

Therese — 'Saint Of The Little Way'

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Installment III
ALENCON
A Saint Is Born

In May, all Normandy is a miracle of florescence. The undulant roads that traverse the Valley d'Eure and the Valley d'Auges are bordered on either side with orchards, white with blossoms which a poet has called "the fragrant snow of spring." The "plains of Caen" are covered with lush green studded with flowers. The white beaches of Trouville and Deauville, sweeping back from the sea, merge swiftly with the verdant countryside. And all this is only the beginning of beauty. Flowering thorn, richly red as well as delicately pale, rises in soft profusion above the stone walls which flank the streets of sleepy villages. Chestnut trees bright with buds of cream and rose, crowded close together to form candlelike clusters, dapple the sunny squares with their soft shade.

Hillsides glow with the same yellow gorse from which centuries ago a bold-faced boy plucked a plant-a-genet to stick in his cap and gave the name Plantagenet to the royal line which he founded. Lark roses, small and sturdy, golden-hearted and pink-petaled, clamber over the trellised arbors leading to great houses. Lilacs and syringa, their leaves and their scent intermingling, perfume the quiet gardens of the poor. Wild violets nestle beside small and secret streams.

To those who have lingered among these lovely landscapes, it seems natural that the young saint of our own times who was so essentially the child of this region should be tenderly called the "Little Flower" in every corner of the globe to which her name and fame have penetrated. It seems natural also that the austerity of the statues which represent her, fair and guileless, in the simple habit of the Carmelite Order, should be softened not only by the sweetness of her smile but also by the luxuriance of the roses which she clasps in her slender hands, and it ceases to be surprising that these statues are always banked with bloom. Her own dwelling for flowers and which has so appropriately been called l'Estoire d'une Ame — the story of a soul Her followers have been swift to sense the significance of this feeling violet is most appealing in connection with her; to still others the shining lily. All are appropriate in their symbolism. All have their proper place in the veneration in which she is held throughout the world.

NORMANDY LAND

Yet there is another side of the background of Therese Martin's story, a side no less significant than that to which the blooming countryside leads us

so logically, but far more often overlooked. Normandy is not only a region of florescence; it is a region of productivity. The orchards which in the springtime are bright with blossoms, in the autumn are laden with fruit. The lush pastures are never empty. Herds of strong cattle, flocks of sturdy sheep, graze over them; an abundance of milk and meat nourishes peasants and seigneur alike.

The flower gardens lie close beside tiny patches of arable land and neat rows of potatoes, carefully tended. The land is as full of plenty as it is of beauty. It is the plenty wrung from the unwilling soil by the perseverance and pluck of human beings; the plenty that cannot be ravished by harsh winters or high winds of incessant rains, because men and women, with God's help, have remained undefeated by these elements and have nurtured their land in spite of them; a plenty into which have gone for centuries unswerving thrift and endless toil, unsparring self-sacrifice and cruel anguish. Your true Norman is no sybarite, no idler, no dreamer, for whom life has been rendered lazy and luxuriant either by force of circumstance or by national inertia. Hardihood is his heritage; energy, his armor; intelligence, his shield; strength his salvation. He safeguards his own birthright through his own efforts. Even his faith is the faith of fortitude.

If this had not been so if the quality of Norman strength had not gone into forming the character of Therese Martin as well as the quality of Norman sweetness, her story might have lacked some essential element for universal appeal. As it is there is no such element lacking or so it seemed to me, after I had been a sojourner for months in the land where she lived so short a time ago, meeting those who knew her in the flesh, visiting the scenes which she sanctified. And this is the story, at least as I have learned it.

LOUIS MARTIN

New Year's Day is always a

RELICS OF LITTLE FLOWER



Two of the personal possessions of Saint Therese, which were recently presented to the National Shrine of the Little Flower, in Chicago, are on exhibition during the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the shrine. Carmelite Father Paul Hoban and Finian Glynan are pictured holding the gifts which came from France. In the smaller case is the original copy of the last written words of St. Therese about the Blessed Mother. The other holds a bouquet of flowers designed and used by her as a sacrifice in the Carmelite cloister in Lisieux.

great festival in France. But in dress, but his heart turned even the year of grace 1873 it was more tenderly to Zelle, his wife, celebrated very quietly in the rue, whom he had fallen in love at de Saint Blaise, the home of a first sight, as he passed her one of the well-known watchmaker of Alencon, Saint-Leonard, Zelle, whose at her elder daughter, Marie, section for him had been as his and Pauline, who went to board spontaneous and steady as his home for the holidays. Under tenuous, habits as sedulous, and normal conditions, he would fingers as devious as his own; have spared no efforts to make for she was a designer of those the feast day especially delight fairytale laces to which Alencon for them and their two own owes much of its fame. In younger sisters, Leonie and Cecile, and she was the instigator of a revival of its most exquisite art, and into the lacemaking

By FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

planned in her parlor went the same skill, patience and delicacy of workmanship that characterized the mending and manufacture of clocks and watches in his little shop on the rue du Pont Neuf.

The similarity of their occupations had from the first created and cemented a common bond between them and sprang their mutual communion the closer — they were all in all to each other; and therefore, it was natural that on New Year's Day the mind of Louis-Joseph should be preoccupied with thoughts of Zelle. For she was expecting another child, a child on whom they were pinning the highest hopes.

Both in early youth had themselves hoped to become members of religious orders, and both had been thwarted in this desire; and though later they had found compensations for their disappointment in the sacrament of marriage, they had never ceased to long for a son who should fulfill the destiny they had missed. They visualized him as a missionary, they dwell on the dream of a man-child who in time should go the far corners of the earth to reveal the true faith and bring to the heathen a way of salvation.

WANTED SON

Two sons — Louis and Jean — had been born to them, but these little boys, as well as two little girls — Helene and Melanie — had died at a tender age. Now at last was a prospect that there might be another. But both Louis-Joseph and Zelle knew in their hearts that the hope which was so high also had in it a quality of desperation. Their marriage had been one of maturity, not of youth; she was now forty-two and he fifty. If a son were not born to them at this festive season, they could not again look confidently forward toward a future feast day which might be crowned with such a blessing.

New Year's Day came and went uneventfully. But on the second of January that sense of thrilled expectation which pre-figures the greatest of all human events on the family scene began to pervade the pleasant little house. Zelle no longer sat at the window of her small parlor. She had gone upstairs to her own room, back of the one where her little daughters slept. It was a room of taste and distinction, the massiveness of its dark polished furniture softened by the richness of its rose draperies. Its order was complete, for even in time of travail Zelle was scrupulous in her supervision of detail. She had prepared to meet her ordeal with the same quiet courage which she had repeatedly revealed before. But there was a new element in her endurance now. If a savior of lost souls, a saint among sinners, were born to her, this would be the supreme moment of her life. She was ready to meet it supremely.

A LITTLE NITE

When evening fell, the curtains were drawn against cold as well as darkness. Zelle had begun to fall, the little boy was blanketed with her, and the little Zelle was on the rise. She had become more and more subdued, more and more petulant of atmosphere. Marie and Pauline, though they had gone to bed, could not sleep. They knew that their mother, whom they adored, was suffering; they felt, without fully understanding it, the deep significance of the hour. They lay still and listened; and as they did so, they heard a clock striking midnight, a sorrowful through the stillness. Then they were startled by a soft sound of tapping. It was their father knocking at their door. They leaped up to meet him, rousing, even in their excitement, to open the door for him reluctantly. After that they walked, breathlessly, for him to speak. He told them that they had a little nite.

It was a man who had met all the disappointments of his life with tranquil fortitude. At the age of twenty, he had traveled, largely on foot, to the famous monastery of Great St. Bernard in the Alps and had asked to be received there, not as a wayfarer but as a postulant. He had been turned away because of the inadequacy in his manual education. On his return to Normandy, his father, a captain in the French army, had consented to a continuance in his studies, but he had been thwarted again, this time by illness. It was then that, without a murmur, he had taken up the trade for which he had been trained.

When four of his children had died, he had had the strength to meet each fresh bereavement in the same spirit as his wife.

and we know from the words she wrote toward the end of her short life: "When I closed the eyes and dreamed the forms of my children, I dreamed greatly. It is true; but the sorrow I experienced was not of resignation. And now that I look at the young daughter, I have been sure to him, he never gave reason to be feeling of frustration which, momentarily at least, has been overwhelming. Eventually, he had his reward. The mother became also his best-beloved. But at the moment of her birth he could hardly have visualized what presence of child and man."

THERESE MARTIN

On the fourth of January, the new baby was baptized in one of the small side chapels of Notre-Dame d'Alencon, into the nursery the baby was brought with tender care. She had been clothed in a beautiful name: Zelle Marie's gentle for design and delicacy of her mother, and revealed in every one of the little garments which she prepared. The observant Zelle, who soon knew the most capable embroideresses had given their making; they fell by a snowy cascade from the graceful lines of the baby's attire. She held her over the foot of gray, rosewood marble.

(Part of this extraordinary story is preserved in the historical chapel of Notre-Dame d'Alencon, and the rest in the *St. Therese Souvenirs of the Carmelite Convent of Lisieux*. A beautiful novel, his ruffled top, and hooded chemise, also worn by Therese Martin when she was a baby, are displayed in the glass case which hangs above the marble in the room where she was born.)

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