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LÉONIE MARTIN

A Difficult Life

Foreword

Many people will take up this book because of their interest in Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. They will not be disappointed. This is a life of Léonie Martin, blood sister of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. The saint has inevitably overshadowed her older sister.

The well-loved book by Thérèse was given quite an accurate title, *Story of a Soul.* It was an account of how God had graced her. Everything she recalled in this work was in a sense guided by this one aim: to celebrate God's merciful love in her. When we read Saint Thérèse, we are certainly brought into her family, particularly in her childhood. We think that we know the Martin household, from which Thérèse began her spiritual journey. But our knowledge of the family is really quite limited to what Thérèse thought relevant; moreover, she was writing for those who knew all about her family.

In Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* and even in her correspondence, Léonie appears as a shadowy figure. This is understandable, for she was not central to the task Thérèse was given by her superiors, namely, to write the story of God's grace in herself. There was also a natural reticence to speak about her difficult sister. Léonie would today be described as a child with special needs: she seems to have had quite serious emotional problems, witnessed by violent outbursts; she would also seem to have had some learning problems. Her family did not know how to help this difficult child: they tried within

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their ability to assist her in many ways; they supported her; above all they loved her. Had she been living today, Léonie would have had the advantage of skilled help and special education. Her family naturally would not speak about her problems, except in intimate correspondence between their members. We are, after all, dealing with a closed bourgeois family in a provincial town in late-nineteenth-century France.

The book opens out the Martin household and their cousins, the Guérins, whom most people know only from Saint Thérèse's *Story of a Soul.* The human side of the family does not really emerge in her autobiography. This book is a welcome corrective. For instance, it gives a fuller picture of the father's illness and breakdown. We can thus understand more the pain, the worry, and the embarrassment suffered by all the family, including Thérèse. The story of Léonie is told from letters, to her and from her and about her by other members of the family. Hers is a fascinating story, with an interest even independent of her canonized sister.

She tried religious life four times before she was finally professed as a Visitation Sister. There she achieved a high degree of holiness. From a most difficult childhood and adolescence, she overcame her disabilities and reached a mature serenity when she finally achieved her goal of being a religious. This book tells of her struggles, her failures, her disappointments, her dogged perseverance. When we get beneath the language and culture of Thérèse, we find that, for all her charm, she was almost ruthless in her pursuit of holiness in her complete sacrifice to God's merciful love. Léonie, too, has something of the hard steel that always lies just below the surface in Thérèse. The reader will find Léonie a fascinating person in her own right, very different from her better-known sister.

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This book by Marie Baudouin-Croix is to be strongly welcomed. It does not add to what has been available to specialist scholars, but it will be a revelation to so many admirers of Saint Thérèse in the English-speaking world. I warmly compliment its author, the translator, and the publishers for making this important book widely available. It is an ideal companion to the autobiography of Saint Thérèse.

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Introduction

(To the 1989 edition)

"*Tell us about the Martin parents instead"*

It may seem strange to write a book about Léonie Martin, the least gifted of Thérèse's sisters. Many of the Martin family's contemporaries—and, indeed, our own—nicknamed Léonie, the third of the five sisters, "the lame duck."

Those who have read Thérèse's *Autobiography* and the *General Correspondence* between her and her family may say, "Tell us about the Martin parents instead." The exemplary lives of this Christian couple have earned the admiration of the world; and there are those who would like to see theirs recognized as a model marriage. Many families where spouses are in deep difficulty with each other or with their children would like the help of such an example of truly Christian parents. The gap of more than a century makes no difference: husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, face the same difficulties today as they did in the Martins' time.

In Rome, the Informative Process for the Cause of the Martin parents is underway. \* On October 10, 1957, Bishop Pasquet of Sées signed an order for research into the writings of Zélie, Saint Thérèse's mother; on March 22 of the same year, Bishop Jaquemin of Bayeux did the same for the Cause of Thérèse's father, Louis Martin. Thus their daughter Céline—Sister Geneviève of the Holy Face, who

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lived in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux until February 25, 1959—had the joy of bearing witness to her parents' exemplary lives.

\*1 They were canonized by Pope Francis on October 18, 2015.

"*Tell us about her Carmelite sisters instead"*

Those familiar with Thérèse's works may also protest, "Tell us about her Carmelite sisters instead. They played the most important role in Thérèse's development; after all, she was only four and a half when her mother died."

This is certainly true of Marie, the eldest of the Martin sisters. She was Thérèse's godmother; she prepared her for her First Holy Communion and taught her in Les Buissonnets. We owe *Story of a Soul* to Marie: after she had become Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, she asked Thérèse to write her memoirs, which became the *Autobiographical Manuscript A.* The *Autobiographical Manuscript B,* too, is due to Marie; it is simply a long letter that Marie asked her goddaughter to write in order to reveal to her elder sister "the secrets that Jesus shared with Thérèse."

Pauline—Thérèse's "little mother," whom she loved dearly—also played an important role in her development; from the time of Pauline's entry into the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, under the name of Sister Agnès of Jesus, Thérèse wanted to follow in her sister's footsteps. Until Thérèse's death, her beloved Pauline gathered all her sick little sister's sayings into the treasury that she gave us in the *Last Conversations;* she was, until her death in 1951, the herald of her little sister's glory.

This is true, too, of Céline. She was the last of the Martin girls to join the Carmelite Order: after M. Martin's death,

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in 1894, she became Sister Geneviève. She died in 1959 and was buried, with Marie and Pauline, in the Carmelite chapel, beneath Thérèse's reliquary. Céline's soul was the mirror of Thérèse's. Father Pichon, her spiritual director, said she had "enough personality for four"; she was called "the thunder-child" and "the dauntless one"; she was strong-willed, overflowing with life. She was also an artist; her deft paintbrush gave us portraits of Thérèse and of the Holy Face that have been reproduced millions of times around the world.

*Why Léonie?*

Why, then, this book about Léonie? She was, both physically and intellectually, less gifted than her sisters; she was an emotionally disturbed child who made all those around her suffer; she herself knew how "awful" she was, in every sense. Yet, more and more, people want to hear about Léonie. Of course, the renown of "poor Léonie"—as the Martins and the Guérins, her uncle and aunt, used to call her—will never equal that of Thérèse, the "greatest saint of modern times." But her goodwill, the deep humility that led her to declare herself unworthy, and her trust in the Divine Mercy left her docile in the hand of God; she was clearly chosen to follow the spirituality of the Little Way.

This book is not intended to bring Léonie's hidden virtues to light; as Pauline said, "the Holy Church is not obliged to canonize all God's friends." Quite simply, it is comforting to everyone to know about one woman's struggle to conquer a difficult, intractable temperament. Also, the story of the young rebel who was Léonie can help

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and give hope to parents who are hurt by their clashes—often violent—with their children.

Léonie died in 1941. Even after the glory of her sister's canonization, she remained generous and self-effacing. Letters from all over the world arrive at the Visitation convent in Caen, asking for her posthumous help. She, who as a child made her parents suffer so much, now gives hope to all those who are convinced that she comes to their aid from Heaven.

*Léonie's relevance*

This will not be an exhaustive biography of Léonie Martin; more authoritative voices than mine have already accomplished that task. I simply wish to portray Léonie, the difficult, stubborn rebel who was gradually drawn toward gentleness and humility, to become a true follower of Francis de Sales, the saint of gentleness. Léonie, having become Sister Françoise-Thérèse, lived the Rule of the Visitation Order from day to day, humbly but faithfully. In the Caen convent, she is still remembered with joy; four of the forty Visitandines now living on rue de l'Abbatiale lived with her and saw her saintly death.

After Léonie's death, the number of supplicants coming to her tomb became so great that the walls of the beautiful eighteenth-century building where her body lies had to be converted so that the crypt could be opened to the public. Families and individuals come, sometimes from far away, to pray at her tomb and to leave there their written petitions, addressed trustingly as to a dear friend. The tomb is of sand-colored marble, at ground level, before a little altar; on it is engraved simply:

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Soeur Françoise-Thérèse

Léonie Martin

Soeur de Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jesus

Décédée le 17 Juin 1941

Agée de 78 ans

41 ans de profession religieuse

(Sister Françoise-Thérèse

Léonie Martin

Sister of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

Died June 17, 1941

Aged 78

After 41 years of religious life)

In Léonie, Thérèse found a faithful disciple. Her Little Way was put to the test, for more than half a century, by a subject who was at first a very difficult one. Thérèse's heartfelt faith, her hope against hope that Léonie would enter religious life, bore fruit. It is true that during her short life Thérèse did not see her prayer answered; Léonie's case seemed a hopeless one. But this means that Thérèse owes to Léonie a special adaptation of her Little Way, suited to more rebellious temperaments. The little Visitandine was the embodiment of the complete self-abandonment that Thérèse described: "One is given as much as one hopes for."

Then, too, perhaps Léonie's "dreadful childhood" prevented the Martin family from falling victim to the self-satisfaction of parents whose children are all gifted, docile, pleasant, and a credit to their families. The Guérins, her uncle and aunt, had no such difficulties with their daughters; perhaps they believed that their methods of upbringing were better, more balanced, more humane.

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Léonie was the catalyst of family humility long before she herself was transformed by her determination to see herself as destitute, to become utterly dependent upon the Divine Mercy.

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Alençon

*Léonie's birth*

Before we come to know Léonie, the Visitandine who made her profession at the Caen convent, we must look in on her during her childhood. She was born on June 3, 1863, in Alençon, the principal town of Orne; in 1877, after Mme. Martin's death, she and her father and four sisters went to live in Lisieux. Léonie was fourteen when she left the little house on rue Saint-Blaise, opposite the imposing Prefecture of Alençon, for the more intimate and secluded Les Buissonnets, in the hills of Lisieux.

Léonie came into the world on rue du Pont-Neuf in Alençon, where in November 1850, at the age of twenty-seven, M. Martin had set up shop as a watchmaker and jeweler. Two older sisters were waiting for Léonie: Marie, then aged three, and twenty-one-month-old Pauline. Léonie, delicate, blonde, and blue-eyed, was very different from her lively brunette sisters. Soon her parents began to worry about her frail health. Léonie was baptized on the day after her birth—the feast of Corpus Christi—in the parish of Saint Pierre de Monsort. Father Lebouc baptized her, as he had the two older girls. She received the baptismal name of Marie, as did all nine of the Martin children—seven girls and two boys; she was also given the

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name "Léonie," after her godmother, Mme. Tifenne, a friend of the Martins.

"*Little Léonie is not strong"*

From the first months of Léonie's life, whenever Mme. Martin wrote to her brother, Isidore Guérin, about her family, her news of her youngest child was not good. "Little Léonie is not strong," she wrote in January 1864. A letter written that March shows her increasing concern: "Little Léonie is nine months old and can hardly take her weight on her legs, which Marie could do at three months. The poor child is very weak; she has a chronic cough, but luckily not as badly as Pauline had—she could not have survived that. God sends us only what we can bear."

Two months later, her poor mother is still worrying: "Léonie isn't growing properly; she doesn't seem to want to walk. There is nothing wrong with her, but she is very weak and very small. She has just had the measles; she had them very badly, with terrible convulsions."

M. Martin, a devout Christian, went on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Sées, on foot, to pray for the health of his frail youngest daughter.

At last, when she was a year and a half old, Léonie walked on her own. Unfortunately, a purulent form of eczema covered her little body, growing worse from day to day. The doctor did not seem to understand Léonie's case; his medicines had no effect on her condition. In desperation, Mme. Martin wrote to her younger brother, Isidore, who was a qualified pharmacist: "Please give me your opinion and tell me what I should do. Perhaps you know a famous specialist who could prescribe an effective remedy. You can't imagine how much it hurts me to see

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my poor little girl in this state. I have just written to our sister Élise, asking her to say a novena for her."

*The Visitandine aunt's intervention*

Élise was the eldest of the three Guérins; Zélie was two and a half years younger, and Isidore was the baby of the family, nine years younger than Zélie. Mme. Martin was very close to her sister, who had entered the Visitation convent in Le Mans, taking the religious name of Sister Marie-Dosithée, in 1858, the same year in which Zélie married Louis Martin. Élise's prayers brought joy to the Martin household: Léonie's health improved rapidly. In June 1865, Zélie wrote to her brother: "Léonie is a darling and fairly strong. One thing is certain: she has never been sick since Élise said a novena to the Blessed Margaret Mary, who was beatified in September. When Mme. D. came, Léonie was in a pitiful state, as she had been since her birth: she had continual palpitations and an intestinal inflammation; in fact, for sixteen months, she hovered between life and death. I remember that at that time I tried to make her stand up, but failed; but immediately after the novena, she was running about like a little rabbit."

None of Zélie's letters to her brother better express her fears for the precarious health of Léonie, who grew very poorly from birth until the providential intervention that saved her when she was two years old.

*The Martin family grows*

In October 1864, an adorable fourth daughter, Marie-Hélène, was born to the Martins. Little Hélène's intelligence

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and gentleness were a joy to her parents and sisters, especially to Léonie, who soon became her playmate. Sadly, this lovable child died at the age of five. It was a terrible grief for all the family—in particular for Léonie, who would always miss the sister who had been so close to her in age and who had shared her joys and sorrows.

When Hélène was six months old, Zélie wrote to her brother, "I don't think there ever has been, or ever will be, such an adorable little girl. I can hardly believe that I have the honor of being the mother of such a delightful creature!"

The proud mother continued: "If you could only have seen the two eldest today, all dressed up; everyone admired them and could hardly take their eyes off them. I was radiant; I said to myself: `They are mine. I have two others who aren't here, one lovely, and one less so—I love her as much as the others, but she won't be as much of a credit to me.`"

The "less lovely" daughter was little Léonie, who was not yet two years old.

*Family bereavements*

When Hélène died, in February 1870, Léonie was nearly seven. This tragedy followed closely the early deaths of the two little brothers who were born after Hélène but who died before her: Joseph-Louis died in 1867, at the age of five months, and Jean-Baptiste in 1868, at eight months. It is difficult to be sure how deeply Léonie's slowly developing intelligence was affected by this brutal loss. But Céline had been born a few months earlier, in April 1869; she helped the flighty Léonie to forget, to some extent, those who had died.

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Although Léonie's physical health was becoming more stable, her emotional health began to disrupt the family atmosphere. Zélie wrote to Isidore, who was living in Lisieux: "Léonie gave us a terrible time all day yesterday. She took it into her head to go to Lisieux, and she would not stop screaming. In the end, her father had to get angry and tell her that she couldn't go; after that, she gave us a little peace."

*An undisciplined nature*

As Léonie grew stronger, she became a little rough, a bit of a daredevil. She ran about recklessly and fell often, cutting her knees and forehead so badly that the scars distressed her mother. But it was Léonie's slow intellectual development that upset her parents most; she stood out against the quick, sparkling intelligence of their other daughters. In October 1869, Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law, Isidore Guérin's wife: "My children often talk about your little Jeanne and ask if she will come back soon. We have had a hard time explaining to Léonie that Jeanne is a little girl, not a boy. She is slow to understand things; but then, she has been ill so often. I hope she will develop in time."

Five months later, new problems appeared: "Now Léonie has sore eyes. The poor child worries me; she has a very undisciplined nature, and mentally she is underdeveloped."

Léonie's constant stubborn insubordination and her lack of common sense continued to disrupt her family; as she approached school-going age, the Martins' anxiety increased. Marie and Pauline attended the Visitation boarding school in Le Mans; in July 1870, Zélie wrote

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to her sister-in-law: "I would have liked to send Léonie with them when they go back. Unfortunately, however, I mentioned Léonie's personality in a letter, and the Mother Superior does not want to take her. In a way I am rather glad, because I don't think they would have kept her there; it is better to wait another year, until she is better prepared. She is really very sweet, but in spite of that, it is hard to make her obey."

*The possibility of a school year in Le Mans*

A year later, Zélie's letters sounded more cheerful: "I told my sister how worried I was about Léonie's education. She thought about it and then said, `Let me try.` She went to the Mother Superior and asked her to take the child until the holidays. So Léonie has been at the Visitation convent with her sisters for several days now; she was delighted to go. I hope they will be able to keep her. I know her to be in good hands, and I have such peace of mind that I feel as if I am in Paradise."

Unfortunately, as this letter implies, the house would become Hell if Léonie were to return to it; and Léonie was not accepted into the Le Mans boarding school for the 1871 school year, on the grounds that "she is not ready to keep up with the others, and there is no teacher available to give her private lessons." Besides, her aunt's bad health prevented her from watching over Léonie's work and behavior.

A few weeks earlier, Sister Marie-Dosithée had written to her brother: "At the moment I am taking care of Léonie, that terrible little girl; she certainly keeps me on my toes. It's a continual battle; she isn't afraid of anyone but me!"

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*Léonie's return to Alençon*

In November 1871, the Martin family moved to a house, at 36 rue Saint-Blaise, which the Guérin grandparents had bought in 1843; M. Martin had handed over his watchmaking business and the apartment on rue du Pont-Neuf to his nephew in order to help Mme. Martin with her lace-making business. And so the family's life continued on rue Saint-Blaise. But the rebellious Léonie, although she must have enjoyed the move to her new home, opposite the large park of the Prefecture, continued to make the pious little family's life almost hellish. Léonie was nine years old when Zélie wrote to her brother: "I am very pleased with Marie; she is a great comfort to me. I only wish my poor Léonie were more like her. I cannot understand her character; the wisest sages would be out of their depth with her. But I still hope that some day good seed will sprout in that soil. If I could only see that happen, I could say my *Nunc dimittis*; but my sister says that I probably won't see it. She thinks, no doubt, that I haven't long to live."

The whole family's life centered around Léonie. At the beginning of the 1873 school year, Zélie wrote to Pauline, who was boarding at Le Mans: "Now you must concentrate on preparing yourself properly to renew your Solemn Communion. Pray above all that Léonie will be able to go to the Visitation convent. She wants to very much, and she promises to be good."

During the same period, Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law, sending her news of her children. "Only Léonie won't settle down. She is like a child of eight. She will be going to the Visitation school in October, unless her aunt wants me to keep her at home for another year."

But in October Léonie did not accompany her sisters to boarding school; her entry had been postponed for

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yet another year. Her patient mother wrote: "If it didn't mean so much to me that Léonie's aunt should prepare her for her First Communion, she would never go to the Visitation school; but I want to see if our sister will, as I hope, be able to change her."

"*Léonie learns slowly"*

In the meantime, Mme. Martin arranged for a qualified young lady of Alençon to give Léonie lessons; but the child was unable to understand arithmetic and did some very imaginative things with her sums! Zélie wrote to her brother:

The child has trouble learning, but slowly she is picking up a little. She will definitely go to the Visitation convent in the New Year. I am getting her clothes ready. I think that it is money wasted; but it is, above all, the trouble she will give her aunt that worries me. Nevertheless, it is my duty to try again; if she doesn't succeed, at least I will have done all I can.

Our dear sister in Le Mans is fairly well; we don't know why, but she is much better than she was last winter. I am beginning to think that God is sparing her so that she may transform my Léonie—she is the only one who has any influence on her. When anyone asks the poor child what she wants to be when she grows up, her answer is always the same: "I shall be a Visitandine with my aunt." God grant it will be so; but it would be too wonderful, I daren't even hope.

Then Léonie's eczema returned, covering her with running sores, so badly that her mother was afraid she would not be able to go to Le Mans.

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Zélie, writing about the New Year's gifts that the Guérins planned to send their nieces, told her sister-in-law: "Above all, no valuable books—Léonie can wear out a catechism in a month, without learning a thing from it!"

*Fresh hope*

Finally, in early January 1874, Léonie went to boarding school with her sisters. Mme. Martin wrote to the Guérins: "Léonie was delighted to go. If she is happy and does well, I will let her stay there for several years."

Three months later, however, Léonie's poor mother received bad news of her daughter's behavior.

"If she is sent back to me," she wrote to her brother, "I will be in despair. My only hope is to leave her there for years. I beg of you, you who are becoming a saint, pray that she will stay at the convent."

Léonie's aunt described to the Guérins the methods of education by which she tried to make Léonie more pliable:

You asked me for news of Léonie. As you know, the poor child has plenty of faults; during her first month here, I scolded her whenever she didn't do well, and that happened so often that I could never stop scolding. I could see that I was making her unhappy, and I didn't want to do that; I wanted to be God's Providence to her.

So I stopped scolding her and started to be very gentle with her, telling her that I saw she wanted to be good and make me happy, that I had faith in her. This had a magical effect—not just temporary, but lasting; now I find her a lovely child. She tells me all her misdeeds very candidly; I told her that I wanted her to, and she is very obedient. I hope that God will bless our efforts and that she will become truly good; the job is far from finished, and I

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know that in future I will have to temper gentleness with firmness more than once.

On February 11, 1872, Sister Marie-Dosithée had written to the Guérins: "Léonie, in the little time I had her with me, gave me great hope for her future. Before God, the most rebellious natures are subdued; His grace makes wolves into lambs, and lambs as fearless as lions. The essential thing is to overcome; it is hard work, but, with the grace of God, it can be done."

*Léonie is sent home*

Then disaster struck: Léonie was sent home from school for the third time. On June 1, 1874, Zélie wrote sadly to her sister-in-law:

You will have heard from Léonie's aunt in Le Mans that my poor child has left the school. As you can imagine, this has vexed me terribly; more than that, the pain that it has caused me is with me constantly. My sister was the only person whom I had hoped could reform the child, and I was sure that they would keep her; but in spite of all their goodwill, it was impossible. She would have had to be separated from the other children. When she is with the others, she loses all her self-control and becomes terribly unruly.

I doubt that anything except a miracle can change her nature. I know I do not deserve a miracle; yet I am still hoping against hope. The more difficult she becomes, the more I become convinced that the good Lord will not leave her like this. I will pray so hard that I know He will relent. When she was only eighteen months old, Léonie was cured of an illness that should have killed

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her; why did God save her if He did not intend to be merciful to her?

I would have liked to take her on the pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, which leaves on June 25, as it was through the intercession of Blessed Margaret Mary that she was cured before; but I cannot leave home then. But I plan to take her to Our Lady of Sées every year, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Although I worry so much about Léonie, the others are a great consolation to me. Marie and Pauline are as good as gold, and Céline and Thérèse show great promise.

*The Martin household*

At this point, Marie was fourteen years old, Pauline thirteen, Léonie eleven, Céline five, and Thérèse one and a half. On March 16, 1873, at the age of two and a half months, the baby of the family had been sent to a wet-nurse in the country a few miles from Alençon, for the sake of her health (another little Thérèse had been born in 1870, but had only lived two months); she was brought home on April 2 of the following year.

Léonie's Aunt Élise, too, wrote to the Guérins about Léonie's return from boarding school: "I expect Zélie tomorrow. It will not be a happy visit; she is coming to take Léonie home. What can we do with her? What a cross to bear! I pity my dear sister; I wish I could help her somehow, but there is nothing I can do, nothing at all. But I still trust in the Lord—yes, with all my heart. I have great faith in Him."

The letter was left unfinished, then continued a few days later: "I have seen Zélie. She is resigned; she thinks that when a child is not like others, it is the parents who must deal with the problem. In the meantime, she doesn't

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know what to do; so she will keep Léonie at home. She is very upset; she was so sure that the charity and gentleness of the Visitation convent would change her daughter."

It is difficult to explain this false note in the Martin household—a household so strongly oriented toward harmony and virtue.

When Zélie learned that a pilgrimage from the Sées diocese would leave Alençon for Paray-le-Monial in July, she decided that she and Léonie would go. Léonie was overjoyed at the thought of the journey—because she would be traveling by train!

*A discouraged mother*

Zélie, still brooding over her incomprehensible Léonie, admitted to her sister-in-law: "I am very satisfied with my two eldest children; but it saddens me deeply to see Léonie as she is. Sometimes I have hope for her, but often I become discouraged. But my sister says that she is sure Léonie will become a saint. She is going to start taking lessons in the afternoon, with two old ladies who used to be schoolteachers and who get by as best they can. I am glad to have found them, but it is painful to have come to this; she would have been better off with her sisters."

Unfortunately, Mme. Martin found that the old ladies were far from respectable; she could not continue to leave Léonie in their care. So Léonie remained at home and found it increasingly difficult to learn—to the point that her distressed mother "didn't know what was to become of her."

Léonie, seeing how different she was from her sisters, thought that her nurse must have exchanged her for another baby. She confided this fear to her mother, who assured her that she, Léonie, had never been with a nurse!

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*First Communion*

Léonie, who was by then twelve years old, was preparing for her First Communion. Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law: "Léonie has received absolution. She was afraid she wasn't properly prepared; I was pleased to see her in that frame of mind. I hope that God, in His mercy, will hear my prayers for the child; she is one of my greatest worries."

Later, Léonie was to say of her First Communion: "That day was not the finest of my life; my childhood and my youth were spent in suffering, in the bitterest trials."

In another letter, Zélie was still hopeful: "I am a bit better pleased with Léonie; she does her best to be good. She responds well when she is asked to explain things, and she knows her catechism perfectly. She keeps telling us that she is going to be a Poor Clare; I have as much faith in that as I would if little Thérèse (who is two) said it!. . . She seems determined to overcome her faults."

Léonie's First Communion was on May 23, 1875, the feast of the Holy Trinity, in the Church of Notre Dame in Alençon. Afterward, Léonie was to spend a few days with the Guérins, in Lisieux. At first, she did not want to go, but her mother was firm; and eventually Léonie changed her mind, decided the visit would be a great treat, and filled the house with her impatience for the departure, until "one heard about nothing but Lisieux from morning till night." Again, Léonie lacked moderation: she rebelled, then just as suddenly was carried away with enthusiasm.

*A little hope*

Little by little, however, the headstrong girl allowed herself to be tamed, to the point that Zélie could write to her sister-in-law:

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I am fairly pleased with Léonie; if we could only subdue her obstinacy and soften her character, she would be a good girl—faithful and unafraid of the suffering she must endure.

She has a will of iron; when she wants something, she will fight her way past any obstacle to reach her goal. But she is not very devout; she will not pray to the Lord unless she has no choice. This afternoon, I made her come to my side to read some prayers; but she soon had enough of that and said: "Mama, tell me about the life of Jesus Christ." At first I didn't want to talk. It tires me out; I always have a sore throat. In the end I made an effort and told her about our Lord's life. When I came to the Passion, she was in tears. I was pleased to see her so moved.

Marie, now nearly sixteen, had completed her studies and was to stay at home, teaching her little sisters; so Pauline returned to Le Mans for the new academic year alone. Zélie, the proud and practical mother, wrote to her beloved Pauline: "Yesterday morning was spent buying a whole new outfit for Marie—a lovely dress and coat that she liked very much. Now I must start thinking about Léonie. I was thinking of giving her your dress, but then Marie would be too elegant beside her; they ought to fit in with one another."

"*Léonie does exactly as she pleases"*

Léonie was preparing for her second Solemn Communion. It was a treat for her to be dressed in white again: "So far, the material side has made more of an impression on her than the spiritual side; she has heard so much about the other life that she often talks about it, but this only touches her on the surface."

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And the anxious mother ends her letter with: "We must hope that God will have mercy on the child. I have plenty of consolations elsewhere: I am very pleased with Marie; she has ideas that please me—quite the opposite of Léonie."

A few weeks later, Mme. Martin wrote to Pauline, once again, about the pain that poor Léonie caused her: "I don't know what to do with her. She does exactly as she pleases. She just noticed that I was writing and said: `Mama, don't say anything about me to my aunt. I'll be good.` I didn't answer her, but she insisted; she wouldn't let me write. To have some peace, I said, `No, I won't tell your aunt anything about you.` It wasn't a lie—I was writing to you, not to her aunt. Well, this is what our everyday life is like, and it is certainly not easy."

The incorrigible little rebel must have suffered from her own dreadful behavior; she knew perfectly well that everyone was waiting and hoping for her stubbornness to melt. Sometimes she asked her mother anxiously, "Do you love me, Mama? I won't disobey you anymore." She built up good resolutions in her changeable heart; but they did not last. Her parents worried about her future, wondering, "What will become of her when we are not here?"

Zélie's sister asked her to bring Léonie to Le Mans during the New Year's holidays. "I will do it to make her happy," answered Zélie, "but what good will it do? None, unless my sister has the power to work miracles."

Zélie's concern for the future grew: she suffered, more and more intensely, from cancer of the breast. Her doctor did not conceal the seriousness of her illness from her, and poor Zélie realized that she had not long to live. In December 1876, she wrote to her sister-in-law: "Marie is grown up now; I am sure that when I am no longer

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here, she will run the household very well. Pauline, too, is charming; Céline shows great promise; and Thérèse is a real little angel. As for Léonie, only God can change her—and I am confident that He will. It's lucky for them that they will have you when I am gone. Your good advice will be a great help to them."

*A prayer for a vocation*

In January 1877, Sister Marie-Dosithée was very ill, and Zélie went to see her at the Visitation convent. It was to be their last meeting; a month later, Sister Marie-Dosithée was dead.

When she returned to Alençon, Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law about, among other things, her constant anxiety about Léonie: "Here are the messages to Heaven that I gave my sister. I told her, `As soon as you are in Paradise, go and find the Blessed Virgin and say to her: "My dear Mother, you played quite a trick on my sister when you sent her poor Léonie; that's not the kind of child she asked you for! You must sort that out!"`"

Ten days later, Mme. Martin sent another letter to Lisieux.

Léonie began a letter to you but got nowhere with it; but she must write to you soon. Marie gives her and Céline lessons and is pleased with her. Yesterday, Léonie said to Marie: "I want to write to my aunt in Le Mans before she dies; I want to give her a message for Heaven. I want her to ask God to send me a religious vocation." Marie pretended to make fun of her, to see what she would say; but she insisted, saying: "I don't care if everyone makes fun of me; I want to say that to her before she dies."

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Now, today, she has written, all on her own, without anyone putting the idea into her head. And here is what her letter says: "My dear aunt, I keep the picture you gave me as preciously as a holy relic. I look at it every day, as you told me to, to make me become obedient. Marie has framed it for me. My dear aunt, when you are in Heaven, please ask God to give me the grace of conversion and also to give me a vocation to be a true religious, because I think about it every day. Please, please, don't forget my little message, because I am sure God will listen to you. Goodbye, my dear aunt, I send you all my love. Your affectionate niece, Léonie."

"*I want to be a saint"*

Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law:

What do you think of that? I must say I am amazed. Where in the world does she get these ideas? I certainly don't put them into her head. In fact, I am certain that unless a miracle is worked, my Léonie will never enter a religious community. It is her future that worries me most. I keep asking myself: "What will become of her, if she loses me?" I don't even dare to think about it. But her little letter really did give me fresh courage, and I find myself hoping that perhaps God has merciful plans for the child. If I could make her become a saint by sacrificing my life, I would do it gladly.

During the same period, Zélie—who was in more and more pain from her cancer—wrote to Pauline, in boarding school in Le Mans, about Léonie's mysterious request: "I hope your aunt will write a little note to Léonie. That is quite a story ..." And Zélie retold the story that she had written to her sister-in-law.

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On Thursday, Léonie wrote her little note—which I think is quite good, for her. That evening, I said to Marie, "I was very surprised that she wrote `a true religious`." Marie was also surprised; she said, "I wanted her to rub out `true`; I told her that it didn't mean anything, but she insisted. She said `Please, let me put it in. I want it to be like that.`" The next day, Marie asked her, "What does a `true` religious mean?" Léonie replied: "It means I want to be a very good religious and then a saint."

I don't know what to think of all that; the poor child is absolutely full of faults. I don't even know where to begin! But God is so merciful that I have always had hope, and still do.

Yesterday, she had a dreadful day. She did everything as badly as she could. I was not pleased, and I scolded her bitterly; I told her that it was very presumptuous of her to ask to be a religious, in these circumstances. Then she cried and cried—tears of real repentance. Goodbye, Pauline. I really would like a little note for Léonie. The poor child came to instruction for the retreat every morning, at six o'clock—she was so afraid of not doing well. I didn't want to wake her so early; but she woke up by herself.

*The rebellious adolescent*

Mme. Martin was still worried about her bewildering daughter; she wrote to Pauline, who had become her confidante, about her troubles. She could only repeat, with great pain, that Léonie always did whatever her poor mother did not want her to do. "The older she grows, the more this hurts me."

On February 24, 1877, Léonie's Aunt Élise died. Mme. Martin hoped that the messages with which she and Léonie

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had entrusted Élise would bring about the grace they asked for; that when she reached Heaven, Léonie's aunt would obtain her miracle for her. With this hope in mind, Mme. Martin wrote to Pauline: "Léonie is still a heavy cross to bear. Would that your aunt could obtain a change in the poor child!"

It is true that Mme. Martin, overburdened with work in her lace-making business and more and more weakened by her illness, could not pay constant attention to her turbulent child. As for M. Martin, he was heavily involved in the commercial side of the lace-making business, which required him to go to Paris often; he took very little part in Léonie's upbringing. Sadly, all working parents suffer—as does their children's upbringing—from their lack of availability in the home. Léonie was often left with the maid, Louise Marais, who had gone into service with the Martins in 1865, when she was sixteen. The child thus escaped from her mother's supervision, and the divide between mother and daughter grew wider and wider; Léonie, unlike her sisters, had an exuberant nature that gave her a tendency to rebel.

*The slave is freed*

A miracle was indeed worked, and the delighted Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law:

I think my sister has obtained a great grace for me. You know that I had no influence over Léonie—that she eluded me. I had tried everything, but nothing worked. Unknown to me, she was fascinated by the maid, who made her very unhappy. It was Marie who discovered this and told me about it.

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I suffered a great deal from the child's inexplicable behavior; I felt that my life was worthless, as I could be of no use to her. But since Saturday everything has changed, and in such an unexpected way that I can't get over it. I haven't time to give you all the details, but I must just tell you that she refuses to leave my side. I am giving her all my attention, and so is Marie. The maid has lost her power for good. I can do as I please with Léonie: before, I couldn't convince her to dress herself and come out; yesterday and today, she got all dressed up to come out with me, and she wants to follow me everywhere.

Mme. Martin must have suffered terribly from Léonie's strange behavior, to be ready to abandon her life, in spite of her husband's love and the joy that the other four girls' kindness and intelligence brought her. She could not understand why her child was a failure, in a home full of successes. She could not understand why an insurmountable barrier prevented her from enjoying the bright joy of a united family. How could she have guessed that her servant gloried in subduing the child whom she believed nobody else could tame?

When there was nobody to see her, Louise beat and threatened Léonie, taking advantage of the child's weakness to satisfy her need for power. The tyrannical servant had secretly decided to force Léonie to obey her and no one but her; Léonie was left helpless and terrified at the thought of the punishments that would be inflicted on her if she behaved well for her parents.

It was only in March 1877 that Mme. Martin found out what was happening. It was a great relief to all the Martin family to discover that there was a hidden reason for Léonie's behavior—that their poor child was being tyrannized by someone who should have kept to household matters.

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*The explanation*

Mme. Martin could not wait to share her wonderful news with Pauline; in spite of her heavy workload, she wrote to her that very day:

I believe that your aunt's prayers have earned a miracle for me. I begged her to plead my poor Léonie's cause as soon as she reached Heaven; and I think we are seeing the results of her prayers.

You know what your sister was like: insubordinate; never obeying unless she was forced to; doing the opposite of everything I wanted her to do, out of sheer contrariness, even when she herself wanted to do it; obeying nobody but the maid. I had tried everything I could think of to draw her closer to me; until today, I always failed, and this failure was the greatest sorrow of my life.

Ever since your aunt died, I have been asking her to give me back my poor child's love; and today, Sunday morning, my prayers were answered. Now she belongs to me completely—won't leave my side, smothers me with kisses, does everything I tell her without answering back, works beside me all day long. The maid has lost all her influence on her; and since things have turned out this way, she will certainly never regain her power.

It was a great shock to Louise; she cried when Mme. Martin told her that she was to leave the house immediately, that she never wanted to see her again. The maid pleaded with Mme. Martin until finally she was allowed to stay on for a time, but she was forbidden to speak to Léonie.

Mme. Martin shared her renewed hope and joy with Pauline:

Now I treat the child with the utmost gentleness. I hope that, little by little, I will manage to overcome her faults.

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She came out walking with me yesterday; we went to see the Poor Clares. She whispered in my ear: "Mama, ask the cloistered sisters to pray that I will become a nun." So everything is going well; let's hope this continues. Now, more than ever, I want to remain with you; Léonie needs me even more than the little ones do. Well, I am sure that if I am needed as badly as I believe, the Blessed Virgin will cure me. I shall certainly go to Lourdes this year. We will all go—Marie, you, and Léonie.

*The end of the nightmare*

Mme. Martin, still outraged by her discovery of Louise's cruelty to Léonie, wrote to Pauline again:

I would be glad to get rid of the maid, now that I have discovered how she made poor Léonie suffer. I will never be able to forget it. I would never have believed that anyone could do, in cold blood, the things she did to that poor creature—who now tells me that she didn't even dare to complain, for fear things would get worse.

Would you believe it, the maid actually claims that she thought she was doing me a great favor; she thinks she was very clever to have managed to overpower your sister, whom, in her opinion, nobody else could control. But brutality has never won anyone over; it can only enslave people, and that is what happened to my poor child.

I couldn't understand why she never wanted a minute's playtime. After each meal, she would clear the table, tidy the room—in short, she would do the servant's work. I wore myself out telling her, "Go play out in the garden; you shouldn't be in here while everyone else is having fun." She would answer sullenly, "I want to stay here." Now I know that that woman was telling her, "If your mother tells you to go play, then go on; but you know

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how you'll be punished afterward." The thought of it outrages me more than I can say.

Now, Léonie plays as happily as a four-year-old; she makes a bit too much noise and isn't as calm as she should be—I am forced to restrain her—but she does try very hard. Let's hope that little by little, with God's help, her transformation will become complete. This hope has given me a stronger will to live than I have ever had before. ... But I have faith in God. Now I pray that He will let me live. I don't ask Him to take away my illness—I am willing to suffer and to die; I only ask Him to spare me for as long as Léonie needs me.

*A ray of hope*

The wild child had been tamed: she was affectionate to her mother and performed her little tasks willingly. Poor Zélie, who had been on the verge of despair, had finally won the love and trust of the solitary daughter who, until then, had barricaded herself behind silence or contrariness.

All of Mme. Martin's letters to Pauline and to Mme. Guérin bear witness to a maternal tenderness that was now repaid by all her children, without exception. She shared her joy with her sister-in-law: "I see a shining ray of hope for Léonie that tells me that some day her transformation will be complete. She has unlimited confidence in me; she tells me even her tiniest misdeeds. She really wants to change her life, and she tries so hard—I can appreciate this as nobody else can. I can't get it out of my mind that this transformation is due to my blessed sister's prayers, for everything changed just a few weeks after her death."

Zélie's sister, the Visitandine, must have pleaded Léonie's cause with the founder of her order, Saint Francis de Sales, who said: "God leads the strong by the hand;

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but the weak he carries in His arms." God took Léonie, frail as she was in body and in soul, in His arms. When we understand Léonie's situation—the circumstances that made her "poor Léonie"—it is easier to understand her dogged obstinacy.

Time passed, and Léonie worked hard to mend her ways; her task was a hard one, and her parents and sisters needed all their gentleness, patience, and perseverance to help her to soften her strange personality.

*A pilgrimage to Lourdes*

Mme. Martin, who was in increasing pain from her cancer, decided to go on a pilgrimage to Lourdes with her three eldest daughters. She confided to her brother: "If the Blessed Virgin doesn't cure me, I shall implore her to cure my child, to develop her mind, and to make her a saint."

Zélie was not cured, but she returned from Lourdes at peace, confident that after her death God would take care of her children—the youngest of whom, Thérèse, was only four and a half years old. Perceptively, Zélie said to Pauline: "Nature did not make Léonie as gifted as the rest of you, but in spite of that, she has a heart that needs to love and to be loved. The dear child looks into my eyes, trying to guess what will make me happy—she does almost too much for me. But as soon as anyone else asks something of her, her face darkens and her expression changes instantly. I am slowly succeeding in helping her to get over this, although she still forgets often."

Léonie had become so attached to her mother that now, seeing her so ill, she wanted to die in her place; she prayed for this every day, even saying novenas for it. In her last letter to Pauline, written only a month before her death, the courageous Zélie still had her sense of humor:

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On Thursday morning, Léonie went to Marie and said: "I feel sick; God has answered my prayers, I'm going to die." Marie laughed at her, but Léonie had been serious, so her feelings were hurt and she burst into tears. A quarter of an hour later, her tears had dried, and, in her flighty way, she had other things on her mind: she wanted embroidered slippers. I said to her, "But since you want to die, that would be money wasted." Léonie said nothing, hoping, no doubt, that she would have time to wear out the slippers; perhaps that was one of the conditions of her prayer, and she planned to wear them only on the most important occasions, so they would last a long time!

*Letters*

I have thought it best, up to this point, to let Mme. Martin describe Léonie's difficult childhood and troubled youth in her own words. Her letters are so bright and lively; they capture the atmosphere of the family with good sense and simplicity, and not without a sprinkling of humor. Those letters, where Zélie's maternal tenderness and hopes and worries overflow, are a godsend to us. We are lucky that in the nineteenth century the telephone had not been invented; if it had, this treasury of correspondence would not be available to us. Nowadays, the ease and rapidity of communicating by telephone means that shared confidences disappear as soon as they are spoken; letters, written slowly in the silence of the home, can reveal the secrets of the past to us.

Apart from Mme. Martin's many letters, an inventory of the correspondence addressed to Léonie includes 343 letters from Pauline, 444 from Marie, 307 from Céline, and a dozen from Thérèse; Léonie, therefore, received more than a thousand letters from her sisters before her death in 1941. As for letters from Léonie, the archives contain

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340 letters that Léonie wrote to her Carmelite sisters in Lisieux between her final entry into the Visitation convent at Caen and 1941.

As for M. Martin, he, like so many husbands, left the family correspondence to his wife; he knew and trusted Zélie's direct, lively style. After her death, he was almost never separated from his daughters; he visited the Carmelite convent often.

Zélie's letters to Pauline and to the Guérins are the flashes of light that illuminate the family's little universe for us—from the time when Léonie was a sickly baby to the time of Mme. Martin's death, in August 1877, when Léonie was a plain fourteen-year-old. The family's life would have been a peaceful and calm one had it not been for Léonie—disconcerting, emotionally unstable, slightly backward, with an ill-favored face and a prominent chin that worried her terribly—who contrasted so strikingly with her intellectually gifted and physically pretty sisters.

*Léonie becomes gentler*

In spite of her youth and her learning difficulties, Léonie, who had been so violent, was slowly becoming more gentle; she, who had been so rough, was becoming tender. One of the last lines that Mme. Martin wrote shows her hope for the future: "Léonie will love God very much and will be good to everyone."

Nevertheless, Léonie's mother, even in the midst of her suffering, felt an anxiety that she shared with those around her: "If I were to be sorry to leave life, it would be only for Léonie's sake. Who will take care of her when I am no longer here? A father, no matter how good he is, can never take my place. Who will love her like a mother?" Marie

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answered her mother's agonized question spontaneously and generously: "I will, Mama; I promise you I will."

With the help of her father and her sisters, Marie kept her promise. Without forcing or coercing Léonie—even though a rebellious nature's vows of repentance are often fleeting—she helped her sister to blossom into a joyful, confident, and considerate person.

Léonie's aunt, Sister Marie-Dosithée, was right when she wrote: "During the short time she was with me, Léonie gave me great hope for her future. She is a difficult child to bring up, and one whose childhood will never be pleasant; but I believe that in the end she will be worth just as much as her sisters. When that little one has some sense and sees what her duty is, nothing will stop her. In short, she has a strong and generous nature, altogether to my taste; but what would that mean, without God's grace?"

It was also Sister Marie-Dosithée who had told Zélie: "I cannot help believing that some day Léonie will be a Visitandine."

*Mme. Martin's death*

Mme. Martin's cancer had spread. She had no respite from the terrible pain in her arms, neck, and head; her legs were swollen, and hemorrhages were draining her strength. On August 16, 1877, she scribbled a few lines to the Guérins; they were to be her last. In these few words, Zélie's deep faith is summed up: "What can one do? If the Blessed Virgin doesn't cure me, it means that my time is up and that God wants me to rest somewhere else, not on earth."

On August 28, 1877, in the early hours of the day, she died. In the morning, a tearful M. Martin, surrounded by his daughters, took four-and-a-half-year-old Thérèse in his

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arms and brought her to her mother's deathbed. Later, in *Story of a Soul,* Thérèse would write: "Without a word, I touched my lips to my beloved mother's forehead."

The house on rue Saint-Blaise in Alençon was soon to be abandoned: in order that the Martin children might have constant and loving support, the family left the region of Orne for Lisieux, in the neighboring region of Calvados, so as to be near the Guérins. The close ties between the two families were to be strengthened, and the Martins' little cousins, Jeanne and Marie Guérin, were to become their inseparable companions.

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LISIEUX

*Les Buissonnets*

Les Buissonnets is a lovely villa, surrounded by a garden, in the hills of Lisieux. Here, in the home that Thérèse was to call "the gentle cradle of my childhood," the Martin family gathered around its beloved father. On November 15, 1877, M. Guérin brought his nieces from Alençon to Lisieux; M. Martin stayed behind for a few days to settle all his business.

The next day, Marie wrote to her father:

We are settling in at Les Buissonnets. It is a lovely, cheerful house, with a large garden where Céline and Thérèse can play. ... I think you will be happy here, surrounded by your little family.

Our aunt has invited us to go to their house tomorrow afternoon. She is going to make an apple tart for tea. The little ones are overjoyed that they are going to play with their cousins; Léonie, in particular, is delighted. Have you noticed, Papa, how quickly she has been changing recently? My uncle and aunt have already commented on it. I am sure that it is our darling mother who has won this grace for us, and I believe that one day our Léonie will make us very happy.

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*Boarding at Notre-Dame du Pré*

In January 1878, Léonie entered Notre-Dame du Pré in Lisieux—a school run by Benedictine sisters—as a boarder. Céline went to the same school, but as a half-boarder; she returned to Les Buissonnets every evening, while Léonie only came home on her days off. The two eldest girls, Marie and Pauline, stayed at home to keep house and look after the little ones.

Later, when Pauline had become Mother Agnès of Jesus in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, she asked Thérèse to write about her childhood memories. In these memoirs, Thérèse often speaks of her sisters. Pauline, Thérèse's "second Mama," had the most influence on her and appears most often in her memoirs. Thérèse also writes about Marie, her godmother, who took such constant and tender care of her youngest sister; and about Céline, her playmate and confidante. But the young Carmelite hardly mentions Léonie, except to say that she left Notre-Dame du Pré just as Thérèse entered it, on October 1, 1881.

At Les Buissonnets, Céline and Thérèse shared a room; they could chat with each other, as could Marie and Pauline, who shared another room. Léonie was alone in her little room. This often happens in families: the children pair off to share their secrets, and if there is an uneven number of children, one will be left out—and we have already seen that Léonie had a tendency to isolate herself.

So the little recluse retreated into her room—so much so that her sisters teased her because, with nobody to keep her company, she often fell asleep during the day. One afternoon, her mischievous sisters secretly hung a notice in her room: "Those who don't come out to play, doze off in the light of day!" It was true: Léonie, wild and uncommunicative, withdrew into her ivory tower.

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Later, Léonie was to write, a little sadly, that she had known "loneliness of heart." When their mother died, the two youngest girls had adopted the two eldest as their "little mothers": Céline chose Marie, and Thérèse adopted Pauline. Only Léonie had no one.

Léonie, however, was never jealous of her sisters; she loved all of them equally and tenderly. On January 1, 1882, Léonie, sending Pauline New Year's Day greetings, wrote on the back of a holy card (now, more than a century later, yellow with age): "May God, through the intercession of this great saint, shower my dear Pauline with graces and blessings. Your little sister, who loves you dearly, sends you these wishes from the bottom of her heart."

The "great saint" on the other side of the card is none other than Francis de Sales—the saint of gentleness, whom Léonie, at eighteen, already seemed to want to follow.

*M. Martin and his daughters*

M. Martin treated all four of his daughters (Pauline entered the Carmelite convent in October 1882) equally, trying to take their mother's place. In the spring of 1883, he went to Paris for the Holy Week ceremonies, accompanied by Marie and Léonie, who was then almost twenty; the two youngest girls were left in the care of the Guérins.

During that week, however, Thérèse fell ill with a strange sickness, and the three travelers hurried home. The family gathered in distress around Thérèse's bedside. She would later write in her autobiography: "Léonie was also very kind to me, doing her best to keep me amused. I sometimes hurt her feelings; she could tell that, for me, nobody could replace Marie."

On Pentecost Sunday 1883, Thérèse's family watched unhappily as she struggled with a high fever; she was

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delirious, unable to recognize those around her. Léonie, panic-stricken, knelt beside Marie and Céline, facing the statue of the Virgin Mary that had always presided over the family prayers. Later Thérèse was to say: "Suddenly the Blessed Virgin seemed so beautiful. ... But what touched the deepest core of my soul was her wonderful smile."

Thérèse was cured of her illness. Three months later, in August 1883, M. Martin took his four daughters to Alençon, to visit their mother's grave and to see the friends whom they had left six years earlier. Mme. Tifenne, Léonie's godmother, and Mlle. Pauline Romet, Pauline's godmother, spent two weeks taking the sisters to visit friends in country houses and manors—much to the delight of the four girls, who were unused to such an active social life.

*Family ceremonies*

The following year, in May 1884, Thérèse made her First Communion at Notre-Dame du Pré; Léonie was much moved by her reverence. On the same day, Pauline made her profession in the Carmelite convent. M. Martin and his five daughters gathered in the parlor of the Carmel for one of the family's most wonderful moments: Pauline and the "little queen" Thérèse were both radiant beneath their white veils.

A few weeks later, Léonie had the joy of being Thérèse's sponsor at her confirmation. Thérèse wrote in her memoirs: "She was so moved that, throughout the ceremony, she couldn't hold back the tears."

Léonie was very attached to her former teachers at the Benedictine Abbey; she returned to visit them so often, and spent so long there, that her sisters nicknamed her "the

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abbey-lover." Marie concluded that Léonie wanted to be a Benedictine nun and teased her about it: "The abbey, my dears! If I were only a poet like Pauline, I would write a beautiful ballad about it."

*A first attempt*

At the beginning of October 1886, M. Martin and his four daughters went to Alençon again. Marie had decided to enter the Carmelite convent in Lisieux. Before entering, she wanted to say goodbye to her friends and to visit her mother's grave.

On October 7, 1886, Léonie—now aged twenty-three—took advantage of the trip to Alençon to go to the convent of the Poor Clares where she had once prayed with her mother. She asked to see the abbess and told her that she wanted to become a Poor Clare. The abbess advised her to enter the order at once; she even gave the new postulant a habit.

Léonie's delicate health, however, could not withstand the rigorous Rule of the Poor Clares; within two months, she was forced to leave the convent and return to Les Buissonnets.

Thérèse wrote of Léonie's first attempt at entering religious life:

Léonie's surprising entry into the convent distressed me; I was very fond of her, and I never had the chance to kiss her goodbye before she left. I will never forget the kindness and the bewilderment on my poor father's face when he came to tell us that Léonie was already wearing the habit of the Poor Clares. Like us, he found it very strange; but, seeing how displeased Marie was, he said nothing. He brought us to the convent. ... I felt no temptation to

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stay. ... Poor Léonie, in her new outfit, was very sweet. She told us to look into her eyes, because we would never see them again; Poor Clares keep their eyes lowered. But God was satisfied with two months of sacrifice, and Léonie came back to us, to show us her blue eyes again—although they were often wet with tears.

*Léonie leaves the Poor Clares*

When M. Martin left Alençon, therefore, only three of his daughters went with him; and soon afterward only his two youngest, Céline and Thérèse, were left with him. On October 15, 1886, Marie joined the Carmelite Order.

On December 1, 1886, Léonie left the Poor Clares and rejoined her father and her two little sisters in Lisieux. Their uncle, M. Guérin, had been right when he told Léonie's family, "Don't worry about it, she won't stay for long!"

Pauline, however, did not give up hope. At the beginning of May 1887, she wrote to her father, "Léonie, too, is a pearl—there is so much goodness and humility in her heart. It is impossible that God will not find a place, in the garden of religious life, for that humble violet."

Léonie's departure from the Poor Clares, however, left her so depressed that her health suffered badly.

On the feast of Pentecost, May 29, 1887, in the garden of Les Buissonnets, Thérèse—who was only fourteen—asked her father's permission to enter the Carmelite convent the following Christmas. M. Martin, shattered by the prospect of another painful parting, accepted it and offered it up to the Lord. The question was then referred to the Mother Superior of the convent and to M. Guérin, who was Thérèse's guardian.

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The following month, at the end of June, M. Martin and his three younger daughters went to Le Havre, where the International Maritime Exhibition was being held. It was to be Thérèse's only visit to Le Havre; Léonie would return, with Céline and their father.

M. Martin and his daughters wandered, fascinated, through a motley crowd from every corner of the world. Léonie and her sisters were delighted with the wonders that unfolded before their eyes: the exhibition pavilions, the boats anchored at the quay, the swimming events, the tournaments, the regattas, the Venetian balls, the sparkling fountains in the Great Dock—not to mention the concerts, the pigeon-flying, and the fireworks.

They took a boat from Le Havre across the Seine estuary, to Honfleur, where they visited Notre-Dame de Grace—an old chapel overlooking the coast. The four knelt before the image of the Virgin Mary, which was surrounded by offerings. Thérèse confided to Mary her desire to enter the Carmelite convent when she was fifteen; Léonie prayed for her own religious vocation, which never left her thoughts.

*A second attempt*

Only a few days later, on July 16, 1887, M. Martin said goodbye to Léonie once again; this time she left, not to join the Poor Clares, where her health could never have withstood the rigors of the Rule, but to enter the Visitation convent in Caen.

Thérèse wrote to her cousin, Marie Guérin, who was on holiday in Trouville: "This week has not been a happy one at Les Buissonnets: it is the last one our dear Léonie will spend with us. But my sorrow is mixed with joy: I am glad

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to see Léonie finally in her element. I think that there, and only there, she will be happy; in the Visitation convent, she will find all that she lacks in the world."

It is true that the founder of the Visitation Order, Saint Francis de Sales, aided by Saint Jeanne de Chantal, created the Order to make the contemplative life accessible to those who are not drawn to austerity or whose health could not withstand it. He wrote: "Let us be down-to-earth, since the high sea would make us dizzy and sick. Let us keep to the feet of our Savior. Let us practice the small virtues that are fitting for our smallness: patience, kindness to our neighbors, service, humility, gentleness, friendliness, acceptance of our imperfections. I am not saying that it is not through prayer that we grow; but it must happen slowly, step by step."

The Salesian spirit was already widespread in Léonie's family. Her Aunt Élise, who had been a Visitandine in Le Mans, had imbued her sister Zélie with the humble and prayerful spirit of the Visitation. Zélie had written to Pauline on December 5, 1875: "At the moment I am reading the Life of Saint Chantal. ... I am overcome with admiration. It is especially interesting for me because I have always loved the Visitation spirit; now I love it more than ever. How lucky are those who are called to that life!"

Also, the three eldest Martin girls had been boarders at the Visitation convent in Le Mans; and Marie, even after she had completed her studies, returned to the convent for spiritual retreats. The Salesian gentleness had left its mark on M. Martin as well; Thérèse wrote in her autobiography: "I noticed how much closer Papa had come to perfection; following the example of Saint Francis de Sales, he succeeded in mastering his natural vivacity, to

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the point that he appeared to have the meekest nature in the world."

*The first happy weeks*

On July 20, 1887, four days after she entered the Visitation convent, Léonie wrote to Thérèse. Thinking to please her little sister, she told her where her cell was in the convent—overlooking the tall spires of the Abbaye-aux-Hommes, Saint Stephen's Church, a marvelous eleventh-century edifice built with money donated by William the Conqueror. Léonie mentions a letter she had received from Thérèse, but this has not been found; she also mentions Thérèse's desire to enter the Carmelite convent when she turned fifteen.

This letter to Thérèse shows us all Léonie's tenderness, her simplicity, and her faith in God:

I am happy, my dear, in my new family; I am surrounded by affection ... how good it seems to me! God has been very kind to me; it was He who led me here, by the hand, and I believe that this is where He wants me to be. Pray for me, my dear little sister; pray that I may not be mistaken. I think of you often, and I have not forgotten the grace you want so much. Be at peace, my dear, nothing is impossible to God.

Our cell looks out on a courtyard; I can see the beautiful Calvary scene that was put up on Passion Sunday. When I see it, when I think of God and how much He suffered for us, it gives me courage to endure the bitterest suffering. I can also see the twin spires of Saint Stephen's, and I feel that God is very close to me, as He is really present in our churches.

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So you see, I am very happy. Envy my happiness—there is nothing wrong with that, for it is the only thing in this world worth envying; all the rest is nothing.

My dear little sister, give my best wishes to all my loved ones, especially my dear father whom I love so much.

Your sister, who loves you more than ever,

Léonie

*The postulant's hopes*

At the beginning of November 1887, M. Martin, Céline, and Thérèse were to set off on a pilgrimage to Rome. Léonie—who had recently had a visit from her father and Thérèse—wrote to them a fortnight before their departure:

It has already been a year since Marie entered the convent. You were there when she left, but I was not; I had joined the Poor Clares only eight days before. When I think of that, I thank God; He made me leave in order to lead me to my dear Visitation convent, where I am so happy—in spite of the thorns that sometimes tear my heart. ... But these are roses, which I am sometimes cowardly enough to trample underfoot. There is so much to do, if I am ever to become a saint. But little by little, through the grace of God, I am coming closer.

Since I saw you, I have been trying very hard; but I could do more for God, I know I could. How I wish that I could throw myself courageously into every sacrifice! You know, dear little sister, it does me good to talk to you; I know that even though you are so young, you understand me. I want to share with you one of my soul's deepest wishes: the desire for intimate union with Jesus. We can find happiness only in Him—not in created things, which can only bring us suffering and sorrows.

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Because our hearts are made for God alone, only He can truly fill them; it is madness to set too much store in mortal things. I know this from my own experience—until now, I didn't know how to control my poor heart. But God—may He be blessed for it—seduced your pure heart, my dear little sister, before it could know the anguish that comes from foolish attachments; it will come to Jesus in all its freshness. I am so happy for you!

I have prayed for you all day, especially at Holy Communion this morning. That is all I have to offer you; you know I have nothing now but my poor prayers. Tomorrow is the feast of Blessed Margaret Mary, who, as you know, cured me miraculously. She is no stranger to the happiness I have found here in the Visitation Order. Pray to her for me; pray that she will, if it is necessary, intercede for a second miracle, to make me a holy Visitandine.

At the end of October 1887, Thérèse answered Léonie's letter, describing the preparations for the trip to Rome and telling Léonie: "You asked me in your letter to pray to Blessed Margaret Mary to intercede for you so that you may become a holy Visitandine; I never miss a day."

*A second setback*

Had the restless Léonie finally found a home in her "dear Visitation Order"? In a letter to her father, written in November 1887, Pauline was uncertain and worried: "Léonie is doing better, but we must keep praying for her; it takes so little to make her stumble."

"Poor Léonie," as Mme. Martin would have said. Her second attempt at religious life lasted only six months; on January 6, 1888, Léonie returned to Les Buissonnets. M. Martin welcomed his daughter home with renewed

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tenderness; he understood her disappointment, and he, like Léonie, trusted in God. Thérèse was to write of her father: "When Léonie left the Visitandines, he did not complain; he never reproached God for not having answered his prayers to send his daughter a vocation. Indeed, it was with a kind of joy that he went to meet her."

Léonie spent her time in Lisieux visiting the sick, the poor, and the dying, doing housework, and visiting Marie and Pauline at the Carmelite convent. On Marie's twenty-eighth birthday, Léonie wrote to her:

My dear sister, you cannot imagine how deep my love for you is and how much joy I wish you here on earth. You are beloved of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose dear spouse you are soon to become.

Your poor little sister who loves you with all her heart,

Léonie

It is clear that Léonie felt no jealousy toward her sisters, at ease in their religious life. Her vision of her own smallness and humbleness—a vision that would lead her to put herself once again completely into the hands of the Lord—was growing clearer and clearer. As an ultimate expression of humility, Léonie asked Thérèse, ten years her junior, to give her French lessons!

*Thérèse joins the Carmelites*

On April 9, 1888, Thérèse was to enter the Carmelite convent, leaving her beloved father, her dear sisters Léonie and Céline, and Les Buissonnets forever. On the evening before her departure, the Martins sat down to Thérèse's last family meal; later, Thérèse wrote in her autobiography: "Then, when I would most have liked

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to be forgotten, caresses and tender words were lavished on me, bringing home to me the sacrifice of separation. My dear Léonie, who had returned from the Visitation convent a few months before, showered me with kisses and caresses."

The next day, in the Carmelite chapel, Léonie and her family attended a Mass that was, for them, a particularly moving one. Then, at the convent door, they said their goodbyes. Thérèse embraced all her family and then, on her knees, asked her father's blessing; he knelt beside her, in tears, to give it to her.

What confused thoughts must have mingled in Léonie's mind! She had failed in her second attempt to enter religious life. Now she saw her youngest sister giving up the happy, comfortable life, filled with love and affection, that she had known at Les Buissonnets—while Léonie, as if waking from a dream too beautiful to be true, left the convent to return to the peace and safety of family life. Léonie must have been troubled to the very depths of her heart by the weakness that, even after she had proclaimed her joy at becoming a candidate for sainthood, made her unable to bear the sacrifices that this path demanded.

*M. Martin's illness*

M. Martin had already suffered a few temporary attacks of amnesia; on June 23, 1888, he had a more serious attack. Under its influence, he disappeared from Lisieux, without saying a word to anyone. Léonie and Céline were distraught, as were Marie, Pauline, and Thérèse when they heard the news.

It was not until four days later that the girls received word from their poor father, in the shape of a note, sent from Le Havre, asking for money. Céline, with M. Guérin

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and his nephew by marriage, left for Le Havre immediately; they found M. Martin near the General Post Office and brought him back to Lisieux that afternoon.

Earlier that same day, a fire broke out in a cottage beside Les Buissonnets; the roof of the Martins' home caught fire, but the firemen managed to save the house. Léonie, who was alone with the maid, waiting for Céline, was more frightened than hurt; panic-stricken, she left the house, returning only when the danger was past.

M. Martin's health improved, and he and Céline and Léonie spent two weeks in Paris, in a little flat they had rented in Auteuil. Léonie wandered about the capital, amazed at the heavy traffic and the dense, busy crowds.

Religious life attracted Léonie more than ever, and she felt herself drawn to the Visitation Order—the Order of the Little Sisters of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as it was called when it was founded, in Annecy, on June 6, 1610, by Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, and his assistant Jeanne de Chantal. In October 1888, Céline wrote to Thérèse: "Léonie thinks of nothing but the Visitation; my little affairs don't interest her."

A few days later, however, Léonie was involved in Céline's affairs: the two girls and M. Martin went to Le Havre so that Céline could say goodbye to her spiritual director, Father Pichon, who was leaving for Canada as a missionary. During the journey, M. Martin had another attack; the Jesuit missionary witnessed the mental breakdown of the much-loved man whom he called "the Patriarch."

*Thérèse takes the habit*

On January 10, 1889, Thérèse took the habit, in a moving ceremony in the Carmelite chapel. The postulant came

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out of the enclosure in a wonderful white bridal gown, as was customary at the time, to attend Mass in the company of her family for the last time.

Léonie must have suffered deeply once more as she watched her little sister go to meet the beloved Spouse to whom she, too, longed to offer herself. As we know, Léonie's nature was not a jealous one—she was happy for her Thérèse; but it goes without saying that there, on that solemn occasion, she must have felt, more than ever, the weight of her own shortcomings.

It was a great day for M. Martin, who seemed to have recovered from his illness. He waited for Thérèse at the door of the enclosure; when he saw her, he went to her, with tears in his eyes, crying, "Ah, here she is—my little queen!" He offered her his arm, and, as the others watched, deeply moved, they entered the chapel together. That day, Thérèse, for the first time, signed her new name: "Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face."

*The asylum*

The day Thérèse took the habit was M. Martin's last celebration. A month later, one of the Martin family's greatest trials began: in a fresh attack of his illness, M. Martin lost his reason. On February 12, 1889, he had to be committed to the Bon-Sauveur asylum in Caen—the "madhouse," as it was crudely called in the neighborhood. This was a great grief to his daughters, who loved their wonderful father very deeply; his sharp intelligence and faithful memory had brought them great joy.

On February 19, Léonie and Céline, heartbroken, left Les Buissonnets to live with the Saint Vincent de Paul sisters in Caen, so that they could visit their father daily.

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After the first visit, Céline wrote to her sisters: "Léonie and I said nothing; we were overwhelmed, shattered."

Céline's twentieth birthday, April 28, was marked by a letter from her beloved Carmelite sisters and another from the Guérins; all the writers thought of her grief and tried to offer her some comfort through their letters. Céline was touched that they had all remembered her birthday. Léonie, too, had remembered; she gave her sister a little brooch and a beautiful rosebush, and the gift-giving brought the two sisters a few moments of gaiety. Among the pale blossoms of the rosebush were five buds; to the imaginative Céline, they symbolized the five sisters, growing among thorns.

The loving letters from the convent were usually addressed to Céline, with a little note for Léonie at the end. These little notes were often teasing and sometimes tactless—a letter from Pauline ends, "Goodbye, my darling. Give that big sheep bleating beside you a kiss from me." The "big sheep" was Léonie!

The three Carmelites, in great pain over their father, constantly asked for news of him; Marie finished a long letter with the words, "Goodbye, little sisters. Don't be stingy with your letters; they are our only hope." A few days later, she was reminding Céline again: "Don't stint on your letters—we are still anxious to hear from you!"

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Goodbye to Les Buissonnets

*Léonie and Céline return to Lisieux*

When Léonie and Céline had been in Caen for three months, the administration of the Bon-Sauveur asylum reduced visits to one a week; so Léonie and Céline, on their uncle's advice, returned to Lisieux. So as not to be on their own in Les Buissonnets, they went to live with the Guérins.

The Guérins had sold their pharmacy and their flat in Place Saint-Pierre. On April 20, 1889, they bought a house with a garden at 19 rue de la Chaussée—now rue Paul-Banaston—in Lisieux. The lease of Les Buissonnets was to expire at the end of 1889; the furniture would go into storage at the Guérins' house and at the convent.

In July 1889, Léonie and Céline went to spend a fortnight on the beautiful estate in La Musse, near Evreux, which the Guérins had inherited from Mme. Guérin's family. It was a Norman estate, including forty hectares of land; a river runs through it, and it has a real castle surrounded by fields and woods.

Thérèse made her profession on September 8, 1890. Léonie, Céline, and the Guérin family were there; but sadly, Thérèse's "dear king," as she called her father, was not. Léonie and Céline had, however, visited him a few

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days earlier and had asked him to bless Thérèse's profession wreath and her crucifix.

Léonie and Céline's life in Lisieux was peaceful. They had the welcome company of their cousin, Marie Guérin, who was seven years younger than Léonie and sixteen months younger than Céline; their older cousin, Jeanne, married Doctor Francis La Néele on October 1, 1890.

*Life with the Guérins*

Léonie and Céline did a great deal of traveling during that period—especially by the standards of the late nineteenth century. They went, with the Guérins, to the 1889 International Exhibition in Paris, for the official opening of the Eiffel Tower; and, soon afterward, Léonie and Céline went to Lourdes. Léonie's frail health was worrying her family; the terrible eczema that had affected her since childhood had returned. Her family prayed that she would be cured; and finally the two Martin girls, with their uncle and aunt, went to Lourdes, visiting Tours and northern Spain on the way. Céline also agreed to accompany Léonie to Paray-le-Monial on October 17, 1890, to celebrate the bicentenary of Blessed Margaret Mary's death—a very special occasion for Léonie.

Léonie and Céline also took the train to Caen every week to visit their father. Léonie took advantage of these visits to pray at the nearby Visitation chapel and to see her former mistress of novices, Sister Marie de Sales, who had—at the young age of thirty—been appointed Mother Superior of the community. We can only imagine the mixture of joy and wistfulness that Léonie, thinking of her two unsuccessful attempts at religious life, must have felt during these visits.

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When the sisters stayed in La Musse, the unsociable Léonie did not enjoy the receptions that her uncle organized; but she did enjoy dressing up! Her accent, however, was less fashionable than her clothes: she rolled her "r"s in the most provincial way! She was so quiet, at these gatherings, that she was considered very shy and reserved. As the more sociable Céline said: "Everyone finds pleasure where they can; I find it in La Musse, and Léonie finds it at the convent!"

*M. Martin's return to Lisieux*

M. Martin was now nearly sixty-nine, and both his legs had become paralyzed. There was, therefore, no longer any danger that he would wander away; and so, on May 10, 1892, M. Guérin brought him from Caen back to Lisieux. He had been in the asylum for three years.

Two days after his return to Lisieux, he was brought to the Carmelite visiting room. It was to be his last meeting with his three Carmelite daughters. As he left them, he raised his eyes to the sky, pointed upward, and said tearfully, "Until we meet in Heaven."

Céline, Léonie, and M. Martin lived with the Guérins until July 1, when they moved into a little rented house nearby, at 7 rue Labbey. Two servants, husband and wife, helped the Martins; the husband, Desiré, took particular care of M. Martin. Léonie's beloved father was severely disabled; he spoke very little and sometimes gave way to terrible outbursts of tears. His daughters pushed his wheelchair around the little garden and made every effort to make him happy.

In the spring of 1893, Léonie, with Céline and their cousin Marie, went to spend a few days in Caen with

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Jeanne La Néele, whose husband, Francis, had set up his surgery there. Jeanne had invited her sister and cousins so that they could go to the Caen Fair; M. Martin, in Lisieux, was in good hands.

The following month, Léonie returned to Caen, this time for a week-long retreat at the Visitation convent. Céline was annoyed that Léonie had chosen this retreat instead of a trip to La Musse with the rest of the family; she wrote Léonie an angry letter, which reduced her to tears.

The impetuous Céline left for La Musse without Léonie. M. Martin went as well, in order to enjoy the fresh air of the large estate, where he had once loved to walk, alone or with his family, in the peace of the park and the woods.

*A third attempt*

When her retreat was over, at the end of June 1893, Léonie—who had just turned thirty—asked the Mother Superior if she could remain at the convent to fulfill her vocation. M. Guérin, as her guardian, gave his consent. Céline was surprised at this; on July 3, she wrote to the three Carmelites: "Uncle allows Léonie to remain in the Visitation convent and congratulates her on her progress. He even went so far as to tell her not to worry about the gap that her absence will leave in Papa's life: he and my aunt hope that, with the help of God, they will be able to make poor Papa's life comfortable and replace Léonie as much as possible. I was very surprised at this, since I knew how opposed my uncle used to be to the idea; but all the obstacles in Léonie's path were removed at the same time, so I am sure that God has put His hand to the tiller of her little boat."

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The letter continues:

Oh, my dear sisters, if you only knew how my heart broke when I read my uncle's letter! It was the fiat, the final seal on the sacrifice. I cried; and for a long time, my heart was heavy. I couldn't stop thinking of Léonie, my companion in misfortune, who was abandoning me. Now I have nobody left in the world; there is only emptiness, all around me. The thought of myself as the last broken fragment of our family filled me with a dizzying grief. Life seems so sad, so terribly sad. Everything that my poor Léonie and I have shared comes back to me, in all its detail, to sharpen my pain. I feel a great bitterness in my soul.

To help Céline in her discouragement and confusion, Thérèse wrote to her each week during this period; the words of this sister, the "echo of her soul," strengthened Céline.

*A letter*

Thérèse did not forget Léonie. In a letter written on August 13, 1893, she wrote:

My dear Léonie, are you afraid that your little Thérèse has forgotten you? But no, you know me too well for that. If you only knew, dear sister, how many prayers of thanksgiving I am sending Heavenward for the favor God has granted you! Your prayers have been answered; Jesus tested your patience, but in the end He was moved by the pleas of His dove. He held out His divine hand to draw His bride into His heart, into the very tabernacle of His love.

Our aunt's prophecy has come true. The child whom Blessed Margaret Mary saved has gone to the Visitation

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Order, and she will be the spouse of Our Lord forever. My joy is certainly all spiritual; for I know that from now on I shall never see my dear Léonie again on earth, never hear her voice, never pour out my heart to her.

Dear little sister, you see how I share your joy and understand how great it is. It is accompanied by many a sacrifice; but without them, would religious life be meritorious? Our little daily crosses are our greatest joy; they prepare our hearts to accept greater crosses when our good Master sends them.

In your prayers, my dear, don't forget the littlest Carmelite, who is united with you in the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This long letter, in Thérèse's slanted handwriting, ends with a few lines that Pauline wrote across Thérèse's words: "Little Léonie, I shall write to you soon; in the meantime, your sister and mother sends you her most affectionate thoughts."

*Léonie's reply*

On August 27, Léonie answered Thérèse's letter:

My dear little Thérèse, your letter gave me great pleasure. If you only knew how I was hoping for a letter from you! You compare me to the little dove of the Ark; I have thought about that many times, for it is, in fact, the story of my life. I also compare myself to the prodigal son: I have returned, once again, to throw myself, not just into Jesus' arms, but above all into His Sacred Heart.

Tomorrow is the anniversary of our dear mother's death. She is watching us and praying for us from above; but I am sure that her most tender protection is for Céline,

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who has stayed in the world to fulfill her filial duty of caring for our dear father.

I must leave you, my dear Thérèse—but no, on the contrary, we are all united, in the Heart of Jesus. Only there can one love with a tenderness that will endure not only for this short life, but for all eternity.

Léonie, who tended to be scrupulous, may have felt a little guilty at having left Céline to care for their father alone; in this letter, she humbly puts Céline, whose self-sacrifice she so admired, before herself.

When she returned from La Musse on August 18, 1893, Céline went to see her sister in Caen. They had not seen each other since Léonie entered the convent, on June 24.

*Thérèse encourages Léonie*

On October 17, 1893, Léonie attended the inauguration of the convent chapel, which had been reconstructed due to its great age. She redoubled her efforts to follow the Rule of the Visitation Order faithfully; but her goodwill was quickly exhausted, as the Mother Superior attached great importance to rigorous observance.

The letters that she received from her Carmelite sisters and that she reread constantly encouraged her to persevere. On November 5, 1893, Thérèse wrote to her:

My dear Léonie, I am happy in your happiness; your lovely letters are a real joy to me. I have no doubt that you are exactly where God wants you to be. . . .

We have just come from a lovely retreat preparing us for the feast of our Holy Mother. The good Father spoke especially about union with Jesus and about the beauty of our vocation. He showed us all the advantages of religious

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life, and of the contemplative life in particular. He made one comparison that delighted me: "Look at oak trees in the countryside," he said, "how crooked they are: they send out branches to right and left, with nothing to stop them—and so they never grow to any great height. By contrast, look at oak trees that grow in forests: they are hemmed in on all sides, they see light only from above, and so their trunks never have a chance to grow all those deformed branches that would take the sap the tree needs in order to grow tall. The forest oak sees nothing but the heavens; and so all its strength goes to reaching in that direction, and it quickly reaches a great height. In religious life, the soul, like the young forest oak, finds itself hemmed in on all sides by the Rule; all its movements are constricted, impeded, by the trees of the forest. But the soul can look Heavenward and see the light; there only can it rest its gaze; in this direction, there are no limits that it need fear to overstep."

Dear little sister, I am sure you will enjoy hearing about such things; we find our happiness in discussing matters of the soul, in immersing our hearts in the infinite.

*Léonie takes the habit*

On April 6, 1894, in the Visitation chapel, Léonie took the habit in a solemn ceremony presided over by Bishop Hugonin of Bayeux. Céline and the Guérins attended. The new Visitandine received the name of Sister Thérèse-Dosithée, in honor of her sister, whose faith and humility she wished to emulate, and in memory of her late aunt, Sister Marie-Dosithée, who had prayed so hard that Léonie would mend her ways and that she would be granted a religious vocation. For the ceremony, Léonie wore a bridal gown of white satin and a wreath of orange

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blossom; after the ceremony, she took off her bridal outfit, returning to the choir for Mass in her habit.

The Mother Superior, Mother Marie de Sales Lefrançois, was in charge of the novitiate; she enforced the Visitation Rule very strictly—many postulants left the Order because of her lack of flexibility—and she was severe with Léonie. Léonie bravely offered up to God, not only her humiliation and spiritual suffering, but also her physical pain: the coif that she had to wear night and day brought back her eczema, which covered her head and itched terribly.

In March 1894, when the Carmelites heard that Léonie was soon to take the habit, Thérèse wrote Léonie a long letter. This time her handwriting is upright rather than slanting; Pauline—Mother Agnès of Jesus—had finally given her permission to stop using slanted writing, and this letter is neater and better expresses Thérèse's personality as a result.

My dear Léonie, I can't tell you how glad I was to learn that you are soon to take the habit. I know how happy you are, and I share your joy. Dear little sister, how well God has repaid your efforts! I remember what you told me, in the parlor here, before you entered the holy ark. It didn't matter to you that you were always the last of us, that you took the habit with so little ceremony; it was Jesus alone whom you sought, and for Him you renounced all consolation. But, as our dear father used to tell us, "Nobody's generosity is greater than God's"; so He did not want to deprive you of the joy of publicly becoming His betrothed before becoming His bride.

Jesus has said to you, as to the Bride of the Songs of Songs: "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ... Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. ... Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the

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night." For a long time, you longed for Jesus to come to you; you said to Him, as the Bride says in the Canticles, "Who will grant me, my Beloved, to find you alone outside so that I may kiss you and in the future no one may despise me."

*Sister Thérèse-Dosithée*

After she took the habit, Léonie wrote to her Carmelite sisters; this letter has been lost, but we do have Thérèse's answer to it, written on Sunday, May 20, 1894. Thérèse began her letter with the words "Dear little sister Léonie," but then corrected it to read "Thérèse," as Léonie had just received the religious name of Sister Thérèse-Dosithée.

I am overjoyed [wrote the little Carmelite] that Saint Teresa, my holy mother, has become yours as well; this is a link that binds us more closely than ever. Dear little sister, I cannot tell you all the things I would like to say; the deepest thoughts of my heart cannot be translated into the cold language of this earth. But some day, in our beautiful homeland of Heaven, I will look at you, and you will see, in my eyes, all the things I long to say to you; for silence is the language of the blessed inhabitants of Heaven.

In the meantime, we must earn the right to enter that homeland; we must suffer, we must struggle. Pray for your little Thérèse, I beg of you, that she may make the most of her exile on this earth and of the many ways to deserve Heaven that she has been granted.

Two days later, Thérèse sent Léonie a note:

You are lucky, dear little sister, that Jesus keeps your heart so jealously. He tells you, as He told the Bride of the Song

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of Songs, "You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, with one of your eyes, with one strand of your hair that strays on your neck." Jesus is well pleased with you, I know it; although He still allows you to find infidelities in your heart, I am sure that the actions of love that He gathers up outnumber them by far.

Which of the two Thérèses will be the more fervent? Whichever is more humble, more united to Jesus, more faithful in performing every action through love! Oh, let us pray for one another, that we may be equally faithful. We wound Jesus, by our eyes, by a single hair—by the greatest things and by the smallest. Let us not refuse Him even the smallest sacrifice; everything is so important, in religion, that even picking up a pin, if it is done through love, can convert a soul. What a great mystery! It is Jesus alone who can give such value to our actions; let us love Him with all our hearts.

*M. Martin's death*

M. Martin had suffered several heart attacks; these left him weaker and weaker and worried those around him. Although Céline knew that her father was well looked after by the servants and by the Guérins (who still lived nearby, on rue de la Chaussée), she hardly dared to leave him, except to hurry to daily Mass at the nearby Saint Peter's Cathedral.

M. Martin's condition improved, and, on July 4, 1894, he and Céline went to La Musse with the Guérins. Two days later, M. Guérin received a rather pessimistic note from Léonie, which he sent to his Carmelite nieces at once. On July 7, Mme. Guérin wrote to her daughter, Jeanne: "Yesterday your father received a letter from Léonie that has made us all very anxious. With filial trust,

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she described all her trials, her struggles, her battles; she even said that if it weren't for the support of her kind superiors, she would already have returned to us. ... All this is far from reassuring; what would she do in the world? She would only suffer; she is not happy here."

On the same day, Thérèse wrote to Céline in La Musse: "My dear Céline, Léonie's letter upset us a great deal. She will be so unhappy if she returns to the world! But I must admit that I hope it is only a temptation; we must pray a great deal for her. God can give her what she needs."

On July 28, 1894, M. Martin had another heart attack. A neighboring priest was sent for to give him the last rites again. Early in the morning of the next day, Sunday, July 29, Céline was alone with her failing father. Suddenly he opened his eyes and looked at her with great tenderness; then he closed them forever. Thus, peacefully, he went to meet the God whom he loved and the loved ones who had gone before him, in eternity. He was seventy-one years old.

A telegram was sent to the Carmelites at once, and Céline wrote to them that same day: "Papa is in Heaven. I heard his last breath; I closed his eyes. His beautiful face took on an expression of bliss, of the deepest calm. Tranquility is painted on his features."

The funeral service took place on August 2, 1894, in Saint Peter's Cathedral. M. Martin was buried in the Lisieux cemetery, not far from the Carmelite burial plot where, three years later, the "little queen" of this "dear king" would be laid. Some weeks later, on October 11, the remains of the rest of the Martin dead—Mme. Martin; her father, M. Guérin, who had died in 1868; M. Martin's mother, who had died in 1883; and Hélène, Joseph, Jean-Baptiste, and Mélanie-Thérèse, Léonie's little brothers and sisters who died in infancy—were transferred from the Alençon cemetery, to be buried with M. Martin.

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Some days after M. Martin's death, Thérèse wrote a poem that she entitled "Prayer of the Child of a Saint"; in it, she asked her beloved father to remember and protect his five daughters. The third verse alludes to the fact that Léonie was then in the Visitation convent:

Remember the fervent prayers

You offered for your third child;

God answered you; she, like her sisters,

Is a beautiful and shining lily here on earth.

The Visitation hides her from the eyes of the world,

But she loves Jesus and is filled with His peace.

All her ardent desires

And all her sighs

Remember.

After Léonie left the Visitation Order on July 20, 1895, Thérèse modified the fifth line to:

She too would like to separate herself from the world.

*Céline's decision*

In August 1894, Céline and the Guérins spent a week in Caen and on the coast of Nacre, with Jeanne and Francis La Néele. Céline visited Léonie at the Visitation convent every day. On August 19, Céline wrote to Thérèse, telling her that she hoped to enter the Carmelite convent in Lisieux as soon as possible, to fulfill the religious vocation she had set aside to care for her father. The La Néeles, however, were up in arms against the idea. But, as Thérèse was to write in her autobiography about the difficulties that

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Céline's decision encountered on all sides: "My dear king, who on earth never liked delays, hastened to straighten out Céline's muddled affairs."

Thérèse answered Céline's letter, to strengthen her in her Carmelite vocation; then, on August 20, she wrote to Léonie:

I think about you more than ever, since our dear father went to Heaven. I believe you feel as we do: Papa's death doesn't feel like a death to me, but like a real life. After six years of separation, I have found him again; I feel him near me, watching me and protecting me.

Dear little sister, are we not more united than ever, now that we must look to the heavens to find the father and mother who offered us to Jesus? Soon their wishes will be fulfilled: all the children God gave to them will be united to Him forever.

I understand the emptiness that Céline's departure will make you feel; but I know well how generous you are to Our Lord. Life will pass quickly, and then we will be reunited, this time forever; and we will be glad that we suffered for Jesus.

*Céline joins the Carmelites*

On September 14, 1894, Céline entered the Carmelite convent, rejoining Marie, Pauline, and Thérèse. She became Sister Marie of the Holy Face, a disciple of her little sister, who led her eagerly along the path of faith and love that she was discovering.

Knowing Léonie's troubles, Thérèse was more tender to her than ever. On October 11, 1894, she wrote to her:

I am so glad that now your feast day is the same as mine. I am sure Saint Teresa will shower you with graces on the

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fifteenth; I am going to pray to her for you, as well as to Blessed Margaret Mary. If you only knew, dear little sister, how we pray for you and what sacrifices we offer for you! I believe you would be touched. Since we know about your trials, our fervor is very great.

I have great faith that my dear Visitandine will emerge from her trials victorious and that some day she will be a model religious. God has already granted her so many graces; would He abandon her now that she seems to have found her harbor? No; Jesus sleeps while His bride struggles against the flood of temptation, but we will call on Him so tenderly that He will awaken; He will quell the wind and the tempest, and peace will be restored.

Dear little sister, joy will follow your trials, you shall see; and later, you will be glad that you suffered.

*Will Léonie stay?*

More news arrived, confirming the difficulties Léonie was having with religious life. Jeanne La Néele wrote to Céline: "I have just seen Léonie. She has not cried for three days; she has been better since the feast day of Blessed Margaret Mary. I talked with the mistress of novices for an hour; I will tell Marie about our conversation, and she will tell you about it on her next visit. She told me that we must pray very hard, as she cannot vouch for Léonie's perseverance."

In October 1894, Jeanne's sister, Marie Guérin, wrote to Céline: "Jeanne has seen Léonie; she has been better for the last three days. But the mistress of novices is beginning to give up, and I don't know what will happen if this improvement doesn't continue. Poor Léonie also has a terrible temptation to do with the Eucharist: she doubts the Real Presence of Christ in it. I am sorry for her, and I pray for her a lot. It seems that during the Office, the

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minute the mistress of novices takes her eye off Léonie, she hardly bothers to follow at all."

It is hard to believe that Léonie would "hardly bother to follow" the Office, as Marie Guérin reports. No doubt Léonie, due to her natural slowness, had some difficulty following the Office and wasted time looking for hymns, antiphons, prayers, and intercessions in her prayer book; she herself knew that, in spite of her Norman common sense, she was not gifted in intelligence. But we cannot infer from this that there was any lack of goodwill on Léonie's part! No; Léonie had reformed.

Léonie certainly did not like complicated matters or abstract analyses; Latin declensions were, in all probability, as foreign to her as Hebrew. Hers was not a searching mind; she herself said, "I want to please God, that is all—without racking my brains over it!" But we have seen how Léonie evolved, from her youth, toward a gentle and loving acceptance of her own imperfections, in total abandonment to God's mercy. She learned to follow the Way of Saint Francis de Sales: "Everything is in love, by love, and for love."

In January 1895, Thérèse was chosen to send Léonie good wishes for the New Year on behalf of all her Carmelite sisters:

It is with great joy that I send you my best wishes at the beginning of this New Year. This past year has been a fruitful one for Heaven: our dear father has seen "that which the eye cannot look upon." He has heard the music of the angels, and his heart understands it; his soul rejoices in the rewards that God has prepared for those who love Him. Our turn will come, too; perhaps we shall never see the end of the year that is beginning; soon, perhaps, one of us will hear Jesus call her. Oh, it is sweet to think that we are journeying toward the eternal shore!

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Dear little sister, your letters give me great pleasure and do my soul good; I rejoice to see how much God loves you and showers you with His graces. He has found you worthy to suffer for love of Him, and this is the greatest proof of His affection that He can give you; for it is through suffering that we become like Him.

Dear little sister, don't forget the last, the poorest of your sisters; ask Jesus that she may be very faithful and that she may be content, as you are, to be the littlest and the last, everywhere she goes.

*Céline becomes Sister Geneviève*

On February 5, 1895, Céline took the habit. At the request of the Mother Superior, she changed her religious name from Sister Marie of the Holy Face to Sister Geneviève of Saint Thérèse, in memory of the foundress of the convent, Mother Geneviève of Saint Thérèse, who died in 1891; her fellow Carmelites shortened this new name to "Sister Geneviève."

When Céline joined the Carmelites, she took her photographic equipment with her to the convent; this gave Léonie a chance to "see" her dear sisters again, in the many photographs, taken over the years, that the Carmelites sent to their Visitandine sister.

Léonie, rejoicing in Céline's taking of the habit, wrote to her: "Our dear mother's wishes have been fulfilled—we are all five religious! Didn't she pray that this would happen—and didn't she ask God, with her great faith, that one of us should be a Visitandine? But her poor little Visitandine's cowardice, her reluctance to yield herself completely to love, make her unworthy. I hope that, in the end, I will surrender."

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These words—"in the end, I will surrender"—which Léonie addressed to herself, like a challenge, show clearly the stubbornness, the strength of will, that had never left her. But this obstinacy had changed its target. Léonie was no longer the demanding, capricious little girl, shooting her arrows of bad temper at those around her; now her target was the Heart of Jesus, which she was determined that her onslaughts of love would reach, in spite of all her clumsiness and helplessness.

*Léonie marks time*

The convent at Caen decided to postpone Léonie's profession; she suffered so much from this that she even considered asking for a transfer to the Visitation convent in Le Mans. Her sisters were told of this, and, in a letter of April 28, 1895, Thérèse tried to comfort and encourage Léonie:

Dear little sister, I am deeply convinced that you have found your true vocation—not just as a Visitandine, but as a Caen Visitandine; God has given us so many proofs of this that we must not doubt it. I see your idea of going to Le Mans as a temptation, and I pray that Jesus will deliver you from it.

Oh, how well I understand what a trial this postponement of your profession must be for you; but it is such a great grace that the more time one is given to prepare for it, the more one should rejoice. I remember with joy the things that happened within my soul a few months before my profession. It was the end of the year of my novitiate, and nobody was taking any notice of me, because our Father Superior thought I was too young. This hurt me a great deal; but one day, God showed me that there was a great self-centeredness in my impatience to take the holy

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vows. Then I said to myself: when I took the habit, they dressed me in a beautiful white dress decorated with lace and flowers; but who thought to give me such a dress for my wedding? This dress is one I must make alone; Jesus wants nobody except Himself to help me; so, with His help, I will set to work with zeal. No human being will see my efforts, for I will keep them hidden in my heart. I will try to make myself forgotten; I will need no eyes to see me but those of Jesus. What does it matter if to others I seem poor, bare of intelligence and talent?

I wanted to put into practice the advice of the *Imitation of Christ:* "Let this one take glory in one thing, another in something else, but as for you, set your joy only in contempt of self, in My will and My glory"; and again, "Learn a lesson that will serve you well: love to be ignored and counted for nothing!" Thinking of all this, I felt a great peace in my soul. I knew that this was truth, this was peace. I was no longer worried about the date of my profession; I knew that on the day when my wedding dress was ready, Jesus would come to find his bride.

Dear little sister, I was not mistaken; even Jesus was satisfied with my desires, with my total self-abandonment. He has deigned to unite me to Himself sooner than I had dared hope. Now, God is still leading me along the same path. I have only one desire: to do His will.

Dear little sister, now that I have given you my spiritual direction, pray for me, that I may put into practice the insights Jesus gives me.

*A third setback*

On July 20, 1895, Léonie left her Caen convent; her delicate health, the rigorous Rule, and her still unsteady character forced her to leave the Visitation Order. She was now thirty-two years old. As all her sisters were in the

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Carmelite convent, the Guérins took her into their home in Lisieux.

That day, Thérèse wrote to Mme. Guérin, who was in La Musse: "We were overwhelmed with grief because of poor Léonie. It was a real agony. God, who is trying our faith, sent us no consolation; I could find no prayer but that of Our Lord on the Cross: `My God, my God, why have you forsaken us?`—or that of the agony in the garden: `My God, not our will, but Thine be done.`"

Thérèse continued her letter on the following day: "Yesterday I left this letter unfinished because Marie (Guérin) arrived, with Léonie. We were overcome with emotion when we saw her; she was crying so hard that we were unable to make her say a word. Finally she met our eyes; then everything went well."

*Léonie in La Musse*

Léonie went to stay with the Guérins in La Musse. On July 28, 1895, Mme. Guérin, writing to Thérèse to commemorate the first anniversary of M. Martin's death, wrote:

And now, about our dear Léonie. Well, truthfully and in all conscience, she really is not doing badly. At first there were ups and downs—she was very cheerful for two or three days, then was unhappy again. We did all we could to keep her amused and to keep her mind off things; Marie tries to distract her, but has a hard time of it.

Yesterday, Léonie made me happy by asking to try a crochet pattern. She hasn't got it right yet, but I am not surprised; it is a very difficult one, and I wouldn't do any better at it than she has. But she concentrated very hard on it, and at least for that little while her mind was occupied, not up in the clouds. She is not bored in La Musse

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anymore, and she seems content to stay a few days longer. In short, my news of Léonie is good; tell that to Pauline and my two other dear girls.

Thérèse, we had such a storm on Friday evening! We were at dinner. Jeanne was afraid, and clutched at her father and Marie; as for me, I got up, as if in a state of shock, and cried, "This is the end!" The scene becomes even stranger when we add Léonie: she wasn't afraid in the least, and, being hungry, she never missed a bite. Your uncle was in fits of laughter.

The La Musse holidaymakers returned to Lisieux, and Léonie to her room in the Guérins' house. Her longing for her convent was renewed when, on August 15, 1895, Marie Guérin entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, receiving the name of Sister Marie of the Eucharist. Sometimes it seemed that a nervous breakdown lay constantly in wait for Léonie, the one who was "not like the others." M. Guérin wrote to Pauline: "Hers is a poor nature, unable to fight back." But it took courage for Léonie to take on her confused and changeable nature, which was in conflict with her stubborn determination to join religious life.

*Solitude*

What was to become of Léonie, back in the world alone, now that her four sisters and her two cousins had all found their own ways of life? She felt deeply that her parents and her beloved aunt, the Visitation Sister Marie-Dosithée, were calling her, from Heaven, to a life consecrated to God. Life must have seemed very difficult to her. Human circumstances sometimes thwart the deepest hopes.

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After Léonie died in 1941, the Mother Superior of the Visitation convent in Caen, writing a circular about her, recalled this setback and defended Léonie: "Nevertheless, in spite of her goodwill, the dear novice could not long sustain the effort she had made until then. At that time, our mothers required the young sisters to follow the Rule in every particular; they did not avail of the softening measures now recognized to be essential to formation. Several of those whose health was delicate therefore had to confess themselves incapable of persevering; our poor child was of that number."

Léonie's every visit to her sisters and cousin at the Carmelite convent must have pierced her to the heart. But it was above all the various ceremonies, confirming the religious vocations of Céline and of Marie Guérin, that made her most aware of her own deficiencies. Céline made her profession on February 24, 1896; three weeks later, on the morning of March 17, she took the veil. Monsignor Hugonin presided—the same bishop who had presided when, two years earlier, on April 6, 1894, Léonie took the habit in Caen. On that same afternoon of March 17, at the Carmelite convent, Marie Guérin, in her bridal gown, took the habit. No doubt Léonie's generous heart rejoiced in her sister's and her cousin's happiness; but her joy must have been mixed with regret.

On April 11th—the feast of Saint Leo, Léonie's patron saint—Thérèse sent her a little message:

My dear Léonie, your little sister cannot prevent herself from telling you how much she loves you and thinks of you, especially today on your feast day. I have nothing to offer you, not even a picture—but no, I am mistaken: soon I shall offer you the divine Reality, Jesus the Host, your Bridegroom and mine. Dear little sister, how sweet it is for all five of us to be able to call Jesus "Our Beloved"; but how much sweeter it

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will be when we see Him in Heaven! We will follow Him everywhere, all singing the same hymn, which only virgins may sing; and then we will understand the value of suffering and trials. We will say, as Jesus said: "Our suffering was truly necessary, to try us and to bring us to glory."

My dear little sister, I cannot tell you all the deep thoughts of you that are in my heart. The one thing I must repeat to you is this: I love you a thousand times more tenderly than ordinary sisters love one another, because I love you with the Heart of our celestial Spouse. In Him we live the same life, and in Him, for eternity, I will remain your very little sister, Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

*Scruples*

Léonie still found it hard to live in the fashionable society of the Guérins' chateau in La Musse. She was tormented by scruples; on July 1, 1896, she wrote to Thérèse:

My dear little sister, if only you knew how often I think of you and how sweet these thoughts are to me; they bring me closer to God. I understand your desire to go to meet Him soon, to be completely lost in Him; I, too, desire this.

But you, my darling, are ready to go to meet God; you will surely be well received. But I will face Him empty-handed; and yet I have the temerity not to be afraid. Do you understand that?

How are you? Dear little sister, you always tell me that you are getting on well, or better, and I don't believe a word of it. When you write to me, tell me the exact truth. And tell me about God, and about everything that can help me to grow in virtue; these are the only things that

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can truly make me happy, and these are the messages I hope for from your beloved convent.

If only you knew how much help I need if I am not to abandon myself to the pleasures and the vanities of the world. All the goodwill in the world cannot prevent one from being almost imperceptibly drawn to them; and if one does not find death there, then at the very least, all one's piety and love for Jesus are spoiled, and one has nothing left to offer Him but faded flowers—how many I have offered Him! Dear sister, you will prevent me from repeating my old mistakes, won't you? I am so weak; you know how I rely on you.

I beg of you, ask God very specially to deliver me from my scruples; I am always turning in on myself, and this does me terrible damage and hinders my attempts at perfection. You may be sure I am showing you my wounds as clearly as I can.

Your little sister, who loves you with all her heart,

Léonie

There is the same sadness in a letter that Léonie wrote to Céline from La Musse, on July 9, 1896:

Only twenty days left in La Musse; I am not unhappy about it, although I have made the same life for myself here as in Lisieux. More and more, I see the meaninglessness of all that passes, and this does me good, gradually increasing my detachment; but there is always this sadness, deep within me, that I can never completely overcome. Although I feel that I am, for the moment, where God wants me to be, I suffer—I suffer terribly—and my exile seems very long to me. Only Jesus knows what it costs me. ... When you write to me, my dear, give me all the news of my little Thérèse. Please, don't hide anything from me; I want to know everything.

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*Taking Jesus by the heart*

Thérèse answered Léonie's letter of July ι with a four-page letter—full of underlined words, as usual!

My dear Léonie, I would have answered your lovely letter last Sunday, if it had been given to me; but as you know, there are five of us, and I am the littlest, so I see letters well after the others do, or not at all! I didn't see your letter till Friday; so you see, dear little sister, it is not my fault that I am so late. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to see you in such good humor!

I am not surprised that the thought of death is sweet to you, because nothing on earth means anything to you anymore. But I assure you, God is much better than you believe. He is satisfied with a look, a sigh of love. As for me—I find it easy to practice perfection because I have realized that it is simply taking Jesus by His heart. Look at a little child who has made his mother angry by flying into a temper or even by disobeying her. If he hides sulkily in a corner, crying from fear of being punished, his mother certainly won't forgive him his naughtiness; but if he runs to her smiling, holding out his little arms, and saying, "Kiss me—I won't do it again," how can his mother do anything but press him to her heart and forget his childish mischief? She knows that her dear little one will do the same thing at the next opportunity, but that doesn't matter; if he takes her by the heart again, he will never be punished.

You asked for news of my health. Well, my dear little sister, I don't cough at all any more. Are you happy? That will not prevent God from taking me whenever He chooses. Since I do all I can to be like a little child, I have no preparations to make; Jesus Himself will have to pay all the expenses of my journey and the price of my entry into Heaven! Goodbye, my dear sister; I love you, I think, more and more.

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*The Little Way*

Thérèse's simple and convincing teachings, and her attentive listening ear, made her a mistress of novices by nature; she became Léonie's guide. The difference in their ages made very little difference; the younger sister knew how to help her elder, who needed so badly to be understood and to be urged, gently but firmly, toward all that drew her—but which, in her timidity, she feared she could never attain.

During this period, Thérèse was taking giant steps along the path of perfection. After she composed her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love, on June 9, 1895, the little "Victim of Love" blazed in a ceaseless act of pure love. Each day she increased the riches she had drawn from the Gospel verse: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt.18:3).

Providentially, it was this Way of Spiritual Childhood which would open Léonie to abandon and faith, leaving her, in spite of all her suffering, more and more at peace. It was this creative, childlike spirit which allowed Léonie, the outsider, to enter fully the ranks of those who hunger for God—those who, for love, accept suffering and humiliation, there to find greatness in their smallness, strength in their weakness.

Thérèse lived with childlike detachment, thinking only of her Lord; she worried little about her health, which was beginning to alarm those around her. She blithely reassured Léonie, who was justifiably worried about the sore throats that plagued her beloved Thérèse every morning and evening, giving her a stubborn cough. Léonie did not know, nor did her sisters, that twice, in early April 1896—once during the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday and once the following day—Thérèse

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had coughed blood. Only the prioress, Mother Marie de Gonzague, knew; she did not wish anyone else, even Pauline, to know of it, and Thérèse, in obedience, said nothing. All the community, however, heard Thérèse coughing, and Léonie was told of it. She knew that, at that time, such persistent coughs could drain the strength of young consumptives; and she feared for the little sister whom she loved, who, long ago, had tenderly called her "Lolo."

*Thérèse's health deteriorates*

On June 2, 1897, Léonie attended the ceremony in which her cousin Marie Guérin, Sister Marie of the Eucharist, took the veil. When the family gathered in the parlor, Léonie was grieved to see how thin and pale Thérèse had become; her tuberculosis was progressing rapidly.

On July 2, Léonie, who was to spend a month in La Musse with the Guérins, went to see Thérèse before leaving. When they met, Léonie burst into tears; she had a premonition that she would never see Thérèse alive again. It was Thérèse who consoled Léonie.

The news from the Carmelite convent came to La Musse through the letters—health bulletins, really—that Marie Guérin wrote. It was from these letters that Léonie learned that Thérèse was moved to the infirmary, on the ground floor of the convent on July 8, leaving her cell on the first floor empty forever.

Even though she was in terrible pain, the little invalid was able to laugh with the nurse and the other sisters who visited her. Marie Guérin wrote to her parents, "She is as gay as a lark; there are moments when one would pay to be with her!"

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Léonie learned from and was enlightened by her little sister's holiness. On July 18, 1897, she wrote to Céline, from La Musse, her thoughts about Thérèse's approaching death:

This is what life is: constant separations; always watching those whom we love go away from us. We are about to lose the one who was our joy on this earth. Little sister, let us not weep for her, but rejoice with her; she will be another angel in the beautiful Heaven that she will help us to reach.

I envy her happiness, and I cannot ask God to cure her. I think that that would be loving my little sister selfishly and going against God's will; for it is clear that He is hurrying to pluck this pure lily, which has always truly belonged to Him—He only lent her to us. I know that you will understand this, Céline, and that you share my feelings.

It is a great comfort to me, to know that it is you who are looking after our little saint. If you could write down everything she says, it would be a great consolation to me to have it; for I do not have your joy, beloved sisters, of being near my dear little sister. But I am not worthy of that; perhaps I would not be as brave as you are. Jesus is right to impose this sacrifice on me. I knew, the other day, that I was seeing our angel for the last time on this earth; and it broke my heart.

*Léonie's love for her sisters*

Due to Mme. Guérin's poor health, Léonie was forced to spend an extra week in La Musse. In early August 1897, she wrote to Céline:

I had planned to write to Marie of the Sacred Heart, to thank her for her last letters, which touched me so. But

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because it is your feast day, you must take precedence, and I am sure our dear eldest sister won't mind—what I write to one of you is for all of you. You all seem to merge within the one love. I could never express all the affection I feel for you.

My soul and my heart are constantly with you at our beloved angel's bedside, waiting in anguish—but also in acceptance—for the moment when she will leave us for Heaven. Little sister, that will be a day of celebration, for her and for us. The knowledge of what she is suffering hurts me so much that, in spite of the pain I will feel when she leaves us, it will be a great relief to me to know that our saint is finally completely happy.

During such cruel partings, there is nothing that consoles one as much as thoughts of faith; they are everything. After all, that which we, in our blindness, call death is really life; it is only the exile in which we now live that deserves to be called death. Our dear angel understands this; that is why she is so happy to leave it.

I had one moment of weakness, little sister: when, on Saturday, July 31, I heard how our dear little one's illness was progressing. And, in addition, to be trapped here in La Musse for another week—it was too much for me! But Jesus supported me, and I know that I will see this trial through to the end; but it is very hard, and I must not think beyond today.

Léonie often reread the last two letters she had received from Thérèse and was deeply moved by them. The first one was only a few lines, penciled on a little sheet of paper at the end of June 1897: "My dear little Léonie, I am so touched by your eagerness to make me happy. I am delighted with the little blanket you made me, and I thank you with all my heart—it is just what I wanted. I shall pray for you specially at Communion tomorrow. I send you love and kisses. Your little sister, Thérèse of the Child Jesus."

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*Thérèse's last letter to Léonie*

Thérèse's last letter to Léonie is dated July 17, 1897, a month and a half before her death; it is written in careful, upright handwriting.

My dear Léonie, I am happy to have the chance to talk with you again; a few days ago, I thought I would never have that joy again here on earth, but God seems to wish to prolong my exile a little. This does not distress me; I wouldn't want my own will to bring me to Heaven even a minute early.

Our only happiness, here on earth, is to concentrate on always finding the lot that Jesus gives us delightful. And your lot, dear little sister, is a wonderful one. If you want to be a saint, it will be easy for you, because deep in your heart, the world means nothing to you. You, like us, can think only of "the one thing necessary"—that is, even while you give yourself devotedly to your outward tasks, your sole aim must be to please Jesus, to become more intimately united to Him.

You asked me to pray to the Sacred Heart for you when I am in Heaven; I won't forget to give Him your messages and to ask Him to send you all that you need in order to become a great saint. A Dieu, my dear sister. I would like the thought that I am going to Heaven to fill you with joy, because I will be able to love you even more when I am there. I will write more another time, but I can't now; baby needs to sleep.

In spite of her terrible physical suffering and the inconsolable darknesses within her soul, this wonderful little saint wrote with such conviction of the Heaven she was soon to enter—a nd ended her letter with childish light-heartedness. During those last days, Thérèse often used the childish name of "baby" in talking to Céline, her nurse. In the midst of her pain, she was trying to cheer up

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the beloved sisters who cared for her and watched over her. "Leave me my little sillinesses!" she told them. But sometimes she let slip a few words that showed that she was not deceiving herself: "baby" was "an old, old woman" who was "suffocating," who "never stopped suffering"—who was "going toward death."

Thérèse lived in perfect balance, as much at ease with heavenly matters as with the things of this earth. Léonie knew all this, and the mark it left on her was to last all her life. The holy picture that Thérèse gave Léonie on her thirty-fourth birthday—the last she would ever give her—bore, for Léonie, God's fingerprint, in the shape of these few words: "Dear little sister, how sweet it is to think that one day we shall follow the Lamb of God together, for all eternity. In memory of June 3, 1897—Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face."

On July 17, 1897—the same day on which she wrote her last letter to Léonie—Thérèse, in the midst of her pain, said to her "little mother" Pauline: "I feel that my mission is about to begin—my mission to help others love God as I love Him, to give my Little Way to souls. If God grants my wish, my Heaven will be here on earth, until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my eternity doing good on earth. It isn't impossible; angels watch over us as part of the heavenly vision."

Thérèse's prediction, made as she stood on the threshold of eternity, became the rock to which Léonie, certain that her little sister was "a word of God," would cling until her own death.

*Thérèse's death*

Every morning, Léonie hurried to the convent to hear the news. Even when her sisters could not be disturbed,

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Léonie learned of Thérèse's progress from the lay sisters who met her at the door. The tuberculosis had reached the intestines. There was nothing left of Thérèse but suffering and lucidity. She spoke to her sisters and the other religious with a faith that earned the admiration of all the community and that overwhelmed Léonie.

On the evening of September 30, 1897, Léonie was praying in the Carmelite chapel with her aunt and uncle when a note was passed to them. It was from Pauline; it read: "Our angel is in Heaven. She drew her last breath at seven o'clock, pressing her crucifix to her heart and saying 'Oh, I love you!' Her eyes were raised to Heaven. What did she see?"

Léonie's name headed the announcement of Thérèse's death; and on Monday, October 4, as M. Guérin was ill, it was Léonie who led the mourners at the funeral ceremony in the Carmelite chapel and at the burial in the Champs-Rémouleux cemetery, on a hill overlooking Lisieux.

*Léonie's constant thoughts of Thérèse*

Thérèse was constantly in Léonie's thoughts. She was very close to her; from Heaven, she became Léonie's help and her model. Léonie went often to the Carmelite chapel; she left flowers on Thérèse's grave; she reread her letters; she thought of Thérèse's last days, when Léonie had listened avidly to her sisters as they told her everything their sick little sister had said.

A few days before her death, Thérèse had asked Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart to write Léonie a note, asking her to live by love and humility. To encourage herself to do so, Léonie reread this letter, which Pauline had sent her so soon before Thérèse's death, again and again:

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A few days ago, I said to her that she must be very happy that she is finally leaving this vale of tears to enjoy eternal bliss. Here is her reply, which I found so admirable that I wrote it down at once: "Ah, my little mother, this evening I heard beautiful music from far off, in the direction of the station, and I thought that soon I will be hearing far lovelier harmonies; but that feeling of joy was fleeting. It has been a long time since I felt lively joy, and it is impossible for me to be really joyful—it does not attract me; I think very little about my own happiness. I think only of the love that I shall receive and the love that I shall be able to give."

Story of a Soul

*Story of a Soul* was published at the end of September 1898. Léonie immediately devoured the book and was moved to rediscover memories of their shared childhood; but most importantly of all, she finally knew the secrets of the love that Thérèse and her beloved Lord had shared. Story of a Soul became Léonie's bedside book; it helped her regain hope for her own vocation.

Léonie's heart was constantly drawn toward her beloved Visitation Order, but she hesitated because of her fragile health and her innate restlessness—a restlessness that sometimes made others see her as indecisive, whereas in fact she was strong-willed to the point of stubbornness.

One day, Léonie would learn—and would bear witness to it at the Process for Thérèse's beatification, in 1910—that in early 1888, after Léonie's first attempt to join the Visitation Order, Thérèse had said prophetically to a Benedictine sister in Lisieux: "We must not worry about the fact that Léonie's attempts at religious life have been unsuccessful. After my death, she will enter the Visitation

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Order, and this time she will succeed; she will take my name, and that of Saint Francis de Sales." In 1888, Thérèse was fifteen and about to enter the Carmelite convent. No one dreamed that she would die young; she was in good health, and photographs of her as a novice show us a cheerful, round-faced little country girl.

In 1915, during the Apostolic Process for the Cause of Thérèse, Léonie recounted a fact that she had learned from Pauline:

Mother Marie de Gonzague, the prioress, told Thérèse that on the day of her profession (September 8, 1890), when she prostrated herself, she should pray that our father would be cured; but in fact, she prayed, "God, since Mother Marie told me to ask this of You, grant that Papa may be cured, if it be Your will; but grant that it be Your will that Léonie should become a Visitandine, and if she has no vocation, I beg You to send her one; You cannot refuse me this." It is true that after this, I made another fruitless attempt to join the Visitation Order; but the faith of this servant of God was still unshakeable.

At the Process, Léonie also described how, on another occasion, Thérèse had said to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, "After I die, I will make Léonie rejoin the Visitation Order, and this time she will stay."

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Léonie's Permanent Home

*The successful attempt*

On January 28, 1899, Léonie entered the Visitation convent in Caen a third time—this time for good. She wanted to live the Salesian Rule in humility, simplicity, self-abandonment, and love; she knew that the holy founder of the Order, Saint Francis de Sales—the "Savoisien," as he liked to call himself—once wrote to Jeanne de Chantal: "Let us walk the low valleys of small and humble virtues."

She remembered, too, that he once advised a nun who confided in him to be "truly a little girl—very little, I mean, in your own eyes"; and that he comforted another of his "spiritual daughters" with the words "God is satisfied with our little accomplishments," adding humorously, "Our Lord does not want convicts in His service!" Saint Francis de Sales, who called himself "a partisan of the afflicted," wanted, above all, "daughters of prayer."

A letter that Léonie sent to her three Carmelite sisters, a few days after she rejoined the Visitandines, gives us an opportunity to see her first impressions:

And so my religious life has begun. Yesterday I walked into the novitiate resolutely, determined to follow the right path at all costs. Oh, I am so happy! How can I make you understand the great tenderness that God has put into

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the motherly hearts of those who direct me? I have never known a truer or deeper affection; it is beyond anything I could have imagined.

When I entered, I was a bit nervous, but full of faith; the first words I said, after throwing myself into my dear Mother's arms, were "When I leave here, it will be in my coffin." Afterward, I spent a while before the Blessed Sacrament. I could feel that even though I was silent before Him, Jesus understood me; and this was enough to let me experience deep peace.

Our little Thérèse shows me clearly, in the courage that urges me on in everything I do, that she is always beside me. Our Mother said to me, a while ago, "Don't be afraid; wait and see, your soul will expand." Her prediction is being fulfilled to the letter. I am ready to make all the sacrifices that will be required of me. At the moment I am so small and so weak! I want to grow and stay small, at the same time.

My dear sisters in the novitiate are so good to me; I love them very much already. Our little novitiate is composed of two professed with black veils; one choir novice; and two lay sisters. I am the only postulant, but I hope to have a companion soon.

The new Mother Superior was less strict than her predecessors; and thus Léonie, like others among her old companions, was able to reenter religious life with renewed hope. It was due to this new flexibility that Thérèse Pougheol, who had been in the Visitation convent with Léonie in 1893 and 1894, rejoined the Order in 1901.

*Thérèse, "my ideal"*

In her convent cell, Léonie read Thérèse's Story of a Soul often, and each time with the same joy. She was moved

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by the memory of her little sister's tenderness and affection when she read the words: "My dear little Léonie also had a special place in my heart. She loved me very much; it was she who looked after me when, in the evenings, all the family went out walking. I can still hear the gentle songs that she sang to send me to sleep. In everything, she looked for ways to make me happy; and it would have made me miserable if I had upset her. I remember her First Communion so well—above all, the moment when she picked me up and took me into the presbytery with her; it seemed so wonderful to be carried by a big sister all in white like me!"

The first few pages of *Story of a Soul* made Léonie smile as Thérèse recalled the moment, in her early childhood, when Léonie decided she was too big to play with dolls any more. She went to her two little sisters, carrying a basket full of dolls' clothes and bits of material, with her doll on top. "Kind Léonie," as M. Martin sometimes called her, held out the basket to them, saying, "Here, little sisters, choose; it's all for you." Céline took a little packet of braid, and Thérèse, reaching out to seize the basket, cried, "I choose all!"

Thérèse's autobiography also contains her memories of the serious illness that struck her when she was ten: "Léonie was very good to me and did her best to keep me amused."

All Léonie's childhood came back to her as she read. Things that she had forgotten were brought back to her as she found them, perfectly recaptured, within the pages of Story of a Soul. Léonie wrote: "Because of my relatively young age, Thérèse was less open with me than with our older sisters, who were like mothers to her."

But as Léonie read, she saw the life of Thérèse's soul unfold before her eyes. From the book, she learned many

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unsuspected details of Thérèse's life; she had never dreamed "that her little sister's heroism had reached such a height."

*Her sisters' affectionate help*

In their letters, Léonie's sisters fostered her devotion to their little Thérèse. Pauline, trying to show her beloved sister the danger of being saddened by her own weaknesses, advised Léonie to follow Thérèse's example. On March 21, 1899, she wrote to Léonie:

My dear sister, if only you knew how I prayed to the Holy Spirit for you this morning—how I asked Him to come to your aid in all the many different struggles of religious life! But you know, my dear, while we live on this earth we must expect to stumble, to fall on our faces. If everything went well—if we could tell ourselves "Ah, I am getting somewhere! I have acquired such and such a virtue!"—then we would become proud. Léonie, seek only one virtue: humility, which will mean that we will never be surprised by our own weaknesses. Let us always want to do good; let us love God very much; and let us sing, with our angel:

My peace is in staying little;

Thus, when I fall by the wayside,

I can pick myself up quickly,

And Jesus takes me by the hand.

If Jesus, taking us by the hand, does not console us; if we are in darkness; if we can neither see nor feel anything but sadness—then let us sing again:

When the blue sky turns dark

And He seems to abandon me,

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My joy is in staying in the shadows,

In hiding myself, in humbling myself;

My peace is in the holy will

Of Jesus, my only love;

Thus I live without fear,

For I love night as much as day.

My little Léonie, do you love night as much as day, shadows as much as light? We must attain this holy detachment if we wish to be worthy of our angel and to be a little like her.

This verse is one of seven stanzas of the poem "My Joy!," which Thérèse had written on January 21, 1897, for Pauline's feast day. Later, Pauline would send Léonie a copy of the full poem; this copy was found in the desk in Léonie's cell, with other papers and letters, after her death.

*Léonie's safe haven*

On April 23, 1899, Léonie wrote to Mother Marie de Gonzague, the prioress of the Carmelite convent in Lisieux. In the letter, she describes her deep attachment to Thérèse: "I think of Thérèse constantly. Every moment, I call her to my side; I do not want to be without her for an instant."

Léonie, in her loving simplicity, ends her letter by asking a favor of the prioress: "I humbly ask you to allow my sisters to take turns writing to me every fortnight until my profession; their letters do me so much good. I am so sure that my wish will be granted that I thank you, very much, in advance."

Although Léonie's little boat had been so battered by storms, she had, in this fourth attempt at religious life,

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finally reached her harbor—just as Thérèse had so audaciously asked God that she might. When things went badly, the new Visitandine confided in her mistress of novices, who was her mainstay; there, in obedience, she found peace. This mistress guided Léonie with a firm hand, never sparing her; but although Léonie sometimes rebelled or cried, her calm soon returned.

Soon Léonie was able to tell her sisters of a great joy: she was to take the habit on June 30, 1899. On June 28, Marie of the Sacred Heart answered her letter:

Believe me, there will be rejoicing in Heaven and on earth when you take the habit. ... At last, Thérèse will see the light of the longed-for dawn; how joyfully she will watch you take the veil of virgins once more—she who, on the day of her profession, asked Jesus to take you for Himself alone. ... My little Léonie must become more and more humble, obedient, and loving. ... Goodbye, my beloved little sister. Your family, both those on earth and those in Heaven, are with you on this day—even your little Carmelites, for love has wings, and the heart and soul know no distances. Don't forget to pray for her who loves you more than herself.

*Taking the habit anew*

On June 30, 1899, Léonie must have been filled with joy at the thought of taking the habit. The sermon was given in the Visitation chapel by Canon Levasseur. In speaking of Léonie's vocation, he quoted the words of Saint Paul: "The grace of God has made me what I am." The assembled community must have been greatly moved by his words, as they joined in prayer for the young woman who had had such difficulty in finding her place.

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Léonie's heart was filled with self-abandonment and gratitude for the long and difficult road that God had walked with her since her birth, constantly enveloping her in His love. Joyfully, she heard the preacher speak of Thérèse, looking down from Heaven to help her Visitandine sister gain humility of heart. Léonie was overwhelmed by the realization that only twenty-one months after Thérèse's death, her radiance was already spreading beyond the walls of her convent.

On taking the habit, Léonie received her final religious name of Sister Françoise-Thérèse—just as Thérèse is said to have predicted, years before, when she said "She will take my name and that of Saint Francis de Sales." The card commemorating the occasion showed a photograph of Thérèse, as a novice, embracing the cross in the Carmelite courtyard; the back of the card read simply:

Clothing Ceremony of

Sister Françoise-Thérèse

(Léonie Martin)

June 30, 1899

Léonie had asked her sisters to pray especially, on that day, that "your little Léonie may be changed, not only in name, but in *everything that might be displeasing* to Him whom alone she wishes to love."

She liked to recall the words that her Mother Superior, Mother Jeanne-Marguerite Decarpentry, said to her before the ceremony: "Your perseverance in desiring to embrace religious life, and the love you have for our holy vocation, gives us hope, my dear sister, that you will joyfully attain the fulfillment of your hopes." It was this same Mother Superior who, when told of Léonie's desire to rejoin the Visitation Order a third time, had agreed to this request,

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saying, "I know her, and I know that her soul is a very obedient one."

During this period, Léonie, and all her companions in the novitiate, had their cells in the attics of the convent. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after their old convent had been confiscated during the 1789 Revolution, the Visitation sisters had moved into two old buildings; they moved to rue de l'Abbatiale gradually, finally settling in around 1900.

*Convent humor*

Through constant effort, the rebel of long ago had become docile and meek. To her obedience she added simplicity and gaiety—so much that she sometimes surprised her companions! One day, she threw her arms around one of them, crying: "How I love this little sister!"

This exuberance was simple and unfeigned; but it could not eliminate Léonie's emotional and spiritual sufferings. Her slowness at work, her lack of common sense, her meticulous preoccupation with her little affairs, all earned her many reproaches. Léonie came to accept, more and more humbly and meekly, her repeated humiliations and the misery that she could not drive away. She knew how weak she was, but she rejoiced in the thought that Thérèse had been able to offer Jesus her very smallness and that it was through this that she had lived and died by love.

Léonie found a refuge in abandoning herself to prayer. As Jesus said: "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Léonie brought this spiritual childhood to recreation times, in her gaiety and good humor, her playfulness, the innocent jokes with which she tried to amuse her companions. In the

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Visitation convent, recreation times and feast days were always an invitation to a fraternal sharing of joy.

Life in the convent did not lack humor. One evening, during a game that was part of the Epiphany festivities, Léonie drew a charm that made her queen for the day; soon afterward, she found her bed decorated with no less than six hot water bottles, which her companions had placed there in order jokingly to highlight the "queen's" extreme sensitivity to cold! Léonie, leaving one hot water bottle between her own covers, mischievously slipped off to tuck the rest of them into the beds of those who, like herself, suffered intensely from the cold Norman winters.

Léonie was blissfully happy. At the end of August 1899, she wrote to Marie of the Sacred Heart: "I am perfectly happy—as happy as it is possible to be on this earth. When I look back on my past, as far back as my earliest childhood, and compare that time with this, I am overwhelmed with gratitude to the Heart of Jesus, who has enveloped me in so much love and who has placed me in this loveliest vestibule of Heaven, where I shall live and die."

*Léonie prepares for her profession*

As the year of Léonie's novitiate drew to its close, she waited in peace for her profession. She kept herself—as had Thérèse—close to the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate, so that she might help Léonie to prepare "a robe for her soul."

On May 13, 1900, Léonie wrote to her uncle: "I have reached my harbor—what joy! My holy Visitandine aunt's prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter: I am, and shall be for all eternity, a little—just a very little Visitandine."

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M. Martin might have said of his Léonie, using one of his favorite sayings, "She scraped through in the end!"

Léonie wanted everything within her and around her to be at peace for her profession, as on the day of her First Communion: she wrote to her sisters, asking their forgiveness for the countless sorrows she had caused them during her dreadful childhood. On June 17, 1900, her eldest sister Marie answered: "All that was forgotten long ago; and besides, those were unintentional wounds, in which your heart played no part. Today you are filling us with such joy that I wonder whether I am dreaming—whether you are really to make your profession! Our Thérèse had to leave us for Heaven in order for this miracle of grace to be granted."

The three Carmelites shared the little Visitandine's joy. On July 1, 1900, Marie wrote to her again:

How can I tell you all that is in my heart on the eve of such a great day? It is impossible. I do nothing but think of you; I speak of you to Jesus. Tomorrow, you will be His bride for eternity—what joy! What inconceivable love on the part of Our Lord: He has sought out His poor creature with such perseverance. ... Oh, my dear little sister, my heart is overflowing with thanksgiving at the thought that your turn has come at last! After so many wishes and so many tears, you too have gained the virgin's palm. ... At nine o'clock tomorrow morning, you will be surrounded by our love and our prayers. You must not think that we shall be far from you—no, the soul knows no distances.

By your side, too, will be our dear mother and father; our aunt, radiant with joy at seeing her dearest wishes fulfilled by her little Visitandine; and our Thérèse, surrounded by the four little angels who have been in that happy land for so long. Yes, all Heaven will rejoice tomorrow.

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I have laid a wreath for you at the feet of the Blessed Virgin—you know the one: the one from our house, who smiled at Thérèse. I even hung the wreath around her neck, and we all kissed it. What joy it is for us to offer it! ... Goodbye, beloved little sister; on this day, I have no words to express my joy and my affection for you.

Your little sister, Marie of the Sacred Heart.

Léonie's uncle, M. Guérin, also wrote to her affectionately:

Many adverse winds have hampered your voyage, because God wanted to help you to mature, to make you worthy of the great honor you sought. Without a doubt, this result is due to the graces that God has lavished upon you to reward your perseverance. I share in your joy, my dear, because I feel that a part of the honor that is bestowed upon you reflects on us. Have you not been, for many years, as a daughter to us? We have done all we could to urge you toward perfection; today, our mission ends. Join us, my dear child, in thanking the good Lord; and believe me, we miss your gentle presence very much.

This letter was written in answer to Léonie's of May 13, 1900, in which she had announced her profession; she had added, with respectful candor: "You were very anxious about my future, especially since you did not believe in my religious vocation. That is very understandable, my dear uncle, after all that has happened during the last thirteen years—dear God, how I have suffered!"

*Léonie's profession*

And thus, on July 2, 1900, the feast day of the Visitation Order, Léonie—the "littlest one," as she liked to call

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herself—radiantly happy under her wreath of roses, consecrated herself forever to God.

The sermon was given by Canon Levasseur, who had also spoken when Léonie took the habit on June 30, 1899. On that occasion, he had recalled Saint Paul's words, "The grace of God has made me what I am"; this time, he took the end of the apostle's text: "The grace of God has not been barren within me." Encouraging Sister Françoise-Thérèse, he said, "It seems to me that you—to a degree known to God alone—can say with the great Saint Paul: The grace of Jesus has produced some result within me. And what is that result? For Saint Paul, the result of grace was the knowledge of the crucified Christ. Isn't this what you, too, desire—what you want with a firm and generous determination? ... May Christ be your life! Live in Him, live by Him, live like Him!"

Léonie's cousin Francis La Néele represented her family at this ceremony. Jeanne and M. Guérin could not be there due to illness; and Mme. Guérin, Léonie's beloved aunt, had died on February 13th.

On the occasion of her profession, Léonie gave each of her loved ones a commemorative card. Again, the picture on the card was of Thérèse, who helped Léonie so much each day. This time, the photograph showed the young Carmelite seated on a bench, her hands folded; the card bore the words: "Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus, who died, in the odor of sanctity, at the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, on September 30, 1897, at the age of twenty-four."

On the day of her profession, Léonie wrote out and signed these words in the Book of Vows, also known as the Book of the Convent:

I, Françoise-Thérèse Martin, have by the grace of God, this day of July 2, 1900, celebrated my vows to live and

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die in the Congregation of Our Lady of the Visitation. May my Savior bless this day and render it profitable for all eternity.

Sister Françoise-Thérèse Martin

On the same page, Léonie testifies that her profession was made freely and without constraint and that she had been able to speak to the spiritual director of the community and to members of her family (in this case, her cousin Jeanne La Néele and Jeanne's husband, Francis La Néele) without any surveillance.

Léonie, like every Visitation sister, would renew her vows each year, on November 21, the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary. This ritual has been followed ever since the Caen convent was founded in 1627; at the time of writing, the Book of Vows of the rue de L'Abbatiale convent has reached its fourth thick volume.

In a letter of August 4, 1900, Léonie, describing her profession, told her sisters:

What a wonderful day! Nothing could distract me from the perfect calm, the heavenly peace that flooded my soul; I have never, never been so happy! In the evening of that heavenly day, I—like our beloved Thérèse—took off my lovely wreath, to lay it before the Sacred Heart and the most Holy Virgin, with no sense of regret; time cannot take away my happiness, for I am the bride of God for all eternity.

When I woke up the next morning, it was wonderful to be able to press to my heart the cross of my profession—the blessed cross that cost me so dear. I said to myself, "This time, I shall keep it. Nothing can take it from me. ... What joy, to belong to Jesus completely!"

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*The life of the newly professed*

Léonie's life, like that of all her fellow Visitation sisters, was one of renunciation, of prayer, and of work. The new Visitandine described her schedule in detail to her Carmelite sisters: she got up at five o'clock in the morning, went to bed at half past eight at night, and had only two meals, one at ten o'clock in the morning, the other at six o'clock at night.

Her days were full; a strict timetable divided each day into neat segments. Léonie wrote to Lisieux: "Here, our time is not just sliced up—it is chopped up. Our life of renunciation, which kills Mother Nature over a slow fire, consists in this."

Sister Françoise-Thérèse wanted to fulfill her various tasks faithfully; but her natural slowness and her meticulous desire for order often brought smiles to the lips of her less finicky companions.

Her favorite job was that of sacristan: she sewed and marked the altar linen, prepared the sacred vessels for Mass, and—a humbler task!—she scraped out the candlesticks.

She wrote to the Carmelites: "I have been appointed assistant to the bursar. It is just the job for me; I put things in order here and there, all through the house. I think of myself as the convent's little donkey, and I certainly find my lot an enviable one. So many sacrifices, known only to Jesus! How many souls I can save by these little nothings—as little as I am myself—which are my humble harvest!"

Later, she wrote to Céline that her job had been changed: "For the last ten days, I have been the nurse. You would be very amused to see how busy I am—really, sometimes I don't recognize myself! Here is my secret: my dear Thérèse is the nurse, and I am only her little helper.

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So it is understandable if we do a good job; but all the glory belongs to her."

Whether in the infirmary, the bursar's office, the refectory, or the linen room, Léonie would never be anything but an assistant. Apart from these various jobs, she continued to work in the solitude of her cell: "I am alone with Jesus for long periods of time, and to make Him happy, my little needle never stops moving; I think about my little Thérèse. In short, solitude delights me; in this I am very much a Carmelite."

Sometimes she was tempted to regret the fact that she always took second place, but at the same time she was clear-sightedly aware of her own incompetence. She wrote to Pauline: "I am still doing my humble job in the refectory. Considering how incompetent I am, I should be very honored to be entrusted with anything in the house. ... When, sometimes, I catch myself wishing for something more, I quickly submerge myself in the will of God."

On the same day Léonie wrote: "I can't make my fingers do anything right."

But Léonie liked her "littleness." She compared herself to a little log, asking Jesus to set it on fire and the Spirit of love to stoke the flames. She sought refuge from the most perfect of mothers, her "Mama Mary," and wrote joyfully, "It is my good fortune to sow Ave Marias!"

*Caring for others*

The memory of her dreadful childhood and the awareness of all the graces that her "wretched heart" had received created in Léonie a generosity that could withstand any trial. She told each member of the community, "Sister, ask me anything you like; I am ready to help you."

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Remembering her own difficulties in beginning religious life, she was particularly attentive and kind to the younger sisters. One evening, Léonie noticed tears in the eyes of a postulant. After the Office, she waited for the girl at the door of her cell and embraced her in silence. The young postulant was greatly comforted.

Léonie loved to comfort all those who were troubled or unhappy. To one sister, who was worried about her family, she said with conviction: "You have nothing to fear. Our little Thérèse is watching over all your family; she looks after them and cares for them. Don't worry; I have entrusted them to her."

A former Mother Superior wrote to Pauline: "Sister Françoise-Thérèse fills my old age with her many affectionate attentions; she arrives, with perfect punctuality, to take me, in my wheelchair, to choir and to community meetings."

On the eve of her profession, Léonie had made this resolution: "My God, do in me what You will; let me be good and charitable, even to excess, so that I may follow my Thérèse's example in practicing Your new commandment. Act in me and for me, I beg of You, in this difficult venture; for I have every reason to fear my great weakness, which has betrayed me so often. My Jesus, my faith in You is all the greater because I feel so small and so worthless."

During the First World War, Léonie worried constantly about the food restrictions at the Carmelite convent; her sisters had to reassure her, and Marie wrote: "Above all, don't worry about us; I have told you before that we have plenty of bread."

Naturally, Léonie's three Carmelite sisters had a special place in her heart. She faithfully remembered their birthdays and feast days; but sometimes, a little confused by the

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many dates, she would remind them of anniversaries that were actually her own!

She accepted generously, in silence, the stinging words of some of her companions—as she pardoned Louise Marais, the maid who had once tyrannized her in Alençon. Louise—who had become Mme. Legendre, a wife and mother—died in December 1923. "I forgive my tormentor with all my heart," Léonie said, "and I am grateful to her for looking after my mother so well during her last illness."

*In pursuit of an ideal*

Through willpower, Léonie had become docile. She once wrote to her sisters: "I rely on obedience, which really lets me work miracles—to the point that sometimes I hardly recognize myself. I love that virtue more than I can say, because it brings me, without fail, to humility, which is my favorite virtue."

Those of her former companions who are still living in the Visitation convent in Caen say that Léonie truly considered herself a useless servant, the least of all. She entered fully into the Visitation ideal of gentleness, joy, humility, and simplicity in her relationships with the other members of the community.

Her goal was to become a saint. She asked not only her Carmelite sisters, but also her uncle, M. Guérin, to pray for that intention: "Pray hard for me, dear uncle, so that I may become a saint. Our dear Mother says I have just enough wit for it."

In this spirit, she peacefully accepted her deficiencies; but this did not prevent her from suffering from them. She wrote: "I have suffered greatly from my inferiority; I have felt keen isolation of heart—of every kind. I

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experience the same difficulties, again and again: worries, dislikes, wearinesses of all sorts. But I can feel that all these torments are a purification—that God is at work; and I thank Him for all of it."

*Self-knowledge*

Léonie remained very much aware of her own weaknesses, moral and intellectual. As we see in this letter to one of her sisters, she knew herself very well: "You know how fickle and easily frightened I am; this little one is a coward, afraid of her own weakness, and she asks you to pray very hard for her."

Elsewhere she wrote: "The fervor that I felt during the retreat has died to ashes. But now, when I fall, I do not become discouraged as I used to; and your letters always arrive at just the right time to strengthen me in my constant struggles. ... But beside my dear sisters, I, poor little nothing, am like night beside day. My only hope is to buy back through humility what I so often lose through wickedness."

Léonie's description of herself as "wicked" was certainly an exaggeration, for she was no longer the "bad girl" of her youth in Alençon; she had allowed her heart to be molded to resemble the Sacred Heart. But she knew that her heart was still far from burning with love: "I eat fire every morning, in Holy Communion; but my icicle of a heart is still an icicle."

Léonie, though she was always friendly and smiling, suffered within herself from her inability to attain the ideal she glimpsed. She admitted this to her sisters—"I am so far from the ideal of humility that I want to attain!"—but then recovered herself with the words, "But with God's help, I hope to reach it."

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In short, Léonie considered herself "a poor, faithless little soul, unmortified, fleeing suffering as much as she can." Her minute self-analysis was merciless; she confessed to Céline: "If only you knew how lazy and unfaithful your Léonie is at gathering virtues! My unquenchable thirst for pleasure makes me steal from Jesus again and again. Pray for me, that I may have the courage to conquer myself; for I am weakness itself."

The same *mea culpa* is in her words to Pauline: "You would not believe what it costs me to work assiduously and what incessant effort is necessary for me to conquer my natural laziness and cowardice, which lead me to seek my own satisfaction in everything."

Léonie judged herself far more severely than did others. Among those who visited her and spoke with her was Mlle. Violette Castel (whose sister, Sister Marie of the Trinity, was a Carmelite in Lisieux), who once exclaimed: "I spend such lovely moments with Sister Françoise-Thérèse during our visits! She might be described as good sense united with the love of God. She is a real little saint—and so humble! She makes everyone love her!"

*Léonie's self-abandonment*

Léonie's awareness of her own wretchedness had led her, in Thérèse's footsteps, to a deep abandonment to Divine Mercy. She wanted to be the child who lives only in boundless faith in the Father, in the Father's tender embrace; it was not just incredible but unthinkable that her Father would forsake her. She truly made herself the "little one," as she liked, more and more, to call herself; in this letter to Pauline, the phrase "so little" is underlined three times: "I wish to be—I am—so little, so very

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little, that Jesus is forced to hold me in His arms. This is what gives me confidence: I know that He will not let me fall."

It seems best to allow Léonie to express in her own words, found in various letters, the filial trust that is one of the most fundamental features of Thérèse's Little Way.

"I am so small that I cannot damn myself; little children are not damned. I trust that I shall fall into the arms of Jesus, who is Love and Mercy; I have no fear of Him."

"I have become so little that I have the audacity to believe that I shall not go to purgatory."

"I feel like a very small child who does not even know how to walk. This thought, far from distressing me, encourages me; for Jesus, seeing my helplessness, is obliged to carry me."

"I could not be more self-abandoned. I believe I have reached the point where God wishes me to be, for I love what He does above all else; I do not want to choose anything at all."

"I am so poor, so little, so weak—but I rejoice in being so, for it makes me more open to His consuming and transforming love." (Léonie had discovered the expression "consuming and transforming love" in a letter that Thérèse wrote to her godmother, Marie of the Sacred Heart, in September 1896.)

"Jesus knows well that even if I should live a thousand years, I should still be just as poor."

"I know well that Jesus asks nothing of His lowly little one except effort; and so I am far from being discouraged, for I want to remain in my complete helplessness, which is my strength. By this childish ruse, I touch the Heart of God."

Léonie once wrote, recognizing the freely given help of her loving Father: "My childhood was dreadful, disfiguring

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our beautiful and holy family. How merciful God has been to me!" Echoing these words, Pauline wrote to Léonie: "I shudder when I think of your childhood; you were a cuckoo in the nest."

*Thérèse's presence*

"It is trust, and nothing but trust, which must lead us to Love," Thérèse wrote in September 1896. Léonie hoped that by following her sister, she too would achieve a life of love dedicated to Jesus and to His Church. "How I wish I had the soul of an apostle!" she wrote; but, feeling the weight of her weakness, she immediately added, "It is hard for my unmortified nature to sacrifice itself constantly."

Léonie, following the Little Way, sometimes felt Thérèse's presence very strongly by her side—very early on, well before there was any mention of beatification. In these words, Léonie described to Pauline an event that had taken place in 1902:

Our little Thérèse bestowed a great grace on me—it was more than two years ago, but the memory of it is still as clear as if it had happened yesterday. I was attending morning prayer and my mind kept wandering—sadly, this is not rare. Suddenly, with the speed of lightning, something luminous appeared on my breviary. It was only afterward that I fully realized that what I had seen was a hand. I immediately said to myself: "It is my little Thérèse, calling me to order." So many times, since then, I have wished I could see that beautiful hand again; but I never have. I assure you, it was not my imagination; it was real.

Both in her letters to Lisieux and in her personal notes, Léonie constantly wrote about Thérèse. "Like my holy

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little sister—but with far greater reason—I can say: I am only a very little soul, who can only do very little things." In other writings, she confided: "I make her words my own, and they will help me greatly: O Jesus, my words cannot express your ineffable condescension." Sometimes—as we shall see in connection with *Sister Françoise-Thérèse's Retreat Resolutions*—Léonie even addressed her notes directly to Thérèse.

In April 1903, Léonie had the great joy of seeing Pauline. Pauline and Mother Marie de Gonzague had been called to Valognes, in the region of La Manche, to settle a loan; on the way, they stopped at the Visitation convent in Caen. This gave Léonie a chance to talk to her "little mother" Pauline of how her soul was more and more drawn to Thérèse's teachings; this showed Pauline, more clearly than letters could, how Léonie was progressing, following the light of the little Carmelite who had died "in the odor

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of sanctity," as was said at the time. Léonie insisted, "Our Thérèse is my ideal!"

Some time afterward, Pauline wrote to reassure Léonie, who was worried by the anti-religious atmosphere of the French government, with its 1901 law concerning the expulsion of religious communities. It was necessary to be prepared for the worst: the Carmelites of Lisieux thought of withdrawing to Belgium, and the Visitandines foresaw the possibility of taking refuge in England. Very fortunately, this surge of religious persecution disappeared from France, never to return, and Léonie recovered her serenity.

*Simplicity*

It seems appropriate, as we attempt to understand Léonie, to seek the source of her charm; all those who wish to know her better sense that this may be found in her simplicity.

She was able to laugh about her own deficiencies; for example, in discussing Thérèse's two godmothers—Marie at baptism, Léonie at confirmation—she wrote: "God alone knows which of our saint's godmothers will be the first to go. But one thing is certain: the baptismal one will fly straight to Heaven, with no detours, while the other one, the confirmation one, may easily spend some time roasting. Well, I believe—I hope—that we will follow one another closely."

In fact, Marie died in 1940, and Léonie followed her in 1941.

Léonie, indeed, sometimes had premonitions. In a birthday letter to Pauline, she adds, with her good-natured simplicity: "I have a feeling that you and dear Céline will live a very long time before you take flight for the Heavenly Country."

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In this, again, Léonie was not mistaken: her two sisters both died at the age of ninety, Pauline in 1951 and Céline in 1959.

A great many of Léonie's writings and sayings could be quoted to show her simplicity, but just in conclusion I must quote a delightful passage from a letter that Marie wrote to Léonie in November 1907. We already know that Léonie, when she lived in the world, was very conscious of her appearance. Beneath her religious habit, this femininity was, luckily, still very much present—and Léonie worried about the hairs that grew on her chin! Even in the cloister, there is no need to be bearded! She was given a pair of tweezers; but, as she innocently confided to her sisters, she was not very skilled in their use.

Marie answered—after some words on higher matters—with the passage: "Now, dear little sister, a few words to teach you how to use your famous tweezers without hurting yourself. Once one has the knack, one doesn't even notice it! With your left hand, between your thumb and index finger, you must hold, very tightly, the part of your chin from which you wish to remove the famous beard. Even without following that method, you can stiffen your chin; and the job becomes an easy one and doesn't hurt at all. It's just that you don't have the knack of it yet."

Marie continues humorously: "You will suspect that, in order to give you such precise instructions, I must be well-practiced at the job. And so I am! But I never wait too long; as soon as the crop appears, I weed it out at once. I am not a gardener for nothing! Speaking of the garden, we shall send you some daisies as soon as we get a chance."

How I enjoy this letter from the "nonconformist" Marie! And so, I am sure, will my readers! It brings us much closer to these religious to see how they, who were so heroic in their lives of perpetual self-sacrifice, suddenly

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descended to our level in the little things of daily life. They are indeed our sisters; there is nothing other-worldly about them—and so much the better! As a result, we are far readier to listen to them when they speak to us of great spiritual matters.

In the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa of Avila, who reformed the Carmelite Order, said, "The Lord is present even among the saucepans." Why should he not be present among the tweezers? It was Saint Teresa, too, who reproached Brother Jean de la Misère for making her eyes so prominent in the portrait of her that he painted—"God forgive you, Brother Jean, for making me so ugly!"; for she loved beauty, not the flaws that we should try to remedy.

*Retreat resolutions*

Léonie told her sisters in Lisieux about each of the retreats she made in the Caen convent. Léonie experienced the times in the desert, the powerful moments heart to heart with God, sometimes with enthusiasm, sometimes in darkness; but in either case, she came out of each retreat with fresh resolutions. She shared these, above all, with Pauline, so that her "little mother" could, through her prayers and letters, help Léonie to keep them.

In order to know Léonie better, it is interesting to examine a few of these resolutions, which have been preserved in the archives of the Visitation convent. Little Léonie, scribbling her plans—sometimes, in the spirit of poverty, on tiny scraps of paper—would have laughed heartily to hear that, decades later, they would be read with such interest.

On November 3, 1922, Léonie wrote: "I hear my Thérèse telling me: `My Little Way is certain; in following

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it, I was not mistaken. My sorrows, my happiness, my little sacrifices—these are my flowers! This is how I became holy; do as I did, and I will help you to become holy as well.` Under your almost maternal protection, I will throw flowers to Jesus."

As we have seen, Thérèse occupied a place of honor in Léonie's heart and thoughts. In 1923, her newly beatified sister was very much in Léonie's mind; on retreat, she wrote: "In your last letter, my beloved little sister, you wrote to me: `If you wish to be a saint, it will be easy for you: make Jesus happy, unite yourself more and more intimately to Him.` I want to concentrate on these two points, especially on gentleness and humility in relationships, and also on greater diligence in work. You shall be my beloved spiritual director; in me and with me, you must continue your religious life."

The next year, in November 1924, Léonie made the same resolutions as she had in 1923—thus proving how difficult she had found it to keep her promises of punctuality, diligence, and good humor. All Léonie's retreat resolutions throughout her life had to do with gentleness, patience, and kindness. She was aware that she resisted the perfection she sought, through fear of the discomfort brought on by the sacrifices these virtues require. Léonie wanted, above all, humility, self-effacement, littleness; in herself she recognized "a rebellious nothingness," as she herself wrote, "to whom nothing is owed."

Léonie understood the principle that Saint Francis de Sales had taught his daughters and that the nuns of the Caen convent followed: "It is not the greatness of our actions that pleases God, but the love with which we do them."

Léonie, however, still faltered now and again; in December 1926, she answered an inquiring letter from Pauline with the words: "You asked whether I am faithful

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to my resolutions. Alas, I must admit to many failures; but I am not discouraged: if the little child keeps falling, Jesus will have even more mercy on her and will be obliged to carry her in His arms. As you can see, you have no reason to be proud of me; in my wicked depths, there is far more weakness than love."

As we try to understand Léonie's spirituality better, it is helpful to read a thought that she captured, in her slanting handwriting, during her retreat of October 1934: "O my God, in my life, where You have put so little that shines, grant that I, like You, may choose true values, disdaining human values to prize and desire only the absolute, the eternal, the Love of God, through constant Hope."

The last of Léonie's retreat resolutions, written in 1937, shows her to us, in all her sincerity and simplicity, summing up the littleness that she had sought with such perseverance.

"It is inappropriate for me to moan over my faults, as I have done until now; I realize now that that is pride. As our Holy Founder said, it is no wonder that weakness is weak; so I must humble myself, not vex myself. I want to be little, so little! Little children fall without hurting themselves badly—they are too small for that; this is the example I want to follow. I can feel that this is what Jesus expects of me."

*Pauline's advice*

Léonie's sisters were anxious to help her to progress along her religious path. The comforting letters that arrived from Lisieux often found her near tears.

Pauline was, perhaps, at once the most maternal and the most entertaining of Léonie's sisters; sometimes, too, she

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became slightly moralistic, so as to edify and instruct the little sister who needed such constant support: "If there is nothing you can do, then don't try too hard to hold back your tears; you can find relief in letting them flow. Offer them up to Jesus, as if they were tears of love, and go in peace—with your handkerchief in your hand—so as not to wet the floor! My beloved little sister, let us just be happy—as in fact you are—for our lot is a beautiful one."

In another letter, Léonie's "little mother" advised her: "Become a saint, but please, not a fearful saint. Go to Jesus through trust and love; don't cry over imperfections that you will always have—that is absolutely useless; it is a waste of time." To comfort Léonie, Pauline assured her: "How God has loved you—and how surprised you will be, in Heaven, by the glory and the love you will enjoy! It is all the same to God if one has a bumpy forehead and crooked teeth." (Léonie's teeth were, in fact, very ugly; later, she would become almost toothless, but would always refuse to wear dentures.)

It seems that Léonie, even in her religious habit, was still very insecure about her unattractive appearance. Pauline wrote to her: "Don't bother to cut off your head—what an idea! God loves it as it is—just as a mother would rather see her baby howling than see it decapitated!"

This was Pauline's attempt to comfort Léonie, who, during this period, was inclined to be melancholy, saddened by her difficulties in conquering her stubborn nature. Often one or other of her sisters had to write from the convent to boost her morale. Here, again, it is Pauline: "If you lapse, ask forgiveness of Jesus and your sisters, quickly and with humility, and then go off contented, without moping."

In another letter she reiterates: "Take care, my little sister, always to trust in God. Don't fret so much about

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feeling wretched; you, like me, will always be so, to the very end. Be cheerful, I beg of you; for you, as for us, the Lord in His Mercy has deigned to do great things, and that without any merit on our part."

A few words from her big sister were enough to give Léonie courage: "They say that when Mama was dying, she thought of nothing but her Léonie's future. And oh, how well her Léonie has turned out! How much more pliant she has become!"

Léonie—affectionate, sensitive, sometimes even touchy—watched impatiently for the post from Lisieux. Her sisters, living together, understood how easy it was for Léonie, alone in Caen, to become heavyhearted when news was late in arriving; in her solitude, she, far more than her united sisters, needed written proof of that fraternal love which sustained all the Martins. Pauline, in particular, wrote to her affectionately, but not without exhorting her dear Visitandine to overcome the despondency and discouragement that threatened her.

*Longing for Heaven*

In almost all of her many letters to her sisters in Lisieux, Léonie spoke of her "homesickness" for her final home. She longed for Paradise and complained that her exile on earth, full of cruel losses and every kind of suffering, seemed endless.

It is important to recognize that this was characteristic of the nineteenth-century religious atmosphere: many religious sighed for the "Heavenly Country," the only source of happiness, and despised life on earth as a minefield of pitfalls and sorrows. Pauline, too, pleaded for an end to her exile and for a final happy dwelling place.

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But it was God who created this life and this wonderful world which He generously offered to mankind; and so we can only criticize an attitude that despises earthly life. Nowadays, fortunately, those who hope to reach Heaven when they die spend their lives crying "Hurrah for life!" in the midst of all the worries and sufferings it brings. In appreciating life, we give thanks to God, who gave it to us—the thanks of a child smiling up at his Father.

It was only toward the end of her difficult life, after a retreat in October 1932, that Léonie realized that her complaints might not be pleasing to God. She wrote to Pauline: "I want to share with you an insight I have had: until now, I have been guilty of a great lack of sensitivity toward God, in telling Him incessantly how long my exile seemed to me. I was telling Him no more and no less than, `Take me soon, for I am sick and tired of suffering for You.` All that is over! Over! Absolutely over!"

On that day, Léonie assured Pauline that she would never again complain about the heaviness of earthly life; but the next month she wrote, slightly inconsistently: "It is taking so long for me to reach my Father's home." Soon afterward, she wrote to Pauline: "When shall we meet Him face to face? I find the time so long! When shall we leave this exile to contemplate our beloved Risen Lord?" But then, once again, Léonie repented her cowardice in wanting to abandon the monotony of daily life for a more sublime land. Pauline replied to her: "I, too, wish to leave this world; but without your vehemence, my poor little sister. I pity you! But it is far from being an imperfection, for at heart you do surrender yourself to God's will."

It was true: Léonie surrendered herself completely to her beloved Lord. But in spite of her single-minded desire to please God, she became impatient with walking the earth and longing for Heaven. One cannot become a

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saint all at once; the sown seed changes and grows little by little. It was only in the last months of her life that Léonie was able to rid herself of all regrets—even of all desires—and of all preoccupation with herself. During that time, she spoke very little of herself to her sisters; it was almost apologetically that she wrote, in May 1941, at the end of one of her last letters: "Just a few words about my soul—a very sinful one, and one that has no fear of God. On the contrary, it is my extreme wretchedness that gives me my confidence; and I joyfully believe that as I leave the dear maternal arms of our beloved Mother, I shall fall easily into those of Jesus and of our Mama in Heaven. What audacity!"

Every saint must develop and progress. In June 1897, three months before her death, Thérèse herself described, in her memoirs, how she had only learned fully to understand the virtue of charity in the last months of her life. "This year, my dear Mother, God has granted me the grace of understanding what charity is; before, I understood, it is true, but only imperfectly."

*Léonie's health*

It will be remembered that, since her birth, Léonie had been frail and sickly. Her ill health had been a considerable handicap to her, both in her early studies and in her religious vocation. The eczema that had manifested itself very early in her childhood had never left her; sometimes it covered her whole body, tormenting her with terrible itching, which worsened if she scratched it.

From her head to her feet, Léonie suffered: she had recurrent migraines, dermatosis on her scalp, frequent intestinal illnesses, periodic attacks of nausea, and ingrown

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toenails that had to be removed, very painfully, in the convent—not to mention her overall lassitude, which worsened around her fortieth year.

Léonie caught every cold and influenza that struck her family or her community; often her illness developed into bronchitis or pneumonia, which were treated with cupping glasses or mustard plasters. She once said, "Those remedies roasted me like Saint Lawrence on his grill!" During the epidemic of December 1930, Léonie—who was then sixty-seven—was so seriously ill that she believed she would soon join Thérèse in Heaven; on December 8, she received the last rites.

Emmanuel Suhard, then bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, visited Léonie in the convent infirmary. In a letter to Mother Agnès, he described their meeting: "I have just returned from Caen, where I went to give my blessing to Sister Françoise-Thérèse. The dear patient is truly in God's hands; I was greatly edified by my conversation with her."

Léonie, however, recovered from this dangerous illness, although her health was permanently damaged; she had ten long years left in which to live—and to suffer. In 1932, Léonie's health gave her further problems: her right knee needed an operation. On May 26, she wrote to Marie: "I am writing this from a chaise longue. ... I was in bed for four days. ... It is my right knee; it has been playing tricks on me for thirty-three years, but in the end it gave out completely, and they had to cut it open, right to the kneecap. The operation was eight days ago. The wound is open, and should heal on its own; this will take at least six weeks." (In August it was still not fully healed.) "I work sitting down. ... My condition remains unchanged. I must have patience, for this will be a long illness; they may have to reopen the knee. I am in hardly any pain, and it is not continual; you see, I am so small that God treats me like

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a big baby!" From then on, Léonie's walk would always be unsteady.

At the beginning of 1935, Léonie was not at all well. Mother Agnès, having occasion to write to a good friend of the Carmelites who was in Rome, asked him to remember her beloved Léonie in his prayers. On February 27, Pauline, to her great surprise, received a telegram from the Vatican! It read: "His Holiness sends most heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to Sister Françoise-Thérèse Visitation convent Caen expressing paternal wishes asking divine comfort through intercession of the Little Saint signed Cardinal Pacelli." Pauline was all the more touched because she had not asked for the Pope's blessing. She hurried to send the telegram to Léonie.

On March 3, Léonie—somewhat better, but still bedridden—replied to Pauline: "The blessing of the Holy Father filled me with joy; sweet tears came to my eyes as I saw how our beloved Father and Pontiff deigned to remember the littlest, the lowliest of his flock. What incomparable graciousness!!! I naturally count on you, dear little mother, to thank His Holiness. The most moving thing of all is that this blessing came unasked for; to my inexpressibly grateful heart, this triples its worth."

Léonie, finding herself on the mend when she had thought herself on the threshold of Heaven, mischievously wrote to her sisters: "I am sure that it was the Holy Father's blessing that kept me on this earth; so I beg of you, if I fall ill again, be sure not to tell him!"

Léonie suffered from rheumatism, becoming more and more stooped and shaky; she wrote, "I am terribly unsteady on my legs!" Her feet became very swollen, and her whole body was stiff. At the end of December 1936, in a letter sending New Year's Day greetings to her sisters, she wrote of her health: "I am doing wonderfully well,

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and so is my lumbago, which makes me stoop like a little old woman of a hundred; it and I are happily on our way to Heaven together. And you, little sisters whom I love more and more, how are you?"

There is a kind of gaiety in Léonie's letter to Céline: "Do you still have rheumatism in your arm? I have it in my left foot, but I am running about all the same; you know the song: `Sorrows are all madnesses—etc.`"

In another letter, Léonie contemplates the future: "I expect I will become misshapen, horrible to look at, before I die. ... I have more and more infirmities; I can't find any comfortable position."

Soon, too, she had hardly any teeth left, and her prominent chin came closer and closer to her lips. In 1936, Léonie asked her sisters: "Have you got used to your dentures? What a nuisance it would be to me, having them in my mouth! I much, much prefer to have no teeth at all."

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The Sister of a Saint

*Thérèse's growing glory*

The little Carmelite who was so strongly present in Léonie's mind soon manifested herself miraculously on every continent, intervening to protect, heal, or bring back to God those who had strayed. She also hastened to lead men and women to religious life. Religious everywhere attested that they owed their vocations to "little Sister Thérèse," as she is called everywhere.

Thérèse had, indeed, promised that from Heaven she would do good upon earth—even adding, "I will come down to earth." At the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, there were many reports of apparitions and remarkable graces; these increased from day to day, to the point that only a few years after Thérèse's death, it was suggested that an examination of her virtues be submitted to the Church. Léonie was very moved by the glory that streamed over her little sister's name.

On October 15, 1907, ten years after Thérèse's death, Bishop Lemmonier, the new bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, asked the Carmelites to put their memories of Thérèse, their sister and companion, into writing. Every day during this period, the Carmelite convent in Lisieux received numerous letters, from France and from abroad, asking for the "little Sister's" intervention and calling for her canonization.

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Léonie showed very little emotion when her superior told her that Thérèse's Cause was to be introduced in the Court of Rome; continuing to hang up the community's washing, she said frankly, "Thérèse was sweet—but all the same, to canonize her—!" She immediately added, "It is true that one never had anything to reproach her for!"

Léonie was asked to provide copies of all the letters she had received from Thérèse. She had kept fourteen of them; when Pauline received them, she wrote to Léonie: "You have sent me a treasure. I didn't know you were so rich."

In 1910, Bishop Lemonnier received the authorization from Rome to open the diocesan Process for the Cause of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus. He notified the superior of the Visitation convent in Caen that Sister Françoise-Thérèse Martin should prepare her deposition for the Process. Timid Léonie, distrusting herself, redoubled her prayers to the Holy Spirit to help her to remember and to write her declaration.

Léonie, her inner life in turmoil, tried to be docile and obedient; she wrote to her three Carmelite sisters: "Our Mother is as devoted to me as can be. I am moved to tears by her help; I know that I would never manage without it. Well, provided that I have enough wit to love God with all my strength, living only by love and humility, that is enough for me."

Léonie—a worthy daughter of Saint Francis de Sales, who once said "Today is enough"—tried not to worry about the morrow; she trusted God to help her, from day to day, to prepare her deposition for the Process.

*A witness at the Process*

Soon, Léonie was called to be a witness at the Tribunal for the Cause of the Beatification of Sister Thérèse of the

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Child Jesus. The Tribunal sat in Bayeux; and so, for the first time since she had entered the Visitation Order on January 28, 1899, Léonie had to come out of the enclosure and leave Caen. On November 27, 1910, she was driven to Bayeux by motorcar, accompanied by her superior, Mother Jeanne-Marguerite. In Bayeux, they stayed at the Benedictine convent on rue Saint-Loup; there, Léonie was overjoyed to meet Marcelline Husé, who had once been a servant of the Guérins and who had since become Sister Marie Josèphe of the Cross.

As the sister of "the Servant of God, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus," Léonie was treated with particular respect, but her keen desire to follow the way of spiritual childhood prevented her from giving way to vanity. "Just now, Thérèse is working very hard within my soul—working on humility. The more I see her raised up in glory, the more I feel the need to humble myself. I thirst to disappear, to be counted for nothing—what a grace!"

Léonie gave her evidence to the Informative Process, simply and naturally, in the course of several interrogatory sessions. After stating her identity, she began with the words, "Although I love my little sister very much, I shall bear witness only for the glory of God and according to truth." She answered the Tribunal's questions calmly and affirmed, "I want this beatification to happen because I believe that it will contribute to the glory of God and will inspire the love of God within souls."

She was questioned about Thérèse's childhood in Alençon, her youth in Lisieux, her relationships with her parents and sisters, and her entry into the Carmelite Order in 1888. Describing Thérèse's last moments at Les Buissonnets, Léonie said: "I told her to think hard before entering religious life; I said that my own experience had shown me that this life demanded many sacrifices and that it should not be taken on lightly. Her answer, and the

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expression on her face, showed me that she expected all these sacrifices and accepted them with joy."

On December 4, 1910, Léonie, much relieved, returned to the Visitation convent with her superior.

Léonie's sister Marie, in Lisieux, reacted in much the same way as did Léonie: she disliked the formality with which the questions were asked and the meticulous care with which the answers were immediately recorded by very ceremonious clerics. She wrote to Léonie: "Let us work enthusiastically to become saints, and God will canonize us in Heaven—on earth, it is too much trouble!" Léonie answered, writing about the excitement that Thérèse's glorification was creating all over the world, "What immense glory for God!—that is the best of the matter."

*A brief meeting with her sisters*

It was announced that an Apostolic Process would take up the Cause of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus; this Process would take place in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, beginning on April 9, 1915. Léonie was invited to give evidence as an eyewitness; thus she had the immense joy of meeting her Carmelite sisters, whom she had not seen for seventeen years. It was a great occasion for all the Martin girls, reunited for the glorification of their little sister.

Léonie had never seen the places where Thérèse had lived, prayed, and suffered. Now, within the enclosure, she enthusiastically visited the various parts of the convent: the choir, the oratory, the chapter hall, the chauffoir (the only room heated in winter), the cell where Thérèse had her earlier hemorrhages, and, finally, the narrow infirmary where she died.

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Léonie went along the courtyard and entered the refectory, where the maxims written on the walls had been read by her sister. She wanted to see everything—just as Thérèse, in her childhood, had wanted to "choose all" from Léonie's little basket. She roamed through the garden and the path bordered by chestnut trees, went into the wash house, noticed the open-air washing-place, the little hermitages, the tiny cemetery where the Carmelites who had died before Thérèse were buried.

In this holy place, the sensitive Léonie spent eight days of bliss—"Oh, I am so happy!" she exclaimed. The interrogatory sessions were less enjoyable; but the preparatory work was made less difficult by the fact that she was able to repeat the statements she had made at the first Process, in 1910.

After this reunion with her sisters, Léonie found it very difficult to return to Caen; she missed her sisters and longed to see them again, more than ever. She wrote to them about this, and Marie answered: "I, like you, feel the weight of our exile more heavily then ever since your departure. For a moment, we shared the joys of being a family. ... It seemed as if we had never been separated; these seventeen years fled far from us, and the joy of the moment was everything to us."

We must not forget that at that time, cloistered nuns had no chance to leave their convents—not even to go to the doctor or to vote, as they do nowadays. It is easy to understand why Léonie later described her unexpected stay in Lisieux as "a visit to Heaven."

To preserve the memory of that time, photographs were taken inside the Carmelite convent; Léonie posed, alone or with her sisters, for the camera. After she returned to Caen, she received the pictures. She thanked her beloved sisters, admitting naïvely: "If I weren't afraid of hurting

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your feelings, I would have sent the portraits of me back to you; what use are they to my community? Hasn't it enough—even too much—to deal with in the poor person, without having pictures of her as well! This is only a surmise, with no foundation; for I believe I am loved, even though I am not at all lovable. Well, since you think I look well, I shall agree with you; this poor littlest one feels so inferior to you, in every respect."

Léonie had still not overcome the feeling, which she had always had, that she was inferior to her sisters.

Léonie wrote to Sister Geneviève, the artist and photographer: "My little Céline, I am afraid I upset you about my portrait; you worked so hard on it, and I gave you so much trouble. It is not your fault that I am so ugly and so untidy; it is mine."

*The whirlwind of glory*

Léonie, isolated in her Caen convent, was notified in detail of everything that had to do with Thérèse. Every publication concerning Thérèse—including the new editions of *Story of a Soul* and of Thérèse's *Poetry* and *Thoughts*—was sent to her, either from Lisieux or directly from the printers, Saint-Paul of Bar-le-Duc. She received the volumes entitled *Showers of Roses* as they were published; they describe the innumerable graces and miracles obtained through the young Carmelite's intercession.

Of course, Léonie took great delight in all the studies of the Way of Spiritual Childhood; in Céline's work on Thérèse's writings, which was published in May 1924; and in Last Conversations, which were published in November 1926, under the title *Novissima Verba*. She wrote to her sisters: "How kind of you to let us know about

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everything that has to do with our dear little saint! I love her so much that nothing gives me more joy than things that tell me about her."

Even foreign translations of Thérèse's writings arrived at the Visitation convent, and the Carmelites generously sent holy cards and portraits of Thérèse, which Léonie loved to distribute to her companions on community feast days.

The events marking the progress of the "whirlwind of glory" were all described in letters from Lisieux to Caen, and Léonie was very moved by what she heard. She already knew that military pilgrimages had been coming to her little sister's tomb in the Lisieux cemetery ever since 1911 and that they continued to do so in spite of the war. She learned that hundreds of letters on the subject of Thérèse's influence arrived at the Carmelite convent each day. It was, too, through her three sisters, who dutifully told her everything, that Léonie learned of the exhumation of Thérèse's remains, which took place on September 6, 1910, after the Informative Process. She heard how, as her little sister's corpse was being moved to another grave in the same cemetery, a scent of roses emanated from the coffin. Léonie was also very excited to hear that on October 1, 1913, her old home, Les Buissonnets, was opened to the public, to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims who wanted to see Thérèse's childhood home.

The work of the 1915 Process was finished, and Léonie's sisters informed her that a second exhumation of Thérèse's remains had taken place on August 10, 1917, in order to place her body in a leaden coffin. Céline and Jeanne La Néele were present at this exhumation.

In the summer of 1921, Léonie's sisters announced to her that Pope Benedict XV had just declared their little sister "the Venerable Servant of God, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus." Léonie was overjoyed to hear that, on

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this occasion, the Holy Father had given an enthusiastic homily on the Way of Spiritual Childhood.

On March 26, 1923, Léonie shared the joy and excitement of her Carmelite sisters as Thérèse's remains were borne in triumph from the cemetery to the Carmelite chapel, in preparation for her beatification. Léonie learned that on the occasion of this Translation of the Relics of the future Blessed, fifty thousand pilgrims had invaded the little Norman town to accompany the carriage bearing the coffin. After the coffin was placed in the reliquary in Lisieux, the decorated carriage was brought to Caen; Léonie saw it through the windows of the Visitation convent.

Léonie also heard about the "whirlwind of glory" that surrounded the Carmelite convent from one of her companions: Sister Marguerite-Agnès Castel, who had entered the Visitation Order in January 1917 and whose sister, Sister Marie of the Trinity, was a Carmelite and had been one of Thérèse's novices. Through the Castel sisters' correspondence, Léonie heard all the news.

*Thérèse's beatification and canonization*

On April 29, 1923, Rome's immense Basilica of Saint Peter was thronged with pilgrims as Pope Pius XI solemnly proclaimed Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus "Blessed." He affectionately called her "the Star of his pontificate." On that day, Léonie was honored both in the Visitation chapel and in the refectory, where she sat beside the superior, at a table decorated with greenery and roses, beneath the portrait of her glorious little sister.

A few days later, Léonie wrote to her dear Carmelites: "Our Blessed sister was honored delightfully here. The chapel was packed with people. The superior, in his

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speech, drew a parallel between the most Holy Virgin Mary and the sweet Virgin of Carmel, who has also made her influence felt throughout the world. I was feted, surrounded, honored—or rather our dear saint was, in my poor, frail person."

Some weeks after the beatification, the Holy Father signed an order for the resumption of the Cause of the Blessed Thérèse of the Child Jesus, with a view to her canonization. The little Carmelite's ascension was a rapid one and one called for by the voice of the people.

At the end of 1924, Léonie, sending her sisters New Year's Day greetings, wrote: "1925—our Thérèse will be canonized! What immense glory for God!"

It was announced that the canonization would be on May 17, 1925. A week beforehand, Léonie, in a letter to Lisieux, exclaimed: "Dear little sisters, our hearts beat in unison, exulting with joy and thanksgiving toward our God of love, who made of our little Thérèse a masterpiece of grace and humility—a very great saint."

It was suggested that Thérèse's four sisters should go to the Vatican to attend the formal ceremony of canonization, but all four preferred the silence and obscurity of their cloisters. Léonie certainly would not have been comfortable in the midst of the honors and the crowds. She wrote: "I am happier here than in Rome. I prefer to be in my lowly place."

On the occasion of the canonization, however, a lavish ceremony was held in the Visitation chapel, and the Visitandines enjoyed a celebration—where Léonie was once more singled out and honored—in the refectory.

Léonie wrote to her sisters, in connection with all these triumphal celebrations: "Human language is utterly powerless to express what happens within the soul; so silence alone is fitting."

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Rome, however, was far from silent. That evening, in a marvelously illuminated Saint Peter's Square, half a million pilgrims celebrated "the greatest saint of modem times"; joy filled the crowd, who had come from every nation of the world to honor the saint who ceaselessly causes graces to rain down on mankind.

After all these solemn ceremonies, Léonie sent these lines to the Carmelites: "We have experienced truly holy and pure joys in the incomparable celebrations, in Rome and in Lisieux, of our little saint's glory. She was truly treated like a queen. But by the grace of God, all that, far from dazzling me, makes me long for Heaven even more."

At a time when the new saint was the focus of glory in Rome and candles burned to little Sister Thérèse in churches and chapels the world over, Léonie was determined to remain obscure and hidden.

At the end of September 1925, an imposing triduum took place in Lisieux. On September 30, Cardinal Vico, the papal legate, placed the Golden Rose, blessed and offered by Pope Pius XI, in the hand of the marble effigy of Thérèse that lies in her shrine.

Also in the autumn of 1925, Cardinal Vico went to the Visitation convent in Caen. As soon as he entered, he called in a friendly voice, "And where is Léonie?" She came forward, with her small steps, and knelt at the cardinal's feet; they had a long conversation in the community hall. Then the cardinal, escorted by prelates, priests, and members of the community, went to the convent garden, where he blessed a statue of the new saint, which the Carmelites had donated. In honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Léonie's profession, the legate gave her a portrait of the pope, with a special papal blessing. Cardinal Vico wanted "his little sister Léonie" to be near him throughout his visit to the convent; and so

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Léonie found herself in the limelight—and very confused at being so honored!

*Léonie stays in the shadows*

Even after the imposing events of her little sister's canonization, Léonie continued to be amazed at the ever-increasing enthusiasm that "little Saint Thérèse" aroused. On June 1, 1925, the first issue of the *Annals of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*—which, of course, Léonie received—was published; this publication, under the name of the *Monthly Thérèsian Journal,* continues to enjoy great success to this day.

On December 14, 1927, Pope Pius XI, who felt a paternal attachment to his "dear saint of Lisieux," proclaimed her "patron saint of all the missionaries and missions that exist in all the universe." Léonie rejoiced; she knew that her little sister's teachings had influenced missionaries the world over.

Soon the Visitation community learned that a basilica in honor of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus was to be constructed in the hills of Lisieux, to receive the thousands of pilgrims who flocked to the town sacred to the Carmelite saint. Léonie was delighted that Pope Pius XI encouraged the plans for the basilica; he ordered that it should be made "very big, very beautiful, and as quickly as possible."

The construction work did, in fact, progress very quickly. The first stone of the basilica was laid on September 30, 1929; and on July 3, 1932, the crypt was blessed and opened to worshippers. Léonie, in her convent, heard the reports of all these events. But it was above all on July 11, 1937, that the enthusiasm of the assembled crowd of pilgrims rang in Léonie's ears as the basilica was blessed by Cardinal Pacelli, who had come from Rome as Pius XI's

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papal legate. Two years later, Cardinal Pacelli would be elected pope, taking the name of Pius XII.

On the occasion of the solemn ceremony of July 11, 1937, the Holy Father's message was to be transmitted over the radio, and he wanted Saint Thérèse's sisters to hear it; so radio sets were lent to the Carmelite and Visitation convents. Léonie, describing the great day, wrote to her sisters: "The radio transported us, not only to the basilica for the unforgettable ceremony, but all the way to Rome. What ineffable joy it was to hear our holy and beloved Pope Pius XI! We were all on our knees, very moved—especially your poor little sister, who watered the floor with her tears."

In his sermon, Bishop Picaud of Bayeux and of Lisieux mentioned Thérèse's three Carmelite sisters—but neglected her fourth sister, the little Visitandine who had been a religious for thirty-eight years and who was eagerly listening to the radio. Léonie would always be in shadow, kept in the background not only by herself, but also by others. When M. Guérin died in September 1909, Léonie was, although not forgotten, denied her proper place: on the death announcement, Céline, who was younger than Léonie, was named before her.

Of course, Saint Thérèse's fame drew her admirers both to Lisieux and to Caen. Visitors to rue de l'Abbatiale wanted to see the sister of the "Little Flower of Lisieux," as many people called Thérèse. Respect for the enclosure allowed Léonie to avoid unwelcome visitors.

One day, as she was helping the portress at the reception, Léonie was questioned by a passing priest, who asked to see Saint Thérèse's sister. With perfect composure, Léonie replied: "We will ask our Mother, but I don't think that will be possible." The priest answered, "Oh, that would be a great disappointment!" To which Léonie replied:

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"However, Father, I can assure you that you won't be missing anything—it isn't worth the trouble!" This comment evidently shocked and scandalized the priest, who was astonished that the sister of such a well-known saint seemed to be taken so lightly; he made no reply, but left, disconcerted. He happened to meet the chaplain, whom he told of his amazement. The chaplain burst out laughing and exclaimed, "My poor Father, you have been tricked—you were talking to Léonie herself!"

*The last months*

In December 1930, Léonie had an attack of pneumonia that was so severe that she received the sacrament of the sick; after this, her health remained very frail. Her right knee continued to hamper her walk; and another attack, in 1935, weakened her even more, leaving her incurably stooped.

In Lisieux, Marie, the eldest of the Martin sisters, had become completely helpless: crippled by the rheumatism that stiffened all her limbs, she lived in a wheelchair. Only her mind was still sound, as was Léonie's. In the last years of her life, however, Léonie was terribly afraid that she would lose her reason and be locked up, only a few hundred yards from the Visitation convent, in the mental asylum where M. Martin had been hospitalized fifty years earlier. She even murmured to her nurse, pointing in the direction of the Bon-Sauveur asylum, "Shall I have to go there?"

Léonie had become "a little shriveled old woman"; in 1936 she wrote to Lisieux: "I am aging a lot, and I am glad of it. ... Our kind Mother is doubly attentive to her aging child—who does not see why she is so afraid of losing this

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cracked window, which will be so easy to replace! It all bewilders me."

But the "aging child" continued to live her life of prayer, of work—even though this work was done more and more slowly—and, above all, of total self-abandonment, which made her very receptive to God and to others. Léonie was surrounded by tender care and provided with medicines; she was treated so well that she was afraid that she would "live to be a hundred."

In Lisieux, her sister Marie was consumed with love for God. Six months before her death—which occurred on January 19, 1940—she wrote to Léonie: "I am told that you are tired. At your age, that isn't surprising; we are going toward Heaven, and the road has been so long that we feel the effects of the journey. Who will be the first to enter Heaven? Perhaps it will be I, who am the weakest? But I don't want to ask anything of God. Now, more than ever, we have the chance to save souls; that is worth staying here on earth and suffering for years to come, if He wishes. Adieu, dear little sister; I send you tender kisses. Let us be of good courage—Heaven is at the end of the struggle. Your poor elder sister."

Léonie, too, sensed that she was nearing the end of her days: "Let us have no illusions: I seem to be better, but I can feel that my whole self is being destroyed. Yes, my exile is coming to an end."

At the beginning of 1941, Léonie's failing health obliged her to leave her cell for the infirmary. In May, an attack of bronchitis exhausted and weakened her; she had difficulty breathing. She wrote to Lisieux: "I am going into eternity—what joy! Little sisters whom I love so desperately, I cannot write anymore; my ailments are increasing. No part of me is healthy any longer, except my eyes, my heart, and my head, thanks be to God—but

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He can take everything, for everything belongs to Him! I abandon even my intelligence, small and poor as it is."

*The last days*

Léonie's superior, seeing how quickly her health was deteriorating, took advantage of a slight improvement: on June 3, 1941, the community celebrated Léonie's seventy-eighth birthday, as well as the fortieth anniversary of her profession, which, due to the war, they had been unable to celebrate in 1940. On June 2, the eve of this celebration, Pauline wrote to Léonie: "How happy I am that on this occasion, I received, this morning, the Holy Father's blessing for you! It is a symbol of the blessing of God, of the whole of Heaven—especially of all those on high who loved us when they were here on earth. They watch, with special protectiveness, their little Léonie, who has grown old in the service of the Lord—but whose soul has remained so young and whose heart so warm."

On that day, June 3, 1941, Léonie was wonderfully feted by all the community, in the chapel, in the refectory, and at recreation. She read, with deep emotion, the Holy Father's blessing: "On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of her religious profession, we bless, with all our heart, our dear daughter in Jesus Christ, Françoise-Thérèse, of the Visitation convent in Caen; and we implore for her, through the intercession of her Blessed sister, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, the grace of the highest sanctification, in the most fervent humility."

At the end of the letter that her superior, Mother Marie-Agnès Debon, wrote to thank the Holy Father, Léonie, in shaky handwriting, signed her name for the

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last time: "Sister Françoise-Thérèse, of the Visitation of Sainte-Marie."

A few days earlier, Léonie had written a last letter to Pauline: "How you spoil me! What a surprise! Biscuits made of cocoa and flour—you are always inventing new things to make us happy! It is enough to make me cry, for you are sacrificing yourselves for us; it is all the more touching, and more praiseworthy, in this time of shortage. I shall be buried in the crypt, near our venerated Mothers. This decision of the council makes me feel even more small and meaningless."

Léonie had declined the honor of having her body transferred, after her death, to the Carmelite chapel in Lisieux, to be laid near Thérèse's shrine.

The rest of the letter is no less interesting; in it, Léonie's common sense, which stayed with her to the end, shows clearly.

"I am glad that your lay sisters will be visiting us. Would they bring us some ribbons for bags and some relic-cloth? ... How I love my little Céline, my other half—and you too, my little mother!"

Throughout this letter, Léonie's care for others, her delicate gratitude, her self-effacement, and her tenderness are as subtly visible as a watermark. The "conscientious little worker" to the end, she described the humble task that occupied some of the time she spent in her cell: making little bags of material, sewn with red thread, to send to Lisieux. These were destined to contain a tiny piece of "cloth that touched Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus"—these humble relics were in increasing demand among the followers of the Little Saint of Lisieux. In Caen, the Visitation sisters still have the cardboard box where Léonie kept these bags; some are unfinished, and Léonie's needle is still there, a reminder of her humble work.

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*Léonie's death*

On the morning of Corpus Christi, June 12, 1941, Léonie attempted to rise early, as usual, in order to receive Communion, but she suffered a stroke and fell at the foot of her bed. A few moments later, the nurse, coming in to help her dress, found her unconscious on the floor. Little by little, Léonie regained consciousness; but sadly, she had lost the power of speech and could only express herself through gestures.

She continued to pray, and her great faith and peace were reflected in her eyes. Silently, with a smile, she thanked the nuns who came to show her their affection for her. Once again, she received the last rites. For five days, she remained in this speechless condition, clutching a rosary that had belonged to her sister Marie in one hand, Thérèse's crucifix in the other.

The little Visitandine, who loved her "Mama Mary" so much, fixed her eyes on the statue of Our Lady; it reminded her of her youth, for it was a copy of the one that had stood in Les Buissonnets and that had once smiled at little Thérèse, curing her of her illness. Léonie, too, smiled when she heard one of her companions recite lines that were very dear to her heart; they came from one of Thérèse's poems, entitled "Why Do I Love You, O Mary?" and they include this plea, which was particularly moving in the circumstances:

You who came to smile on me in the morning of my life,

Come smile on me again, Mother, for evening is near.

The Carmelites, who were immediately informed by telegram, sent two young lay sisters to Léonie's side. Today,

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those two nuns are still at the reception of the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, welcoming visitors with a fraternal smile. They brought Léonie roses that Pauline and Céline had picked in the Carmelite garden. Léonie, overwhelmed, seized the flowers and scattered the rose petals over her crucifix, in an outburst of love very like that of the little sister whom she was soon to meet again.

During the night between June 16 and 17, Léonie's companions gathered around her in the infirmary, praying intensely. A little after midnight, Léonie, still clutching her rosary and crucifix, suddenly fixed her eyes on her beloved superior; Mother Marie-Agnès Debon blessed her and, with tears in her eyes, embraced her on behalf of Céline and Pauline. Soon afterward, Léonie peacefully left our world. She had gone to the Heaven of which she had dreamed so often, into the arms of the Risen Jesus and of Our Lady of Tenderness; there she finally found, once again, her beloved Thérèse and all those whom, in her long life, she had never stopped loving.

In the infirmary, the Magnificat sprang from the hearts of all those who thus bore witness to the graces that little Léonie, in her difficult life, had received. She, who had chosen to become like a little child, had entered the Kingdom of Heaven.

Léonie, crowned with white roses, lay in state in the chapel choir. The news that Saint Thérèse's sister had died spread rapidly, and crowds of people hurried to the Visitation convent, bringing flowers that soon filled the choir on either side of the open coffin. The people were moved both to tenderness and to wonder by Léonie's face, wrinkled and yet made youthful by the smile that still touched her cold lips, bearing witness to a joy without end.

The crowd grew and grew; people wanted to touch objects—pictures, medals, rosaries, flowers—to Thérèse's

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crucifix, which Léonie still held in her hands. Four Visitandines had to remain in the chapel as the crowds came to express their affection.

Léonie, who had wanted to stay in the shadows, hidden and unknown, was suddenly being honored by thousands of people. They filed silently through the chapel, after queueing for a long time on rue de L'Abbatiale—to the point, in fact, that, as it was wartime, the Occupation army was worried for a moment!

The little Visitandine made a great impression on all those who saw her. Her mortal remains lay in state for several days; but in spite of the sweltering heat of that June 1941, her face lost none of its suppleness, its coolness, or its luminous ivory complexion.

*Léonie stays at the convent*

Léonie's funeral took place on the morning of Saturday June 21, 1941, in the presence of several prelates, more than thirty priests, numerous nuns, and a sizeable crowd. The coffin was left open until half an hour before the Mass. Monsignor Germain, rector of the Basilica of Lisieux, gave the homily. Bishop Picaud of Bayeux was ill; the Vicar General took his place. The Caen choristers were joined by members of the choir of the Basilica of Lisieux. In accordance with Léonie's wish, all the congregation sang the Magnificat.

After the service in the chapel, priests bore the coffin to the crypt, where it was laid beneath a marble slab, before the little altar. To this day, many supplicants come to meditate at Léonie's tomb, to ask her help, or to thank her for graces that her intercession has won.

As we have seen, Pauline had told Léonie that she would like her to be buried near Thérèse, under the reliquary in

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the Carmelite chapel—as Marie had been the year before and as the other two sisters would be some day. Léonie, however, had replied that she wanted to stay in her beloved Visitation convent. The mayor of Caen and the Calvados Prefecture were immediately asked for permission to bury her in the convent crypt.

The death of Léonie Martin, sister of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, was announced on the radio and in the newspapers. On June 18, 1941, the daily paper Ouest-Éclair published an article beneath the headline "At the Visitation convent, thousands of visitors filed past the body of Marie-Léonie Martin"; another article was entitled "In the Radiance of a Saint." On the day after the funeral, an account of the ceremony was published, with a photograph of Léonie's face, crowned with roses and surrounded by flowers. The journalist wrote, among other things: "The deceased's kinship to our great Norman saint, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, of world fame, made it inevitable that crowds of the faithful should hasten to her little sanctuary on rue de l'Abbatiale for the funeral ceremony."

Cardinal Archbishop Suhard of Paris, the former bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, wrote to Mother Agnès:

Dear Sister Françoise-Thérèse was truly a flower of holiness, whom the Lord came to pluck from the Visitation garden to unite her to that other Flower—nay, to those two other flowers—who already perfumed the garden of Heaven. It is such lives as hers that build in silence, here on earth, the edifice of sanctity, the true City of God. It is, too, such lives that bring down the blessing of Heaven, not only on the places where they live, but on the whole universe. I myself cannot forget the kindness with which Sister Françoise-Thérèse surrounded me and the generosity with which she promised me her support. I rely on her continued and powerful help!

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Recently I was fortunate enough to have a long conversation with the older Visitation sisters in Caen, who welcomed me very graciously; they had known Léonie, and they keep their memories of her preciously. Mother Marie-Agnès Debon (now deceased) was the superior at the time of Léonie's death; she comforted her beloved daughter in her last moments and closed her eyes on June 16, 1941. She was ninety-two years old in 1989, but she still remembered well the kindness, simplicity, and self-effacement of the accomplished Visitandine whom the difficult child of Alençon, through her own efforts and the grace of God, had become.

*Léonie's renown*

"Poor Léonie" went through many trials, insecurities, setbacks, darknesses, and inner rebellions. She knew how weak she was, how cowardly, how irresolute—in short, how sinful. However, she tried, with all her frail strength, to see nothing but the Lord of forgiveness and tenderness. She made herself as little as possible, so as to win the heart of her Beloved by recognizing her own wretchedness.

Léonie shows us all that the Way of Spiritual Childhood—which is not childishness, but conquest—can be lived at any stage of life, even in extreme old age. Little by little, over more than sixty years, Léonie succeeded, through her sacrifices and her prayers, in mastering her nature—the nature that had once been so rebellious. Aware of her weaknesses, she took refuge in abandonment to God's mercy. She made Thérèse's words her own: "Ever since I realized that I can do nothing on my own, my task has no longer seemed difficult; I know that the only thing necessary is to become more and more united to Jesus—the rest will be given to me freely."

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Léonie followed the royal Way of Spiritual Childhood—the way of the Gospel, and the only one that leads to supreme joy. In Heaven, little Saint Thérèse joins with her Léonie to show us forever how those who pray to the God of Love may gain the outpouring of graces they seek. Since her death, a great wave of affection for Sister Françoise-Thérèse has spread throughout the earth. Letters from every part of the world arrive at the Visitation convent in Caen: from Europe—Belgium, Italy, Austria, Ireland, Scotland, England, Portugal, even Malta; from the Americas—the United States, Canada, Brazil; from every region of France. But whether the letters are written in French or in a foreign tongue, they hold the same pleas for intercession.

Parents who have been terribly disappointed by their children's behavior, their ingratitude, or indifference ask for the intervention of the rebel who, for so many years, gave M. and Mme. Martin so much trouble. Petitions arrive on behalf of troubled families or households broken by incompatibility. Sometimes religious who are anxious about their vocations ask Léonie for enlightenment. Many letters ask for Léonie's intercession to improve fragile or endangered health.

Sometimes, the letters are simply requests for holy cards, photographs, or documents about the little Visitandine or her convent. The majority of them are petitions for intercession; but many are written to express gratitude for graces or miraculous cures that Léonie's prayers have earned. The letters are sent to the Caen community, but many of the envelopes are addressed to "Sister Françoise-Thérèse Martin"; the Visitandines place these on Léonie's tomb, and all the community prays for these petitions, which sometimes come from very far away.

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Little Léonie, who always considered herself "a useless servant," now has influence throughout the world. She has become inventive, fruitful, and attentive to these many afflictions. The prediction that Pauline made, in a letter written on February 21, 1927, to comfort her sister is now being fulfilled: "Don't be sad, my dear little sister; for such a beautiful future is waiting for you."

Léonie, with a transparency she never had in her youth, is very close to us. Gradually, through her wonderful determination to be the littlest, the most contemptible, she achieved her transfiguration, with the help of God and of her holy little sister. Together, the two sisters fully realized the Little Way: Thérèse marked out the path, and Léonie followed it, to the end of her long life.

Léonie recalls, to every parent who has been hurt by a child's behavior, the mystery that the prophet Isaiah foresaw: "We can save our children by the wounds they inflict on us" (Is 53:5). She teaches those who are overcome by loneliness that no human intimacy can fill the void in the human heart; that God alone can fill it with His infinite tenderness.

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Chronological Index

1860

February 22

Marie, the first of the Martin children, was born. She entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux on October 1, 1886, taking the name of Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. She died there on January 19, 1940, at the age of eighty.

1861

September 7

Pauline, the second Martin daughter, was born. She entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, taking the name of Sister Agnès of Jesus, on October 2, 1882. She died there on July 28, 1951, at the age of ninety.

1863

June 3

Léonie, the Martins' third daughter, was born in Alençon.

1864

October 13

The fourth Martin daughter, Hélène, was born. She died at the age of five, on February 22, 1870.

1866

September 20

The Martins' first son, Joseph, was born. He died on February 14, 1867, at the age of five months.

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1867

December 19

The Martins' second son, Jean-Baptiste, was born. He died on August 24, 1868, at the age of eight months.

1868

February 24

Jeanne Guérin, the Martin girls' cousin, was born. She became Mme. La Néele on October 1, 1890, and died in 1938.

1869

April 28

The Martins' seventh child, Céline, was born. She entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, where she would become Sister Geneviève on September 14, 1894. She died on February 25, 1959, at the age of ninety.

1870

February 22

Hélène died at the age of five.

August 16

The eighth Martin child, Mélanie-Thérèse, was born; she lived only two months, dying on October 8.

August 22

Marie Guérin, the Martin girls' cousin, was born. She entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, taking the name of Sister Marie of the Eucharist; she died there in 1905, at the age of thirty-five.

1873

January 2

Thérèse, the future Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, was born.

161

1875

May 23

Léonie made her First Communion at Notre-Dame in Alençon.

1877

February 24

Mme. Martin's sister, who was a Visitandine in Le Mans under the name of Sister Marie-Dosithée, died at the age of forty-eight. She had taken special care of Léonie when Léonie spent some time as a boarder in Le Mans.

June 18

Léonie, with her sisters Marie and Pauline, accompanied their ill mother to Lourdes.

August 28

Mme. Martin died at the age of forty-six. She had had nine children, seven daughters and two sons, of whom four had died in early childhood.

Late November

M. Martin and his five daughters left Alençon to live at Les Buissonnets in Lisieux.

1881

October 3

Léonie, at the age of eighteen, completed her studies at the Benedictine school in Lisieux, where she had been a boarder. Thérèse, at the age of eight and a half, entered the school as a half-boarder.

1882

October 2

Pauline entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, becoming Sister Agnès of Jesus.

162

1883

May 13

Thérèse was miraculously healed of a serious illness by the Virgin Mary. Léonie was present and was greatly moved.

1884

May 8

Thérèse made her First Communion. Léonie was touched by her fervor.

June 14

Léonie was Thérèse's sponsor at her confirmation.

1886

October 7

While M. Martin and his four daughters were staying in Alençon, Léonie made her first attempt at religious life, joining the Poor Clares. She stayed only two months, leaving the Order on December 1.

October 15

Marie, the eldest of the Martins, entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, taking the name of Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart.

December 1

Léonie left the Poor Clares' convent in Alençon, after two months of religious life.

1887

March 19

Marie, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, took the habit as a Carmelite in Lisieux.

July 16

Léonie, at the age of twenty-four, entered the Visitation convent in Caen; this was her first attempt at the Visitandine life. She left the convent six months later, on January 6, 1888.

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1888

January 6

Léonie left the Visitation convent in Caen; her second attempt at religious life had lasted six months.

April 9

Thérèse, at the age of fifteen, entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, becoming Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

May 22

Marie, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, made her profession.

June 23

In a state of amnesia, M. Martin went to Le Havre; he was found four days later.

1889

January 10

Thérèse, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, took the habit. M. Martin, Léonie, and Céline were present.

February 12

M. Martin, at the age of sixty-five, was committed to the Bon-Sauveur mental asylum in Caen, where he would spend more than three years. Léonie and Céline visited him regularly.

December 24

The lease on Les Buissonnets expired.

1890

September 8

Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus made her profession.

1892

May 10

M. Martin, now paralyzed, left the mental asylum in Caen, after three years there, to return to Lisieux.

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1893

June 24

Léonie entered the Visitation convent in Caen for the second time. She would leave it again two years later, on July 20, 1895.

1894

April 6

Léonie, under the name of Sister Thérèse-Dosithée, took the habit.

July 29

M. Martin died at the age of seventy-one, on the Guérins' estate at La Musse, near Evreux.

August 2

M. Martin was buried in Lisieux. Léonie was not present, as she was in the Visitation convent in Caen.

September 14

Céline entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux; she took the name of Sister Geneviève. She died there in 1959, at the age of ninety.

1895

February 5

Céline, Sister Geneviève, took the habit in the Carmelite convent.

July 20

Léonie, at the age of thirty-Swo, left the Visitation convent in Caen; her second attempt to join the Visitation Order had lasted two years. She went to live with the Guérins in Lisieux.

August 15

The Martins' cousin, Marie, entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, taking the name of Sister Marie of the Eucharist. She died there on April 14, 1905, at the age of thirty-five.

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1896

February 24

Céline, Sister Geneviève, made her profession.

March 17

Marie Guérin, Sister Marie of the Eucharist, took the habit in the Carmelite convent.

1897

March 25

Marie Guérin, Sister Marie of the Eucharist, made her profession.

July 17

Thérèse wrote her last letter to Léonie, who had returned to the world after her attempts at religious life.

September 30

Thérèse died in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux.

October 4

Thérèse was buried. Léonie led the mourners.

1898

September 30

*Story of a Soul*—Thérèse's memoirs, which she had written at her prioresses' request—was published. Léonie read the book immediately.

1899

January 28

Léonie, at the age of thirty-five and a half, entered the Visitation convent in Caen for the third and final time, taking the name of Sister Françoise-Thérèse. She died there on June 16, 1941, at the age of seventy-eight.

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June 30

Léonie took the habit again, under her definitive name of Sister Françoise-Thérèse.

1900

February 13

The Martins' aunt, Mme. Guérin, died at the age of fifty-three.

July 2

Léonie, Sister Françoise-Thérèse, made her profession at the Visitation convent in Caen.

1905

April 14

Marie Guérin, Sister Marie of the Eucharist, died in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, at the age of thirty-five.

1909

September 28

M. Guérin, Mme. Martin's brother, died at the age of sixty-eight.

1910

August

The Informative Process for the Cause of Beatification of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus opened in Bayeux. Léonie was a witness.

1915

September

Léonie joined her three sisters in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux for the Apostolic Process of the Cause of Beatification of Thérèse.

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1923

April 29

Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus was beatified, by Pius XI, in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Léonie and her three sisters were invited to the ceremony, but declined the invitation, preferring to remain in their convents.

1925

May 17

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus was solemnly canonized, by Pius XI, in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

1927

December 14

Pope Pius XI proclaimed Saint Thérèse "Patron Saint of Missionaries and of Missions."

1937

July 11

The basilica in Lisieux was inaugurated and solemnly blessed by Cardinal Pacelli, future Pope Pius XII.

1940

January 19

Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, the eldest of the Martin sisters, died at the age of eighty. She was buried in the Carmelite chapel, beneath Thérèse's reliquary.

1941

June 3

A ceremony took place in the Visitation convent at Caen, celebrating Léonie's seventy-eighth birthday and her forty years of religious life.

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June 16

Léonie, Sister Françoise-Thérèse, died in the Visitation convent at Caen, at the age of seventy-eight. She had entered the convent permanently on January 28, 1899, at the age of thirty-five.

June 21

Léonie was buried in the crypt of the Visitation convent.

1944

May 3

Pope Pius XI stated that Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus was now "Secondary patron saint of France, equal to Saint Joan of Arc." (The primary patron saint of France is the Blessed Virgin.)

1945

March 11

The Lisieux reliquary, returning from celebrations in Paris in honor of Saint Thérèse, was brought to the crypt of the Visitation convent in Caen to salute Léonie's mortal remains.

1951

July 28

Pauline, Mother Agnès of Jesus, died at the age of ninety. She was buried in the Carmelite chapel in Lisieux, beneath Thérèse's reliquary.

1959

February 25

Céline, Sister Geneviève, died at the age of ninety. She was buried in the Carmelite chapel in Lisieux, beneath Thérèse's reliquary.

THE END