

# Therese — 'Saint Of The Little Way'

Installment VI  
SCHOOL DAYS

The Martin family group was so sufficient unto itself that it was hardly conscious of a craving for companionship beyond its own compact little circle. But there was always a Sunday dinner of expansive proportions at the home of the Guerin to which the Martins also went, and the Martins in turn were given to suitable gestures of hospitality themselves.

Once a year, for example, their friends and relatives were invited to a play enacted by the small sisterhood, which was given in a little pavilion temporarily transformed into a theater and appropriately decorated for the occasion, and at the end of this spectacle there was always an award of prizes for excellence in scholarship.

Therese still studied alone and therefore had no competitors, but the highest standards were scrupulously observed, and she was crowned only for those studies for which she had shown special aptitude and in which she had made real progress.

But this seclusion in development and diversion this solitary striving toward excellence in scholarship could not as Louis Joseph was well aware suffice his child indefinitely if her education were to be effective and complete. A weaker and more selfish man would perhaps have succumbed to the temptation of continuing to keep her constantly at his side, persisting himself that she would do well enough with only her sisters for playmates and only himself as a mentor. But Louis Joseph was made of stronger stuff than that. He was not unkind of the benefits which Marie and Pauline had received at the Visitation in Le Mans and which Leonie and Céline had already begun to en-

joy at the Abbaye des Benedictines at Lisieux.

The nuns at this ancient convent, founded by the Countess Lescaigne, widow of William the Conqueror at the beginning of the eleventh century, were women of cultivated minds as well as holy habits. They had applied themselves to forming the characters of young girls who were not only well taught and thoroughly prepared for any duty which might await them but also reverent and modest, lacking in none of the reserve inherent to their sex, aspiring to no role beyond their limitations, scrupulous in their manners, serious without pretentiousness or stiffness, and knowing how to

be natural instead of wishing to change their own God-given qualities for others less suited to their type and their environment.

It is not surprising, with such standards as these, which are indeed characteristic of the best in conventual education everywhere in the world, that the Benedictines of Notre Dame du Pré had become justly famed as teachers not only in Lisieux itself but also throughout the department of Calvados. The best families of the region sent their children there as boarders if they lived at a distance as day pupils if they were residents of the city itself. Both Jeanne and Marie Guerin went there when Therese was a little over eight years old. It was decided that she should join the ranks of the day pupils.

Les Buissonnets and the Abbaye des Benedictines are very far apart. To go from one to the other it is necessary to cross diagonally the entire city of Lisieux. It is a long walk, even for a sturdy little girl, to take twice a day. Yet only when there was one of those heavy snow storms in which Therese so delighted were she and her elder sister Céline Marie Guerin and her elder sister Jeanne allowed in the shelter of a rambling flange to be shaken from side to side as they went clattering over the cobblestones. Otherwise in every sort of weather, and the Norman climate is given to sudden bursts of rain and driving winds, nor is it often balmy even in summer, the four little girls went to school on foot. Some times Monsieur Martin took them all the way. At other times, he took Céline and Therese as far as the Guerin's house where they joined their little cousins and continued their walk in care of the Guerin's nurse.

Therese was not overtaxed by the walk, her father had accustomed her to exercise. But it is not only a metric distance as measured that Les Buissonnets and the Abbaye must have seemed far apart to the little girl. Les Buissonnets was modern, not to say modish in aspect. The Abbaye was over a thousand years old and the very latest of its buildings was already venerable. Its "new" chapel had been built after the French Revolution but even the "new" chapel had long since taken on the tone of the other buildings which made up the convent quadrangle. Les Buissonnets extended in wide velvet lawns to clumps of gnarled shrubbery, the worn down playground of the Abbaye shaded though it was with pleasant laden trees was a constant reminder of its surface was always scuffed.

**ABOUT FOOD**  
The kitchen of Les Buissonnets was fragrant with the scent of home-cooked food, which came hot and hearty in the dining room that opened out of it. The Abbaye's kitchen, beyond the courtyard and the chapel ofered only a succession of tepid dishes brought by a patient Sœur Converse to the distant dining hall of the pupils, a thin bread soup boiled beef, pain brille, the peculiar bread of the region, ragouts and roasts, which followed each other with monotonous regularity. On Tuesdays and Fridays when baking was done at the Abbaye there were gal-

eries for the four o'clock tea, more rarely a thin apple cake called le boudin. For the most part, one wholesome but unappetizing offering followed another, and the conditions under which these were eaten were scarcely calculated to render them more inviting.

The pupils' dining hall itself was to be sure, an apartment of noble and imposing proportions, and the grouping of the girls at three long tables — the boarders on either side, the day pupils in the middle — was in accordance with the best traditions of the table d'hôte. Each girl, moreover, had her own crouver, her silver knife fork, spoon, and napkin ring, which gave an individual touch, and much of this silver was very handsome.

Therese's own crouver, after wards carefully kept at the Abbaye bore comparison with the famous silverware of Madame de Frequi also preserved there. But the pupils were not allowed to talk, their natural laughter was smothered and as they ate their bouled beef and their pain brille, a nun read tales of unrequiring character to them. Some of them shudder to this day at the memory of the stories of Siberian martyrs where sufferings were so graphically described that tears fell into the plates from which sympathetic pupils could not eat.



Therese at the age of eight with her sister, Céline, in religion SISTER GENEVIEVE, now 81 and one of the two living sisters of the Saint.

leadership begrudgingly. Les Buissonnets was governed by one mentor, white-haired, benign, so wise in the eyes of his youngest daughter, that she felt confident all the problems of France would be solved if he were king; the Abbaye lodged innumerable nuns, black veiled, black-robed,

By FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

stiffly coiffed, who spoke of strange things. The aspect of life itself seemed changed to the child who had been so tenderly cherished when, for the first time, the venerable postress, Sœur St. Scholastique, opened the great iron-hinged doors of the imposing entrance on the rue de Caen to admit a new little pupil.

Intimate acquaintance with her school and its history, deep appreciation of her surroundings and their significance, did come to her in time. In the beginning she was completely overwhelmed. The education given by the nuns, permeated with the Benedictine spirit, was indeed maternal in character. But still there had been a great transition for the little girl, and though this was softened as much as possible for her, Therese inevitably resented it, somewhat as a tender plant taken from the hot-house in the springtime reacts to the fresh air in the garden.

**A BLACK UNIFORM**  
The very clothes she wore were unfamiliar, making her ill at ease and self-conscious. Hitherto, her pretty dresses had been cut from the finest materials, in the latest styles; her sisters took enormous interest and pardonable pride in her appearance. Now, like all the other pupils, she wore a black serge uniform, a white bonnet like that of a postulante — to which, on Sundays, a short white veil was attached — and a short pelerine, black to match the dress in winter, white to match the bonnet in summer. The costume had a certain quaint charm, but Therese was not conscious of this. She could not change it quickly enough when her father came to fetch her in the evening, and she fairly hung herself into her coat and hat as she rushed out to meet him.

There were five classes in this school, each containing two or three divisions, according to the number of pupils, who generally

spent two years in each class, making the complete course at the Abbaye one of ten years, but only the best pupils were distinguished from those of another. The pupils in the fifth class — the primary department — wore red belts, those in the fourth class green belts, those in the third class purple belts, those in the second class orange belts, and those in the first class blue belts, while the honor of wearing white belts was reserved for those who had already received their diploma, but were pursuing advanced and supplementary studies.

Therese skipped the primary department entirely, so the first belt that she wore was given, and she wore this only one year. Then she passed promptly into the "purple" class, she had been younger than most of her classmates to start with, and the promotion which she won so much more quickly than the average pupil put her still further ahead of them. The preliminary lessons which her sister Pauline had so capably directed had been thoroughly and conscientiously pursued; and, besides, Therese loved to study, and she was naturally gifted, so it is not astonishing that her progress was rapid. She herself later confessed in much difficulty in remembering, but the confusion greatly satisfied her teachers, for the pains she took with this were never apparent and she "recited" with much feeling and expression.

She had no special talent for music, and her talents for painting and poetry were discovered only after she was twenty years old, but she almost invariably led her class in everything except mathematics and penmanship — and the standards in the latter at least must have been exceptionally high, for the samples of her compositions which have been preserved reveal outstanding excellence and grace. The small silver laurel wreath, signifying pre-eminence in scholarship, was nearly always pinned to her uniform, and she carried away "crowns" quite as readily as when she had been the only

applicant for them. **HIGHLY APPRECIATED**  
Therese's progress in her studies was of course highly appreciated by her family, and it was the best of her parents' pride in her that she ever so earnestly strove to excel. It is probable that her talents were less appreciated by most of her classmates. Children are seldom impressed by competence and conscientiousness when they are in their own studies, and the school room was apt to be a lonely place. It seems almost certain that Therese was the victim of her confidence, for she knew she could do it, and she did it, and she was never less than successful.

She did not even say that she was lonely in the crowded classrooms and in the tumultuous playground at the Abbaye, that she had never been in the special section of Les Buissonnets. Nevertheless, she reflected, "I did not like games, especially chess, and I did not know how to play the other children. I did not feel that I was an agreeable companion. I did not like to initiate others, but I was able to do so, and I was very simple in my speaking of her school days long after they were over."  
(To Be Continued)

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