this miraculous protection, commissioned the artist Victor Orcel to paint a picture which is still to be seen in the shrine at Fourvière. The following inscription appears at the bottom of the picture:

> "In the year of grace 1832, during which cholera ravaged Europe, the city of Lyons was miraculously preserved by the all-powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The people of Lyons then vowed to place this painting in the chapel of Notre-Dame de Fourvière as a record of their gratitude towards the Mother of God"[28]

M. St. Ignatius also made a vow at this time, that of taking into the *Providence,* entirely free of charge, two abandoned children. She also promised to keep permanently at Fourvière a young cripple who was already at the *Providence.* The community of Fourvière thus wished to participate in the endeavours of the population to obtain heavenly protection. When, in the autumn of the same year, the Bishop opened a subscription to erect a monument in gratitude to Our Lady of Fourvière, the Sisters were among the first on the list with a generous contribution. To honour the Blessed Mother, no sacrifice was too great.[29] It was at this time that M. St. Ignatius had to sign the deed of sale of the property at Belleville. One may suppose that this further sacrifice was offered to Mary in homage for the protection received.

During this troubled period, the Foundress and her community never lost their enthusiasm and their work progressed constantly. Ever since coming to Fourvière they had wanted to build a chapel more worthy of the Divine Master and better suited to the increasing number of



religious and students. When the *Providence* was erected in 1821, a piece of land had been reserved for a chapel between l'Angélique and the *Providence* but circumstances had not favoured the project so far. After the epidemic, the situation improved, but social conditions still threatened the weavers' work. However, M. St. Ignatius courageously took up the project. Before coming to a decision, she prudently consulted the Diocesan authorities who praised her foresight and courage:

> "Do not be deterred by the present unsettled situation; do what you can for God each day without worrying about what might happen tomorrow"[30]

This positive reply was an invitation to be daring when working for God and it was also "a testimony to the esteem that the ecclesiastical authorities had for the Foundress". Work was begun without delay and the foundation stone was solemnly laid in 1832. Impressed by the courage and enthusiasm of M. St. Ignatius, the Chaplain, Father Rey, devoted himself to the project, and, to reduce expenses, he was its architect, foreman, builder, according to needs. The enterprise became a community affair involving the children, girls and sisters, during recreation and free time, all of them eager to help build the Lord's house. Some dug for the foundations, others carried water, sand or stone, climbing on ladders with baskets of stone on their heads. At times, the orphans formed a chain and the bucket of water or the bag of sand was joyously passed from hand to hand up to the bricklayers who willingly accepted the proffered help. The work advanced quickly. Moreover, God seemed to have provided building material for His temple on the very spot. While digging the foundations, interesting discoveries were made. That part of the hill-top was close to the old Forum de Trajan and buried treasures were unearthed: cisterns,

The Basilica of Fourvière and, facing it, the buildings of the Mother House of the Congregation

remains of the aqueduct, large blocks of carved stone and marble slabs. Coloured marble from the ruins of an ancient pavement served to decorate the main altar. All went so well that at the end of 1833, the chapel walls were completed and work begun on the dome.

But, in the city below, another storm was brewing which soon became more and more threatening. The population was rising in revolt. Would they be able to finish the chapel before the fighting started? By April 1834, the tension had reached a climax. Barricades were raised and demonstrations held. On the 9th, the Revolution broke out and lasted a week. The rebels positioned themselves on the Fourvière hill and were bombarded from the Place de Bellecour by the regular troops. The community at Fourvière found themselves caught in the cross-fire. The very first day, M. St. Ignatius barely escaped when a bullet skimmed over her head. She threw herself onto the ground and crawled back to the house. On the last day of the struggle, the soldiers climbed the hill and invaded the *Providence* in search of rebels who, they thought, were hiding there. The sisters were in the chapel reciting Vespers. Hastily, Father Rey went to meet the intruders as they broke through the door:

"Gentlemen! Are you aware that this institute belongs to nuns who look after poor orphans?"

"Shots have been fired on us from within; there must be rebels hiding here!"

"There are not! Come with me and see for yourself."[31]

The commanding officer did not insist but he did decide to occupy the building on account of its elevated position. Soon there were soldiers positioned at the windows and they fired on the rioters in the square. Bullets whizzed

overhead causing fear and anguish. The sisters and the children gathered in the safest rooms and begged the Lord and His Mother to spare them. From below, the battery turned their cannons furiously against the *Providence;* walls shook and every pane of glass was shattered. A few dramatic hours of fighting were decisive in favour of the army. The rebels understood that resistance was useless; they fled, taking with them their wounded and their dead. The battle ended at Fourvière but the army did not leave their fortress for three weeks. They occupied the basement and first floor until order was restored.

It was a wonder to all that the convent and the church of Our Lady of Fourvière were left untouched after the shelling at the opening of the struggle. Even the officers were at a loss to explain this, and one of them admitted, "If I believed in miracles, I would recognize one right here. After the horrible shelling, not one of those buildings should be standing." A reflection of this nature pleased M. St. Ignatius. She, for one, believed in miracles and she knew the secret of what was a mystery to many: what Heaven guards is well guarded. She was convinced of the special protection of Mary and her heart was filled with gratitude.

The fighting was over and the soldiers had left the house but that did not mean the end of anxiety for the Foundress. The Minister of War had noted the strategic value of Fourvière hill: it was an ideal site for a citadel. He offered to buy the property. Upon M. St. Ignatius' refusal, he threatened expropriation. The Mother knew full well that if the government wanted the place, there was nothing she could do about it. She was totally abandoned to the will of God, yet with her usual determination, she would do all in her power to save the property and the entire hill. The population of Lyons – even the least religious – were

against turning their beloved shrine into a fortification. "If the church of Fourvière is destroyed, Lyons is lost," the people claimed. With her usual foresight, the Foundress consulted the ecclesiastical authorities and searched for suitable premises where she might move her community and her dear children should there be expropriation. It was not easy to find a building large enough to rehouse one hundred and twenty people. Where would they go if the government took possession before they had found a new home? All those problems, together with deep concern for the shrine of Fourvière challenged the serenity of the Mother. Once again she had recourse to prayer, recalling the Lord's words, "Have confidence, I have overcome the world", and, assured of His help, she would repeat, "God will provide!" In a long letter to her niece she wrote:

> "I place my hope in God alone through the intercession of Mary Immaculate who has protected us so well and defended us from the shells and bombs that were hurled at our Fourvière property to set it on fire.
>
> Pray hard that they abandon the project of fortifying Fourvière. Recommend our interests to the prayers of those devoted to Mary".[32]

The victory, in this instance, was won, not by military force, but by the strong faith of the religious at Fourvière. After a few months of courageous resistance and of calculated delays, the threat disappeared when the Minister who was responsible for it resigned from his post. They could breathe freely at l'Angélique. "At this moment we are free from anxiety," wrote the Foundress. "The new Minister of War has revoked the order to build fortifications; we are giving thanks to the Blessed Virgin who has not allowed her hallowed mountain to be turned into a fortress."

When the dangers of the revolution and the threats of expropriation were over, the Foundress lost no time starting on the necessary repairs and the construction work on the chapel was resumed under the direction of Father Rey. The nuns and the children helped enthusiastically, and the project advanced to the satisfaction of all.

That same year, 1834, brought another and still greater worry, since it concerned the very existence of the Congregation. From Le Puy, where the school had an excellent reputation, the Superior wrote that certain "spiritual directors" were influencing the young religious in their loyalty to the community by proposing a plan of fusion with another institute having similar aims. This was a hard blow for the Mother who was faced once again with the problem she had fought previously at Lyons. She gave the matter much thought and prayer and then sought advice. After serious consideration, she decided to maintain the autonomy and identity of her Congregation. True to her conscience, with tact and deference, she used her authority to maintain order. This period was particularly painful for the group at Le Puy yet it seems to have drawn down the blessings of Heaven upon their work. The number of students increased and a new property was acquired. "If the wheat grain . . . dies, it yields a rich harvest."

About this time, a tragic accident occurred at Le Puy. On a bright September morning, the Superior, M. St. Borgia, (Francoise Blanc, widow Ferrand) was walking slowly in the garden where nature in its loveliness spoke to her of the Creator. Suddenly there was a crash of falling stones. The wall beside her had given way. The gardener ran up immediately and called for help but already the Mother was buried under the débris. By the time they succeeded in freeing her from the stones and earth, she was already dead. There was great consternation in the com-

munity and in the whole town, as the Superior was beloved by all.

But it was the Foundress herself who was most deeply affected by the sad news that a very dear companion had been taken from her suddenly and under such tragic circumstances. For twenty years, M. St. Borgia had been the loyal supporter of the Foundress. She was the only one who had shared the solitude and anguish of that night at Pierres-Plantées, October 5th. 1818, when the first seeds had been sown. They had pronounced their vows together and she was the last of the three religious who, with M. St. Ignatius, had formed the first General Council. Only God could measure the depth of the loss experienced by one who was so faithful to her friends! Something of herself seemed to have been taken from her. M. St. Borgia was a widow when she first joined Claudine and she had a daughter who later entered the Congregation. This young religious, M. St. Paul, gave great consolation to M. St. Ignatius who found in her the remarkable virtues of her mother.

That same autumn, the Foundress suffered another loss when Father Rey resigned as chaplain. The priest had, in the first place, hesitated before accepting a ministry at Fourvière, but he soon became attached to the community. He admired the apostolic zeal, the generosity and the breadth of vision of the Foundress and of her daughters. Gradually the thought came to him that an institute similar to the Fourvière *Providence* could be set afoot for boys. His desire soon took a more definite form. He resolved to abandon the chaplaincy and went without a word of farewell. It was only after he had left Fourvière that he wrote and explained the reasons for his departure. For M. St. Ignatius, his going meant the loss of a spiritual guide upon whose wisdom and prudence she could rely.

All those trials – untimely deaths, revolutions, epidemics, projects of amalgamation – were distressing for the Foundress who saw in each case a threat to her Congregation. Moreover, the horrible events of the Revolution renewed the anguish she had known during her adolescence. At all times, she showed herself energetic and serene, encouraging the community and stimulating their zeal. She never hesitated when a decision had to be made, a task undertaken or a sacrifice accepted. Rising above events and confident that God protects those who trust in Him, she confided her religious family and her apostolic work to His fatherly care.

We have seen with what moral strength M. St. Ignatius overcame the many difficulties that beset her path; yet these trials affected her health which, with the years, became seriously impaired. She had always been frail, especially since the tragic events of her girlhood. No matter how strong a person is, successive emotional shocks will always be a strain on the nervous system. M. St. Ignatius suffered from violent headaches which she used to call her "terror"; still she carried the burden of her charge serenely. The terrible days of April 1834 which posed problems demanding instant solutions and which brought back painful memories were especially damaging to her health. However, she succeeded in inspiring courage in all around her, but at a heavy cost! She counted upon each day's grace to overcome her fear and anguish. Even though her spirit of faith and her courage never failed her, even if she was only sixty at the time, her strength could no longer keep up with her zeal and generous impulses. Her headaches increased; she could eat but little and even her breathing became laboured. However, no one heard her complain and she remained attentive and thoughtful to all, even in the smallest details.

Throughout the years she had remained very close to her family. She had given herself totally to God when she

founded the Congregation, yet her loving heart was never to forget the family circle where she was born, nor her brothers and sisters with whom she grew up. There her character was formed, her affections deepened, and her faith took root. She shared the joys and sorrows of her dear ones. This is seen very clearly in her letters. When her niece Emma Mayet Perroud lost a child at birth she immediately wrote to her:

> "I do not need to tell you how close I have been to you in affectionate concern and sympathy in your suffering . . . As soon as I heard of your loss, you were the object of my solicitude."

And in another instance:

> "I shared your husband's grief as I knew how affected he was at his sister's death, particularly as he was alone at the time. As for you, dear Emma, take good care of yourself. Ever your devoted aunt who loves you with all her heart."

Mélanie Mayet when writing to her sister Emma, speaks of their aunt who was seriously ill:

> "She is always happy when we visit her and as she speaks of the affection she has for all of us, tears come easily to her eyes".[33]

In all her correspondence we find the same attachment to her family. There is sensitivity and tenderness for all that concerns them and loving thoughtfulness for each one personally. In her, as in all well-balanced persons, grace did not destroy nature but perfected it so that she became a witness to God's loving care for His children. To the very end of her life, M. St. Ignatius surrounded her dear ones with love and they in return had for her the greatest admiration and affection.

Let us turn now to her religious family to accompany the Foundress during the last trying years of her life. Father Rey had resigned from the chaplaincy of Fourvière and he had to be replaced. M. St. Ignatius laid the matter before the Archbishop, Mgr de Pins. In her request for another chaplain, she wisely mentioned that she was drawing up the constitutions and rules of her Congregation in view of having them approved by Rome, adding that a priest who had some knowledge of religious life and could give her sound advice would be greatly appreciated. The Archbishop proposed Father Francois Xavier Pousset whom he thought competent, since he had lived some time in the Company of Jesus. As M. St. Ignatius wished to keep in her Congregation the Ignatian spirit which had inspired her at the outset and which Father Coindre had always encouraged, she welcomed the choice. Father Pousset arrived at Fourvière in February 1836. Only later, alas, did it become evident that this priest had left the Company of Jesus with much bitterness of heart. Anything which had to do with the Jesuits was distasteful to him.

M. St. Ignatius quickly realized that she would get no help whatsoever from Father Pousset. She felt her physical strength diminishing and yet she had a great desire to complete her task and obtain from Rome the approbation of her Congregation. With generosity, she accepted the disappointment that was to cause her so much suffering during the last year of her life. God always measures His grace to the cross and this situation revealed the degree of virtue she had attained. The struggle was a painful experience but it was to sanctify the soul about to be called from this world.

After Father Pousset's arrival, the Foundress knew no peace of mind. She admired the priest for his many qualities: he was a man of order, a good orator and he

presided over the religious ceremonies with great zeal and dignity. But he at times exceeded his jurisdiction and M. St. Ignatius, in spite of her respect for authority, knew it was her duty to maintain her rights. She could not allow the chaplain to transform at will the life style and spirit which God willed for the Congregation. It would have been more in keeping with her temperament to step aside discreetly and allow the priest to direct everything. But at this point, with the wisdom acquired by past experience and constant attention to the Lord's action, she looked upon her religious family as a trust which she was to orientate according to the will of God and for His greater glory. To be faithful to her mission, she considered it her duty to prevent Father Pousset from acting as absolute superior of the community.

In silence she bore the bitter, reproachful comments and kept the conflict from her sisters. But it would seem that the chaplain was less discreet. He even tried to win over some of the nuns to his way of thinking. The sister in charge of the chaplain's rooms was a witness to distressing scenes. She would have needed to be both blind and deaf not to have realized how matters stood. "Father Pousset wants to be our superior," was her pertinent comment. Almost daily, the Foundress had to put up with harsh words, encroachments on her authority and unwarranted interventions.

During the month of October 1836, the health of their Mother was a cause of great anxiety to the community. Her headaches become one constant pain; yet they were less difficult to bear than the frequent confrontations with Father Pousset. She could eat but very little; when the pain became unbearable, she sometimes took a small statue of the Blessed Virgin she kept near her and placed it on her head in a gesture of supplication and of

offering. She felt her strength fail rapidly and knew that the end was near. She classified documents, checked accounts and put everything in order. The Sisters were alarmed as they watched her work and some were heard to say: "This urgent need Reverend Mother has to go through everything and sort it out makes me afraid."

By the end of December, M. St. Ignatius was confined to her bed and was not to leave it again, nor was she to finalize the work she had undertaken. She was not to have the very legitimate satisfaction of seeing the constitutions and rules of the Congregation approved by Rome. To the very end, the Lord was demanding sacrifices and, right to the last, she accepted His will as a gift of His love. Another consolation which was refused to her was that of seeing the chapel completed and blessed.

She offered these last sacrifices with her usual generosity and abandoned herself totally to Divine Providence. When her sister Elizabeth visited her on January 22nd, she encouraged her to say frequently: "Lord, may your will, not mine be done". Her recourse to this prayer which Christ repeated during His agony, reveals the depth of her faith, detachment and humility. The fact that she requested others to pray in this manner shows that she measured the extent of the sacrifice to which she consented. On one occasion, her eyes filled with tears as she thought of the sisters and children she was about to leave. But she quickly controlled her emotion and regained her serenity as she confided her charges to the one true Shepherd and murmured gently: "The Lord will provide!" Later, to console the infirmarian, she said reassuringly: "Sister, a superior continues to be one when she is in Heaven!" Those prophetic words still inspire her daughters to this day.

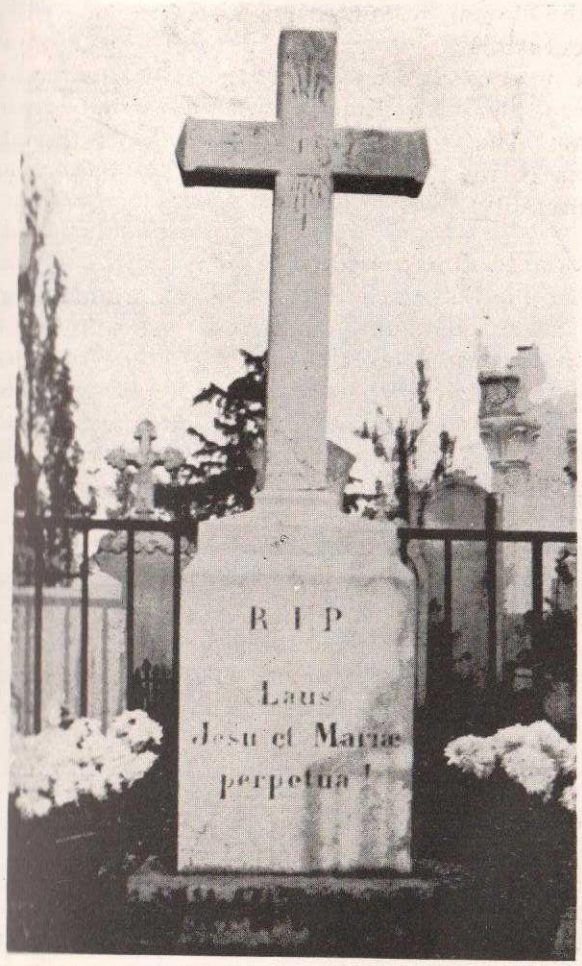
The doctor no longer hid his fears. M. St. Ignatius was lucid and showed interest in everything and every one but she grew markedly weaker. Mgr de Pins visited her and authorized her to receive Holy Communion each week as Viaticum. This was a new proof of God's special care; devotion to the Eucharist was, in fact, a characteristic of her spirituality.

Soon death appeared to be imminent. It was time to offer her the Sacrament of the sick. On Sunday, January 29th, all the community gathered around her bed. The chaplain, Father Pousset, approached the dying woman and the sisters expected to hear from his lips words of consolation for their Mother. Instead, the priest who had caused so much suffering during the past year, was to deal one last blow as he sought to humiliate her publicly. After a moment of silence came the exhortation which was to reopen every wound:

> "You have received sufficient graces to convert a whole kingdom," he said to her. "What use have you made of them? You are an obstacle to the progress of your Congregation. What answer will you make to God who will demand an account of everything?"[34]

It was an inconceivable scene, truly! No reproach could be harder to bear than to be considered an obstacle to the progress of her beloved Congregation. Any other accusation would have been easier to accept.

Such an attitude on the part of the chaplain would be hard to justify even in the case of the greatest culprit. But it does throw light upon the scenes the Foundress had faced during an entire year. There is one likely explanation: the priest was ill. In fact, a few years later, he had a nervous breakdown from which he was to suffer for thirty years. One may well suppose that this illness already affected his behaviour even before the breakdown.

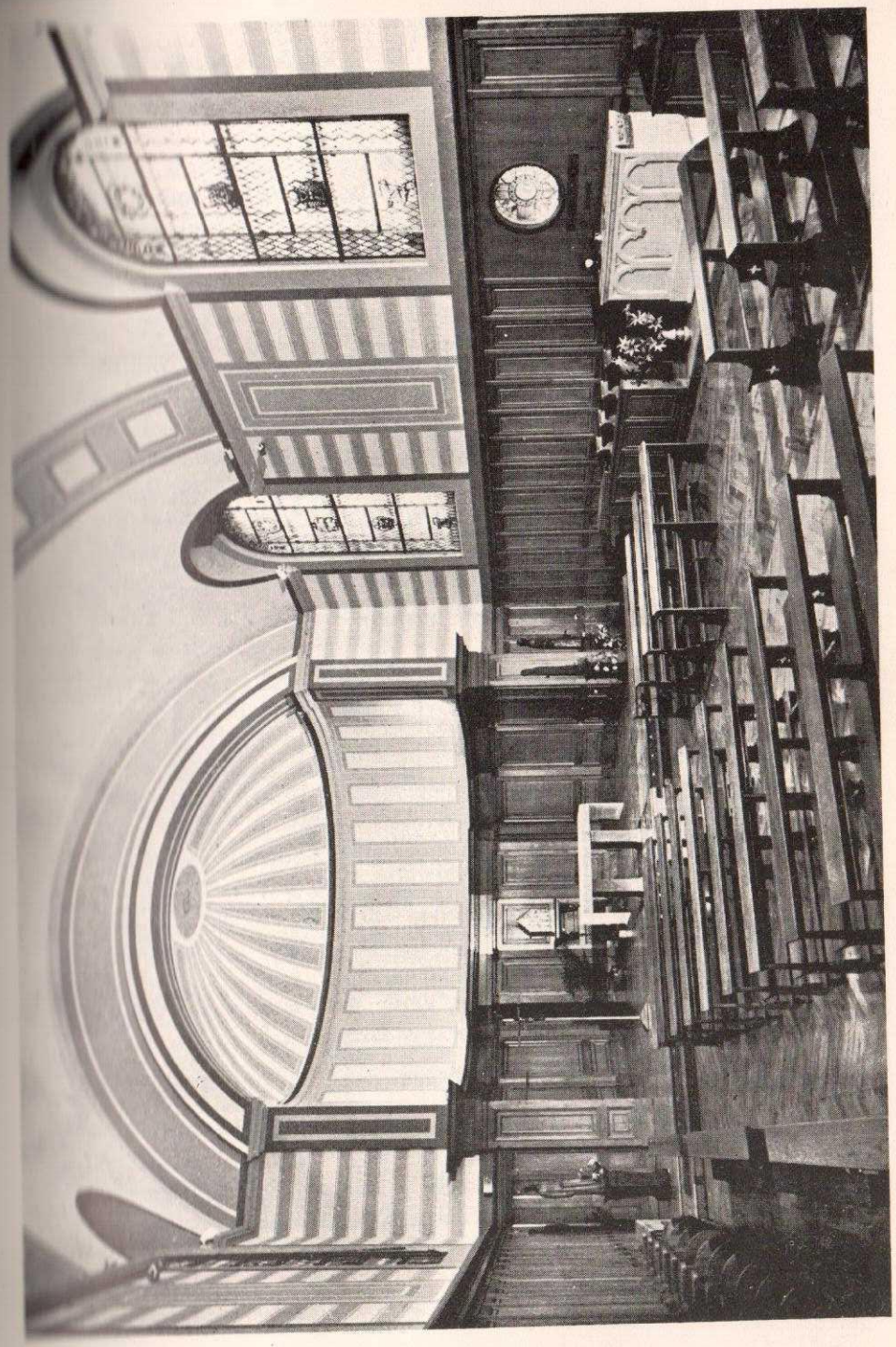


Grave of the Religious of Jesus and Mary in Loyasse Cemetery. Claudine Thévenet was buried there

M. St. Ignatius accepted the reproach with great serenity as a last purification. From the bottom of her heart, she implored God's pardon and abandoned herself to His infinite mercy, finding in the memory of past graces the assurance of His love and goodness. Later, she confided to some of her sisters that when she heard the chaplain's words, she nearly burst into tears. Only her courage could overcome her physical weakness at such a moment. Pardon came readily to her heart, and she no doubt remembered the plea of her brothers "Forgive, Glady, as we forgive", and the appeal of Christ who had uttered a similar prayer on the cross. She answered the prayers for the dying with piety and confidence. Then she prolonged her thanksgiving, saying "I have forgotten something". For a few minutes she remained deeply absorbed in her prayer and she finally said, "I have asked of the Divine Master a great favour for our beloved Congregation. May my request be granted." It would be difficult to surmise what the request was. Possibly the end of all attempts to merge the Congregation with another and the approbation of Rome, assuring the autonomy of the Congregation and its mission in the Church; and probably, for her religious family, an ever-renewed fidelity to the spirit which, as Foundress, she had sought to inculcate.

That same evening, January 29th, the Mother Foundress suffered a stroke and remained paralysed. For five more days, ill and weak, she struggled on, now conscious, now in a coma. On February 1st, during one of her lucid moments, the nuns who were with her heard her pronounce distinctly and with an expression of intense joy: "How good God is!" Those words of praise, uttered with loving conviction, summarize her whole life. She must have repeated them often since they came so spontaneously to her lips as she lay on her death-bed. Those who witnessed the scene were never to forget it.

Tomb of Claudine Thévenet in the Chapel of the Mother House, Fourvière



How good God is! These were the last words of the Foundress who, docile to the Holy Spirit, had responded to the loving goodness of God and sought to lead souls to Him. Two days later, on February 3rd, 1837, the First Friday of the month, at three o'clock in the afternoon, M. St. Ignatius passed away peacefully.

Her death was not unforeseen, yet it came as a shock to those who could not bear to face the reality of the situation. The Foundress was deeply mourned by the nuns, her family, the orphans, children, friends and acquaintances from every walk of life. All felt they had lost a mother, a counsellor, a loyal and sincere friend. A last homage was paid her in the chapel she did not have the joy of seeing completed and her mortal remains were carried to Loyasse cemetery accompanied by a long procession of relatives and friends.

The Mother was now at rest with God and there was no doubt of the Father's loving welcome, yet the Sisters felt the separation keenly. As a consolation in their grief, they loved to repeat some of her prophetic sayings: "God will provide!" "A superior is still one when she is in Heaven;" "My daughters, love your daily task." Their spirit of faith had developed in their contact with this woman of strong faith and they were confident that her attentive presence, her maternal interest, still lived on. Her spiritual daughters knew that the truest homage they could render their beloved Foundress was to carry on the work to which she had consecrated her life, while she experienced for all eternity the ineffable goodness of God.

Abundant Fruit

The Foundress had left her Community a precious spiritual heritage which they were eager to preserve as a testimony of their loyalty to her. The first step was the choice of a Sister to replace Mother St. Ignatius at the head of the Congregation.

Six days after Claudine Thévenet's death, the second General Chapter of the Congregation elected Mother St. Andrew as Superior General. M. St. Andrew was the only surviving member of the Association of Pierres-Plantées and although twenty years younger than M. St. Ignatius, she had been her closest colleague and had shared her views and aspirations. Imbued with the spirit of the Foundress and desirous of seeing her work expand and progress, she generously accepted the post. With energy, yet prudently, she set to work, relying on the promise of her companion to remain, in Heaven, a mother for her religious family. Her confidence was justified, for her term of office (1837–1856) saw the Congregation firmly established and its apostolate expand and prosper.

Without delay, the new Superior General took the necessary steps to have the Constitutions approved. In January 1838, less than a year after the death of M. St. Ignatius, she obtained provisional diocesan approbation

and a few months later final approbation was granted. This recognition for which the Foundress had worked so hard and suffered so much, brought great joy to all. At Fourvière, the boarding-school and the *Providence* continued to develop to the point that it became necessary to build. In 1841, M. St. Andrew undertook the renovation of the old house and the construction of a new three-storey wing.

More important still and of greater consequence in the field of education than Fourvière itself, was the unexpected invitation received in 1841. Up to the present, no one had ever dreamed that the young Congregation could establish itself outside France, still less on another continent. The designs of the Lord are truly inscrutable and He alone knows the needs of the harvest. In July 1841, the Vicar-general of Gap, on behalf of the Bishop of Agra, Mgr Borghi, came to Mother St. Andrew with a request for Sisters for India. The Superior General was deeply moved when she saw how the Bishop's letter expressed the ideal of the Foundress: "To form souls for Heaven through a Christian education". In the details which he gave, Mgr Borghi used terms that were identical with those employed by Claudine Thévenet when she spoke about her *Providence:*

> ". . . There are many families," wrote the Bishop, "who would willingly confide their children to us if we could feed them and take them completely in charge . . . We could take them in at the age of five or six and, besides the truths of our holy religion, we could teach them how to work and train them to an active life thus preparing them to earn their own living honestly.
>
> While with us, the children could save a little money which would be placed in a bank and given to them when they left the institution. This money would tide them over the first months and prevent them from returning to their superstitious practices, which they might be tempted to do if they found themselves in need."[35]

This important matter was put to the Community. At first, it was received like any other request, but soon emotions deepened as the Sisters saw in the message a special call from God to be welcomed with joy, if with a sense of wonder. Who could have thought of the small Congregation for so extensive a mission? Was it right to accept? Or rather, could they refuse? Much thought and prayer were given to the proposition; advantages and difficulties were weighed. M. St. Andrew studied the offer with her Council. The apostolate, as described by the Bishop, was too like that of the Mother Foundress to be refused. An affirmative answer was given with enthusiasm on August 15th, 1841. Cardinal de Bonald, Archbishop of Lyons since 1839, was duly notified and the project received his blessing and approval. Six religious were chosen and they prepared for the distant mission but the entire Congregation was involved in the project.

How could M. St. Andrew know that this new missionary venture was to save the Congregation? While preparations were being made for the departure of the Sisters for Agra, M. St. Andrew sought to obtain pontifical recognition for the Institute. Mgr de Bonald gave the cause his entire support, and it was on this occasion that the community realized that the Bishop had, until now, favoured the idea of amalgamation with les Dames du Sacré-Coeur. It had taken the decision to accept missionary work to convince him that the daughters of Claudine Thévenet had a special place in the designs of God. In order to avoid any possible confusion and future difficulty, he suggested that they modify their name "Religious of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary" which was so similar to that of other institutes. The suggestion demanded genuine detachment and it was not easy to find another name. One morning, M. St. Theresa greeted M. St. Andrew with the

words: "What if we kept simply 'Religious of Jesus and Mary'?" The Superior General was overjoyed: she was about to communicate the same inspiration to her companion. Was this a case of telepathy between two souls attentive to the action of the Holy Spirit? Claudine Thévenet's religious family would henceforth be known as "The Religious of Jesus and Mary", to the satisfaction of all concerned.

It was under this name that the Congregation would cross the seas and branch out to all the continents, opening houses in twenty-one different countries. On January 4, 1842, Cardinal de Bonald ratified the new name which was also approved by the Bishops of the other dioceses where the nuns were established. There was every hope now of obtaining pontifical approbation when the normal steps had been taken. In December 1847, M. St. Andrew received the long-desired decree which had not been preceded by the usual Laudatory Brief because of the remarkable growth of the Institute. This is clearly expressed in the letter which accompanied the decree:

> "Reverend Mother: It gives me great pleasure to inform you that, contrary to the usual custom of the Holy See, your request has been granted *in extenso;* as a general rule, the Holy See grants only a Laudatory Brief in response to a first petition for approbation. In departing from its usual procedure, the Sacred Congregation wished to express its recognition of the remarkable growth of your Institute, the good works it has already done and those it is called upon to do in the Master's vineyard".[36]

In January 1842, the six missionaries were ready for the great adventure. On the 27th, they left for Marseilles where they boarded a ship on February 1st. The separation from Fourvière was painful but, animated by the ideal of their Foundress "to make Jesus and Mary known and loved", they set out happily.

The first arduous missionary journey lasted more than ten months. Travelling then was not what it is now, but, happily, the expansion of the Congregation followed a different rhythm. The first departure from Lyons was the prelude to further developments. The tiny grain sown by Claudine Thévenet in the midst of difficulties, contradictions and sufferings, was to grow, little by little, into a sturdy tree with branches spreading to several regions of its native soil, then beyond into other countries of Europe, to India, the two Americas, Africa and finally to New Zealand.

The spirit of Claudine Thévenet continues to animate her Congregation and the Religious of Jesus and Mary who experience in their own lives the goodness of God are eager to share this experience wherever the Lord calls them. In spite of winds and storms, the tree of Fourvière has grown and bears fruit in the Church, thus realizing the words of the Gospel: "If a grain of wheat dies, it yields a rich harvest".

NORTH AMERICA
Canada 1855
United States 1877
Mexico 1902
EUROPE
France 1818
Spain 1850
England 1860
Switzerland 1893
Italy 1896
Ireland 1912
East Germany 1922
West Germany 1939
Belgium 1959
Scotland 1974
ASIA
India 1842
Pakistan 1856
Lebanon 1963
AFRICA
Equatorial Guinea 1951
Gabon 1960
SOUTH AMERICA
Argentina 1913
Uruguay 1952
Colombia 1958
Bolivia 1961
OCEANIA
New Zealand 1961

Steps towards Beatification

Two significant dates: death 1837, beatification 1981. One may wonder that more than a century should separate the two, before the Church recognized the virtues of Claudine Thévenet.

After her death, as during her lifetime, the example of Claudine was a beacon light, particularly for her spiritual daughters. But it was an interior homage that was rendered her in hearts ever loyal to her teachings. The memory of her virtues became a family heritage to be kept carefully, almost secretly, true to the spirit which the Foundress herself wished to inculcate in her religious family: love of a hidden life and silence on all that concerns one personally. Her humility and her desire to remain unknown may have been interpreted in an exaggerated manner. The first French Mothers, wishing to respect what they believed to be a tradition in the Congregation, published nothing in homage to their Foundress. Nevertheless, they referred to her as to their saintly Mother.

But happily, there came a day when, for the glory of God and of the Church, light was thrown upon a life too long unknown. During the term of office of Mother St. Clare as Superior General (1903–1931), during the General Chapter of 1925, it was resolved that the first steps be

taken to prepare the Informative Process on the virtues of the Servant of God. The Diocesan Process took place in Lyons from October 16th, 1926 to September 7th, 1928. The Sacred Congregation of Rites requested an additional study which was made in Lyons from November 24th, 1930 to June 30th, 1933. Four other investigations were held in the cities of Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, it was decreed that the cause of Mary St. Ignatius would be treated according to the norms of historical causes as instituted by the Motu Proprio of Pius XI, February 6th, 1930.

Several events, among them the Spanish War and World War II, delayed the work on the cause, which had been begun with such interest and enthusiasm. In 1968, a new impetus was given when the Positio received a favorable vote from the historical consultors. Since then the different stages in the progress of the cause have followed the normal slow rhythm established by the Church in its wisdom.

January 8th, 1970. Decree approving the writings of the Servant of God
August 23rd, 1973. Decree of the Introduction of the Cause
November 23rd, 1973. Decree stating that there had been no public cult
December 13th, 1977. Vote of the Cardinals on the heroicity of the virtues of Mother St. Ignatius
February 6th, 1978. Decree on the heroicity of the virtues: The Servant of God was officially declared Venerable
May 30th, 1979. The Medical Commission of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints unanimously declared that the complete cure of Luis Alfonso Soto Villa, of Medellin, Columbia, cannot be explained by any natural laws.

March 30th, 1981, Claudine Thévenet's birthday. In the presence of Pope John Paul II, the cure was proclaimed a miracle.
The other steps followed rapidly: the dispensation from a second miracle, after the Holy Father had attested the holiness of Claudine Thévenet, and finally the Beatification announced for October 4th, 1981.

Above all human testimony, the voice of the Church officially recognizes today the holiness of Claudine Thévenet, Foundress of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, and known in religion as Mary St. Ignatius. This is a date ever to be remembered in the History of the Congregation and lovingly kept in the heart of each of its members.

For the greater glory of God and of the Church and for the edification of Christians, we have: BLESSED CLAUDINE THEVENET!

Instantaneous cure after forty-six years of illness

A young boy of seventeen, living in Angostura, a small village not far from Medellin, Colombia, one day suffered a bad blow on his left leg as he was working in the fields. Luis Alfonso Soto Villa was born on April 9th 1909. He did not, at the time of the accident, realize how serious the wound was.

Weeks and even months later, as the leg did not heal, it was evident that the condition had become chronic. Years went by during which the sick man was in and out of hospital several times, his state of health varying constantly. The infection grew worse, worms developed in the wound and the sore had a repugnant smell.

During the years 1960 and 1961, Luis Alfonso was taken to a hospital in Medellin where, after X-Rays and treatment, the doctors diagnosed chronic osteomyelitis of the tibia. It would be necessary to amputate the leg. On hearing this, the patient refused the operation and fled from the hospital.

The wound grew worse: in 1963, Luis Alfonso was completely immobilized and suffered greatly. Finally in

1972, unable to bear the pain any longer, he asked to be taken to the Medellin Hospital which he had left so abruptly ten years before. On the way, he stopped at his sister-in-law's who could barely stand the nauseating odour and did not know what to do. She advised him to go to the nearby dispensary, kept by the Religious of Jesus and Mary, to have the wound dressed before going to the hospital. The Sister who greeted him on his arrival at the dispensary was taken aback at the sight of the wretched, feverish man with the badly swollen, infected leg. Very gently, she tried to clean the wound which measured eighteen centimetres by seven but the slightest touch caused intolerable pain to the poor man so she could do very little. She bandaged the leg and said quite simply: "From the medical point of view I cannot do anything but we can pray." She offered him a picture of Mother St. Ignatius and suggested that he begin a novena to obtain a cure. With faith, Luis Alfonso agreed to do so and he returned to his sister-in-law's house. That evening, he began a novena and the Sisters at the dispensary did likewise. This was June 9th 1972.

The very next day, Luis Alfonso realized that the pain, the fever, the odour, all had disappeared! As the Sister had advised, he kept the bandage on but he no longer spoke of going to the hospital. Instead, as he felt so well, he set off to see his brother and walked the two kilometres without any difficulty. On June the 12th, the Sister noticed that the sore measured only three cm by one. On June 20th, he returned to the dispensary, as the Sister had requested. When the infirmarian removed the bandage, she saw that all traces of the wound had disappeared. Luis Alfonso returned to his family and resumed his work; he was well again after forty-six years of illness.

The diocesan investigation of this miracle was made at the Archbishopric of Medellin from July 9th to

September 18th, 1974. After having passed through the various stages required by the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, this miracle was presented for the beatification of Claudine Thévenet.

Yes, blessed are you, Woman, whose trusting heart
bent every effort, every hope, even life itself
upon the One Necessity, assured that God,
Master of the impossible, foresees everything . . .

"GOD WILL PROVIDE"

Blessed are you, Woman, whose faithful heart
chose the better part, seeking God in all things
and all things in God,
with the desire of pleasing Him . . .

"LOVE YOUR DUTY"

Blessed are you, Woman, whose apostolic heart
burned with missionary zeal for God:
you consumed all your energies to make
Jesus and Mary known and loved . . .

"FORM SOULS FOR HEAVEN!"

Blessed are you, Woman, whose motherly heart
bestowed the best of your care and tenderness
upon the young in an endeavour
to promote their human and spiritual growth . . .

"BE TRUE MOTHERS!"

Blessed are you, Woman, who in kindness of heart
granted total forgiveness and allowed
the goodness of God
to act in you and by you . . .

"LET CHARITY BE AS THE APPLE OF YOUR EYE"

Blessed are you, Woman, whose heart marvelled
as you lived your life in joy of heart,
liberty of soul, confidence and generosity –
entirely open to the Spirit . . .

"HOW GOOD GOD IS!"

One in heart and soul,
in the joy of gratitude and of praise,
united in the Church,
we thank God because of you,
and with you, we sing:

PRAISED FOREVER BE JESUS AND MARY!

References

1. "A document, kept in the department archives at Lyons, shows that even on the eve of his sons' execution he was still trying to achieve the impossible and save them." cf. GABRIELA MARIA, *The Life and Times of Claudine Thévenet,* p. 85
2. *Ibid.*, p. 86
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 95
4. Mgr CRISTIANI, *Au service de l'enfance*, p. 8
5. *Ibid.*, p. 11
6. *Positio*, p. 484
7. *Ibid.*, p. 486
8. We owe Elizabeth Mayet numerous letters exchanged between them
9. *Positio*, pp. 540, 541
10. GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 180, 181
11. *Ibid.*, p. 200
12. *Ibid.*, p. 207
13. For the following pages, see GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 202–209
14. *Ibid.*, p. 203
15. *Ibid.*, p. 204
16. *Ibid.*, p. 239
17. *Ibid.*, p. 250 and *Positio*, p. 248
18. *Ibid.*, p. 250

19. *Ibid.*, p. 251
20. *Ibid.*, p. 258
21. *Ibid.*, p. 286
22. *Ibid.*, p. 287
23. *Positio*, pp. 361, 362
24. GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, p. 288
25. *Positio*, p. 629, 630
26. GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 284, 285
27. These deaths occurred in the summer of 1828
28. GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, p. 370, note (12)
29. *Ibid.*, p. 374
30. *Ibid.*, p. 372
31. *Ibid.*, p. 380
32. *Ibid.*, p. 382
33. *Positio*, pp. 338, 340, 341, 430
34. GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, p. 400
35. A. VIATTE, *Histoire de la Congrégation de Jésus-Marie 1818–1950*, pp. 123, 124 and *Positio*, p. 649
36. GABRIELA MARIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 412, 413

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