

## ***Autobiografia e altri scritti***

# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARIA TERESA SCRILLI

*Foundress of the Institute of Our Lady of Mount Carmel*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Sisters of the Institute of Our Lady of Mount Carmel are singularly blessed in possessing the autobiography of their foundress. In this precious document she tells the story of her infancy, girlhood, and young womanhood, unveiling at the same time, and, principally, the course of her spiritual life. Her story also involves the origin and early growth of the Institute.

However, "autobiography" is perhaps too ambitious a word. Maria Scilli, who was born in 1825 and died in 1889, lived to be almost sixty-five years of age, whereas her narration ends in the year 1860. She was a young woman of thirty-five, and had lived little more than half her life, though by this time the contours of her spiritual life may be

said to have been drawn, and the rest of her existence, whatever its external incidents, can be considered a matter of maturation.

Moreover, the document leaves unsaid almost as much as it states. Not writing for the public, Maria presupposes familiarity with her family and friends; conditions, political and social, of the town of Montevarchi and its environs; circumstances of the very turbulent times of the Risorgimento. The document is written in 19th century Italian, sometimes with sfumature of the Tuscan dialect, by a not very lettered person. With regard to herself, what Maria states may point to other matters, perhaps not even known to herself. The spirituality which Maria incarnates may prove a mystery to the young and not so young person of today. In short, the document requires comment, at least for Englishspeakers.

Already on the first pages, Maria reveals that she is an unwanted child, unloved by her mother, Serafina, and that her sister, Cesira, is preferred to her. Maria finds it difficult to forgive her mother for turning her over to a wet-nurse instead of feeding her herself. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the frigidity of Serafina, until one counterbalances it with Maria's confessedly sensitive nature. Perhaps, her mother was simply an unemotional, nonsense individual who was burdened with many domestic concerns. After Maria's sudden cure from the dreadful illness, Serafina seems to have become more aware of her and her particular need for affection. In fact, after her cure the miracolata acquired considerable prestige, not only in the immediate circle of family and friends, but even in the capitol. This is not immediately evident from Maria's account, which naturally understates anything to her credit.

Maria's early unsatisfactory relation to her mother by her own admission led her to find a substitute in the Blessed Virgin. Marian devotion is a significant element of her spirituality. Symbols of breast-feeding, which her mother had denied her, pervade the language of her interior experiences. It is perhaps no coincidence, too, that devotion to Our Lady of the Milk is particular to the town of Montevarchi.

Maria's relation to her sister also improved with time. In preparing Cesira's trousseaux, the two are seen working together quite amiably, and after the marriage Maria becomes a frequent visitor to the Baldassini family in Florence. Cesira's child, Marietta, is evidently a favorite of her aunt. On the other hand, in Ireneo Scilli we have a classic example of the doting father. Attractive, vivacious Maria was definitely his favorite over Cesira. That Maria was an attractive and personable young woman is abundantly clear from her account, much as she tends to disguise the fact. Her desperate attempt to avoid society, her father's disappointment in her lack of coquetry can only be understood in terms of her physical gifts. Perhaps her mother's coldness to Maria can be explained by the fact that she outshone her favorite daughter. Ireneo is also the typical Italian father who adamantly opposes his daughter's entering the convent, because he considers it a waste. His effort and that of Maria's family and friends to involve her in polite society and its pleasures and amusements are one of the trials of her young life. Ireneo becomes a rather pathetic figure, when after Maria's flight to the Carmelite monastery of Our Lady of the Angels and her failed vocation to the contemplative life, he has to settle for allowing her to live in the family as a pinzocchera, all his plans for her future at an end.

The origin of Maria's vocation to a life of total commitment to God is not clear. Her account of her childhood does not explain why she should avoid becoming involved in the secular world. She is obviously pre-dating an awareness that only later asserted itself. In her teens, during a visit to a devout family she becomes convinced of a vocation to the cloister, only to discover her true vocation; namely, that in her case prayer must be accompanied by mission. That mission, she realizes, is the education of girls and young women.

Maria later has some hard things to say about the world and its allurements, which may offend the modern ear, but it must be remembered that she was struggling to persevere in her perceived calling to the interior life. In the spirituality of the time, "The World" was regarded as the enemy of the spiritual life. Her struggle was all the more desperate because she was aware that by nature she was only too likely to succumb.

Among Maria's friends, the Martini's play an important role. Caterina Cini, one of Maria's girlhood teachers who took an enduring interest in her, was the sister-in-law of Francesco, head of the Martini family and superintendent of the Scuole Normali of Montevarchi. She lived in her sister's home, and so her pupil, Maria, was a constant presence there. Francesco's son, Giovanni Battista, was Maria's peer and eventually became gonfaloniere of Montevarchi. She was convinced that she had once saved his life through her prayers. Although Maria got along well with the Martini women, she was destined to engage in a running battle with their menfolk over the conduct of her school. In spite of everything, Francesco and Giovanni Battista seem to have held Maria in esteem, but they were liberals in politics and would not hear of religion in public schools.

Maria presents herself as timid and bungling. She certainly was not wise in the ways of the world nor efficient in her role of foundress. She explains her timidity as the result of her need constantly to suppress her lively character, until a

feeling of inferiority became a habit. Yet, when the interest of her Institute was at stake, she mustered enough courage to approach with trepidation the highest authorities in the land and the grand duke of Tuscany himself. With regard to local authorities, especially the Martini's, she was a veritable tigress. Maria had little patience with the timid, when it was a question of doing God's work. Whatever she says about herself, the record shows that she was an excellent administrator and a successful teacher.

An endearing feature of her spirit, to which she herself calls attention, is her uprightness and love of the truth. Even as a child, she could not bear to tell a lie and she abhorred duplicity in others. Witness to this trait is her account itself with its worry over accuracy of detail. Her confrontation with the timeserving teacher, Luisa Panunti, is worthy of an implacable Daniel. In one so committed to the practice of prayer and so profoundly immersed in God it is not surprising that what look like mystical phenomena should occur. Maria does not claim that her experiences are supernatural; nonetheless, she considers them significant enough to record.

In her life of prayer, Maria reflects the spirituality that characterized Catholic life until the Second Vatican Council. Unlike her contemporary, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, she did not unconsciously distance herself from it. That spirituality emphasized obedience to authority, (which occasioned excessive preoccupation with accountability), and asceticism. The most important virtue in religious life, candidates were told, was obedience. Maria herself would not make a move without an "obedience" from her confessor or religious superior, though this scruple by no means replaced a sense of responsibility to her conscience.

Also, it was felt that prayer, to be authentic, should be accompanied by penance. The passion and death of Jesus, rather than his resurrection, were the preferred object of Christian contemplation. Among the devout, there were those who not only endured suffering but welcomed it, requested it, inflicted it upon themselves, in order to share the passion of Christ. Perhaps to minimize the severity of her penitential practices, Maria assures us that from childhood she was indifferent to pain.

Suffering can be a vocation. In the history of the Church there are many examples of saints and devout persons whose entire lives were consumed by illness which the medical science of the day could neither explain nor cure but which represented a share in the sufferings of Christ. Maria Scilli is to be enrolled in the rarified ranks of these lovers of the cross.

The autobiography of Maria Teresa Scilli was first published on the occasion of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of her birth, but in a modernized form and with certain omissions, some of them substantial. <sup>1</sup> Sister Maria Stella, like the mother foundress much too modest, has prepared a critical edition, as yet unpublished, from which this translation was made. She also helped the translator through some of the more impenetrable thickets of the text.

Chapter and paragraph divisions and titles are added. The autograph is preserved in the generalate house of the Institute of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Rome. It consists of a volume of 225 pages, 31 x 21 cm. The cover is made of brown cardboard with a vellum back. Maria wrote her life between the years 1854, when the Institute was founded, and 1860, when it was suppressed by the Italian government. For the most part, Maria left a wide right margin, in which she made additions. In the course of translation, a photocopy of the manuscript was also occasionally referred to. Maria's account ends with the year 1860. Like her beloved Spouse, she died with her life's work in ruins but serene in the faith that it would be restored to life.

Joach Smet, O.Carm.

I.M.I.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus, my beloved, my only good, my God! You alone know what an effort it is for me, the most wretched of beings, to record my memories and to do so only to fulfill your divine will, which I recognize in the obedience given me by my various confessors and directors. If, therefore, I do this at the cost of such violence to myself, you must help me do it in the manner you desire, so that I do not remain silent about what you want said and do not perchance say what you want left unsaid. O my dear mother Mary, intercede, pray for your child, who has always loved you as a daughter.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **A hurried baptism**

I was born on May 15, 1825, so I have been told, a Sunday, at two o'clock in the morning. I seem to have heard that on that Sunday morning very early, that is, a few hours after seeing the light, I was carried to the baptismal font, in order to do the thing as privately as possible, given the dissatisfaction of my parents at having in me a second girl.<sup>3</sup> A sister of my mother held me at the font.<sup>4</sup> She was told to call me Palmira, but when it came time to announce the name to the priest,<sup>5</sup> she could not remember it. For this reason I was given the name Maria, which I have always regarded as providential, and I was most grateful, because it is the name of her whom I loved so dearly and still love as my beloved mother.

My mother undertook to breast-feed me herself, but after I know not how many months she turned me over to a wet-nurse, constrained to this course by the many duties she had; among them, the need to dedicate herself to my little sister,<sup>6</sup> still needing much attention, as she was not yet two years old.

### **An unloved child**

Until I was four years old, or a little more, according to my mother, I was quite low-spirited and given to crying; for this reason, I being a burden to her, she tried to keep me away from herself as much as possible. She turned me over to a good woman who took care of little children in a kind of school. Occasionally, either my grandmother<sup>7</sup> or the aunt who had been my godmother took me with them. My mother herself says that everyone declared that I was very quiet, and they liked me very much. That is why I think it was my mother's ways that made me a bit restless. It is not given at that tender age to know that one must support inconsiderate and offensive manners with composure; nevertheless, I don't want it thought by this that I was naughty.<sup>8</sup>

I recall that because of the great amount of work she had to do, it annoyed my mother even to have me around her. She wanted to send me outside to play with my sister and the other little children, and when it wasn't in me to obey her, she would slap me. She would promise me other things that ordinarily appeal to children, but on me had the effect of making me cry. Although I was still so small, I suffered, because I was so impressionable. I am persuaded of this by the fact that I remember it—not an easy thing to do at so tender an age. I recall some things that happened, I've heard my mother say, when I was scarcely two years old.

Considering my mother's character and her many duties, I think I must have been quite a burden to her and continued to be, until I reached an age when I was less dependent on her. I wanted to be near her; on Sundays I wanted to go to church with her, and she, perhaps because she was in a great hurry and had no time to dress me properly, would become flustered and sometimes slap me. The realization that my other sister had all her needs provided for must have been a great provocation<sup>9</sup> to me. I was naughty, I felt and understood too much; otherwise there was nothing special about me. And naturally, I repeat, it is not given at that early age to suffer virtuously. As soon as I was old enough to be able to do so, I realized my mother's lack of love for me and I cannot sufficiently describe what a thorn this was in my heart. I was upset, not from envy of the love I saw my sister given, but only from a desire to be also loved, for I loved both my parents and my little sister exceedingly.

### **Maria starts to school**

I don't know if I was five years old when my mother sent me to the school my sister attended, to a certain lady, a friend of the family, who loved us beyond measure. Me, however, she loved most. She told my mother that I learned more readily, and I don't know for what other reason she loved me so much, as she certainly showed me. I don't know whether it was for this reason that my little sister was taken away by my mother and sent elsewhere.

At that age I was quite lively. Perhaps it was my new environment that encouraged this. The house of my teacher was given over to pastimes and amusements. The ladies and gentlemen who came there showed me great affection,

especially the friends of my father. They took me now here now there to dinners and cafes. I was fondled and petted by everybody. My father was pleased because he loved me so; my mother had little use for me and readily handed me over to whomever asked.

### **Early attraction to devotion**

Notwithstanding so unfavorable an environment and a vivacity of character, which, I have been told more than once, and I also recall, was out of the ordinary, I always felt alien to the noise of children and very fond of my mother and of matters of devotion. On Sunday, rather than going for a walk I preferred to go to church with her and with great pleasure made the Stations of the Cross with her. I experienced great satisfaction when she had us recite the rosary in the evenings and I recall distinctly that I recited it for the souls in Purgatory. That it had this purpose I must certainly have been told by her. I recall a mistaken notion I had in this matter: I believed that these prayers were also able to obtain relief for condemned souls; for when I heard mention of Hell, I could only think of something worse than Purgatory, that is, more painful and nothing more. So, every day I also used to recite vocal prayers for those most unhappy souls. I don't recall how this came to the attention of my mother; when she told me it couldn't be done, I was left very sad. Love of the truth My heart was in no way capable of indifference, so I have always had much to suffer. I was moved by the most insignificant thing. The affection I had for my parents and my sister was very strong. Everything I thought was a burden to them was also one to me. I remember certain things about which truly I don't know whether it is better to speak or whether it is a waste of time to recall, but I'll say no more. I don't know what I would not have done for them; not, however, something I would have believed to be wrong, because I remember once my sister wanted me to tell a lie, and I couldn't. That fault I have always abhorred in a special way, something noticed by all the teachers I have ever had and also by my mother herself. The maid servants of the sister of my teacher (whom I had when I was older) would often advise me not always to tell the truth about things, because she, I mean my teacher's sister, had a character which found fault with everything, but I submitted to any sort of mortification rather than tell a lie.

### **Love of the truth**

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### **Indifference to pain**

At the same age of six, to obey my sister in a matter she had told me to do, I fell and broke an arm. All in the house were in tears. While the surgeon and others performed the painful operation of setting my arm, I shed not a tear nor even complained. I have been told that this caused considerable wonder. And when my mother came to collect me, I told her, as if it were a matter of little account, "Mother, I broke my arm."

Another time I fell, hitting myself against the iron frame of my mother's bed. I hurt myself quite seriously, laying open an eyebrow and bleeding copiously. The girl who lived with us to help my mother took me in her arms and, weeping, I think, because of the excitement, brought me to my parents. My father took me, and when the surgeon arrived, trembling, held me under his hand, while he medicated and applied pressure to the painful wound. I underwent that operation in the same way as the other. I don't know how that came to be; while in others every little hurt frightened me and made me cry.

In this respect, I recall various incidents. I remember that I would be very troubled at seeing anyone whatsoever suffer, even at hearing tell of some mishap. When I happened to see someone given a remedy that to me seemed painful, I would cry. I don't know if I'm saying something wrong; if so, I pray whoever first reads what I have written to cancel it (I mean my reflections). What I wanted to say is that it seems to me that my every physical and moral quality concurred, or rather, was ordained to cause me greater suffering. The same holds for all the circumstances of my

whole life. I repeat, if it is a defect on my part to say this, let it be canceled and corrected. At the same time, I can only admire and thank the goodness of God, who in this way provided me with the means of always gaining merit. Woe is me, if I did not know, and do not now know, how to profit by it.

### **A change of school**

I don't know if I had already completed my seventh year, when my mother changed my teacher. I was given in charge to two ladies who, although of distinguished birth (I suppose them to have been so from the way they were treated) at that time were obliged to conduct a school in order to support themselves." <sup>10</sup>The younger one, (she was much younger), I heard, had a vocation to become a nun. I don't know what my thoughts were about this. I know that I admired her goodness and loved her very much. She too was particularly fond of me. She got into the habit of taking me with her to church. I became ever more fond of matters of devotion, and she, knowing it, once when she wanted to punish me for some fault, threatened not to take me with her to church. At that threat I pleaded so warmly for forgiveness that she pardoned me. I was always very devoted to reciting the rosary and making the Stations of the Cross, in which devotions she had me guide the other children.

Everything that good creature taught me remained impressed on my heart. One aspiration I never forgot and I recall that even then I recited it with great emotion: *O flame of love, I now depart, and as a pledge I leave my heart* <sup>11</sup> I recited it with feeling and devotion, but I'm not sure to what extent I managed to understand it. I do know I wanted to leave my heart to Jesus.

While I remained with this teacher, mine was a pleasant situation, and I remember that my spirit very much appreciated the good that was taught me. However, I was not entirely protected and removed from the pastimes, worldly foolishness, and harmful blandishments already mentioned, because I was not always entrusted to my good guide. After a few months, I was destined to lose her completely. She left the area; she was from Florence. This separation, I recall, distressed me very much.

### **Return to her first school**

I was again entrusted to the teacher I had first left. I well recall that I was never fond of that teacher; to me she did not seem good. Sometimes, at seeing her scant religiousness, I became so irritated that, not knowing this was wrong, I wished some ill to befall her. Such things were not typical of my character, I being excessively sensitive to the ills of others and inclined to become extremely fond of others. It was a miracle of divine grace that I never fell into wrongful affections. The occasions, when I grew older, were continuous, the relations at school being more personal.

My teacher was very happy to have me back again. Being so fond of me, she left me to myself without supervision, which was quite harmful, given the excessive vivacity of my spirit. Perhaps it was the pleasure I felt at the continual flattering remarks made about me that turned into a fault my exceeding fastidiousness,<sup>12</sup> to which I was very inclined by nature from the tender age of two. This, my mother told me various times, was one of the things that annoyed her about me. That pleasure, as I said, caused that tendency<sup>13</sup> to degenerate into one given to luxuries<sup>14</sup> and childish vanity and to a certain satisfaction at being admired and praised. But I also took pleasure in the impulses<sup>15</sup> and prettiness which by nature I had, because they were admired in me and petted by others. My God, how pained I am at the thought of that environment in which I was kept until I was past ten years of age.

### **A visit to Florence**

During that period—I think I was nine years old—I was taken to Florence to have some teeth pulled which were crooked. My father gave a great deal of thought to maintain in me those physical qualities which he prized. The operation kept me in that city for about two months. I bore it courageously; it did not cause my vivacity to lessen, nor did it disturb my vain thoughts, aroused and encouraged as they were by the family with whom I lived.

I don't know how it was that I didn't abandon all practice of devotion, since I had no one around me in whom I could discern a shadow of it. The Church being near the house, I managed to be occasionally accompanied to Mass (both weekdays and Sundays I was always accompanied). There being in that house itself a picture of Jesus of Nazareth, I would kneel before it in the evening for a considerable length of time, to make I know not what kind of prayers, for I don't recall whether I had already learned to meditate. Certainly, even praying vocally, I reflected on the sufferings which he whose image I beheld had undergone: that much I remember.

### **In the villa of Swiss friends**

That same year, when I was nine years old, certain Swiss signori invited me to their villa, a few miles from Montevarchi <sup>16</sup> I found myself attending a great ball to which my father had taken me, dressed, as he was, in Spanish costume. My God, I cannot retrace in memory the way along which I was being led without shedding most bitter tears! I remained in that villa, I think, two weeks or a little more. During my stay I became well acquainted with those signori who were quite fond of me. I took care to avoid certain of their demonstrations of affection which I did not want, I know not whether from natural contrariness or because I thought them wrong. It seems to me it was from one and the other motive.

The *signorina* occasionally amused herself by accompanying my singing on the piano; I had a good voice (according to what I have been told, even at an older age). Not thinking of her state (she was a Protestant), I sang little songs about the Child Jesus and also profane ones, which, given my disposition and vivacity, I had no trouble learning. I remember many occasions in which I found myself and about which I am silent here, which bring back to me and make me understand that even at that early age the dangers were many, and I know not who would have defended me. But what am I saying? God defended me from understanding that of which I have no idea even now. O my Supreme Good, my God, how greatly am I in your debt!

### **An unloving mother**

The situation of my sister was quite different from mine. Removed from her first teacher, she was placed with a certain lady who from religious motives undertook to educate a few girls according to a system which can truly be likened to that of a convent school.<sup>17</sup> They returned home only for a half hour after mid-day for lunch and quite late a night at bedtime to sleep. I was the only one left at the mercy of every dangerous occasion.

My mother always showed indifference to me and a lack of love, and, oh, with the passage of the years that thorn pierced my heart ever more deeply! I recall that I could not stand hearing that she had not finished breast-feeding me. That really convinced me that she could not love me like my other sister. If I could have been sure that she loved me, I would not have suffered nor been afflicted at being forgotten by her. Oh, what a great pity that at that age it was not given me to understand the value of suffering! By suffering I mean that of the spirit; about the physical kind I have related how little I was concerned in the experiences already mentioned.

Notwithstanding my mother's lack of love for me, to which I was beyond measure sensitive, my affection for her did not grow cold. I tried in every way to please and help her, and in this respect my achievement was quite beyond my years, as she also has reminded me more than once, when the subject happened to come up. I remember I did it for the love I bore her, not in order to be Praised of this there was little danger. Certainly, it was the disposition of God for my benefit; I do not want, nor will my heart permit me, to believe she was at fault.

### **A new teacher**

After I had completed my tenth year, my teacher was changed <sup>18</sup> I know that a certain good person told my mother that to leave me in the situation in which I had been until then was to waste my possibilities or to cause me great harm. With the new teacher there was the advantage that she was a close friend of my sister's teacher, and since she used to visit her in the evening to talk, she took me with her and left me there until later, when other secular amusements called her elsewhere. This was the principal advantage of the above mentioned change, because my situation in the family of the teacher herself was not much different from that which I had left.

I continued my carefree ways without thinking it was wrong. I had never been corrected, nor was I then, not even by the good lady<sup>19</sup> who was my sister's teacher; in fact, she was amused by my ways, which were deemed ingenuous, as were the other ladies in the company. I know this teacher said she was very fond of me; that my open character, unlike the other girls in her charge, pleased her greatly. That she was very fond of me I already knew. When it was carnival time, I took advantage of her opinion, which disapproved of public shows, to persuade my father not to take me. He consented all the more readily, since my mother was opposed to the idea at the time, because her mother had recently died.

### **Vacation time in the Scuole Normali**

In vacation time,<sup>20</sup> my teacher went to the country with her family. At such times, I was consigned to the sewing teacher of the Scuole Normali, since the brother-in-law of my teacher was the superintendent of those schools. When I was there, I liked it very much: that place seemed to have a special attraction for me. The teacher was good, and since she had a very small number of pupils, a certain quiet and order reigned. Therefore, I enjoyed the peace of paradise, thinking only of the work and prayer the teacher gave me to do. Having been told by my mother not to talk

to the other girls nor to bring them home, because she did not want me to make their acquaintance. Except for this, as can be expected, the school being a *Scuola Normale* and thus frequented only by girls, I could not have in them, nor did I have, other distractions. The teacher became very fond of me. She praised me highly to the good lady who was my sister's teacher and she told my mother. (Please, cross out what I shouldn't say; certain it is that, although I also reveal the good out of a sense of duty, in myself I feel only confusion and abasement, that is, consciousness of my nothingness.)

The pupils also loved me dearly and, when I had to go to school, they vied with each other in asking the teacher for time to be placed beside me. Such affection led me once to violate my mother's command, for when some of them wanted to accompany me home, I hadn't the courage to refuse. But on being corrected by my confessor (when I committed that act of disobedience, he was the Reverend Provost Graziosi,<sup>21</sup> it being the second year or second season that I attended that school) I obeyed and did not again commit that fault.

My teacher had me read the life of some saint—I recall that of St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi—and oh, how I was attracted by their virtues, I mean, those of mortification and prayer! I began to fast a bit and took advantage of breakfast to give alms, because I did not feel entitled to do more, and I also remember that I did not want to aggravate my father. I don't know if this was a virtue; I don't believe it was, and I think my affection for-my family was excessive, because at that time my giving a little bread to the poor shouldn't have disturbed him. I also began to devote great care to saying my prayers with much external recollection and interior attention. During the two years I mentioned<sup>22</sup> I derived much comfort from imposing order on my life; that is, regulating all my occupations according to a truly monastic system. I recall that when I had the chance, (that is, as soon as my teacher and her family left), and I had conceived the plan, I explained it to the good lady, my sister's teacher. She approved it and, smiling, showed her satisfaction.

### **Maria discovers a mother**

This was the period when I discovered the longed-for return of maternal love in my dear mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Oh, what pleasure I experienced when, reciting prayers in her honor, I imagined her present. Reciting the litany was for me a delicious source of spiritual nourishment, because, reflecting on its meaning (which I had available in a book with the litany in the vernacular), I felt I was doing her great honor. And in the return of affection of which I became aware when she caused me to experience the sweetest sense of her presence, united to a loving delight, I discovered the sign of her satisfaction that my love was increasing. This love so filled my thoughts that when I slept, I dreamed of her, and when I was awake, my childish imagination sometimes pictured her where she lives above, and already my thoughts took comfort at the time when I would be at her side. It seemed to me that she actually regarded me lovingly as the daughter of a mother. O my dear Mother, what delights you made me taste! Certainly, at that tender age that was all I was able to feel for what I was. I say, they were not supernatural gifts; they were emotions, affectionate, devout desires, because I did not merit supernatural gifts. In this state of affairs, I felt less my mother's negligence, which was well known as being observed by those around us, especially by my teacher and by the good lady, but I continued to have the same affection for her and took every care to please her.<sup>23</sup>

### **First Communion**

I do not know if I had yet completed my eleventh year, when the lady mentioned above told my mother that she thought I ought to make my First Communion. The same lady undertook to talk matters over with the Reverend Provost Graziosi, and everything was arranged. I placed myself under his direction and made a general confession to him, but I believe I myself had so little idea of my defects that I do not know how I confessed them. I wanted to make a good confession and asked my good lady to help me.

I do not remember with what feelings of devotion I received the sacred Host.<sup>24</sup> I know that when I felt a certain desire, perhaps from vanity, to be placed near the cross,<sup>25</sup> I persuaded myself that it was rather a grace to be placed in another place, less distinguished, because not subject to distractions. I also asked to be dressed very simply, refusing anything colored (like a ribbon they wanted me to wear around my waist). I was dressed all in white and very simply, as I had requested.

### **Growth in the spiritual life**

After making my First Communion, I was sent to catechism class. When the Reverend Graziosi said in class that it was a good thing to make a daily examination of conscience, I began to do so, and very diligently. I also heard that it was pleasing to God to meditate on the passion of Jesus during Mass, and this also I put into practice, being deeply

moved, sometimes to tears. I managed to attend church daily before going to school, and in the evenings likewise, when I could obtain permission from the teachers to take time off from play. I had myself accompanied by one of their maids who was much given to matters of devotion. As she was a home-loving woman, along in years, they let her be. Being a serving-maid, as I have said, she could not have such freedom, if they did not allow her, and in asking to go with her, I also satisfied her piety.

My compassion for the poor also increased. I could not see anyone of them under the weight of a heavy burden without feeling my eyes fill with tears. Then, if I could suppose they were fathers of families, I would also pity the affliction of their children, which I imagined great at seeing their parents worn out with fatigue and penury. I measured their pain by what I would have felt in seeing my family (I mean, in that state). I know not what I would not have done to bring them relief. I recall what pleasure I felt when my teachers had me distribute alms (which the family used to dispense on Saturdays).

In this regard, the following happened: One time I undertook to distribute bread; I thought the poor were fewer than what I found. Without reflecting, I simply reduced the size of the pieces of bread already prepared, and made them suffice for all. As soon as the poor were dismissed, I experienced such a pang that I had no peace until I had gone, (when I had a chance), to seek them out and bring them, from my own portion of bread, that which I had with held. I had already begun to know the duty of suffering in the spirit as well and, as I have already said, to sweeten bitter drafts with devotion and love. I remember that on once hearing in a sermon how dear to God were those souls who bear the cross for him, I felt such fervor and desire to be one of them that I asked with great feeling never to be left without it (since I seemed already to be bearing it).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **One family too many**

Our family had been joined by that of my father's brother. <sup>26</sup> This, too, was a cross for me because of the great affection, as I said, I bore my mother. Through the added family I saw her grow much more tired, and the sacrifice she had to make caused me insupportable sorrow. I did what I could to relieve her, but my tender age was not equal to the demands I made on it. Sometimes, when the sight of her so burdened weighed upon my heart, I would break out in some complaint. Besides, I saw my father caused sacrifices from an economic point of view, and this also pained me beyond measure. I thought his worries were increased, (and in fact they were) and I did not want this. My breaking out in complaints occurred before my First Communion; afterwards no longer, for the violence I did myself, knowing it was wrong. This caused me to earn the displeasure of my aunt who did everything to put me more in the wrong with my mother, who being her sister and loving her much, was almost subjected to her. This aunt managed to have my mother require more of me than I was already doing, both in regard to work and household chores. In many matters, having to go to school, I found myself unable to oblige her, and then I had to undergo embarrassment and scolding. One of the things that hindered me from complying with her wishes with regard to work was being employed by my teacher in matters about which she wished me to be silent and keep hidden. For this reason I was obliged to bear in silence the mortification of being accused of working little, because I kept silent about the motive which had hindered my from doing more.

On the other hand, I saw that my elder sister was given every convenience, and in no way was she made to occupy herself with domestic chores; and this was for me no small temptation to complain (I mean, I was tempted to complain). And if I asked her help for those chores I was unable to do alone, I was obliged to suffer a refusal. But this I suffered with a will. Love is a great help for supporting all things, and that which I bore for my sister had to help me a great deal.

I knew my father loved me much, but for the sake of peace he overlooked all my pain and suffering. I had occasion to know that he was quite displeased at my mother's preference [for my sister], but I do not recall that he reproached her more than once or twice, while my vexations were continual. My mother also began to neglect my needs, saying she could not manage both (my sister and me), and moreover I needed to be deserving. But it was not the lack of such things that caused me concern, although because of certain tendencies of mine to excessive fastidiousness and vanity, this also distressed me.

### **A case of scruples**

I grew in age, and the Lord in his infinite mercy increased the weight of the cross on me. He granted me other troubles and suffering. I consider myself fortunate in having borne the yoke of the cross from childhood. The new

weight of which I felt the heavy burden was the following: after I know not how many months after my First Communion—I do not recall what condition I was in<sup>27</sup>— I was seized by a great fear that God was displeased with me. All the circumstances of my past life appeared before my mind; in all of them I seemed to have gone wrong, but I did not know how. I was seized by such tremendous anxiety that I found no peace. I know not what I would not have done to obtain the certainty that I had not gone wrong. When I was alone, I wept and when I could not hide in order to give vent to my anguished spirit, I suffered indescribable strain. I do not know how such a young age was capable of so much pain. In this way, a period of time passed; even at night, at bedtime, because I was not seen, I cried, and my tears did not cease until I was overcome by sleep.

Not having the courage to reveal my state to my confessor, I determined to have recourse to my good lady, whom I had not seen for some time, since it was vacation time, and I could not as usual attend her evening entertainment of friends. I went there for this purpose and through my sister let her know that I needed to speak to her alone. Having managed to see her, I cast myself at her feet. I was overcome with weeping, so that it was some time before I could find words to reveal my anguished state. Encouraged and comforted by her, I stood up. I explained to her how the circumstances surrounding my past life made me greatly fear that I had displeased God. I told her of my vanity, brought on by my situation outside my family; of my impatience at the inconvenience I saw caused my parents by my uncle's family; besides, I recalled certain improper words I had repeated twice, because I had constantly heard them used by others. My Jesus, what pain! Oh, my enslavement, how unfortunate my situation! What I related, as can be supposed, happened quite a time before I made my First Communion, I mean, said those words I mentioned.

The good lady, poor thing, comforted me and, because she was so charitable, excused and pitied me. She told me she did not know whence these fears were coming and to remain calm. She said so many things off and on to console me that I found myself another person. Freed from those fears, I seemed to have come out of a very inferno.

Notwithstanding this sense of security, thereafter I made sure to maintain a careful watch over myself. To refrain from certain ways or manners<sup>28</sup> which were said to be pleasing, I took care to restrain the vivacity of my features admired by others and not to give expression to the suffering my family caused me. And if I feared I had erred in some matter, and in another did not know how to act, I had recourse to my good lady, and she would direct and enlighten me in my doubts which recurred frequently, both with regard to life in school and in the family I examined all my actions rigorously, because at all costs I did not want to displease God, even in the least matter.

### **The Cavallerizzi**

Once, when my father went to Florence on affairs, he took me along, perhaps because he had seen me lacking my usual vivacity of spirit. While I was there, I had to accompany him to a certain pageant known as the *Cavallerizzi*. As soon as I saw those people who appeared to me so badly dressed (I mean, immodestly), I lowered my eyes and took care not to look at them. My father, and also the gentlemen around me, often addressed themselves to me to look at what appeared to them to be marvelous and pleasing. To me it seemed so disagreeable, (as I have already said about their dress), and I so much feared displeasing God by looking, that it was the severest trial not knowing where to direct my eyes, because I wasn't allowed to keep them lowered, (as I already said). I don't know how or with what effort I arrived at the end [of the evening] without having looked at the pageant. It certainly was great, the care I took not to displease God!

When I was of the same age, I recall once being in a carriage<sup>29</sup> with a gentleman who attempted to show me a sign of affection. Not knowing how to free myself, I jumped up suddenly and was about to throw myself from the carriage and would have done so, if the gentleman had not restrained me and promised not to force me to accept what I did not want, because I thought it was wrong. Giving way to what I have mentioned was certainly wrong, and I have always been against such things. But at that time, that is, after my First Communion, I was reduced to such scrupulosity that I feared evil where there was none.

### **"I never seemed to do what I should."**

In this respect, the trouble I had to undergo was great (I think from the devil). No matter how much I tried to practice virtue, either in matters concerning the family or those outside it, I never seemed to do what I should. I had the advantage of having recourse to my good lady, who reassured me in everything. Poor thing! She lavished on me her every care, also asked to do this by my confessor (as I later heard). He also made every effort to set my spirit at holy liberty, truly desirable. But I, no matter how much I wanted and recognized the duty to obey him, did not succeed. Not that I resisted counsel and persuasion; on the contrary, I immediately submitted and calmed myself, but the devil<sup>30</sup> disquieted me with ever new tricks. He well knew how to change the aspect even of things, and this is the

reason I was ever plunged in new fears and doubts. Once, when I went to Father more agitated than usual, he several times repeated gently, "Maria, have no doubt, you belong to Jesus, you belong to Jesus, I assure you." Such consoling words, expressed so gently by that venerable priest, touched me very deeply.

The devil also upset me by making me believe that I did not know what I needed to do to save my soul. At times he made me hear words which filled me with terror and fright, because not hearing them with bodily ears, I seemed to conceive them within myself. The fear of this tore fiercely at my heart, which wanted only to give itself to God, and the words in question were an outrage to him! Moreover, he [the devil] showed that he wanted to make me know things of which I in no way wished to have knowledge, both because of natural repugnance and because I saw them to be wrong.

Oh, what suffering this was for my inexperienced spirit! It was such as to render me almost witless<sup>31</sup> both with regard to what I was told to do as to what I knew it was my duty to carry out. My will desired it, my memory betrayed it, so that, neglecting my usual duties, I was reproached and scolded by my teachers and, more than by them, by my mother. I accused myself of everything, but my confessor, knowing that the cause of these negligences came from the hard trials the Lord permitted me, tried to encourage me as much as he could, assuring me that there was no fault: that every other worry except this (that is, the fear of failing in duty), was insignificant in comparison.

### **An extraordinary way**

O Jesus, my spouse, what would have happened to this your wretched child, if after you had led her from infancy by a way so extraordinary, I mean, with regard to my way of feeling and thinking and by trials of the spirit and external crosses and dangers, she at the end through inadequacy should stray from it? To call that way extraordinary seem to me to tell the truth, because I have never known its equal, and that from so tender an age.<sup>32</sup> Did I say, "What would have happened?" Ah, let that never be! Rather that she should first die, even though still young, than that, reared by you in good desires, I should have the heart to disown her! Ah, my dearest spouse, I will never cease to repeat: I am yours, I was born for you; my Lord, what is it you want of me?

So needful of comfort and help, I tried to visit my good lady ever more frequently; wherefore, when my teachers went for a walk, I asked to visit her. But I didn't have it long, this great comfort, because one of the teachers, the one to whom I was "actually entrusted, brusquely refused to allow it, saying to me, "If you prefer your sister's school, go ahead and see if the lady will take you." She said this brusquely, at the same time giving me to understand her great displeasure at supposing that I preferred my sister's teacher to her. I was aware that she was motivated by a certain jealousy, but since it was she I had to obey, I believed it my duty to please her. So I only visited my good lady when I was sent.

### **Maria leaves the *Scuole Normali***

Also, in vacation time I no longer went to the teacher of the *Scuole Normali*. As I was thirteen years old, it seemed better that I should stay at home. I took advantage of that circumstance to make a sort of spiritual retreat, and because I did not neglect domestic duties and work, my mother did not forbid it (in fact, I had more time for those matters, since there was no one to interfere, as I mentioned otherwise happened).

She, too, (I mean, my mother), no longer considered those schools suitable for me, I think for fear that I would become friends with those pupils and, she said, be badly brought up. About this she was always careful, I mean, to want me not to start mixing with little girls. She wanted us to be alone, and I thank the Lord that I obeyed her, knowing now how harmful such company is. In that period, my thirteenth year of age, the tempest in which my spirit had labored ceased. I attended to the practice of virtue in peace, as far as the troubles and terrors caused by the devil were concerned. But my situation presented no lack of obstacles to the practice of virtue, and I had many occasions to practice it, if obstacles are to be regarded as a means to that practice.

### **Maria's health begins to fail**

The worry I had undergone seems to have caused some injury to my health, because as though without feeling it I found myself at the end of my strength and with such palpitations of the heart that I could climb the stairs only with great effort and fatigue. Every effort left me breathless. I was fourteen years old when I also had the misfortune to lose the most worthy Father Graziosi, my confessor and director. He died, if the death of the just can be called that.

Given the exhaustion and faintness I felt, those little services I used to perform both in the family and at school became for me an insupportable burden. I did not refuse them, but on account of my great weakness, I performed them very slowly. My illness was not remarked upon, except when because of some more strenuous action, I mean,

to do more quickly what I was doing, I became so breathless that, if asked a question, I could not answer; once the moment passed, I was scolded if I did not work more quickly. I suffered it all, making an offering to God, but perhaps I did not fully know the value of suffering, only the duty of supporting it in order not to offend God, and so I suffered more. I continued to meditate on the passion of Jesus, and this helped me much in the sufferings I had to bear. So also was the devotion to my dear mother, Mary. Oh, how many times I fled to her, sobbing and weeping, asking for comfort! Ah, dear Mother, I said to her, I cannot go on in this way unless you help me! I repeated the same words to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, my only Good, whither I fled in the evening, oppressed.

The affliction I suffered both from my mother and my aunt as well as from one of her daughters, though she was small, is not to be described. My aunt even went so far as to slap me without my knowing why. Her daughter tormented me all the time, now by undoing what I had done, now by playing displeasing tricks on me, now by saying humiliating things to me out of contempt, now by wanting to enter a room to which I had retired for some personal need. Suffice it to say that she continually studied a way to irritate me. Through her means the Lord tried me greatly.

<sup>33</sup> It was a continual provocation.

### **Maria goes to the theater**

We had entered Carnival time and consequently the quite cold season. I was lacking many articles of clothing. My father said to me, "If you want me to provide what you need, you have to please me and go to the theater." To tell the truth, I did not consider that diversion a sin, or an occasion of sin, as I do now. I thought that by going one failed to make a mortification to which one was not obliged, not because one might incur a sin. Therefore, I believe after many requests I finally gave in, because if I had considered it a sin, I think I would not have done it, even at the cost of some privation, because that which I believed to be wrong I tried not to do, even though it might cost me mortification and effort. In fact, I consented to go to the plays, because I did not think them wrong; not, however, to parties, which I did think wrong because of the familiarity between men and women which was unavoidable there and for which I had the greatest repugnance.

In this connection I recall the following. As a student I very often found myself in the necessity of conversing with gentlemen with whom I conducted myself in a cheerful and relaxed manner (characteristics, I think, of my nature). But if they became familiar and tried demonstrations of affection, they did not succeed, except a few times when I was caught off guard and could not prevent them. I remember how a young member of the family, the nephew of my teacher," annoyed at being often repulsed, said to me, "You make me sick! Do you want to become a nun? I assure you that if you become a nun, I'll become a friar."<sup>34</sup> And when I again asked him earnestly to leave me alone, he consented and promised not to touch me.

I have already related that I had consented to go to plays as desired by my father, motivated in this by the need of what I lacked, it not being a question of superfluous but of necessary things (at least so they seemed to me). Having started going, I took a certain pleasure in it. The music pleased me, for which reason I returned several times.

I knew from others that my mother was not very pleased, but I considered that it was impossible to please her; that all I had up till then done because of the great affection I bore her had availed only to make her love me less. And now being in the dilemma of not being able to please her without displeasing my father, wanting the one and not wanting the other, I decided to resign myself to her displeasure. I do not even recall seeking counsel, a thing I certainly would have done, had the most worthy Provost Graziosi been living; the confessor to whom I was going at the time I told only matters I thought wrong. It seems (I do not recall) I did not think it wrong to displease my mother, because the one who had constrained me to do it (I mean, go to the theater), my father, was her superior. My good lady knew of it, but she said nothing to me, perhaps warned by my teacher who wanted me to have some diversion, hoping thereby to see me recover vivacity and strength, both of which she saw failing in me from day to day. I had reason to know that she<sup>35</sup> loved me very much. When she began to fear for my health, she suffered a great deal and sympathized with me; I mean, she pitied me for the way in which I was treated by my mother and my aunt. But, alas, it was all to my spiritual harm. Knowing no other means of diversion than that of worldly pastimes, she invited me to those and awoke in me a desire for them.<sup>36</sup> I said my teacher loved me, but not in the good sense of the word, and I could say that I had no one who truly loved me, because I had no one who counselled me to do good.

My resolution not to offend God was only his grace. And if you alone, my God, were the one who truly loved me, in you alone I should have sought and found recreation and comfort. But, O my gentlest God, the things of the world are for that growing age a pleasing monument, erected in exquisite taste, in which, if we did not well know what it contained that is, putrefaction and slime, which is precisely the material from which Man is made, and likewise filthy is that which the pastimes of the world contain—I said, if we did not know what the monument contains, one would

think that a precious treasure is hidden in it. And one who did not investigate further would see it only as a beautiful thing in itself. This is exactly what happened to me. I was entertained by those pastimes without going to the end of their filthy roots. But although I did not see in them other evil than that of finding there more occasions of vainglory than elsewhere, I decided not to frequent them any longer.

### **A visit to Florence**

In that time, my sister was staying in Florence for a while. In the summer my mother went to visit her. My father, knowing how much it would have cost me to be separated from her, sent me also to Florence to be with her. Once there, falling in with the situation, I found myself again assailed by thoughts of vainglory. To my misfortune, I could not forego the pleasure of pleasing others. However, my firm desire not to offend God kept my spirit in continual strife. I lived in this manner between fourteen and fifteen years of age. While the desire not to offend God held me in continuous torment, I did not always keep from exposing myself to occasions [of sin].

In that city I kept company with all the other girls in the family and became considerably dissipated. We stayed there for days. On returning to the bosom of the family, I applied myself to my usual occupations. I kept very close guard on myself, because there were persons enough to draw me into the world, praising me much and, staying about me, making flattering comparisons. O my beloved Jesus! With how much I had to contend: against the world which tried to entice me, against the devil who tempted me to pride, against myself at hearing certain things. My character was indifferent to nothing, and if I made myself such, it was by an effort I thought to be my duty and by duty imposed on me. For fear of vanity I fled from those I knew admired and praised me, as one flees from the devil. Now the world took his part; while after my First Communion, as I have related, he had himself tormented me in other ways.

### **A return to ill health**

In November of 1839, when I was fifteen years old, my health again worsened (it had considerably improved). One evening, while I was visiting my good lady with my teacher, I was seized by a violent convulsion and heart pains. They were so severe that both my good lady and my teacher were very frightened. I had experienced much trouble in the family on account of the misfortunes of our relatives, but I was troubled not on their account alone but also at seeing how much suffering my mother was caused. My teacher was aware of my every suffering and seeing me, besides, so badly treated by my mother and supposing that this new worsening in health and faintness were caused by it, combined to make her go into a frenzy<sup>37</sup> and complain loudly about my mother's conduct.

I do not know whether it was due to having known about it or because my teacher had also complained to her, my mother became a good deal more severe than previously. The first days I got up from bed to which I had been forced by the fever which developed the evening of the faintness already mentioned, I was so weak I could not take a step without supporting myself. Nevertheless, when I asked for something of which I had need and which was on the other story, I was told that if I wanted it, I should go and get it myself. What I had asked was not a whim of mine.

As soon as I was able to leave my room, they wanted to send me outside, saying that my faintness was all hypochondria and that therefore they needn't pay attention to me. I obeyed and started out for church, it being Sunday. But before I arrived, I was seized by faintness, on account of which my aunt who was accompanying me (not the one at home already mentioned a number of times) was obliged to bring me to my teacher's house a few steps away. When my indisposition had passed, I was taken home, where—it seems impossible, but it is so—I had to undergo more scolding by my mother. My teacher, to whom, as to many others aware of the situation, it seemed barbarous that I was so badly treated, took more interest in me. The day she came to help me in my needs, my mother did not dare impede her, but after she had left, she reproached me for being contrary.

When I had sufficiently regained my strength, I returned to school. Everyone said I looked healthy, and therefore no further thought was given to my health. I bore the burden, which I knew was God's will, of everything that was commanded me, dragging myself along by force, doing violence to my lack of strength a thousand times a day. Sometimes, such were my exhaustion and my malaise that, when I was not seen, constrained by necessity, I lay down wherever I happened to be.

### **Maria resists temptation**

At Carnival time in 1840, when I was still fifteen years old, they began again to insist that I go to the theater. My teacher tried every means of persuasion, and, that failing, her brother-in-law, Signor Martini,<sup>38</sup> was called in. He tried very hard, begging me many times, telling me that he would take me to their box. He tried everything to entice me. Temptations continued to come from all sides and from every relationship with others, but the Lord gave me the

strength to resist them. They were many, and some it were better not to mention. But with regard to these I felt myself quite strong and always firm, and also, placed in the situation, I found a way of disengaging myself.

One evening, my teacher took me to a private home to a performance by little children. Afterwards, the company descended to the parlor and began to organize a dance (I don't know whether on the spur of the moment or previously prepared). I too was invited to dance. I did not know how to get out of the room, but I managed it and had myself immediately taken home.

### **Trouble with the family**

What I did not have the strength to resist was the ill treatment I underwent in the family: precisely because of my weakness I could no longer support it. I told Jesus, "Such violence will bring me to my bed and it will be nothing in comparison to this; it will be the end of me, but such an end will be a delight. My God! They will find my heart broken with suffering, because, not knowing how I died, they will not fail to investigate the cause." In this way I unburdened myself at the feet of my Lord, because I did not think it wrong, and sobbing and weeping I was driven to long for the moment I mentioned above—not so much with impatience, but gently, as a refuge from my utter dejection which at the time, it seems, also showed itself in my features. Various persons have told me that anyone who might have seen me, even briefly, would have seen in me a creature singularly afflicted and it seems that many asked the cause.

I believe my father was well aware of all my maltreatment and suffering, but as a man of peace he said nothing in order not to cause a disturbance. I believe, however, that he suffered much on account of it, because when the occasion presented itself he showed that he loved me exceedingly. My affection for him was no less, and as to the family,<sup>39</sup> I felt his burden more than my own.

Because of my lively disposition, great effort of will was required not to be resentful at any sort of mortification. Sometimes I felt suffocated by the effort it took to repress the tears, so much so, that when I could do so without lacking respect, I went to my room and on my knees begged help from him from whom I always received it. At other times, that comfort was denied me, because when she became aware of it, the daughter of my aunt came and knocked so violently on the door that I was obliged to open it. She would enter and amuse herself by annoying me in a thousand ways. Hence, I had no other refuge but the church at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, my only Good, where I tried to go in the morning before going to school and in the evening when I left (time that I took from recreation and rest). And sometimes (as I related above, also when I was at school) I fled from the teacher and all the others and took refuge beneath a picture of my dear mother, Mary, in a room not often occupied.

The thought occurred to me that one day I would look on those bitter experiences with supreme joy, if I would suffer them for love of her upon whom I gazed and loved as my dear mother. Already that hope<sup>40</sup> dried my tears, and as that reflection inspired love in me, love itself made suffering sweet to me; I mean, began to make love sweet to me. Holy week I spent in bed because of severe palpitations and heart pain, which in fact deprived me of the strength to remain up. The doctor thought it best to bleed me, but I felt no relief, except for a very short while. I spent those days in almost continual meditation on the sufferings of my beloved Jesus.

On Sunday *in Albis*<sup>41</sup> I attended church with great effort to receive Holy Communion, the last time before I became ill. I had already offered myself to Jesus, willing to suffer in my members any pain and martyrdom. This [I was inspired to do] during my meditation on his suffering: so beneficial is it to meditate on his passion. They continued to send me outside, as the doctor wanted, to take the air, but I could not take a step without a strong support to help me. My suffering was so great because of the effort to drag myself along that, once back in the house, I seemed to feel myself devoured by the pain in my bones. Such was my agitation that I was forced to throw myself into a chair before arriving in my room. This I did not accomplish without being considered affected,<sup>42</sup> as though I wished to appear other than I was. For this reason, my mother was moved to scold me, with words so biting as to pierce my heart. I was told, for example, that if I were sent to school, or for love or constraint forced to work, I wouldn't have pulled such faces. My father, in spite of the love he bore me, continued to let matters ride. He was not aware of many things (and it was not my habit to go and tell him about them). God permitted this, because such a manner of acting was so contrary to nature that it could only have been due to extraordinary causes.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **The long illness, May 3, 1840—Aug. 15, 1841**

I think it was the third of May (various circumstances make me think so) when I was seized by a very severe convulsion. Without wishing to do so I screamed so loudly that I was heard in the street, although I was on the third

floor<sup>43</sup> of the house. [The seizure] lasted more than an hour, and I frequently emitted those screams. They ran to call the doctor. The disturbance and upset in the family were such that those outside were made to hear, also on account of my screams, and friends came running, among them my teacher, who happening to be passing on the way to go for a walk, heard the noise. All feared for my life; the doctor himself said he had never seen such convulsions in all his life. My extremities were all burned, because when neither cloths nor other means availed to rouse me and restore circulation, it seems that they applied hot stones and fomentation.

That month I completed my sixteenth year of age. From that attack of May 3, I remained fast in bed for about seventeen months without being able to move either a little or not at all. Almost every evening I was again seized by the usual attacks. The doctor tried many remedies which served more to aggravate than to alleviate. Among these remedies, one that greatly worsened my condition, was the attempt to place me in the bath, which the doctor, fearing I might faint, wanted to do himself with the necessary care and assistance. This was a great trial to my spirit, which could adapt itself only with the great difficulty, constrained by command. The doctor, seeing his every effort vain, declared he did not know what to do with me. My father decided to call in other doctors, also from out of town, and a consultation was held. Many were the persons who anxiously waited the judgement the doctors would pronounce about my illness. They showed great affection in my regard, perhaps from the knowledge they had of my situation before I became ill. Thus, my person (as it was said, and also sometimes told me by my teacher) was the topic of their conversation; they discussed me with quite a bit of feeling. Outside the family, it seems that whoever came to know me grew fond of me and showed me that they greatly loved me. I say this not because I merited it, but so it happened, perhaps on account of my sensitive nature, because whoever has heart is naturally loved (so it seems to me), and if I were to say so, I did not believe it would be false humility, and I would also lack that sincerity which I love so much.

### **Aversion to lying**

Both in conscience and by nature, I abhor the opposite sin as a most ugly thing. This aversion is very strong in me, and a person who does not love the truth, who is less than sincere, to me is worth nothing, even one who many other virtues. Neither do I think I am worth much because I have [this aversion], and in me it is a natural thing. I go to such extremes in loving it that at times it can be a defect, when I allow myself to be preoccupied with the thought that it is not believed to be what it is, and on that account to feel dejected. Oh, how great is my misfortune! When, my God, will I strip myself of everything? I see that there is always something more to do and then I will not cease to find work to do, even on behalf of someone whom I do not want to help. But I do want to, if you, my God, wish it, and therefore it is necessary to prepare oneself so as not to lose the chance.

### **Her life is despaired of**

The judgement of the doctors was that my health was done with. It was very sad news for all. The doctors (I mean those who did not know me) asked if I had suffered unpleasantness or anxiety, because they said that such illnesses were often caused that way. I do not know what answer was given them; I do know that they had supposed things of which I had not even dreamed.

The gravity of my illness had reached the state that it took six persons to move me from my bed, lifting me in sheets to an adjacent bed and with the doctors present, for these always feared some ill effect, which in my condition was very likely. (They were obliged to change me because of my heavy perspiration.) I couldn't stand any noise, which, no matter how slight, made me start and thereby caused great injury to my heart and convulsions. So much so, that even on the second floor of the house (I was on the third <sup>44</sup>) they swept with brooms of sorghum, <sup>45</sup> and those who were near my room had taken the care to put a sign with the word "silence" in the rooms in which I could hear them. In the street, too, they saw to it that boys did not stop near our house to make noise. In the room they walked about without shoes and sat on pillows on the ground, so that no noise would happen to be made with the chairs. I could not stand light, and so the room was entirely darkened with a small light well hidden. I could not bear to smell odors of any kind, because these also caused me convulsions. When I fell into these, to bring me out of them they held smelling salts up to my nose, but it helped nothing. For food I could take only very thin liquids and in very small quantities. Eventually, I confined myself to taking only a bit of ice cream. <sup>46</sup> My throat was continually constricted <sup>47</sup> so that I could swallow nothing and could hardly utter a word at a time <sup>48</sup> I lay always on my back without ever moving even a little. The arm on the side of my heart, that is, the left, was all contracted and twisted. <sup>49</sup> I was very thin, as can be imagined, since I took no food, but they say that my features never changed, except as of one in a faint, but not disfigured or emaciated, and therefore I did not give a displeasing or frightening impression.

### **Holy Viaticum**

Toward the end of July I was given Holy Viaticum.<sup>50</sup> This was announced to me by my good lady, because neither my own relatives nor my teacher had the courage to do so. I knew how extremely saddened my family was; already they kept my father away from the house. My sister, who had returned from Florence at the beginning of my illness, I heard being told (and the one who said it thought I hadn't heard) that I had fallen down, taken by a fainting spell. My mother wept, blaming herself. An aunt (who wasn't living with us), who loved me much, also cried, saying, "She has been given the grace to die so soon, she has been given it!" (She had heard me say how little I cared to live.) That was the one who had nursed me from the first day of my illness. Also my teacher could give herself no peace and helped me all day. I was seized by certain fits of drowsiness and faintness which were exactly signs and images of death. The announcement of Communion, that is, that I was to receive Communion, moved me to tears, but I do not know what was the cause of that emotion. I was concerned about my poor father and asked that he not be told, if possible. I thought he would be inconsolable, and so it was. As to myself, the thought of death did not upset me. In fact, the thought of regaining my health, and with it life, saddened me, for I considered death as life. I recall clearly that I could not think of death without rejoicing; perhaps it was due to a lack of reflection and also a grace the Lord granted me.

### **A vision of angels**

After I had received Communion, I no longer pictured the room in which I was. I saw a great crowd of angels in such numbers as not to be able to be contained in that room. They were most beautiful, ascending and descending long stairs, the top of which I could not see. They held in their hands very beautiful garlands which they wove and joined together one with the other. Enraptured by that vision, I uttered words about it, which made those who were nursing me aware that there was something [beyond their ken].

Afterwards, I remained two days without speaking or swallowing. I showed no sign of life but breathing and pressing the hand of the one who held mine either as a signal or to ask me something. Neither my sister nor my parents any longer came to see me. I remained in this condition three weeks. Although, as I have already said, I gave no sign of life except to breathe, I had not lost the sensation of physical pain nor the clear perception of things. Within, I was as though I were healthy. I suffered very calmly, even with spiritual joy, those torments I felt in myself, such as, I believe, could not have been greater. I suffered, I say, with joy by means of the continual presence of God which I managed to maintain and which, by his grace, I sensed in me. "My God," I sometimes said within me, "you reward me for what I suffer for you with awareness of you, who make all bitterness sweet and every burden light."

### **Other visions**

I do not know in what manner, in mind or in imagination, I experienced the following: I saw present to me two darling little angels who were suspended in the air (I saw nothing on which they stood). Between them stood a large cross, the stock of which both held with the hand closest to it. The one on the right side of the cross held a chalice in the other hand. It was a delightful thing to me and extraordinarily sweet to my 'spirit. Other times I thought I saw Mary who, holding out her hand, seemed to me to be inviting me to go to her. Oh, how strong was the love I felt for her and the desire to join her in the kingdom of heaven! Another time I saw Jesus just as he is represented in the agony in the garden. O my most lovable Jesus! O sweetest spouse! How you encouraged me to suffer! It was for me a true joy having suffering to offer.

Another time, I saw a very large dove which, covering me with its wings, that is, holding them extended over me, illuminated me completely, sending forth great splendor. This seemed to me a dream, but I do not know what it was. Afterwards, when I returned to myself or woke up, having, as I have already said, feelings of exquisite vividness, more than a healthy person, I heard it said that I seemed to be in the pangs of death, as I no longer gave signs of life, neither by starting if they made a noise, nor by showing pain if they touched me, nor by batting my eyes (which I kept raised to heaven), if someone passed before me; I saw only what I have described above. Such incidents occurred several times, as I heard it said, and I became aware of them when I seemed to return from the other life. I comforted myself, thinking that one day I would never again return. Oh, in this way I seemed to gain my true life! I seemed to strip myself of death, leaving here below this fragile body<sup>51</sup> and taking refuge in the supreme happiness I hoped to find only in heaven.

After a few days, I felt in myself a presentiment that I should recover. I was sad, thinking I would find no remedy to the anxiety of my heart. Then it seemed to me that I could find it in the Blessed Sacrament and immediately I protested that I wanted to receive it frequently and be united to him, nay, embrace him, because I was desirous of

him like a child at the breast of its mother. Meanwhile, the sweet memory of the visions I had had never receded from my mind and heart, and I evoked them to make acts of love and to animate myself to suffer.

I had no relief from creatures: not because they were unwilling, indeed it was painful for them not to be able to give me relief, but because I was incapable of feeling it. The only way they could help me during those three weeks was to moisten my mouth with ice cream.<sup>52</sup> It was an unusual thing my not having other needs, and it was a grace I did not develop sores<sup>53</sup> from the great sweats which they could neither dry nor change, because I could not be touched without suffering convulsions and mortal faints. Day and night there were persons at my side with no other inconvenience than the pain of expecting me to cease living from moment to moment. Already persons less involved (I mean, through friendship and relationship) had taken thought to prepare what was necessary.

### **Maria is denied Extreme Unction**

The doctor had also given orders that I should receive Extreme Unction,<sup>54</sup> but I was not given it, because, in order not to further distress the family (my parents and my sister), the priest was kept away from me. Thus, if Jesus wanted me, if I were to die, I would have remained without that help. But Jesus helped me; I dwelt entirely in him, I desired only him, and I do not know what more others could have done.<sup>55</sup> I say this in order to explain how the Lord made up what was lacking, not because it should be believed it was a good thing to keep the priest away from me, as they did. I think, however, that whoever did it had reasons enough, among which the most urgent was that of wanting to avoid as much as possible the desperation to which my father was capable of abandoning himself.

After those three weeks or a little more, the convulsion of my throat eased somewhat, but I could not express what I ardently desired, namely, Holy Communion. I could make myself understood only with difficulty by making a sign by pressing and opening the hand of my teacher who held mine and asked many questions. Poor thing, how much she suffered at not being able to understand me; she wept at the pain of it! Finally she understood, but the doctors would not allow me, fearing that swallowing the sacred host would have some ill effect. They urged me to resign myself. For this reason my confessor was summoned, who told me to consider that there had also been a saint who died with that desire and was greatly rewarded by God; so, I should also console myself in the same situation. I resigned myself but I did not cease desiring.

### **She receives Holy Communion**

It was the vigil of St. Lawrence.<sup>56</sup> That night I reacquired the use of speech, and thus showed that nothing untoward would have happened had they satisfied my desire. They promised to do so, and in fact in the morning everything was arranged. At twelve o'clock I received my only Good in the sacrament.

Before this, I had been seized by such violent pains that I could not remain silent. And since I who had thoroughly learned to love suffering, did not wish to complain, I uttered affectionate words of love to my dear Jesus and told him that my suffering was nothing compared to what he had suffered for me. For love of him I also refused to moisten my parched lips, saying that such relief had been denied him. No, no, I said, I want to suffer, I want to suffer. O my Jesus, how much you suffered for me! And saying this, I held the crucifix, gazed upon and kissed it and repeated my love to him. I did all this without being able to restrain myself.

Shortly before Communion I calmed myself somewhat. The pains let up, but afterwards they seized me again, with even greater vehemence. I remained in that condition for about three days. Those who assisted me were in tears, and also those in the vicinity of my room, as I subsequently learned, were deeply moved.

The vehemence of the pain made me blurt out my thoughts,<sup>57</sup> so that, when my teacher left me, I repeated more than once, "I will not see you again, because I am dying." Perhaps she believed that I felt pain at separation, but it was not so, for no matter how much gratitude for her love for me required that I return or reciprocate it, this was not such as to make me feel the pain of separation. This could not be, in view of what I said above. With such desire for the things of heaven, I could not suffer at separation from those of earth. Truly, it was so; I did not feel it. O my Jesus, my God! Just as you then helped me so much by your gratuitous grace, so I beg you to deign to assist me when the time comes, for that will certainly not come about through any merit of my own.

After three days, on the vigil of the Assumption of Our Lady,<sup>58</sup> or the day before the vigil, I do not recall, I began to improve, and the improvement progressed to the extent that my life was no longer feared for. Nevertheless, I remained gravely ill, so that they could never move me from my bed except with six persons, transferring me in sheets to another [bed] next to mine, and taking great care not to shake or touch me, because then I would have suffered severely. They changed me only once a month and sometimes even less frequently. I remained so immovable and always on my back, that the bed remained always the same. Nothing was disturbed.

### **Resignation to dying**

Every once in awhile I made a Communion of devotion.<sup>59</sup> I did not concern myself with getting better; neither did the duration of the sickness bore me. I believed it was the will of God and that I was suffering for him, and that was enough to make suffering pleasant to me. I recall that once the priest who brought me Communion asked me if I were not bored at being always ill and suffering. To avoid Saying how much I enjoyed reposing in the will of God, no matter how much he asked me to suffer, I remained silent, answering with a smile. I do not know what he who asked me such a question would have thought.

My mother wanted me to get well, and the knowledge that I did not want to weighed heavily on her. She told me to ask it and had my sister urge me as well. Such was the reluctance I felt to ask for it that I could not do it. I replied to my sister, "Believe me, it is not yet time. When God wishes to grant it to me, he will inspire me to ask for it. I know and firmly believe that he can do so, but I do not wish it yet." My mother once had the Rev. Fr. Dotti<sup>60</sup> bring me a picture of the Child Jesus reputed to work miracles. She was put out at hearing me say (when asked by the priest) that I was just as willing to remain in bed for the rest of my life as to recover my health, desiring only the will of my God. My persevering in such sentiments was a grace, because I had no one to help me. My confessor came only to hear my confession; the chaplain, to bring me Communion. The Reverend Provost<sup>61</sup> came only on the occasion mentioned above. None of them felt at ease visiting my family. Another priest came, a relative of mine,<sup>62</sup> but he did not speak about spiritual matters; more than anything he talked about trivial things with my sister.

### **Cesira studies French**

She was studying French. Her teacher, who was a layman, set her to translating romances.<sup>63</sup> When she was studying, she had me listen to her. Perhaps she did it to bring me relief, for my not complaining about what I suffered and the length of the illness had led her to become habituated to my condition, so that she was no longer aware of the sacrifice of my not being able to move and considered my life wasted,<sup>64</sup> because removed from all worldly comfort, and therefore needful of relief. I do not know how I managed to listen to her read that literature, for before I became ill, the mere sight of a book with the title of a novel was reason enough for not touching it, I being of the opinion, I know not wherefrom, that novels were bad. In reality, I know that they are such from certain impressions I received, which I feared were not good (after this, I never again read them nor 'heard them read). Therefore, I condemned<sup>65</sup> them, but without knowing what was wrong with them, or even if they were wrong, and so I do not even know how I came to condemn of them.

### **The Feast of St. Florenzio**

At the beginning of the hot season I began to get worse. In a short time I was reduced to the condition of the previous year. I had passed the winter better, as I have already said. In August, my cousin<sup>66</sup> went to Florence. There was a great celebration in the church of the Scolopians,<sup>67</sup> where a few martyr saints were exposed for veneration. At sight of one of them, called Florenzio, who was said to have died at a little less than my age<sup>68</sup>, she seemed to see me in the position in which he lay and was moved to bring me his blessing. Not knowing how, she brought me his picture. When I had received it, that is, when it had been laid on my pillow (for I was unable to take it), I felt moved to ask a favor and felt confident I would receive it. I was strengthened in this conviction by the thought that [Florenzio], being young, would be likely to obtain favors for young people. (In May, I had reached my seventeenth year of age, and the year was 1841) It was St. Lawrence's Day,<sup>69</sup> and so we were near the feast of the Assumption of Mary, my dear mother, whom I contemplated in the act of ascending into heaven. A few days before I received the picture already mentioned, I felt a great desire to follow her, but afterwards it seemed to me that everything worked together to help me and invite me ask the favor. Besides, I asked it under the condition' that if it- happened to be to my spiritual detriment, I did not want it. I passed three days with such sentiments and I felt ever growing in me the conviction that on the day of the Assumption I would be cured.

On the vigil, I thought of placing the little card on my heart, because I believed I would receive the favor in that instant. I experienced some doubt about doing this, since I could not endure the least pressure on that part of me. I could not even have the sheet there. From the waist upwards I wore the simple garment or shirt which I kept fastened at the neck, as is done in bed. Besides, I recognized that fear as a positive temptation, because, if God wished to grant me the favor, it was unlikely that an act of devotion by which I witnessed to my faith would serve to harm me. And even if it did, it was the will of God which impelled me to do it, and therefore there was nothing to fear.

### **Maria is cured**

Induced by the fear of being lacking in faith, I took the little card and courageously placed it on my heart, pressing it there firmly. It was six o'clock in the morning; doubles were being rung <sup>70</sup> in the church of the suppressed convent where we are now.<sup>71</sup> It was time for Benediction. I do not know how it was that that year the vigil was also solemnized, because afterwards, I recall, only the day of the Assumption was so celebrated. It can also be that the doubles were being rung for Mass. I thought they were ringing for Benediction and I turned my thoughts thither. My sister and my mother had spent the night with me. Although I was almost in the same condition as last year, they took courage and nursed me themselves. When one suffers for others, prolonged pain loses its strength, and habit also helps much. At the aforementioned hour, they were resting near me.

Carried in thought and with all my heart to Mary, again requesting the favor, praying the little saint to intercede with her, and placing and pressing his picture on my heart, I was seized as it were by drowsiness and in that instant I felt myself freed of all faintness; I felt all my members reinvigorated and my internal organs renewed. I called my sister who took fright at hearing my voice, for a long time unheard. I calmed her fears and asked her to lift me up. She could not yet believe it and did not recover her calm until she saw me move with agility and without constraint. With cries of wonder and surprise, my mother ran to notify the other members of the family. All were surprized; <sup>72</sup> they seemed beside themselves for joy, while they still felt uncertain and fearful of what they saw with their own eyes.

That day of my recovery was truly a day of joy and gladness both for my parents and for my relatives and acquaintances. They all seemed crazed for joy. All showed that they wanted to pay me their respects and offered me gifts. It seemed as though they wanted to make up the time I had not been able to enjoy. I took advantage of it, but in the midst of the fun (though innocent) I felt in me something that called me back to solitude, and it seemed to me that health was an obstacle to it. Alone for brief moments - more was not granted me (they did not leave me alone for a moment and pressed me with invitations and comforts) - I regretted that I had recovered my health, and it remained a burden to me until I found a way to use it better, because I had asked it only to help my own and to use it well.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

The first while after my cure, I think about two months, I was left somewhat in peace, that is, free, so that in the evening I had a bit of time to devote to prayer and reading. I resumed meditation on the passion of Jesus, which during those two months I seem somewhat to have neglected due to the circumstances I have mentioned. But this is no excuse for the defect. In one way or another I should have arranged to make [my meditation] and found time and obtained leisure or freedom to do it. I frequented the sacraments every other week, although at that time it was not done by many; in fact, according to what I said I promised during my illness I ought to have done it more often. However, to tell the truth, given the way things went in the family and its relation to friends and relatives, it seemed to me that I could not do more, thinking that more would not have been permitted me. Even that which I have mentioned seemed too much to the family.

I read the life of St. Mary Magdalen, to whom I had always been devoted. I had regained my vivacity, and with this I was troubled by worries I did not know how to allay. I recalled the time when I had found their remedy in death and now I regretted the good health I enjoyed. "My God," I repeated, "I was not worthy to come to you! How grievous it is to me to be here where I find no rest." Sometimes singing was a help, though not a remedy. I had no books, nor anyone to obtain them for me, in which to find loving spiritual songs, such as I later found in the works of Liguori.<sup>73</sup> However, I sang a profane which I remembered and which I had heard sung by others. I turned it into a sacred song, changing the theme, because for that matter I had never sung such songs enthusiastically with regard to the words, even though I always sang with spirit.

### **The source of the spring**

O my God, though the worries of my heart betrayed a certain solicitous desire, how late did I discover the gushing source of that spring which my heart longingly sought without knowing it! Until now I had tasted only the rivulets, which, though they issue from that spring, do not produce the same effect; that is, they do not satisfy two appetites at the same time. Just as a baby enjoys only the quality of the milk; that is, the sweetness of its taste, if its mother squeezes it into a glass and hands it to him. Oh, it is quite another thing if the mother takes the baby to her breast. There is the same difference, in my opinion, between holy feelings and the true love of a spouse who embraces the beloved and from him draws that for which she hungered—I mean, thirsted, because she burned with love. I said, it

draws that which sustains and wounds; that is, the mutual exchange of love, as a child at the breast of its mother sucks her love and bestows it on her.

I do not know if what I said was proper; if I said something wrong. If so, I beg him who was the last to order me to write, who will be the first to read it, to remove it, to cancel it, and correct me. I only revealed what I feel and I know not how else to express it. Perhaps it is my way of feeling that is wrong; in that case, I ask that in charity I be told it. Before what I have related above I do not know what I was <sup>74</sup>.

### **Maria practices dancing**

We had begun carnival time. My sister went to parties and by way of preparation practised dancing. When she was alone, I accompanied her. I experienced a lightening of the spirit; the motion seemed to relax me. I feared that it was wrong, and if nothing else, that I might convince myself to be inclined to such things; therefore, I did it only once or twice.

My father began to beg me to go to parties with my sister, but I in no way consented. I feared that it was wrong, and that was enough to render me opposed even to that which in itself was enjoyable. To my father it was not enough to beg me again and again; he also had others do so. To a priest, a cousin of his, <sup>75</sup> I replied: "I am ready to do what you ask, if you will also agree to do what I am about to ask you." When he answered in the affirmative, <sup>76</sup> I told him that he must come and dance with me. By means of this trick I avoided prolonging the argument.

### **A flame open to the air**

My situation was critical. I was a flame open to the air, (considering my disposition). I was a flame open to the air, exposed to a thousand winds, all of which attempted to press me to the earth, and it was a grace that I did not bend to any side. Of this I am certain; neither did I feel the least stirring of emotion. Being always accompanied by the firm will not to offend God, as soon as some occasion presented itself, because I did not wish to sin, I denied consent without further consideration. I did not give way to any feeling, to any inclination <sup>77</sup> to what could entice me. It was always thus, even in my earliest years. If I am not mistaken, I think I have already mentioned this.

Sometimes I fear that I am committing a sin of self-love in exposing, as I do, my feelings and my liveliness of spirit, because in so doing one would seem to pretend to virtue. Certainly, a great loss is not such to one who does not feel it, and to a frigid spirit the privation of what perhaps annoys it is of little account. It is true I was not like that by nature, but I can say I did my part to make myself so. But, O my Lord, who helped me? You alone. I have nothing to be proud of and much to humiliate and confound me. I have no reason for self-love nor do I feel any, but it might seem so to one who does not know me, although it may also be that I know myself least of all. O my good God, grant that I may be known by those whose duty it is to know me, and that is enough.

### **A devout family**

Toward the middle of Lent my aunt became seriously ill. <sup>78</sup> My parents, aware of my excessive sensitivity, feared that my proximity to that concern might be harmful to me. For this reason they entrusted me to certain relatives of theirs. This family was quite devout and without the preoccupation and noise of children. Living with them was a priest who at present is my confessor. The house was situated almost in the open country. In that family it was easier for me to attend church. My good relative went every day, I think, or almost every day, and she took me with her, while in my home there was no such custom, and my wishing to do so would have seemed excessive, and my father would have noticed it and feared that I was devout. I didn't want to upset him and so was as careful as I could without fear of failing [in my religious obligations].

In that family, as I said, I found support in doing good. They loved me very much, they showered me with a thousand attentions, to which according to my emotional nature I could not be indifferent. In their midst, after the first days in which I was very depressed over the serious illness of my aunt and my parents' worry over her, I enjoyed the peace of paradise. The quiet, the devout harmony reigning in that family, the solitary situation of the house, all enchanted my spirit, which experienced a concentration of its powers in the very depths of the soul, where it enjoyed its delights, because it was aware of God and hence rendered almost stunned <sup>79</sup> from sweet inebriation. It felt drowsy; its vivacity no longer broke out; I did not feel it either.

### **The birth of a vocation**

The good people of that family in which I lived asked me if I intended to become a nun, but I had not yet thought of doing so. I confess my imperfection in that, on the contrary, I was displeased, when I heard that they supposed it to

be so. I had not given a thought to a choice of a state in life; I had never heard nuns spoken of except that, as a child, when my good lady brought me to a certain convent, I did not wish to leave it, feeling quite attracted<sup>80</sup> to those religious and to the place itself. But that was childish enthusiasm, because neither then did I understand nor until that moment had I understood what it meant to be a nun; nor did I consider nor regard that state as more pleasing to God. Although I wished to belong wholly to him, I did not consider how (with regard to a state in life).

I remember that, greatly loving little children, when I saw them I could not refrain from caressing them. I imagined how I would rear them lovingly and in a Christian manner (but this was when I was younger). I amused myself with such thoughts and even found enjoyment in them without, however, thinking of the state it would be necessary to embrace. Of this I never thought.

I think it was before returning to my family that, regarding the religious state as the refuge of my soul, as a means of uniting myself more intimately with God, of gaining the fullness of that for which I felt I hungered, I seemed to see there the spring for which I was longing without knowing it. I do not remember, as I said, whether it was before I returned to my family that I resolved to seek refuge where it seemed to me I would fully possess my unique treasure. Oh, like a little child, I saw my mother there, who from far away sent me a few jets of milk that made me more and more anxious to possess her, to draw near to her breast.

If it was not at that time and shortly afterwards, it was certainly in that place, in that house and family<sup>81</sup> that I resolved to embrace the religious state, because the solitude suggested the idea. For this reason, the memory of that house and family has always been dear to me, and I take pleasure in looking at that dwelling, a thing I can still do, because it is near the garden<sup>82</sup> of the convent where we are now. I remained in that house for about three weeks. After I had returned to my family, I continued to go there and passed whole days there. I liked those good people very much. My parents permitted it, thinking, as indeed it did, that it afforded me respite. My father for some time did not notice that the respite he allowed me nourished something which he found most displeasing. His lack of perception allowed me an interval of peace.

### **The joy of meditation**

I attended church every day, I frequented the sacraments more often, and, I do not know exactly when, perhaps a month later, my confessor told me that I could receive Communion several times a week. I do not know with what joy my heart leapt. The previous evening I would devote myself to prayer for a long time and for this reason I would retire to bed at a very late hour. Oh, what delight I experienced in meditating! Already I felt myself drinking of that divine source, the sweetness of which cannot be expressed. Outside of prayer, also, I felt the effects of what I had enjoyed. Everywhere I found my God, and everything brought me back to him. I enjoyed pleasing him, that is, serving him both in family troubles and in my parents. I saw him in them, because I wished to endure everything for him and not out of love of them, which in me was and always had been excessive. I still loved them, as I had always loved them, but now that love absorbed in a love immeasurably stronger I found him in the solitary walks I took with my good friend and relative already mentioned, and to him her [good] works raised me. In her house also [I found him], as I have already related. Oh, how the singing of little birds, often heard in that house, ravished me to heaven! That was the period in my life most lacking in pain and filled with spiritual delights. If repose were to please me, if I desired it, I would be able to envy that time.

When I was in church with my good relative opposite the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, I felt myself so irresistibly drawn there that sometimes I found myself there without knowing it.

What a good thing it is to meditate (in fact, necessary for everyone), and to withdraw from vain entertainments and pastimes, tainted by the shadow of the world and not what they seem. By this path I found that living source of love and fullness which nothing else in this insipid, vain, and most corrupted world could for a single instant give me of nourishment or even relief. I do not know how persons consecrated to God through choice of a station in life and by this fact not allowed to be of the world nor even desire it, I do not know, I say, what sort of life they lead, if not one of death, unless they labor to find that which I have mentioned: the living font of God, nourishment of love. O my Spouse, it would be much less trouble than to weary oneself appeasing the hunger for that which is harmful or to feel the remorse of your reproaches. Much less trouble it would be, I say, to remain far from occasions [of sin] and to meditate on you, about you, whom we have chosen for our portion, called by your Father by gratuitous grace.

Indeed, that obligation would in part be incumbent also on those who, by reason of their state in life, must also play their part in the world. O my Spouse, grant light to all and bring it about that all are yours. But I particularly commend to you those to whom through gratitude and the order of charity I am more obliged, and I feel the need of it.

### **A visit to Florence**

Towards the middle of June, my mother took me to Florence. Since May, I had completed my eighteenth year of age. They took that occasion to have me change the brown clothing I had worn until then, in keeping with the vow I had made for the favor I had received<sup>83</sup> I managed, besides, to be allowed to dress with utmost simplicity. More than anything I wore white dresses. The need to leave my solitude, which at all cost I had managed to keep in the midst of the family (to the degree that my parents permitted it).

The need to leave my solitude, I say, caused me some concern. And were it not for the fact that the purpose of the trip to that city was in part to visit the relics of my protector saint<sup>84</sup> I would perhaps have refused; I mean, I would have asked not to be taken there.

I feared greatly for myself with so many temptations (I do not know whether the devil put them in my way), many temptations, I mean, to vainglory. I was paid compliments and was well aware that I would have had more temptations had I varied my style of dress, as my parents wished, and gone into the city, where politeness and propriety, as well as my mother, would have constrained me to engage in conversation, be in the company of various persons, and go walking to please the family with whom we were staying.

I would have passed it all up to avoid what I did not like, but I felt I could not do so. However, having resolved to go about, I made a pact with my eyes not to raise them except to look at innocent things, convinced that that would not draw attention, and so I would be free of vainglorious thoughts. Such behavior was a great help to enable me to be again free without a shadow of wrongdoing, but it did not entirely remove the occasions when my mother and others noticed such conduct. Therefore, my attention was continually recalled, and I was also mortified by my mother. Noticing that when I went out I wore a veil to make it easier for me not to look about, she showed no little disapproval. She did everything to divert and entertain me, having had orders to this effect, as I came to know, from my father, who, it seemed, had begun to be aware of my vocation. I had a good deal to put up with. Sometimes I said to her, "Mother, believe me, what you intend for my relaxation is a torment to me." We were approaching the celebrations for the feast of St. John<sup>85</sup>. I begged her earnestly to fix a date to return to our family. She promised me to do so, but then, when requested time and again by the lady<sup>86</sup> with whom we were staying to do otherwise, she would persuade me to stay. She had only to say to me, "That is what I want," for me to recognize my duty to obey.

The home where we were staying being one of the better ones in the Piazza di Santa Maria Novella, on the days of the festivities many persons visited its owners, relatives of my mother<sup>87</sup> and our hosts. I asked that they would at least allow me to remain by myself in a room removed from that *piazza*. This was promised me, but fearing importunate requests, when the festivities of the great feast approached (of which that year there were many), I retreated to a small room where they would not expect me to be and thus would not find me.

### **Interest in the miracolata**

And so it happened. But the following day, urging reasons of politeness and propriety, they constrained me to appear for a moment in the room in which there was a certain Signora Fossombroni<sup>88</sup> who had expressed the wish to greet me. Perhaps it was some Scolopi Fathers who had told her about me. It all caused me confusion, because in every instance they had only good to say of me. Fathers Inghirami and Gatteschi, of that Order<sup>89</sup> wanted me to tell the story of my cure, which had been recorded by the former<sup>90</sup> This distressed me a great deal. I do not know how the widowed Grand Duchess M. Luisa<sup>91</sup> came to know about me, since at the time I was in Florence, the Scolopian Father Paoli<sup>92</sup> presented me to her and to her niece, now duchess of Bavaria. This Father told my mother that the grand duchess had requested to see me.

### **Her father opposes her vocation**

After the festivities, we returned home. It would seem that even before I left for Florence my father had become aware of my vocation, because the day before our departure I had to hear from him such strong complaints, as if leaving him to enclose myself in a monastery were the basest ingratitude to him. Because of the great good I wished him, it was a great trial to know I was the cause of sorrow to him; but soon considering that in my case I could not please both my father and my Spouse, I embraced the latter more closely and repeated, "I suffer all, all for you, my love; and for love of you the strongest bonds of nature itself are broken!"

When we had returned from that city [Florence], my father began to show displeasure at everything: he did not want my clothing so simple, he did not want spiritual friendships, solitary walks. Everything caused him upset, my every word seemed to his ears to say "convent". To persons of his and my acquaintance (by the affection they had for me) he said, "If she perseveres in such a vocation, I'll go mad, and it will be her fault if I do something out of order." Such

words which were reported to me, perhaps to try to dissuade me from my resolve, were wounds to my heart, reopened every time I saw him, and even more when as a sign of his love he caressed me. To repress my feelings, I turned my thoughts to God and, renewing my promise of fidelity to my spouse, Jesus, I felt myself embrace him even more closely and glow with even deeper feelings of love for him.

Notwithstanding what I have said, the continual situations, I mean, the temptation of the affection my father always showed me, renewed my pain. Oh, why is it not given me, I said to myself <sup>93</sup> to impress on your heart duty toward God rather than filial love? And must I therefore withdraw partly from Him for love of you? Let me die before I cease to follow Him wherever He wishes. I had recourse to prayer, and my spirit regained new strength, which, although it did not render my spirit impenetrable, made it immovable.

In what I considered my duty I complied with my father's wishes. This consisted in some concessions regarding my clothing and otherwise doing what I could to avoid contact with spiritual persons. I also less frequently visited my good friend and relative, to whom I have alluded several times. But this was not enough. He wanted me to dress up more, curl my hair, go walking with my sister. In short, he did not want me to become a nun. All this he did not tell me in so many words; because of the great love he bore me he did not have the courage to require of me something that was repugnant to me. Or else, he arranged to have me know it through others, or he made me aware of it by his discontent or sadness, or he spoke in a loud voice, so that I would hear, even if I were not in the room with him. Such conduct, which only served to convince me of <sup>93</sup> These words seem to be addressed to her father rather than herself. his uncommon affection, was more painful than any other; his suffering caused me to suffer. I no longer knew how to act. To continue to offer him the usual attentions and submission and to show myself happy and at ease I well realized was to plunge him all the deeper into his bitter and sad thoughts of separation from me. Not to do what he told me did not seem right. I held to doing his will, referring and recommending to God whatever the outcome might be. My mother also showed herself contrary to my vocation; she advised me against it and did all she could to make religious life repugnant to me. But whatever she said against it only served to strengthen me in my vocation. That this was so I clearly told a priest who argued with me, perhaps engaged by my father to do so.

### **Maria is freed from vanity**

For a moment I was even tempted by the thought that I was wasting myself. (Oh, how embarrassed I am!) It seemed to me that one should not bury in a monastery what deserved to be seen and enjoyed in the world. O my Jesus, how much I owe you for giving me the strength to resist! I repeat, how embarrassed I am at having been capable of such a thought! But I didn't heed it for a minute. I immediately turned to my good Jesus and said to him, "If I had more, I would want to sacrifice more for you, and for you I wish to renounce <sup>94</sup> all the glory of the world."

From that moment I so became mistress of myself that, whereas previously my person had been a burden to me because I saw myself on its account exposed to a thousand dangers and temptations to vanity—from that moment it seemed no longer mine; the knowledge that I was being admired had no other effect on me than to make my heart leap with love of him to whom I was totally given. Whereas previously, as I said, it cost me an effort to some degree, because, although in feeling pleasure I never had any particular object in mind, nevertheless I experienced a feeling of pleasure; besides, it was irksome only for fear of the 'sin of vainglory and complacency over the gifts admired in me. This was why it cost me an effort: anticipating and avoiding occasions, fortifying myself against those which were inevitable, and combatting others in which I unknowingly became involved.

In the attitude mentioned above there was nothing of all this; all began and ended in a loving embrace of Jesus, my spouse, and in the sweetest joy of having given myself to him to the shame of the world which wanted me and had tried to enthrall me. In this way, I seemed to repudiate that world and let it know the great nothing that it was by having left it in spite of its enticements and the awareness of having pleased it. That awareness I no longer feared, since it served only to bind me more closely to God.

### **Jesus, spouse of Maria**

In that same year (I was still eighteen years old) the marriage of my sister was arranged with a young man of the city of Florence. When he came to visit her, which was often, thinking of what a spouse I was pledged to, I felt almost beside myself with love. Sometimes, no longer able to repress it, I took refuge in my room and, pressing the crucifix, my supreme good, to my breast, I repeated many times, "I will always be yours! You will always be mine! O God, my love, how sweet you are! How delightful you are to me! How much more do I prefer you!" Sometimes, on entering the church, I felt, as it were, an invisible hand clutching my heart. It was a loving embrace ravishing my soul, which in the same instant, attracted by him, took refuge in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, whence I felt the loving wound

pulsing. Thus, I was constrained to repeat, "My Spouse! Do not ever, ever think I will leave you. Even if they break me to pieces." Oh, how good he was to bear such protests! Ought I not rather ask him not to leave me? But to tell the truth it was not I who spoke; it was love, which when it is strong, does not think of what it is saying and thinking.

### **Maria describes her prayer**

The sense of the divine presence, as I have already said, had become continual to me. At prayer I was no longer able to profit by books or to pray orally. It was a most delightful union—if I am not mistaken, the prayer of union; I call it that, believing it to be so according to my little knowledge; it was, as I say, a most delightful union from which I knew not how to free myself, or to express it better, could not resign myself to have it cease, unless persuaded to leave God for God: that is, to leave God in the contemplation of Magdalen to find him again in my own duties, in the cares of Martha; who, if she had given them their proper place and no more, if she had not been completely absorbed in them, I think, would not have been reproved by the divine Master. It even pleases him that we cease to enjoy his company in order to work for him and then return to repose in him. Oh, what an excellent guide in this matter, as in everything, is pure love of you, and how easy it is for love of self to become mixed with it! I mean, love according to one's own satisfaction, which, though spiritual, I do not think to be good, nor have I ever thought so. I now find this confirmed by something I read, I think, in the writings of the holy mother Teresa; but, as I have said, even before reading them I held that opinion. It is a great misery which I see, and of which therefore I have had experience: that either we want to be devout and spiritual according to our own fashion or we are not so at all. Small minds easily fall into the first error; great ones (not the very great) into the second misfortune.

### **God is not known**

O my God, an evil, most evil thing is the pride which distorts and diverts the most beautiful gift of man, which is understanding properly taken. Oh, if it were used for the ends for which you bestowed it, how happy we would be! But why do we not understand that you made us a gift of this intellect? Ah, how unhappy we are, that we waste it on vain and fallacious things, which perhaps we will not manage to understand, either because it is not given us or because we will be snatched from them by premature death. Oh, blindness, Oh, blindness, to lose oneself in human knowledge, when it does not serve an eternal purpose; and such certainly cannot be called what eventually will end.

O my spouse! my spouse, how difficult it is for one who loves you much to understand how greatly knowledge of you is neglected by men, as though everything else were more important than this. Oh, the confusion of human minds! That in our age better individuals, that is, those who pretend to be true Christians, approve many things and on occasion practice many more, with the excuse that they must do so from propriety and the custom of the times, and that with the passage of time will come civilization and change. O civilization harmful to us, if little by little religion is extinguished in the heart of man!

O my spouse, my spouse, who will follow you there in the midst of the fashionable world? If there are those who do not do so out of bad will and those who avoid doing so out of human respect, others do not do so out of ignorance, because they were reared and grew up that way through circumstance and misfortune<sup>95</sup> These are not those I named above, who go about seeking and fascinating themselves with the vain knowledge of the world and neglect the knowledge of the things of God. Oh, truly God has no place to put his head! Everywhere are dry branches and thorns, vanity and more vanity. And I also fear that what has the appearance of virtue is not genuine, not solid piety.

If the rich man does not flee for fear of infection, we are happy to remain beside him, more avid for honor than nauseated by infection. O my spouse, my spouse, whither have I strayed, forgetful of my main purpose? Here I go then, after some brief words.

### **On seeking acquaintance of the rich**

In the first years of my childhood and youth I was very much involved (without wanting or seeking it) with persons distinguished by their condition, with the first families of the land. I believe that if I had sought it, or out of vanity prized it in spite of the dangers I knew to be there, I would have been less helped by grace and then I would not have kept firm as I did, because the good God did not want to punish in me that for which I was not to blame, that is, being kept in that situation by my parents.

Oh, how well off are the girls and young women who remain with their parents or are entrusted by them to good and pious teachers or religious! Unfortunate are those whom the need to earn their bread impedes from this condition; guilty are the others who, while able, do not do so (if ignorance does not excuse them). But let it be said for all that in every class and age there is unfortunately that haughtiness, that love of intimacy and friendship with the rich, even if

it be to the detriment of one's own conscience. O vanity, vanity! On your account how many will lose the true glory of heaven. O my spouse, give me at least the comfort that you save by force from the general shipwreck those who are bound to me by blood and acquaintance. Oh, what a great consolation were I to see them so, like the families of Noah, freed from the fatal flood, from the current of the world.

### **Her vocation under siege**

I continued in the situation I have described, when I spoke of my father's opposition and of my state of soul. As I have already said, that opposition by my father had deprived me of certain innocent entertainments, such as visiting my good friend and relative and taking solitary walks with her. Thus, on returning from church I would retire to my room, while the other members of the family engaged in other pastimes which they preferred, that is, which pleased them. My mother began to fear that such a way of life could harm my health. In truth, at that time my health was excellent, and I took no particular care of myself. I believe that the strongest health would not have supported the hundred little mortifications and privations I practised in a day; although small, because they are continual, they cause much wear and tear on the body. As I said, my mother feared that the privation of every comfort at that young age could do harm to my health. Therefore she tried to persuade me to allow myself comfort and distraction for this reason also. But when I convinced her that I would have quiet of mind only by eschewing worldly amusements and confirmed that by my cheerful attitude and appearance of contentment, she was reassured and dropped the matter.

My father no longer dared make demands nor require something he supposed me to be against, having seen that to please him I had deprived myself of a great many spiritual comforts without showing him the least discontent. It seems that my firmness with regard to what I considered contrary to my vocation and my condescension and readiness to please him in what was only a personal sacrifice added to his love for me a certain trust<sup>96</sup> by which he showed respect, and it seemed that he loved me even more. Oh, how painful was our position in this matter, his and mine! If God had not strengthened me to such a degree, I would not have been able to bear it.

I kept myself very busy working on my sister's trousseau and in order thereby to relieve the concern of my parents I took time off from prayer. In this matter I was always very detached, when duty required me to leave prayer. If not entirely, at least in part I took time from my rest. Once, when persons who came to visit praised my work, my poor father answered, "Praise of something one fears to lose is of little comfort."

### **Sisterly relations**

In my own affairs I was so clear and decided that, seeing my sister uncertain and irresolute and also sad and thoughtful concerning the course to follow, I said with my customary frankness, "Why wear yourself out like that? If you think you are called to that state, take courage and accept it and don't treat so uncivilly the one who is to be your partner. If not, leave everything and return to your peace of mind." It seems that God wished it, because she calmed down and did not refuse the match. In fact, I think that the date of the marriage was set.

I loved her so much that I paid her every regard and attention. It had always been part of my character to concern myself with comforting and pleasing others, never giving a thought to my own interests. Those hours during which we worked together we passed in silence, except when I interrupted it to sing little songs to Jesus, which also pleased us the more because set to beautiful music. This caused my mother to say several times, "This house seems to me to have become a convent." The friends who came to visit also said the same. Besides, this happened during the hours of work; at other times, the others took their leisure. I betook myself to a room on the top story near a terrace and there I had my recreation alone with God. I had been given permission to receive Communion daily. The ardor I felt for that sacrament is beyond expression. Sometimes I would say, "My Lord, my spouse, no more, I haven't the strength to resist." I felt a great desire to practice bodily penances, but living with my sister I did not have the opportunity, and I had no one to obtain the instruments for me. Sometimes, seized by the most vehement desire, I made use of bunches of keys and other things.

I did not mention that after my illness, everyone in the family loved me very much and showed it; also the persons who were accustomed to visit us. The only worry I had was their not wanting me to become a nun. In no way did they wish to lose me. Neither did I mention that, realizing that my teacher's family could in some way be dangerous to my spirit (because of worldly frivolity<sup>97</sup>), I stopped going there, but they always liked me very much, and the ladies of that Martini family also came to visit me.

I was twenty years old when my sister went as a bride to Florence." For I time I felt depressed because of my excessive sensitivity. Separation from her cost me a good deal. It also distressed me very much to see my father's great consternation, considering how much more so he would be at being separated from me. I knew that nothing

would be more bitter for him. In fact, all would be nothing, he said, not having me. He said that if he lost me, he would desire to die.

### **Death of Antonia Scilli**

In that same period my aunt became gravely ill, the one who lived with us, whom I have mentioned before, when I recalled her being ill two years previously. I assisted her up to the last moments of her life. Her illness was long and painful. She needed to be nursed day and night by several persons. Ten days passed from the time she received Extreme Unction until her death; two days passed from the time she entered the death agony until she actually died.<sup>99</sup> The troubled state of the whole family on this account can be imagined.

The poor thing (I mean the sick woman) wanted me always at her side. To please her I did more than my strength allowed. It was a grace that I did not become ill. I sat by her several nights together with the chaplain and also by day I took very little rest, because, as I said, she wanted me always near her. Her illness did not permit her to remain lying down<sup>100</sup> and she propped herself up on pillows. It was necessary for long periods to hold her in one's arms supported on the breast. Moreover, such was the pity<sup>101</sup> she caused by her vivid expression of pain that even strangers were moved to tears. She recommended her two daughters to me, saying that perhaps God was taking her because she was unable to rear them in a Christian manner. She was very grateful for the help I gave her and told me that, if she recovered, she would never again oppose me in my religious preferences. In connection with her death, I was able to obtain from my father permission to wear brown. It was the middle of April or a little earlier when her death occurred<sup>102</sup>.

### **A visit to her sister**

I do not recall whether in May or June, but I think in May, my sister asked to have me with her for a while. My father consented, hoping perhaps in this way to distract me from my vocation. To tell the truth every means was tried.

They tried a doctor who used to visit my sister's home. Oh, what a nuisance he was! It happened that I also needed his services; I was a bit indisposed due to overwork during the illness of my aunt. He took advantage of this to prolong his visit with me. I was forced to make many sacrifices, because he wished personally to minister certain remedies and treat me himself. I was exposed to many dangers, but I was so firm, trusting in God and clinging to him; I was so sure, I had no fears. And the distaste I felt for everything that could allure me caused me not even to recognize danger. That person was a great torment to me, using every persuasion and enticement to divert me from my vocation and to induce me to embrace another state in life. He spent half-hours at this. I let him talk and then in a few words told him I was unmoved. One day I answered him so resolutely that he was silent at once and tried to reassure me. He said, "Rest assured, I understand that you are a spouse of Christ and wish none other than he; is that not so?" "Exactly," I answered him. "Haven't you yet understood?" That day he ceased but, never weary, he always returned to the same old story. As I have already stated, he was a visitor in the home, not only in case of illness, but as a friend. In this way, I found myself discomfited quite often. He also came several times a day, and if I were not in the room with my sister and the family, he looked for me in my room. My sister allowed him to do this; everyone wanted to dissuade me from my vocation and tried to bring it about.

They kept me away from everything that could remind me of nuns and monasteries, not wishing me even to go to their churches, and they managed to take me on walks in the more public places. I remember how they would bring me there without my realizing it. I found a solution in never lifting my eyes and in keeping my spirit turned and united to God. It was quite an effort. They constantly asked me if I had seen this or that, now one thing, now another. In order not to be an aggravation or a nuisance, I pretended indifference, as if it were more a distraction for me than anything else. Sometimes I had the maid bring me secretly to the church of St. Mary Magdalen<sup>103</sup> I remember that while I was praying to be allowed to enter and don the habit within those sacred walls, I heard an interior voice tell me that I would not become a nun in that monastery.

### **Her father is adamant**

My sister, seeing that nothing availed to divert me from my vocation, wrote to my father<sup>104</sup>. He replied decisively that he would never permit me to become a religious, to enter the cloister, but he agreed to allow me to practice a devout life at home. For this he would provide a chapel and anything I wished. After that reply he immediately sent my mother to bring me back.

On my return he took no account of our agreement but, as if I had said I would always remain with him, he took every care that I should find my needs satisfied at home and showed himself agreeable to all my devotions; although

I was always very moderate in that matter, preferring to be rather than appear devout. This I wished only when I could be of use to the others. With regard to devotions, as long as I remained in the world, I had to endure no criticism whatsoever. Everyone loved and trusted me; for this reason I sometimes gently complained to God, telling him, "Lord, perhaps I have not yet truly begun to follow you?"

On my return from my sister's to my parents' home, as I have already said, finding myself of an age to follow my vocation and seeing that my father in no way wished to grant his consent and even acted as though I did not wish ever to leave him, I was filled with dismay and did not know how or in what way to suggest to him to abandon his purpose. I could think of no other way than to recommend myself to the Lord. I did so continually, I prolonged even more my meditations, and for this I also rose during the night. Being at liberty, I began to practice bodily penances. Fasts I had already been practicing a long time. I slept on a straw mattress and when winter came, I did not take advantage of a fire nor of means to protect me from the cold, except exterior garments, for which I adapted myself to what my father wanted, mortifying myself only in what he could not notice. During the hours when I could stay in my room I also did not wear shoes.

### **Maria brands herself**

So great was my desire to suffer that it all seemed as nothing to me and rather than satisfy me it only increased my need. During the Christmas holiday this became so great that I took a piece of iron and, having heated it, traced in my flesh many letters which formed loving words to my dear Jesus. I think there were no fewer than forty letters. I did this at various times in the course of the novena. The iron with which I did it was the thickness of a little finger. The strokes [of the letters] I made by pressing it extended, so that it made wounds so deep that in some places the tendons could be seen. The burn of the rest of the letters, that is, of those that were not strokes, was more superficial, although more than skin deep, because nowhere was it so little. But everywhere sores were formed, some deep enough to hold gauze, others superficial. Due to that hurt my limbs became inflamed and swollen, so that it was only with great effort that I could move. I had sores on my waist, one on an arm, but this one was smaller, and many deep ones on my legs from the knee upwards. As a result I was obliged to remain in bed.

On Christmas Eve, although the height of the inflammation had caused me to have a fever, I did not remain in bed, but on two chairs, having had the permission of my confessor some days previously. I had also asked an obedience from him, knowing that without it the matter would not be pleasing to God. I had asked permission to do something more than usual, when love had seized me so strongly that I could not resist the need to suffer it caused me. He granted his permission without concerning himself about what it applied to nor putting a limit to my penitential practices; thus, he knew nothing about what I had done to myself. The last time I appeared at his feet, before the pain made me remain at home, the fear of being obliged by my father to place myself in the care of a doctor made me seek his advice, even his obedience to oppose myself to such a course.

In no way did I wish to undergo a visit from a doctor, also lest it become known what I had done to myself; the doctor at least would certainly have discovered it. It was only too evident that it had been badly done and not successfully. The manner, too, betrayed how and wherewith the injury had been done, because a few words and crosses could be distinguished. Fearing, as I have said, to be forced to undergo a visit, neither knowing how to hide the injury nor how to oppose my father, as I have already said, I asked my confessor what course I should follow, adding that he please say to Jesus not to wish to show to someone whose business it was not that which I had done for love of him. To tell the truth, with loving confidence I complained a bit and said, "Why, O my spouse, do you give me a reason to fear it?" The injury had become so serious as to give reason to fear gangrene. The gauze I changed had begun to smell fetid. At home they did not know the nature of my illness, but fearing that it was quite serious and seeing that I could not move, they planned to call the doctor. At my insistence and prayers that they not call him they showed themselves willing to please me. But not long afterwards I saw him come; I don't know whether he was summoned by my father. They said he had come to wish me a happy New Year. He wanted to know the nature of my illness, but thank heaven I succeeded in extricating myself without letting him know. Not long afterwards I began to get better and soon I was completely cured.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

I desired only to please God to whom I had given myself completely and I wanted no one else but him. I saw that I could do that much while still remaining in the family, if he were to wish it, because the world is of small annoyance to one who has given herself unreservedly to God. Notwithstanding all this, I knew that serving him in one place

while he was calling me to another was not the way to please him completely. And I felt such a calling so keenly as to make me grow faint. On the other hand, not knowing how or by what way to go whither he was calling me consumed me with ever growing desire. Then I told him to open the way and I would follow it, all opposition notwithstanding. I had no one to help me or show me the way, because everyone for fear of my father opposed me, blocking every way.

### **A dilemma**

My father had declared that if he was finally constrained to leave me at liberty he would not consent to give me a cent<sup>105</sup> and I would have to take into account that he was no longer my father. Seeing myself practically unable to heed the voice of God, my worry was great, and immeasurably strong and intense was my awareness of my father's anxiety, of which I saw myself to be the cause. I would have been very willing to please him, were it at cost to my person.

"Believe me," I answered a person who wished to convince me to please him, "if pleasing him depended solely on a sacrifice on my part, I would not hesitate an instant. I do not disagree to his wishes to satisfy my will but only to follow that of God. If after I entered the convent, God made it known to me that he did not want me there, I would leave with the promptness with which I went there. In this case, I cannot know the nature of his will by consanguinity<sup>106</sup> If unfortunately a greater love had not possessed me, I would have been obligated by that of my father"<sup>107</sup>.

I compared myself, one given to God, to gold in the hand of the goldsmith and to wax in the hand of its shaper, ready to take whatever form was pleasing to him. I regarded myself no longer my own mistress, but guided only by that impulse which I felt in my spirit, moved by my sweetest love, which wholly possessed it. O my spouse, I said, who will keep me from pleasing you? Nothing that seems much stronger;<sup>108</sup> therefore, deign to show me the way.

### **Maria tells her father**

At this, I remembered that I could have recourse to the Scolopian Fathers, who in the matter of my miraculous cure, as I already recounted, had shown a certain interest in me. I thought I might use their services to present myself to the monastery of St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi to which I felt myself attracted, not only out of devotion to that saint but because I thought it a monastery of much perfection and austerity<sup>109</sup>.

Therefore, it was necessary to treat with my father to see how I might obtain his consent. We had never discussed this matter between us, he and I. What he new he had heard from others and learned from my comportment.<sup>110</sup> He never said anything to me; all his complaints he expressed to others. To me from him there were only benevolence and demonstrations of love; to him from me only expressions of regard. To make him enter into a discussion I tried showing myself troubled and discontented, but it availed nothing. He pretended not to notice anything and continued with his expressions of love.

During Lent, on the day dedicated to the solemn commemoration of Our Lady of SorrowsIII considering how to make the sacrifice to her of my excessively sensitive heart, I resolved to call my father and tell him that I felt myself called to the religious state, that I was obliged to answer that call, and he to resign himself. I was in my room on the third floor of the house and he was on the second.<sup>112</sup> I got up (I had been kneeling) to do as I had decided, but my legs failed me. [I felt] a strong palpitation of my heart. To avenge my excessive sensitivity and also to be strengthened by sacrifice, I took a piece of iron, heated it, and began to afflict my flesh; but natural strength failed me, I felt myself growing faint, and I was obliged to cease, greatly humiliated at my lack of courage.

When I had recovered somewhat, I got up again, took a small crucifix, placed it on my heart, pressing it strongly, and left. And while my feelings struggled with my will, driven back and forth, asking my God for help, I plucked up my courage, ran to the door of the room, called my father, and told him what I intended. At my words I saw him change color and support himself, because he could no longer stand. I grew faint with nausea. He said little, only answering, "Do as you please." These few words afflicted me even more, not knowing how to make him resign himself. Later, he returned to his usual loving ways with me and with others continued to say that if I left him, he would go mad, he would no longer know any peace.

### **A visit to Florence**

In Spring, my sister again asked to have me with her. Her family also liked me; all were very fond of me. The family was composed of her husband, two brothers-in-law (one of them a priest), and his parents.<sup>113</sup> Visiting my sister in Florence was a good opportunity for me to go to the Scolopi Fathers and recommend my vocation to them.

The moment of my departure was felt very much by persons of my acquaintance, particularly my intimate friends. One of them, a bit younger than I, was a certain Silene Rosai, niece of Canon Regini, my father's cousin, and

consequently a distant relative.<sup>114</sup> In no way did she wish to be parted from me, weeping copiously, holding me close, and saying that losing me she lost everything.

About my father I do not know what to say. Although he did not think I was leaving him; that it was only for the duration of my visit to my sister,<sup>115</sup> it was nevertheless a very difficult thing for him. The sight of him moved one to pity, and I was deeply touched. Separation from him was a very severe trial to my poor spirit, much more to my natural feelings. Due to the very great affection I felt for him, I felt my heart to be torn. God alone gave me the strength to conquer myself. I held tight to him and asked him to help me. Help was not lacking; I could feel it in my being.

To manage being brought to the Scolopi Fathers mentioned above, I needed to pretend to arrange for a confessor,<sup>116</sup> and so I was conducted there. I spoke about my vocation and the opposition to it I had met. A certain Father Paoli (I don't recall whether I mentioned him above; it was he with whom I became acquainted after my cure) and also Father Gatteschi promised me to do what they could. My desire was so strong that seeing deferred what I asked made me fear they would forget. Such slowness on the part of those who should help me and such activity on the part of those who opposed me caused me much concern.

One evening, when I was returning from their place, it seeming that I had no one to help me and consequently feeling myself suffocated with pain, I asked the woman accompanying me to stop in a church. It was that of the Fathers of St. Philip.<sup>117</sup> That day the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. Oh, with what tears, kneeling there recollected, I recommended myself to that divine spouse! In that instant I heard myself being called. It was Father Paoli. I went outside, and he gave me the comforting news that the following day he would bring me to the Sisters of Saint Mary Magdalen, who awaited me with pleasure. It was in order to become acquainted, they with me and I with them. Returning home, I told my sister, asking her to accompany me, as was proper and the Father wished. She consented, thinking that it was a question of a simple visit, and this she did with pleasure, because although she had never had a vocation to become a nun, nor wanted me to have one, she liked nuns, she was a good person, and, as I have said, the education she had had was more that of a nun than a laywoman. That is why my mother said more than once, "If Cesira (that was my sister's name) had had Maria's vocation, oh, her father would have crucified me with reproaches, saying it was my fault for having sent her to a religious school, and even more, had I sent Maria there, since he had altogether other plans for her because of her vivacity of spirit. He would have said that it was I who had repressed her" (she actually said, 'wasted')."

### **Cesira takes her to Carmel**

My sister was a good person, as I said, and liked nuns. At the appointed hour she took me to them. Fathers Paoli and Gatteschi were waiting in their church. We continued on to a separate parlor<sup>118</sup> in which the girls who presented themselves to become nuns, that is, to be accepted for trial, were interviewed. They [the Sisters] gave me a very hearty welcome, and before the interview was over invited me into the cloister that very evening. The Lord brought it about that they immediately became so fond of me that they did not want me to leave. It was late and there was not enough time to request permission of the archbishop. Therefore, my entry was put off until the next day, the feast of Blessed Maria Bagnesi.<sup>119</sup>

At the proposal of the nuns that I remain, my sister turned rigid as a statue. She could not utter a word, affirmative nor negative. We left after it was agreed that the following day, at eleven o'clock, I should be brought by the priests. On arriving at my sister's home, I set myself to write to my father. I imagined his anguished state, when he learned from my letter (after I had urged detachment on him) that I was already enclosed in the monastery! Oh, with what ardor I recommended him to God! I wished that all suffering would descend on me, but that he would be spared. I consented to the privation of his affection, but I did not wish him to feel the burden of separation. I wanted God to remove affection from his heart without making him feel the heartbreak of separation.

I wrote recommending him to Canon Regini. Placing all in the sweet heart of Jesus, I set myself to thanking him for opening to me the way to unite myself more intimately to him, my most beloved spouse.

### **Maria enters Carmel**

Next morning, I betook myself to the church of the Oratorians, (which I usually attended) to receive Holy Communion. At eleven o'clock, the carriage came for me, and with the Fathers already mentioned and my sister I went to the convent.

The Mother Prioress<sup>120</sup> opened the door and received me most lovingly. As soon as I set foot in the cloister, I took to kissing the walls with the greatest affection and at that moment looked to them as most blessed, a shelter from the

vain things of the world, a refuge of love for embracing my most beloved spouse ever more intimately. These were the lively sentiments of my spirit, when in that very instant, as though repulsed by those walls I looked to as most blessed, as though warned by an extraordinary voice of doom that I would have to leave, I fell into the deepest depression.

I was conducted to the choir, where the nuns were singing the solemn Mass of the Blessed Virgin, then to the refectory, and afterwards to recreation. I was in such low spirits that I do not know how I had the strength to put up such a pretence.

The sisters welcomed me heartily and were very happy to have me among them. They were extraordinarily pleased with me, and it was a thing to be wondered at, as [Sister] Falconcini (who died in the odor of sanctity), then still living but ill, declared.<sup>121</sup> After recreation they brought me to her. As soon as she saw me, she took me by the hand and I hers, and pressing each other's hand firmly, we spoke more through silence than with words.

### **Second thoughts**

The tempest of my spirit grew worse day by day. Driven back and forth, it had no peace. I took counsel with myself: was it rules, the austerity, the retreat—that is, the cloister? It was none of these, they pleased me all. Was it the privation of certain devotions and penances and other mortifications of the will (which to the other novices were, if not grievous, at least painful)? It was none of these. I was quite convinced that obedience to superiors was more pleasing to God than any other thing, no matter how holy, and I sought nothing other than his pleasure.

"O my God, my spouse," I said to him, "why is it then that I have no peace?" In vain did I seek the reasons. I added, "if that is your pleasure, let it be, even if it were to last all my life. But give me the strength to resist, let me know that you want me to be here, and from that certitude I will draw strength. O my spouse, my spouse, I came here to follow your divine will, to embrace you more intimately, and for this I trampled the strongest bonds of nature. I abandoned father, mother and everything I had and was dear to me. But everything is nothing when left for you. Therefore, what I did is not to my credit, and I glory in nothing. I recall it only to tell you that I am all yours and always wish to be so. And although I should consider it a glory and not a sacrifice, and I do so consider it, it is goodness on your part to receive me and not virtue on my part to give myself. Yet to me, as yours, you should not refuse to say what you want and so give me peace."

I prayed, I wept, but I found myself in ever deeper darkness and extreme agitation. I sought to persuade myself to cease thinking where God wanted me, postponing thought of it until the moment I needed to decide, namely, after the six months period of trial. I could not do so; my anxiety only increased. My spirit was a ship on the high seas, buffeted back and forth by a thousand contrary winds without knowing which to follow.

It is true that I ought not guide myself nor did I wish to do so; therefore, what I knew I told the confessor. Noting my state of agitation and anxiety and having examined it, he saw that it could not come from external causes. Neither observance, obedience, mortification, nor any other element of religious life were a burden to me. Rather, everything pleased me, and religious things were my only relief. He did not know what to say other than that time would bring counsel; for the time being it seemed best to him not to take any decision. "Father," I said, desiring to remain within those sacred walls, "by these worries is the Lord testing my fidelity, or are they a sign that he does not want me here?" He could not decide, repeating, "Time and prayer will provide counsel; therefore, try to reconcile yourself to spending six months here."

I repeatedly prayed the Lord to give me tranquillity enough to be able to obey. Nothing. An irresistible inner force, even during prayer, wholly upset me, forcing me to leave those most blessed walls, so dear to me. "O my spouse," I said to him, ".must I then leave this place? Must I return there where I see you so offended?" At that thought, one day I was seized by such palpitations of the heart and such breathlessness that I fainted away.

I attended the community acts with the others, but sometimes, seized by delirium and uttering a desperate cry, I was constrained to take refuge in the private oratory or in my cell. The sister assigned to me as a companion according to the custom of the monastery sought me out and, because she was quite fond of me, sympathized with me and reassured me. The superior summoned me and sought to persuade me that the Lord certainly wanted me to be with them, citing the extraordinary circumstances that had accompanied and preceded my entrance there. Being accepted on the spot with full votes sight unseen, and considering the little that had been told her about me, she said that the constant and unanimous approval of the community had been a wonder and what heaven desired.

### **Sister Francesca Teresa prophecies**

Sometimes they brought me to the sister who was ill. I came to realize her extraordinary virtue. To comfort me, she asked what I had done or what I had said to Jesus, when because of my great anguish I had fled into the oratory or my cell. In asking me this she anticipated my replies. She showed me great affection, sympathized with me deeply, understood how greatly I was troubled. My anguish became even greater, because not even she provided me any light and counsel as to whether I should leave or remain; I mean, whether it was the will of God that I should stay or leave.

One day, more troubled than usual, I said to her plainly, "Mother, for pity's sake, tell me what you believe God wants of me: whether I should stay in spite of my reluctance, because this is a test of fidelity he asks of me; or whether I should return to my family, this being the reason why he causes me to be troubled." She answered, "My daughter, I am unable to understand it. I am not worthy to receive supernatural enlightenment, which is what is needed to make a judgement in this matter." Then, seized by some extraordinary force which seemed to make her say what she said, she added, "Oh, I would like to have you here." Then, interrupting herself, she continued emphatically, "You will go out there, but, O my daughter, my daughter, God has in store for you suffering, suffering, great suffering. He wants of you much, very much. He will offer a cup to your spirit of extraordinary bitterness. O my daughter, go forth to great suffering." Saying this, she pressed my hand with great feeling. I remained silent, offering myself to God, ready for any suffering he might wish. But being still uncertain of his will, I was left with my troubles, for which there is no word.

### **A visit from her father**

My father came to Florence (I do not know whether it was about twenty days after my entrance into the convent). I was told he was there and also that he had been persuaded to come to see me. He in no way wanted to do so, saying I was no longer his daughter. The sisters made an effort to treat him with regard, receiving him in a special parlor, airy and private. As soon as he saw me, I made such an impression on him that he grew faint and almost needed to be supported by my sister who had accompanied him. She also had little heart, I mean, courage. It was a most moving affair.

After my father had recovered somewhat, the superior tried to cheer him, saying she had prayed the Lord to give him courage and resignation for making so great a sacrifice. He replied, "You pray that way, I'll pray in another way." He meant to say, I'll pray that he return her to me. When he later heard that I had returned, he declared with great joy, "God has heard me; he has heard the prayers of the wicked rather than the good."

The nuns feared that, having seen my father in such low spirits, I would be even more disturbed. Therefore, they urged detachment on me and at the same time gave the appearance of being certain that I would remain among them and very pleased that I would do so. I knew I was much loved by all, and I loved them. I regarded and esteemed them as so many angels and believed myself unworthy to be among them. They wanted so much to have me that, fearing my father would positively keep me from coming back to them, once I returned to him for the six months trial, they said it were better I did not go. It seems their only interest was to keep me. So many were the demonstrations of affection, benevolence, and liking, even of the greatest desire, that I wondered how this could be, since I lacked some of the conditions (like the dowry and noble birth) which (though they did not say so) I knew the monastery customarily required.

But it all served to cause me greater regret, because thereafter I had to decide on my own to leave that sacred place, where besides the attractions it had for my spirit, [there was] the pleasure in me of that community which I regarded and loved as a choir of angels. Ah, my suffering was extraordinary! Tearing myself away was painful!

### **An interval of peace**

I do not recall how long after my father's visit I had some interval of peace. Then that sacred place seemed to me an earthly paradise. I enjoyed everything that those holy rules and cloister had of delight for my spirit. I had no problem except the little austerity, which I considered little because I did not come from an ambiance of certain greater comforts which, being special to nobility and high birth, I believed the other Sisters had had to renounce, and consequently were a greater penance for them, even though not great. These intervals of peace were a portent of fiercer wars. These were such as to make me think I was going mad, I mean, to drive me to desperation. To keep myself from frenzy and crying aloud, I embraced the naked cross, which according to custom hung in the cells,<sup>122</sup> and holding it close, undaunted, I was comforted. All the community acts became exceedingly burdensome to me, because the premonition of having to leave them presently, that is, of no longer having to attend them, served to

exacerbate my pain. I prayed God to do me the favor of at least repressing my tears, in order to hide my pain as much as possible from my Sisters, but I was unable to do so. I asked the superior to give me an obedience, and after she did, I succeeded. In fact, I could no longer cry; I remained as though without tears. But when the superior saw that it might be at the cost of my health, she dispensed me from that obedience.

### **Maria learns her vocation**

One day, at prayer, while I was asking God to deign to make his will known to me, it seemed to me that my spirit was carried outside into the world, and that I was shown a quantity of creatures, whom he was waiting for me to send to him. I do not know whether this was something occasioned by my frenzy and extreme agitation which sought comfort. I said, "sought comfort," because it asked my spirit the cause of such frenzy, and not finding it there, [asked] God why he kept it in that state. I said that the spirit asked itself and not hearing a reason, asked God. It wasn't by my imagination that it formed and procured motives. Because of my extreme suffering, it was not capable of it, and if [the suffering] had been less, no motive was for me sufficient for leaving—that is, the sacred cloister.<sup>123</sup> As can be supposed, it was my spirit that felt and seemed to see it all; my senses<sup>124</sup> no longer saw and heard, but my spirit felt it very distinctly. Since it seemed to me that I had been assured that I should return to the world, although regretfully, I prepared myself to do so. Thereafter, though I was saddened beyond measure, I was not agitated; I was able to put up a pretense and appear contented.

### **Maria appears at peace**

The nuns, being reassured, spoke to me with pleasure about my betterment (of spirit; my health was always good) and were glad of the surety it gave that I would remain among them. The sister who was ill had given me St. Teresa as my particular patron. A Sister told me that no novice who had had that saint as her patron had ever left. When they saw how I wished to get up for their customary office before daybreak, they said, "Don't worry, when you are a nun, you will get up more often." No feature of religious life was alien to me, and I was so pleased with everything that fulfilling them was satisfying and therefore easy and, as it were, a matter of habit. (I felt that way when the agitation to which I have referred had ceased; while it lasted, I was incapable of feeling any comfort or sensation of pleasure.) In the great sorrow I felt in having to leave that most holy place (I could not nor cannot call it anything else), it was a great comfort that God willed it; that he wanted not simply me, but that I lead others to him. From the moment I had understood this, as related above, it became so clear to me that my doubts ceased. I seemed to be already there in the world, solely intent on removing girls from it and making them spouses of God.

### **Maria explains her prayer**

How that could come about I did not know, it was not made known to me, nor did I imagine how. I neither pictured it with my imagination, nor was it made clear to me.<sup>125</sup> My spirit never represented things through it [my imagination], nor was my fantasy ever changed by it [my spirit]. It did not need it to keep my thoughts firm. They were held by a feeling which did not come from cognition. Let me explain: I was not in the habit of praying in an intellectual way, but only praying and meditating on that to which the love of God and his service led. In that prayer, or way of praying, [I had] a most vivid sense of the divine presence in such a way as to render drowsy all my senses<sup>126</sup> and make them incapable of any movement. Without seeking or foreseeing them, certain lights and thoughts<sup>127</sup> would occur to me, which subsequently would come about, no matter how impossible they seemed to me, nor did I know the means by which they would come about. Then I became more convinced after I had success. I'm not saying that I did not believe that God had the necessary power; I only doubted myself; that is, whether what I had felt was an illusion or an inspiration. Then and there I hadn't the least doubt; I mean at the time [the ideas] came to me.

Of that inspiration which told me I had to return to the world to bring souls to God I was absolutely certain and in that certainty, though I did not know how to go about my task, it not being my habit to set myself to inquire, I also felt sure it would be by good example. Being in the world as though not in it (which I proposed to do), I would give an example of contempt of the world and its vanities and so send many young women to the sacred cloisters and help others to do good. It seemed to me that those who could still do so through their uncommitted state in life would all give themselves to God; I mean, those who would be reached through my means.<sup>128</sup> It really seemed to me that many would seek refuge in the ark of religious life.

## **A judgement of the world**

At the time, I understood only the great benefit of loving God more, that is, cooperating with his love. If I had then known, as now I know (without wishing it) with a partial knowledge darkened by most unpleasant shadows—I say, if I had known it was to escape<sup>129</sup> from those dregs which I did not know existed there, O my spouse, I would not have felt as I then felt the separation from certain things of the world, because it is more trouble to pluck a flower in a dunghill than to leave it, even though with it [one would have to leave] many more. I say, it would not have been an effort to leave certain comforts in themselves innocent and to detach my heart from the purest attachments—at least they seem to me to be so, because they concerned persons of my sex; with others, there was not even a shadow of affection, except for my father. Also, [I would not have felt] being taken from there (that is, the world) where all is dregs.

O my spouse, my spouse, I haven't words sufficient to thank you for having chosen me for your own. Oh, I believe my life would have been a two-fold miracle, if I had always understood what now increases love and gratitude; I mean, if I had understood from what things exceedingly harmful to me you saved me, as is evident from what I have said on that subject during my childhood. Now I seem<sup>130</sup> to understand that the state of one who consecrates herself to you is angelic by comparison; it is leaving the impure for the most pure.

O my spouse, in the midst of so many anxieties it is of great comfort to me to think that, in spite of all my sufferings, I loved no one but you and neglected to do nothing that I thought pleasing to you and did nothing I thought displeasing to you. O my love, would you love me less<sup>131</sup> perhaps because I displeased unawares? Oh, let that never happen; I could not bear it. My love cannot endure it.

## **Urgency to leave**

I have described the state in which I found myself: no longer of frenzy and agitation, but of quiet affliction, because I had to leave those most holy walls. My inner peace gave me courage to stay for the six months. I was compelled to this by the great attachment I had to everything in religious life.

It would seem that God did not want it, for having made this resolve, that is, this plan, I again found myself in a state of anxiety, frenzy, agitation, and pain. Overcome by these, I made known to my confessor my desire to leave without finishing the trial. He resisted me, as did the superior. A few days previously, I had written to my confessor here<sup>132</sup> (because I did not want to leave without an obedience), but I received no reply. It would seem that he did not receive the letter, or that it had not been forwarded to him. My sister's brother-in-law, who was a priest,<sup>133</sup> took the side of the sisters, perhaps at their request, and he wrote me a nice letter, in which he wished to assure me<sup>134</sup> that I was making a mistake in leaving there. He said it was undoubtedly a temptation that was prompting me to do so. The sisters were of the same opinion, moreover, quoting me various examples of the saints. O my God, what conflicts these were!

I answered that leaving seemed to me the will of God, and that I was motivated by no other purpose than that of pleasing him. Unfortunately, I told them, this course was injurious to my good name and dignity, because having entered there as I had and leaving without reason (as far as others knew), I appeared to pass for being flighty and of little judgment. This was actually my conviction without considering myself excused, as I was by many, because they supposed my motive for leaving was regard for my father and the two little girls my aunt had recommended to me. These few words I have just recorded did not convince them that it was the will of God. They repeated that it wasn't to be believed, taking into account, as was necessary, the prodigies God had worked, both in helping my spirit and removing the obstacles to my entering that cloister. As to myself, these trials being also added to the interior ones, I took refuge with my dear Lord and unburdened myself of my anxieties.

Seeing how much I was suffering, they left me in peace, asking me only to wait a few days to take advantage of some feasts that were coming. I felt that to consent (I mean, to remain in that place) signalled an end to the struggle or to cease battling without hope of the desired victory. Therefore, I explained to them that the longer I remained, the more difficult it would be to leave, and since this had to be, it were better to do the thing expeditiously. I was listened to. My sister was notified. It seems that they told my father nothing of all this, in order to arrange it so that, if after leaving I wished to return, I would be able to do so. Therefore, nothing was said, not even to the other sisters. Only the superiors knew it.

### **Maria leaves the convent**

On the day fixed for my departure, while in my cell, kneeling at the feet of the crucified, my beloved, I professed my fidelity As a pledge I cut my hair. I had hardly finished, when the novice mistress arrived to take me to the refectory. She was astonished and even more the superior who loved me much. I asked to make the act of humiliation in the refectory in the presence of all the sisters. It was not permitted me; I was told because of fear that they would become extremely disturbed and would become aware of my departure. Up to the last minute, it seems that they were confident that I would change my mind. After the refectory, to distract and amuse me they conducted me to the wax workshop where I had never been. O my spouse, how painful was my state, buffeted back and forth. O most difficult conflict! O inexpressible torment!

When my sister arrived, I left, accompanied to the door by the novice mistress. The superior could not bear to see me, she was obliged to take to her bed. They said it was necessary to bleed her. They didn't even take me to the sister who was ill, saying it was not the thing to do. It seems I had made an impression on her. She sent me a book as a souvenir.

I say all this not to make it seem that I believed I merited all this love. Certainly not; I merited nothing, and I had only reason to be ashamed. I tell it only, that is, to make clear my trouble, which if it was great when I entered, was not less when I left. Thanks be to my God who has always given me the means to merit. The parting was painful, exceedingly painful. On leaving the choir, I bent to the earth, kissed that sacred marble, and offered myself a victim to the will of my God. On arriving at my sisters home as well as during the journey which we made in a closed carriage, I do not know whether because I appeared extremely dejected, we all remained silent. In no way doubtful about the will of God, though unwillingly afflicted in executing it, I believe I was in such a state, as I was later told, as to move to compassion whoever beheld me. Not to relate one sorrow after another, I will simply say that I suffered a good deal. When I slept, I was in my beloved retreat, from which it seemed to me I was being taken by force. On awakening I wept bitterly. Thus it was for a few days, until the Lord helped me more. Two days after I left the monastery I visited the superior. When she asked me confidentially, (she had a great concern for me), whether I wished to return, assuring me matters had been arranged to permit it, I made it clearly understood that I still believed that God did not want me in the cloister. She allowed herself to be persuaded and said that she had thought that some secret disposition of heaven was involved, but she confessed this to me much later.

### **A Carmelite Tertiary**

I asked the confessor I had had in the convent how I might be enrolled in the habit of the Third Order.<sup>135</sup> (I don't know who suggested it to me, not having heard of it before.) He sent me to the Rev. Fr. Camillo, then of the convent of San Paolino, but now no longer, who at the time was confessor in St. Teresa's.<sup>136</sup> That is why he sent me to the church of the Teresian nuns. My mother, who had come to Florence to get me, took me there. Leaving her in the church, I went to the sacristy to find the priest. He moment he saw me, he placed his hand on my head and called me by the name Maria Teresa of Jesus. He asked whether, rather than being clothed in the Third Order, I felt like joining the Teresian nuns. I gave him to understand that it had not been the rules and the enclosure which had made me leave the monastery I had left, and that therefore I did not feel disposed to enter elsewhere, because I did not believe it was the will of God. At this, he questioned me no further and, showing himself persuaded, told me to return the following morning and he would accede to my wish. This was done, and he gave me the name mentioned above.<sup>137</sup>

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Maria returns to her family**

Once more in the bosom of my family (it was 1846), I returned to being submissive and obedient to my parents, as I had always tried to be. I adopted toward them the same attitude I would have shown as a novice to my superiors. Therefore I made no comment on what pleased them or what I was ordered to do. I would have scrupled about uttering even an involuntary complaint they didn't hear or about allowing a sigh of suffering to escape me. That did not happen, because the Lord gave me the grace of continually keeping perfection in mind.

To please my father I had only to arrange my prayers (without his demanding it; I did it of my own accord) in such a way as not to overlook all those attentions which as an affectionate daughter I owed him. I also took care that my clothing, though brown, did not too much suggest a pious person, or as they say, a religious crank, but was unaffected and proper. These were matters which by nature cost me little; indeed, I was so ungenerous as to contrive unconsciously to mix business with pleasure, as they say. I would like to think that in that I committed no fault,

because I aspired only to please Jesus, my spouse, and him alone; and if knowing that I had not displeased anyone whatsoever did not worry me, it was because I aimed only at the glory of God. If I had experienced the least feeling of personal satisfaction, I would have dressed in the meanest manner, no matter what it cost. So I told my confessor and asked him if he thought it a thing pleasing to God that I was ready to do so. He, well knowing my spirit, without reservation approved my method of procedure. This was the least I could do for my father, who for the joy of having me did not indicate that he wanted more. He was satisfied with my way of living in the world though not in it, as in reality it was. For, although my manner was easy and pleasing (so it was said), in my retirement I lessened my comfort.<sup>138</sup>

### **Incompatible mixtures**

Now I am caused and have reason to feel pity and bitterness at certain mixtures of devotion and amusement and walks in places where there are crowds, and also dresses not simply proper but of the latest fashion. Oh, what incompatible mixtures, all the less excusable if not done out of a motive of charity! I repeat, what incompatible mixtures: God and the world, frequenting the sacraments and parading among crowds, clothing and affected and pleasing hair-styles according to the fashion of the times.

I do not say that a mother of a family cannot reconcile frequent Communion and a devout life with accompanying to such places a daughter who does not feel called to a celibate life. In fact, it is her duty to chaperon of her; it would be wrong not to do so, and there is no better way of joining duty to devotion; I mean, the satisfaction of the duties of one's state in life with piety. It would be emptyheaded (so it seems to me, although mine is the emptiest head of all and very limited in knowledge) to neglect the one and do the other.

I do not know why it is that sometimes a present thought makes me stray from the narration of past events. I believe it is the will of God, because it is not my intention to do so. In fact, I would like to be as concise and brief as possible. I return to the point.

### **Troubles in the family**

I had a bit to do, or rather to endure, on my mother's part. Without noticing it, she saddled me with burdens and domestic duties beyond what my constitution could bear. It was a continual worry. Add to this the bodily penances and mortifications which I interposed, and it was a miracle that I survived, even if my constitution were strong, which it is not, but exceedingly delicate. Besides this, there was the continual moral wear and tear: intense grief at offenses against God. I considered myself a most unhappy spouse, obliged to be where the beloved spouse was constantly outraged. Therefore, my heart was cruelly wounded, I suffered continual pain!

Besides that, the older daughter of my poor aunt caused me concern. She allowed herself to be ruled by her ill humor and unhappy character in a manner impossible to describe. It was my duty to watch over her; I was a mother to her, because this was what her father and my parents wanted. Therefore, I bestowed on her every concern, motivated in this primarily by the thought of doing something pleasing to God. What I had to suffer from that blessed girl God alone knows. I tried every means to pacify her, but it was all in vain. If I treated her gently and with patience, she accused me of affectation; if with severity, for which there was not much need; she continued with her mischief; if with unconcern, paying no attention, she said I was the one leading her to hell. How many tears this poor child cost me! But in the end I won her over, bringing her to satisfy her Christian duties. Nonetheless, with her kind of character she kept me always busy. The little good she did and the evil she omitted to do was all at my cost, as it was necessary continually to study the way to treat her. What a difficult study it was! She was never still a moment. I have never had a creature give me to do a hundredth part of what she gave me.

### **Maria's plans take shape**

After I know not how many months after my return from the convent, a person of our acquaintance asked me to tutor a child, and I accepted. After this, two others. The children gave me much pleasure; I kept them always near me, except at night time and when they had lunch with the family. I saw begin and realize itself with some clarity what the Lord had meant, namely, that I should lead souls to him.

Notwithstanding the care of the students and domestic duties (the running of the whole house, or rather, of the two families, including that of my uncle, devolved on me), notwithstanding all that, I continued to make meditation and also recited the divine office. The time for this I took from my rest; I had no other opportunity, not wishing to neglect my duties to the family and the others with whom I was associated.

### **She describes her prayer**

The delight of my spirit in prayer cannot be described. It was a drowsiness of love which took possession of all my senses<sup>139</sup> and rendered me immobile, so that I had no power over them; I mean, I felt no strength in them, my spirit had made itself master of them. For all this, I did not cease to hear and feel. I did not see, because my eyes remained closed (I think). In that attitude I experienced no fatigue. I did nothing more than place myself before God in humble prostration, adoring him profoundly. Uplifted by this, feeling the most delightful effects of union with him, I went my way penetrated by a pleasurable love, which I can only describe with a few words of the Canticle—which ones I will not tell, lest I say something inappropriate.<sup>140</sup> At the moment I do not recall them, only their effect—the words, no. Oh, how strong is love, how cruel! O my spouse, I do not know how one can live, feeling it to such a degree: life would be death, if it did not give the certainty of dying.

I practised many penances and mortifications. The desire to suffer which love awoke in me caused me to obtain it in every way I could. I think the strongest constitution would not have been able for long to support such a way of life. In everything I felt myself attracted to choose what was most inconvenient and worst. For sleeping, too, I persuaded my mother to let me use the worst room, which served as a broom closet.

I forgot to mention that sometimes the Lord abandoned me to myself, making me feel exceedingly the weight of every trial. In such a state of mind it seemed to me folly to wear myself out in the way I did, practicing penance. (This was what the devil suggested to me.) To overcome the temptation I managed to obtain permission to practise even more.

Toward the end of 1847, I was seized by a very severe fever. My life was feared for. In the family, because of the great worry my illness caused everyone, inquiries were made and it began to be feared that my weakness was caused by the penances and mortifications done without anyone's knowledge. I believe they told my confessor not to allow me so much liberty. Perhaps he had not put limits on many things, because he thought I would not go too far. I recovered from that illness in the Spring of '48, and my sister wanted me to stay with her for some time. I went, leaving my two little scholars and cousin in the care of a good friend and relative who has since died.<sup>141</sup>

### **A severe illness**

Upon my return in the summer of '48, I was seized by severe heart trouble and loss of appetite. I ate only some watered-down soup<sup>142</sup> and a bit of potato or squash without seasoning. I found it all exceedingly nauseous, whatever the taste. It was something I asked of the Lord in view of family cares, and sanctioned by an obedience from my Confessor.

My illness daily became worse, and in a few days I took to my bed. I believe it was due more to pain and worry of spirit than to physical affection. I was seized by attacks so severe as to frighten whoever was present. These were caused by love, which sometimes led me to repose in God, and when this was the case I experienced enjoyment beyond measure; other times, they led to violent suffering, making me feel the weight of the many offenses committed against him.

Such repeated attacks reduced my body to a condition of illness to which the doctor applied various remedies, but all without effect. He found me so weak that, fearing I would not be able to survive the attacks, recommended Holy Viaticum. I received it and had the most delightful experiences of union with God.

After I had received Communion, my confessor visited me various times. The day following [Holy Communion] he told me he absolutely wanted me to be cured, and therefore I should ask it of God. He considered it necessary for the good of those little creatures I had undertaken to educate and also for my nieces (who at the time were three).<sup>143</sup> My recovery, he added, was advantageous in many respects, and I should persuade myself that it was so and obey. I wanted to comply but was reluctant to do so because of the love I had of suffering. Nevertheless, I obeyed and two days later was certain that I had been heard; trusting in this, the effects followed, and to the wonder of those around me I got up.

The following day I went to the Capuchin church to receive the Franciscan indulgence.<sup>144</sup> It was three days since I had received Holy Viaticum. On the street leading to the convent, I left traces of water and blood from the sores on my feet, caused by the mustard plasters applied to the soles. I had sores like those caused by a vesicant and even deeper. My recovering so rapidly was a grace, even considering only the harm caused by medication, the severe diet (as described above), and remaining three months in bed. I was completely cured. My stomach also was immediately able to digest anything whatever. It only required a few days for the soles of my feet to be healed.

### **Maria obtains a cure**

In the autumn of the same year of 1848, the only son and heir of the Martini family fell ill;<sup>145</sup> I had stayed with them, as I mentioned at the time, during my girlhood. Asked by his family and also moved by a spirit of charity, I warmly recommended him to God, more than my poor forces were able. I begged for his recovery, not only of body but even more of soul. Oh, how inconsolable was that most afflicted and unhappy family! On being asked, I went there. They repeated their requests for my prayers, adding that they would do whatever I indicated God wanted of them in recompense for the favor, (as the aunt of the sick man, my teacher, already told me several times). I was moved to assure them that they would obtain it (as in spite of Maria's intimacy with the family and her services to it on this occasion and later on behalf of Giovanni Battista's wife (see below), the two Martinis later became Maria's implacable opponents in the matter of secularizing the schools of Montevarchi. would happen to me when God wanted to grant what I asked). I had passed the preceding night in prayer, telling God I wanted the favor; let him tell me what he wanted of me and the family of the sick man and it would be done. Thereupon, I had a very clear and perceptible inspiration, more distinct than a voice heard by ear, to the effect that the family should help me erect a religious house, which he wanted me to found in our native Montevarchi. I said, "Lord, they will do it; meanwhile, grant me the favor." He granted it to me. The sick man began to improve against all expectations of the doctors, who had judged him at the brink of death without the possibility of healing.

After he had gotten better, and they were sure of his recovery, they again asked me what they should offer to God in return for the favor received. On account of my great reluctance to speak about inspirations, I answered that I would tell them later. Therefore, I asked my confessor what I should tell them. But because also to him I said nothing about the above, he advised me according to his own lights. I reassured myself, saying, "Lord, when the time comes to lay hand to the work, I will reveal all"; although because of my great reluctance, I wanted him to inspire them, rather than that I should make a request. But since it was proper that I should participate also by my sacrifice, it was my duty to tell them, which I did in order not to betray my own conscience and theirs.

Until now, 1859, they have not helped me, as God wanted, disagreeing with the substance of my project. If sometimes they do good because God is punishing them, they later return to doing evil, not giving us the help to which they are obliged and not defending us against those who would like to see our work destroyed. Oh, what worrisome times are these, both in general and in particular! But, in reference to what I said above, God is vexing that family with crosses of continual illnesses.<sup>146</sup>

I return to the point. Early in 1849, when a sick woman who caused me a good deal of trouble arrived at the point of dying, I prayed urgently for the salvation of her soul. I asked the Lord for sufferings, and sufferings of every sort came to me. The first one was that I became ill, and then because of the nature of the illness, I was called upon to make the greatest sacrifices. Then I became troubled in spirit beyond description. To these sufferings, which certainly were the work of the devil and which I understood to be suffering for the salvation of the soul I already mentioned, thinking such to be God's will—to these sufferings were added the circumstances of the times, times to be wept over.<sup>147</sup> During Lent, I began to improve and to enjoy peace and faith in the future. I felt myself safe from what was about to occur. Without thinking, I predicted it<sup>148</sup> to a person who was much impressed, because at the time those things seemed impossible.

### **Penances and mortifications**

I was not yet recovered from the illness I had undergone when I immediately undertook all sorts of penances and mortifications. Among other things, I managed to obtain from my father permission to eat at an hour different from the family's. Thus, not being seen, I mixed in the food, of which I took very little, absinthe and other distasteful substances. (When I was younger, by way of mortification I would sometimes also place myself near refuse.) Such ill-suited food caused me to vomit and reduced me to the condition of only being able to eat a bit of fruit.

Such a diet together with all the rest, the coming of the heat of summer, the air perhaps infected by the passage of troops, family troubles related to the times—all this and more, because God wished it, caused me to contract an acute illness accompanied by *migliara*.<sup>149</sup> God wished it, and I had asked for it.

At prayer, when I considered the great offenses to God that were being committed, my pain was so great that I asked him insistently to permit me to suffer, because, offering myself to him as a victim, I wished thereby to make compensation. I wished to gratify him in reparation for the discourtesy of those ingrates who were offending him. In fact, on returning home, I was seized by a strong fever.

### **About of migliara**

To set myself to describe what I suffered in that illness seems to me folly, because it is impossible. I will say only that my body was in such a state as to make the person who was nursing me say, "I believe that God has inflicted her with all the ills there are in the world."

With regard to the spirit: anguish, temptations, opposition. I can only repeat, "*Timore, tremor venerunt super me, et contesserunt me tenebre*"<sup>150</sup> I could only repeat, "My God, why have you abandoned me?"<sup>151</sup> Suffice it to say that after I had recovered, every time I was reminded of that illness, I would break out in such a sweat as to have to cease speaking about it, lest I should faint.

The very severe fever, I am not sure, lasted about three weeks, but the recovery was also very painful. I received Holy Viaticum and arrived at the point of death. My family was desolate. My confessor drew near to me and asked me if I thought I was dying. I told him no; they could be sure I would not die of that illness, adding to one of my women friends, "*Patire e non morire.*"<sup>152</sup> At my words all were reassured.

### **Things obscurely experienced**

I fell into a swoon in which I seemed to hear a heavenly harmony which repeated the words, *Versi, sposa Christi*,<sup>153</sup> in what seemed to me a delirium (but I do not know what it was), while little angels presented me with garlands that did not seem completely finished. I asked the Lord to let me suffer more, in order to give him glory. I heard the answer, yes, and it seemed to me a grace.

Another time I thought I saw the face of Jesus. Oh, how beautiful it was! Seized by indescribable enthusiasm, I was moved to say to someone near me, "Oh, don't you see Jesus?" These were the lucid intervals I had in the midst of such dense darkness I have already called indescribable.

From the time I experienced what I have just described, I began to improve and grew steadily better. During convalescence also, I had some experiences of sweetest union. Sometimes I seemed to be nourished at the breast of my dear mother, Mary; at other times to rest in the arms of my dearest spouse.

But, Oh, the recollection of such things obscurely experienced, do not soothe, do not comfort, but leave us where we are. In this [obscure] state, they seem only dreams, phantasms, tricks of the imagination. So it was and is with me, when I return from darkness. This happens (that is, the loss of the feeling of God's favors) because that darkness is caused by the withdrawal of the light of faith and all sensation of it (so it seems to me, unless I am wrong). In every other kind of trouble and temptation, the remembrance of those things, that is, of God's favors, provides great comfort and Security.

Concerning such favors, although I have described them in material terms (like nourished at a mother's breast, being in the arms of the beloved) by this I did not mean to say that there was anything physical in their enjoyment, because they are all spiritual. I do not know how also the senses should experience such delight, if not because the soul is also in them, and therefore the delight is also infused into them. But in setting myself, who am so worthless, to explain such things, I can be talking through my hat. Therefore, it will be better if I state what occurs in me without further ado, and perhaps I shouldn't say even that much.

### **An act of love**

I love 'you, my God, in your gifts. I love you in my nothingness, because there, too, I discover your infinite wisdom. I love' you in the many, varied, and extraordinary events with which you have accompanied my life. I love you in everything, in trouble or in peace, because I do not seek nor have I ever sought your consolations, but only you, the God of consolation. Therefore, I have never gloried nor taken complacency in what in your divine love you have made me experience solely out of gratuitous grace. I was not disturbed nor upset if abandoned in aridity and weakness.

I do not know how we can worry, upset ourselves, if God does not give us special, extraordinary gifts, because even without these we have too much for which to be grateful to him. I do not know how we can worry ourselves over gifts which we do not need and which he does not give us. It were better to regret those which we deny him.

Purity, purity of intention, in all things seeking the pleasure of God, the good of neighbor (this also in God), and abnegation of self: it is all summed up in the fulfillment of the obligations of one's state in life. This is enough to make a saint, and what more do we want? Let us be on our guard, for goodness sake, against the devious ways of selflove. For long I had much trouble and desolation of spirit. If I had become disturbed and repelled by them, I would soon have abandoned the way I had undertaken, or at least grown weary and followed it hesitantly; something that never happened.

### **Maria's work expands**

In the period indicated above, 1849, the number of my little students had reached twelve (including the two cousins). I cared for them without payment, except for small gifts in token of gratitude, to which I often replied with others. Also, during my illnesses some of the mothers offered me some services.

Besides these students, there was a good friend and relative, Silene Rosai, who loved me dearly and passed an occasional hour in my company. She joined me in some of my practices of devotion and also helped me to the best of her ability in the work I had undertaken with regard to the infants I had in my charge.

Another one, who could not be a pupil because of her age, was Miss Pulini, slightly younger than myself.<sup>154</sup> She came and asked to be directed by me, and this with the consent of her parents and confessor.

The town by no means disdained my way of life and devout ways. In fact, all showed faith in me, both the good and the bad, and all were kind to me. So much so that I sometimes said to the Lord, complaining gently at not being despised, "Perhaps I have not yet begun to follow you? I know that whoever is yours is not loved by the world; indeed, is despised by it."

### **Enrichetta Pozzolini Magi**

In the Spring of '50, there came to the house of Gonfaloniere Corsi<sup>155</sup> a certain Signora Magi, of Florence.<sup>156</sup> I got to know her by sight, and God so disposed that she should take a great liking to me. She was very devout; indeed, to tell the truth, she was of an extraordinary piety. (It is two years since she went to her eternal repose.) She asked the Signori Corsi to speak to me. But at the time she asked, I was on the point of leaving for Florence, so she did not have the chance. She, too, had to leave not long afterwards to return to that city. She later told me that she was confident she would trace me there.

In fact, we ran into each other, but not knowing how to approach me, she kept looking at me, stopping every few steps but doing nothing further. My companion wondered at such unusual conduct and called my attention to it.<sup>157</sup> I then turned and recognized who she was and since I knew before leaving Montevarchi that she wished to speak to me and make my acquaintance, I thought it only polite to approach her and stop. She was embarrassed, fearing she had made a mistake, because, she said, she thought I was a person she had seen, two years previously in the church of St. Teresa at a clothing,<sup>158</sup> and therefore no longer knew whether I was the one from Montevarchi. But taking courage, she said to me, "Are you a certain Miss Scritti from Montevarchi or a person I saw in the church of St. Teresa at a clothing?" I replied, "I'm both," and it was actually so.

She was very delighted and, confessing that she had always wanted to make the acquaintance both of the one and the other, she invited me to her home, adding that she would have come to mine but she did not know where I was staying. I told her where but promised to pay her a visit (she having pointed out her house to me). The day I had promised to visit her I could not go. Fearing that I had left town, she came looking for me, but not being sure where the house was and knowing that I was staying at a sister of mine, she went to the rectory of San Remigio<sup>159</sup> and made inquiries to trace me; in that way she found me. How thorough she was in everything she did! Perhaps this story is out of place, but I thought it would be pleasing to recount how I came to make that friendship, of which I will often have occasion to speak.

### **Maria mediates for the canons**

Before I left Montevarchi, some of the canons had apprised me that Bishop Bronzoli<sup>160</sup> was about to confer the office of provost of our provosture on one who deserved very little esteem and trust (for such an office), and that therefore it was quite unbecoming<sup>161</sup> that such a thing be done. They went on to suggest that an intervention on my part might be well received. I did not know how, both because of my insignificance and because I was not known and had no relation to the bishop. On all accounts, instead of consenting, I laughed at the idea as ridiculous. My confessor told me the same thing [as the canons], but I took little account of it.

One morning—during the time I was in Florence, as related above—after Holy Communion I happened to remember it, and was moved by an irresistible force to do what I had been asked. "My Lord," I said, "how can I possibly do this? You know that I do not know His Excellency; I don't even know where he is. And besides, you know how insignificant I am. It is truly impudent to expose oneself to this. What would His Excellency say when he found before him an urchin discussing such things with him? It is impossible." But while I was saying this, he made it appear to me very possible, destroying my every argument, making it seem to me to be self-love and resistance to his inspiration. Then I said, "I will do it even at the cost of passing for a mad or stupid woman." I managed to find out where the bishop lived, and it

required a lot to do it secretly, as I was accustomed to being accompanied when I went out, and it took a great deal more to work up my courage. When I was presented to him, I told him what I believed about the matter in question.

### **Our Lady promises Maria a house**

I continued with the care of my children, but I saw that it was very burdensome to my parents. I seemed to be depriving them of their liberty and causing them bother. However, they made no objection, perhaps not to displease me; my mother who was more perspicacious and penetrating perhaps did not want to impede my doing that good work. One day when I was more than usually concerned at seeing them in a part of the house, inconvenienced on my account, I said to the Lord, "How can I continue with such an undertaking without the necessary accommodations?" It did not seem to me a good thing to be a source of inconvenience to my parents. Therefore I asked him to find a solution for me. In that moment I felt myself comforted by my dear mother, Mary, saying, "In two years you will have accommodations. But, Oh, it will end by being a source of suffering, and you will see much more of it!" This was something felt very clearly by my spirit, as those things have always been that afterwards came true. This also came true, because two years afterwards we moved into the quarters where we are now.<sup>162</sup> I believed what I had heard, but as usual I did not know nor foresee how it would come about. I had this presentiment in 1850.

### **Provost Gabellini elected**

In the same year our actual provost, Signor Giacomo Gabellini,<sup>163</sup> was elected, He did not want to accept. My confessor then begged me to write to him about it. I refused, saying he would pay no attention to me, but, on being commanded, I acceded, asking him to accept [the office] and, I think, persuading him with various reasons.

One evening when I was more than usually afflicted on account of my oldest students (not the two I kept near me, who never caused me aggravation); being, as I said, quite afflicted, having reason enough to be so, and being also inconvenienced, my confessor paid me a visit. He told me that Gabellini in no way wished to accept [the office] and that he had also jokingly alluded to my letter. I answered that that was what I had expected, adding, *Bonum mihi quia umiliasti me.*<sup>164</sup> But his Reverence will soon say yes: that "I", that "I" cannot resist God. That is exactly what happened. Such things often happened to me. But I am far from attributing any merit to myself, for if I could reveal myself as I see myself, most miserable, I would arouse pity (except for the gifts of God) and perhaps I do not see myself entirely as I am.

### **The illness of Adelina Benini nei Galeffi**

In September I had gone to Florence, because my sister wanted me to be godmother at baptism to one of her children, the child I have with me now.<sup>165</sup> Besides this reason, my father also wished me to leave, because of a sick woman who wanted me always near her. I did not know how to refuse, nor did he command me to, being so good-hearted. However, fearing I might suffer some harm, he thought of sending me to Florence.

The sick woman was a certain Adelina Benini nei Galeffi,<sup>166</sup> an acquaintance of mine since childhood (she took part in the receptions of the good lady, my sister's teacher). The poor thing was at the point of death. The family (composed of parents, husband, and a baby a few months old) was desperate and summoned me, in some way to prepare her for Holy Viaticum. But because as soon as she saw me she began to improve, they decided to postpone it.

I was not pleased at this and told them so. I tried to persuade the sick woman [to receive it] out of devotion, but reluctance to frighten her husband prevailed in her heart. Her being still in a critical condition was not reason enough for her husband; like many others, he was not convinced of the need until she was at death's door. The sick woman did not even know she was in danger; she is to be pitied, if after I had counselled her [to receive Viaticum] by way of devotion, she resisted for the motive I mentioned.

This happened during the novena of the Assumption of Our Lady. While I was praying for the sick woman, I felt that if she did not receive Communion, God would punish her by prolonging the illness to the extent of frightening her and making her do out of necessity what she would not do out of love. And so it came about. The patient showed signs of consumption<sup>167</sup> and after a few months received Communion. Thereafter, she began to improve and returned to sufficient health. She is still living and has many children and has not forgotten what then happened.

As I have already related, in September I went to Florence. Signora Magi expressed the desire to have me in her home. My sister and my parents consented, and I stayed with her almost a fortnight. She was extremely fond of me. I also became fond of her and to please her would have stayed a good deal longer, but the charge of my pupils required my presence. Therefore, I left her, but her regret was a wonder to behold.

### **Maria takes her niece in charge**

It has always been my habit, a thing I have always tried to do, to adjust all my affairs, devotions, and practice of virtue, to the situation in which God placed me. An infant of my sister, the one I related having held at Baptism, was entrusted to a wet-nurse. In the Spring of '51, I felt it my duty to go see it, and having discovered that it was suffering and having heard that the nurse was not able to give it the nourishment it required, I did all in my power to take it away.

As it was a burden to my sister to take it back in her home (though she had servants) because of another infant she had recently weaned, I undertook to take it myself with the consent of my mother and father. It required quite a bit of courage to take that little angel from Florence to Montevarchi without a wet-nurse. I was with my mother. The persons in the carriage wondered at me, and one of them who knew me was amused at seeing me in that situation, while the baby remained very quiet and caused no disturbance.

Once at home, I was confident I could feed it without engaging a wet-nurse, using other milk. But this was not agreed to. Therefore, one was found and taken into our home. Apart from giving it milk, I took care of everything. After a few months it was weaned, and then I took over its care completely. The persons who knew of it were surprised that it did not impede me at all from practicing my devotions, managing the house and caring for my pupils.

The winter preceding the Spring already mentioned, the Signora Magi had come to Montevarchi and with great insistence asked my father to permit me to spend some time with her, at least two months. It seems that they were arranging to have a sculpture made of me by her husband, who was a professor of that art,<sup>168</sup> (a thing I did not know until it came time to do it). After repeated requests my father agreed, and in the summer I left. (There are so many things [to relate], and I, being so little skilled, perhaps put down some out of place; I mean, there are so many things that I always forget some.)

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

I forgot to mention a very important event: In the Spring of the year mentioned above [1851], Bishop Bronzoli came to Montevarchi, I think on a pastoral visit. I had in fact made a sort of spiritual exercise, or retreat, with my pupils, to prepare two of them for First Communion.

### **The bishop approves Maria's work**

By chance (if not to say, by divine Providence) he came to know it and wished to come and administer Communion to them by his own hand in the church of this convent, then also called "Delle Monache."<sup>169</sup> It had kept this name, I think, from the time when the other nuns were here before the Suppression.

I was notified that the bishop would come to administer Communion to the two first communicants and all the other pupils and companions, instead of the canon, our confessor, as we had arranged. We had a very solemn ceremony with sung litanies, the antiphon of the Blessed Sacrament, *O quam suavis*<sup>170</sup> and so on. It all took place to the greatest satisfaction of the bishop, and the sacred function turned out to be very solemn, devout, and moving. In the course of the same day, I was summoned by the bishop to the provost's office; He asked me various questions and encouraged me in the work I had undertaken, promising me assistance and help when I had decided (as he also thought was the will of God) to separate myself from my family and open a house to begin an Institute. With this, I began to see open to me a way and a means to what was suggested to me by love of God and neighbor. To this work our Lord incited me ever more in prayer in an almost irresistible manner.

### **In the home of Signora Magi**

The following summer, as I mentioned, I went to Florence with the intention on my return of finding a house. I left my pupils in the care of my companions, consigning the baby to the wet-nurse and my mother, the household duties to my cousins. I had trained them in domestic concerns, and they helped me in certain ways, though afflicted with a thousand frustrations due to the many meannesses to which they were subject. How difficult it was to rear them [the pupils] and that to nothing more than the virtue proper to any state in life. It wasn't as though I required them to live a monastic life.

Having arranged matters in this way, I went to the home of Signora Magi and determined to be subject to her like a novice and to mortify myself in every way. Occasions to do so were not wanting; I was given the opportunity to make the hardest sacrifices both to nature and to spirit. At the same time, temptations to self-love were frequent, because great benevolence was shown me both on the part of the family with whom I was staying and of everyone who came

near me, acquaintance or relative of that family. If I had wished to be proud and grow fond of vanities, I would have been able to do so; the means were not lacking.

### **Maria poses for a statue**

After some time, I was told they wished to make a likeness of me.<sup>171</sup> I refused, but it was no use. In the end they obliged me through obedience to my confessor and my father. It cost me an effort, but I saw I had to submit. I think my spirit suffered no harm, either in this matter or in the others mentioned above, because it never lost sight of its divine spouse, remaining ever close to him. Thus, there was no place for vanity; I offered the whole sacrifice to him. Nothing arrived at the door of my spirit of which it could vainly boast or which was not at once laid down at the feet of its beloved Good, embracing him more strongly with a more deeply felt act of love.

My stay in Florence began to weary me, both because I had abandoned the care of my pupils, although entrusted to my cousins, and because I wished to begin my Institute. I also feared that one of my companions would commit herself definitely to entering another monastery with which arrangements on the part of her parents and herself were almost concluded.

### **A visit to the bishop**

Everything induced me to return, but my good friend made it difficult, because in no way did she wish me to leave and she had had me with her almost two months. Before leaving, I thought it necessary to visit the bishop, but I did not know how to say so, because I did not want to reveal my reason for seeing him, and going there without saying why was impossible. I had made myself so dependent on my good friend that I did not do the least thing without her knowledge and approval. Everything depended on this promise I had made. But the visit to the bishop was too important a matter for me to forego on her account. Therefore, I sought counsel from my confessor, who told me to go, even without her knowledge. I could think of no other way of doing this than to be accompanied to my sister's and then by her to the bishop. But by the disposition of God, in order that I might be mortified in everything, my not visiting my sister was precisely one of those sacrifices my friend asked of me. I do not know why she hindered me from fulfilling so important a duty of charity and love of justice, unless God wished it for my greater merit. In the end, not a little embarrassed, I explained to my friend what I did not want her to know and was by her brought to the bishop, with whom I discussed the way to begin my work.

### **Maria explains her timidity**

The reason I did not want to reveal such things to my friend was because I considered myself so little apt for them that to others it would appear ridiculous that I should believe myself called by God to do them. Oh, how have I suffered because of that idea, which has always had a certain strength and force in me, so that I suffered much from timidity at every step I had to take in order to accomplish my work. I do not believe it was due to a timid character; my nature oughtn't to be such, I believe, if I recall the vivacity my spirit developed from the age of six, as those who were near me also remarked. As I grew older, as can be seen from all I have written, I in fact suppressed it; I mean, because I wished to practise virtue in the midst of so many trials in which I was placed, I repressed it in such a way as to make it appear no longer the same. Otherwise, I think it would have been impossible to remain firm, given my sensitivity.

It was a great grace that God gave me this insight together with firmness of spirit, and that I did not deceive myself into believing in certain vanities, typical, as they say, of the young, given also the thousand opportunities my youth provided. I think that it was from keeping my spirit so long restrained, repressed, and humbled, that habit made it act foolishly, even in matters which required other conduct. That is why I believe that cost me so dearly which by my character and spirit should not have done so.

After much opposition, it was decided I should depart. I was sorry on the one hand and happy on the other. I intended to follow what I thought was the will of God and was aware of the many difficulties involved. Therefore, I would have to undergo great trials and pains, to which my strength seemed to me unequal. The spirit was willing, human nature disheartened and almost frightened at the very thought of them.

When the day of my departure had come and I was united to my family, I found all my little pupils and companions waiting for me in a festive mood. I had to do great violence to myself to correspond to their joy, because concern weighed me down and I became ever more conscious of my weakness.

### **Margherita Pulini becomes a nun**

After awhile, I set about finding at what point matters stood with regard to the young woman mentioned above, the oldest of my students, a few years younger than myself, who wished to become a nun. To my great displeasure, I heard that everything was decided and that shortly she was to take the veil. It was a great sorrow for me, because I knew her to be one of the better prospects I had for the Institute. She knew I was upset and would have been inclined to stay with me if she knew God willed it (as she told one of her friends), but without this certitude she did not dare, because she thought she would partly be satisfying her own will and inclination, which was to remain with me because of the trust and very great affection she felt for me. Both she and I were troubled beyond measure. One day she cast herself at my feet and asked me with tears to tell her what was the will of God. I thought I would not be able to tell her without first having had the permission of my spiritual adviser. The next time I sat at his feet, I told him all, but he forbade me to reveal my thoughts to the girl, telling me that if God had wanted her to stay with me, he would have shown it through some wonder or special sign. Now the matter had gone too far to give any hope of changing it. I suffered much in having to appear to my pupil happy about a matter which cost me so much, not from natural affection, but for the sake of the work to be done and from a spiritual bond. I obeyed to the point of keeping her with me until the last days before she entered the cloister attired as a bride, accompanying her to the convent, and then dressing her in the sacred habit on the day of her solemn clothing.<sup>172</sup>

### **Maria looks for a house**

I began to discuss the new arrangements with my friend Silene. I found her disposed to join me, except that she was troubled on account of the opposition she feared from her family. I was in the same situation, besides having many other misgivings which the devil suggested to me to weaken my faith. I prayed a lot and performed penance, all to obtain light, strength, and means: light to understand, strength to undertake the task, and the means to execute it. I asked the Lord to give me guidance, but I did not yet perceive it. All the human help I had was that Bishop Bronzoli had promised to assist me after I had found a house. On this account, I begged my confessor to give some thought to finding it, but he hastened to say that he had not whereon to lay his head. Finally, I remembered a house which seemed to me suitable. The owners of this house lived in Florence. I heard much in praise of the lady. Encouraged by this, I left Montevarchi to ask her. I went with a certain Signor Casalini,<sup>173</sup> at that time ricevitore here, an excellent person, a true Christian such as are rarely found. When I was introduced to that lady and explained the reason for which I had come to see her, she asked me to what use I wished to put the house. When I told her it was to associate some girls with me and conduct a school, she showed herself totally opposed to the idea, and all we told her about the advantage that would accrue to the town she refuted with the most unreasonable arguments. Seeing that we were getting nowhere, we politely left.

### **The former Augustinian monastery**

During my stay, in Florence, I recalled a building which had been a monastery of nuns before the suppression of religious Orders.<sup>174</sup> At the time, the teachers of the Scuole Normali were living there, and it wouldn't be difficult (it seemed to me) to obtain it, because the teachers were on the point of retiring. As they were no longer suited for work, the schools for knitting and sewing were practically empty. The girls were enrolled only in order to receive their dole, and everyone knew that the sewing teacher spent the day with only one girl or at the most five or six, and the knitting teacher with a few more. The place of the weaving teacher had been supplied by an elderly scholar who had been a teacher elsewhere and seemed to have returned for reasons of health, or at least so it was said, and in the school, I believe, held the post of teacher's subordinate. It was not my intention to seek the jobs of municipal teachers, but only, as I said, the premises in which they lived.

To know where to apply for information, I wrote to the superintendent of schools, to find out to whom the building belonged, the municipality or the government. I was acquainted with him from the years I had attended the school conducted by ladies of his family.<sup>175</sup> He replied that it belonged neither to the one nor the other, but to the Bortoli Foundation, because it had been acquired by its funds.<sup>176</sup> In the same letter he indicated to me that for some time it had been his decision to make me directress of the Scuole Normali located in that building. The schools needed reform and personnel, because the teachers were unfit and almost useless. If I were willing to take the position, he would propose it.

## **The Scuole Normali**

The situation with regard to these schools was as follows: Before the suppression of the monasteries, there was a convent in Montevarchi, which a certain Bortoli had named his heir with the obligation, besides, of providing yearly thirty endowments of thirty scudi each to thirty needy girls. After the convent was suppressed, which occurred in [...].<sup>174</sup> at the time others were being restored, they tell me the nuns of Montevarchi were recalled and given, besides, the task of teaching.<sup>175</sup> It seems they were unwilling to agree under those conditions. Signor Martini took advantage of the situation to propose to the government a plan for allocating the income of the foundation. This was partly to engage teachers for the public instruction of girls, partly to support a few youths for study, partly to subsidize the poor. As to the teachers, he said that nuns were also acceptable, provided they were not recognized as a religious body, but as individuals. This shows his antipathy to religious houses of nuns. Then, in practice he managed to have secular teachers engaged. The schools opened in 1821 with three secular teachers who were about to be retired at the time of which we speak, when I was asked. I postponed giving him my decision in order to ponder the matter further and seek counsel. I spoke to Bishop Bronzoli, who without further consideration thought it an excellent idea. After returning to Montevarchi and upon mature reflection on the relation of those schools to the municipality and local authorities, I became uneasy, fearing it would be a hindrance to the execution of my designs, which were to form an institute of oblates, one of the principal duties of which would be the instruction of young women in civil and Christian morality and in feminine skills—all duties also of the secular Scuole Normali, but which it seemed to me could only be faithfully and honestly performed by a religious body.

I saw the opposition there would be to making a request under conditions different from the usual and recognized my inability to overcome it. The conditions for arriving at my purpose seemed to me to be the following: to request that the elderly teachers be definitely retired and removed from the premises; that the available premises be given to me with authority to find new teachers as I pleased without specifying them, and that I should therefore be the only recognized and solely responsible person.

## **Maria's slender resources**

On this account, another fear arose: I saw the impossibility of performing the tasks to which I was committing myself. By way of assistance I could count only on my friend Silene. There was another who had presented herself, a certain Edwige Sacconi (who later followed me during part of my troubles),<sup>179</sup> but since she had opposition from her family and was so uncertain and timid in her affairs, I could not count on her. A widow, also desirous of retiring from the world,<sup>180</sup> wanted to follow me at all costs, but in view of her abilities I saw no possibility of using her in the school. Therefore, her good will was more an aggravation to me than anything else.

My pupils were all practically infants; the oldest were sixteen years old. Little can be expected at that age; besides, I saw that they were then little disposed for the task to be undertaken. In that state of affairs I felt even more the privation of the one I had lost,<sup>181</sup> and this caused me such affliction that I even felt bitter toward the confessor, whom I felt to be in part the cause. O my God, what difficult days those were for me!

The only refuge I had to calm my spirit was prayer, where I felt my strength renewed. In order not to displease God through lack of faith, I wanted to believe what seemed to me to be his will, no matter how I saw myself lacking in knowledge, means, help, and assistance. A difficult conflict! rather than involve myself with the municipality, a thing I saw in every way a most heavy yoke on the development of the Institute, I would have preferred to rely entirely on divine Providence, renting any kind of house (waiting until he provided a better) and settling there with my companion, Silene, and the pupils, accepting whomever more were entrusted to us (according to our ability), and so begin with a little mustard seed. This was my desire, but I had no one to help me realize it, because even to the bishop it seemed best to accept the post of teacher which had been offered to me, in order to get a foothold in the building which he thought truly suitable as it was for fulfilling our desires. With his counsel and that of other estimable persons I resolved on this course; only, however, if the municipality agreed to the conditions mentioned above.

## **Maria becomes directress of schools**

I betook myself to the superintendent. At his explanation I was somewhat taken aback.<sup>182</sup> I forgot to mention that I asked to see the regulations for schools regarding teachers, and observing that they contained a rescript to the effect that the teachers could be nuns, I felt reassured. I went to the *gonfaloniere*,<sup>183</sup> explained my wishes and also the request Martini had made of me of becoming directress. A timid and pusillanimous man, he found a thousand difficulties, many of which disappeared when he saw my lack of selfinterest. I told him that if he acceded to my

conditions, as pay for our services free use of the building sufficed. He realized that in this way I made it possible for him to retire the elderly teachers at full pay, and the Bortoli Foundation would be spared, besides the daily salary of the teachers, a great many other expenses with which it was burdened. The Foundation had a deficit, and this did not permit it to provide for the needs of new teachers, if it meant paying double salaries. In me, he saw many advantages and no inconvenience; according to their ideas of ordinary administration, the assistance I had in my little pupils and companions were more than adequate to the maintenance of the school.

In view of such advantages, the gonfaloniere was convinced, or rather he overcame his pusillanimity in presenting my request to the municipality, hoping that so many advantages would make it agree to my conditions and praise rather than censure his having proposed and supported them as an excellent plan. He feared only the censure of the "wise"<sup>184</sup> and anyone's dissatisfaction. For that matter, being basically truly Christian, good-hearted and well-meaning, he would not have failed to protect us, also in view of protecting a religious interest and pleasing the religious superior who had warmly recommended it by letter. My God, what a sad thing it is that those who have such good will have so little courage, and those who plot only evil have so much!

The superintendent thought it an excellent thing that I become directress, as he had asked me to do. Never deviating from that slavery which kept the arrangement always on the plane of secular schools, he also had in me the advantages he desired for instruction: he saw that with my little pupils—whom he wanted to be with me only during school hours—I would be able to restore the school to a proper degree of excellence, while burdening the Bortoli Foundation with only one salary.

On hearing the conditions, he did not approve my lack of self-interest and said that the past system had to be maintained and; if there were need of additional teachers, even though proposed and obtained by me, they would have to be individually approved and paid. His sole motive in all this was to keep us in bondage. My plan, my disinterestedness had led him to suspect my designs. Being most contrary to any shadow of a conservatorio or nuns, he tried as much as he could to put obstacles in my way.

When he heard that the municipality had accepted my proposal,<sup>185</sup> he went to the gonfaloniere and showed him so many mistakes he had made<sup>186</sup> that the poor man found himself in another mess. But it seems that once the municipality had decided, it was too late to go back. It seems also that an attempt was made to disquiet the prefettura on my account,<sup>187</sup> because it required from the gonfaloniere the names of the teachers, in order to insert them in the clause which the superintendent wanted. But the gonfaloniere gave it to understand that, since he was not paying us salaries, I could not be required to submit myself to individual approval of those I hired to help me.

I did not say that in the deliberations of the municipality in which I was accepted as directress of the two schools of knit-ting and sewing I had been allotted four hundred lire a year as a gratuity. These I was given because I was the only one Officially recognized; divided among us, they came to one hundred lire each. I did not request this sum; all I asked for was the premises. But they wanted to give it to me as a sign of their gratitude.

In the school of weaving, as I have mentioned, they had already substituted someone for the elderly teacher who was no longer able for the task.<sup>188</sup> Since she was quite able and young, and I had no one able for weaving, I told the gonfaloniere that she could remain, provided she either joined me and my companions or that she had in the building only the use of the room in which she taught. She had the advantage of having on the side the entire salary which the municipality had accorded her in order to retain her, besides the convenience and freedom of living with her family, as she had hitherto done. The gonfaloniere promised to arrange things in the latter manner, foreseeing that she would prefer to stay with her family rather than join us. The matter was indifferent to me.

### **A visit to Cesira**

At the end of Lent of 1852, at which we had arrived in treating and arranging our business, I went to Florence to spend a few days at my sister's and brought back to her her baby which I had with me, since I realized that in my new situation it was not befitting to keep it.

I was accompanied to the city by Silene, the widow mentioned above, and a few of my pupils. The former always had much trouble from her family, on account of which we had suffered a good deal, both I and she. Because of her family, she left Florence before me. In leaving me, her pain was so great it seemed excessive. I calmed her, or rather, tried to, telling her I would soon be back. But she could not separate herself from me and wept Bitterly.

Easter Sunday, I was prey to worry and had no way of finding relief except to abandon myself to my pain and submit myself to him who permitted my state and left me in it, protesting every minute that I wanted to be faithful to him. On the last day of the solemn celebrations, they came to fetch me and gave me the news that my companion, Silene, had fallen ill. They told me little, but I feared much and with reason mourned her as dead.

### **The death of Silene Rosai**

Back in Montevarchi, I went to visit her I found her in a most serious state. My God, what a hard trial that was for me! I remained with her as much as I could. She, poor thing, confessed that she was afraid she was dying, showing also her reluctance to do so because she desired so intensely to help me in the good work and in order have time to gain merit. She sympathized with me in my isolation and begged me to ask God for her recovery, promising that she would spend her life in his service and in helping me. "Lord," she repeated many times, "grant me the grace of allowing me to gain more merit. Ah, do not let me die before I have labored at the work to be undertaken!" Rambling in her mind, she thought she was in school and talked to the children as though she were teaching them. Returned to herself, she asked if she had received the favor [she desired]. It was a difficult trial for me, seeing and inwardly knowing that unfortunately she was nearing the end! I encouraged her to be resigned and trusting in God.

As to me, I saw myself comfortless and alone. I bowed my head to the divine Will and as my spirit went to meet the most difficult sacrifice, I said to my God, "The second victim is about to be consumed. Where will your beloved progeny have a beginning? Where is the foundation of your building? Where are the workers in the vineyard already acquired for cultivation?" I wanted to believe that he would provide them and I made an effort to repeat, "He will provide."

The sad moment arrived. God called to himself that soul, the only comfort and support I had here on earth. I left a few moments before she ceased living in this land of tears.<sup>189</sup> She no longer recognized me. I left her, returned home, and retiring to my little chapel cast myself at the feet of my good crucified one. Alone, alone I offered myself to him as a perpetual sacrifice. "O my God," I said, "you wish me to be alone, I come to you alone! But sustain one who does not know how to sustain herself in such a tempest." Two days later I also had the pain of seeing leave me one of the older of my students, a cousin of mine.<sup>190</sup> Her mother planned to take her with her (she lived in Pisa). She was already in the carriage, when, deeply feeling the weight of my sorrow, she decided to remain with me, and her mother gave her consent.

The death of my companion, Silene, made a deep impression on many, particularly because they knew how fond we had been of each other, and that I had lost her at the time I had most need of her. This encouraged Edwige Sacconi to join me. She decided on this in spite of the fact that I told her several times I would be sorry if she did it for any other reason than to please God. Upon her resolution, her family, always contrary (except her mother, who afterwards consented), from being friends became most hostile and never ceased to vex us, nor ever left us in peace.

### **Problems with the weaving teacher**

Also on the part of the teacher of weaving there were not lacking worries and trouble, particularly from those who took her part, because they were opposed to nuns or to scheme and gain some advantage.<sup>191</sup> In short, these were the rocks against which the new Institute was constantly running, the waters lurking beneath the difficult terrain, which kept its foundations from consolidating. And their work was so deadly that in the end they were able to cause it to totter and fall (humanly speaking and considering the fact), when the building was almost finished.<sup>192</sup> It pleased God to permit it to be: *fiat!* But without regard to our merits he will rebuild it, as he can, and with greater strength.<sup>193</sup> May it happen for the glory of his name.

I return to the matter at hand. The gonfaloniere, it seems to please the superintendent or perhaps someone else, did not arrange matters with regard to the teacher of weaving in the manner I had requested. Without my knowledge, he obtained a rescript for her which, while it gave her full liberty to live with her family, assigned her a part of the premises which I had requested and which had been promised would be available to me. Besides that, the gonfaloniere had given her so much other freedom in the building itself as to wholly infringe on our part. All this was kept secret from me until it was impossible for me to request my rights or to reverse the situation.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Maria opens her school**

I took up quarters in the Pious Establishment<sup>194</sup> on the feast of the Finding of the Cross, May 3, 1852. The same day the pupils who were registered were consigned to me. I came with my companion, Edwige Sacconi, and we were followed by the widow mentioned above, who, not being able to teach, wanted to come in the capacity of servant. My little pupils whom I had had before coming to the Pious Establishment gave me a hand, especially the oldest (now Sister Victoria of the Holy Stigmata), who after a few months elected to board with us, in order to embrace the state upon which we were embarked. The widow stayed with us for only about seven months, after which she decided to

return to living with a good Franciscan tertiary. Her place was taken by a country girl sixteen years old, of angelic conduct and more than ordinary virtue.

There was much physical work, and the mental worry was no less, because among the students there were some older ones who previous to our arrival, that is, during the time of the retired teachers, did not attend school. The authorities could not require it, because the teachers were not able to teach them. As I have said, they were enrolled, but only for the purpose of receiving a dole. When we arrived, they all returned. To rear them properly required much prudence and foresight, because they were accustomed to a freedom incompatible with good morals and education as citizens. I bore it all willingly, and it was a great comfort to live in the tabernacles of the Lord. The students grew in number day by day, wherefore after a few months, notwithstanding all our effort and dedication, we found ourselves unequal to our task. I notified the municipality, calling attention to the need in which I found myself of associating other companions to myself, adding that I did not thereby intend to increase the expenses of the Establishment. They gave me permission.<sup>195</sup>

### **Efforts to secularize the school**

It seems that certain gentlemen in the town (the leader of them being Signor [Francesco] Martini) began to suspect that our boarding school was becoming a convent school,<sup>196</sup> and in no way did they want nuns. For this reason, headed by the son of the same Martini,<sup>197</sup> they thought of making new regulations for the schools, in which, besides rules about teaching, would be included others preventing the teachers from in any way de-secularizing their way of life.<sup>198</sup> This was their whole purpose, because they had nothing to complain about with regard to the running of the school. The authorities were very satisfied and when they had come to visit the school, they had praised it highly. When what I have just related came to my knowledge, I went to Florence to try to prevent those regulations from being approved. I visited Bishop Bronzoli. As on other occasions, he was pleased with my good intentions, but I believe I seemed to him rather insignificant or incapable (as in fact I was) and unequal to the undertaking about which I was informing him. He listened to me and told me that it would be an excellent thing and quite advantageous to be able to consolidate the good we were then doing by making a conservatorio out of that institution, a thing he much desired. But with all this he did not tell me how nor offer me help.

I did not dare ask for it. I was restrained by the knowledge of my nothingness, which made me ashamed to present myself as the head of the undertaking, and it seemed to me quite reasonable that he have no confidence in someone as worthless as I saw myself to be, and I suspected that I appeared to be even more so than I believed.

I knew that for him the source of our difficulty was the fact that we had no income. I reassured him, telling him that God, who had not failed to provide for us so far, would not cease doing so in the future, and if by not providing for us he would indicate that he wanted us to go begging, we were ready to do so. Therefore, with regard to the existence of income he should not worry. But I could not convince him. Both for him as for the Reverend Provost Gabellini (to whom he had recommended and entrusted us) the thing was a very great obstacle.

How many times have I complained to my God on this account! I told him, "Lord, why do you give so strong a faith to one who has no power whatever and to those who could accomplish so much, a faith so languid and flaccid? I mean, those who had it would not be impeded from acting, trusting solely in you."

### **Maria appeals to authorities**

I spoke to my good friend Enrichetta. She thought of bringing me to the secretary of His Highness,<sup>199</sup> Venturi<sup>200</sup> if for no other reason than to request the approval of the regulations mentioned above.<sup>201</sup> He, having probably been informed of my plans by my friend's husband, questioned me about them. I felt so timid, I did not know what to say. As a result, he formed the opinion of me which I deserved. Talking later to my friend's husband, he said, "She may be a good enough woman, but she seems so frigid that I think it unbelievable that she can succeed in her undertaking." I laughed at this, because I had little interest in appearing otherwise, but then considering all the difficulties involved, I asked God either to enliven my spirit and show me the way or to cease calling and inviting me to do something in fact impossible for me.

Before leaving, I also visited Cavaliere Bicchierai<sup>202</sup> whom I knew from having approached him another time regarding a favor I had been requested; it concerned someone who had compromised himself<sup>203</sup> in '48. I cannot omit saying that it cost me a good deal to assume such roles for the usual reason that I am conscious of my nothingness. And now it pains me to retell them, because it seems to me that whoever reads this ought to laugh at me. But I did those things, moved by the desire of doing good no less than my confessor<sup>204</sup> and the person who had appealed to me. To refuse because of the reluctance I felt made me fear to displease God, and that I did not want.

Cav. Bicchierai also had me talk to the minister of Public Instruction, His Excellency Buonarroti,<sup>205</sup> and, I do not know whether it was this time or on a previous occasion, to His Excellency Landucci, Minister of the Interior.<sup>206</sup> I had to do mortal violence to myself to present myself to such persons and I found courage only in the thought that God wanted it and I should do it only for him. I think that before leaving I also returned to the bishop. Cav. Bicchierai wrote a petition to the prefect of Arezzo, informing him of the advantages for Montevarchi [of my work], setting down my requests.

### **Illness in the Martini family**

I failed to mention that in the Spring of 1853, a year after we had taken over the Pious Establishment, the young wife of Martini's son became gravely ill and was close to death.<sup>207</sup> The distraught family, also at the request of my relative,<sup>208</sup> continually sent messages to us to recommend her to the Lord. We did so, and I prayed very hard because of the good I wished for that creature who seemed to me to be exemplary in her situation and state of life.

She came through the crisis, when I was seized by inflammatory colic pains, so that my life was feared for. Twice I was immersed in a bath. After twenty-four hours, it pleased the Lord that I should improve, and I gradually recovered.

The Signora Martini remained in a condition which, although it did not occasion fear for her life, was a source of much grief, because there was no hope of recovery. I took the occasion to remind the senior Martini of the obligation he had of coopeating with the Institute. Seeing that he remained obstinately opposed, I spoke to him firmly. He only became more bitter. But when the condition of the sick girl worsened, being several times reminded by her and his sister-in-law who had been my teacher, he wrote a petition to His Highness, informing him of the good we were doing; he showed him that in consolidating the Institute there was also an economic advantage, even if they were to pay us as much as they paid the teachers.

In the same note he requested that the gratuity of four hundred lire, which until then had been given me, should be raised to one thousand. This increase was almost immediately approved, and we began to receive it in '54, but I was little interested in an increase in salary, so it gave me little comfort. Divine Providence had never failed to provide for his handmaids, as I shall relate in its proper place, and I had every reason to hope, although in the beginning faith was my only salvation. What Martini had done he did solely out of fear, though convincingly, but not willingly. After that, he always acted to the disadvantage of the Institute, as can be see from a few things which in their place I shall be obliged to relate.

### **A trip in winter**

My departure [from Florence] had of necessity to take place on the first day of the year (the year 1854 was beginning), because on the second there were tests for the children, and I needed to be present. I had gone to Florence with only one of my pupils as a company and I also returned with her. It was the first time that I had undertaken a journey without being accompanied by my parents or being entrusted to other persons.

The day I had to leave to return to Montevarchi, the weather was very strange;<sup>209</sup> there had been a great deal of snow, followed by frost. My sister and my friend Enrichetta in no way wanted me to leave, but after I had acquainted them with the need, they reluctantly agreed. The coachman who served the family had two carriages, both occupied by business men come to Florence on affairs. I travelled in the one in which there were a few acquaintances of mine from our town. My father had recommended me to them (so they said) out of the great concern he had for me in the event of my return. Such was the great affection he always had for me.

We departed at nine o'clock. We had hardly left the city when we ran into so much ice that the horses were unable to remain on their feet. It was no use putting skid chainszlo on them. We were obliged to get out and continue a few miles on foot. The company consisted of ten or twelve men, my pupil and myself. O my Lord, what are we not able to do, when we can think of doing it for love of you? The street was so covered with frozen snow that the men also were hardly able to keep on their feet. At a certain point I was obliged to take advantage of the offer of assistance made to me by one of the men of the company, leaning on his arm. Besides the wretched state of the road, the air was so raw that from the roofs of the houses beside the way hung great pieces of ice.

After we had gone about a third of the way, it seemed to the coachman that we could mount. We climbed aboard, but not long after, the other carriage a few arm-lengths away from us fell precipitously, to the great fright of all. Thank heaven, those who were inside were not seriously injured, but we were obliged to stop, also because the carriage was considerably damaged. As soon as it was repaired, we started out again and arrived in Montevarchi at nine o'clock in the evening.

### **Concerns for the Institute**

The affairs of the Institute caused me great concern. To obtain the grace of attaining what I thought God willed, I prayed a great deal, managed to do quite a bit of penance, and tried to mortify myself in everything. I served my companions as much as I could and outside of school hours kept busy with the humble duties of the kitchen. All this gave relief to my spirit, which sometimes was so overwhelmed with worries that I thought I would not survive. I saw no way of attaining at my goal. Everywhere I turned my thoughts, I found the way blocked. I saw that the schools could not make progress without an increase in the number of teachers and unless the Institute took on a religious character. I considered it in fact impossible to find persons willing to join me, nor did I dare search for them, because I did not know under what claim. What was needed was a reliable person to take our part, but I found no one to help me. Oppressed by such and so many worries, I took refuge at the feet of the naked cross and, holding it close, I told God that he must help me.

Once when I was absorbed in prayer—I do not recall the place where I was—I seemed to see before me a very high mountain, not to be climbed but to carry, wherefore I became very weary and oppressed, also physically, so that I was drenched with perspiration. Another time, I saw myself as a worker in building materials. I saw my double with the tools builders usually use. Each time I laid one brick, several others fell down, for which I experienced unspeakable pain, not at recognizing my insufficiency, of which this vision was the true image, but at seeing myself unable to serve God in a matter he wished.

### **Amalgamation with the Stigmatines?**

We were in the Spring of the same year of 1854, when the Reverend Father Andrea da Quarata, O.F.M.,<sup>211</sup> came to visit me. When he asked me how the affairs of the Institute were getting along, I told him. Then he asked me if it had ever occurred to me to join Sister Lapini, foundress of the Stigmatines?<sup>212</sup> I told him yes; in fact, in the worries and difficulties I saw to attaining my goal, I had thought of doing so, because it seemed to me that I would not be departing from the will of God, if I arrived at the same end, although by other means. I frankly told him all.

He approved my ideas and said that he also believed that such was the will of God. He advised me to await the outcome of the petition already in progress. If nothing new happened about the agreement, he advised me to withdraw, and he would arrange everything, associating me to Sister Lapini and opening a house of the Stigmatines in Montevarchi. I was consoled, because I did not love glory but the good.

Not many days after that conversation, he wrote to me, repeating that he truly thought it the will of God that I join Sister Anna Lapini (a letter I still keep). This raised in me such great emotion that, fleeing to the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, my only good, I burst into desperate tears, declaring myself ready for anything. Not knowing, however, whether my companions would be disposed for so much, I recommended all to him, who was no less the master of their hearts, to arrange the matter as he pleased.

I told the above to Fr. Gabellini and to my confessor, Canon Brandi.<sup>213</sup> The former approved immediately and the matter seemed to him already concluded. The latter disapproved and told me to recommend myself seriously to the Lord in order to obtain light. I do not recall seeking advice from the bishop, nor was it suggested to me; all was ordained to my greater suffering.

In pursuance to the petition addressed to the prefect, it was necessary for me to go to Arezzo. I went there a few days after the happenings related above. I did not know that Fr. Andrea was there, wherefore I proceeded directly to the prefecture without looking him up. Neither did I know that negotiations were in progress to found a house of the Stigmatines in the town. The prefect, who perhaps preferred our institution, told me that if the town of Montevarchi was unwilling to keep us, he would be most willing to have us in Arezzo and asked me if I would accept. He questioned me further about Sister Lapini, perhaps to know whether there were some relation between her and me. I told him the high regard I had for her and said that the scope of her institute was the same as ours; therefore, if he wanted to place a house in Arezzo, he could apply to her; I was not opposed, in fact, was most agreeable to recognizing her as Head.

I had been accompanied by a certain Signora Maddalena Barzagli, the widow Marrubini, who was quite well disposed to us. Leaving the prefect, we went to the convent of the Holy Spirit, where she had a sister. Before leaving the city, we betook ourselves to the house of a certain Signor Giovanni Facondo Fikai, canon penitentiary<sup>214</sup> (I don't recall if he was penitentiary at the time), with whom I was acquainted from our conversations of other times. To my pleasant surprise we found Fr. Andrea there.

My satisfaction was at once embittered by his welcome of me; he received me in a brusque and scornful manner. I wanted to recount my conversation with the prefect, but his conduct did not encourage me. I did not know what to

think or do. Acting as though I wasn't even there, he addressed himself to the persons with whom I had found him. It was time to depart, and I had to take my leave.

After a few days, knowing that Sister Lapini was in a town not far from Montevarchi, I went to visit her. I was received in no better manner. I did not know the reason, because previously Sister Anna had always shown me great good will. She had also come to visit me and had spent the night in our house.

I only discovered the reason a few months later from my good friend Enrichetta, who told me about the negotiations to open a house of Stigmatines in Arezzo, and how the prefect had tried to disengage himself, perhaps showing that he was committed to me (because it would appear that he really preferred our Institute, my friend told me). For this reason, Sister Anna Lapini and Fr. Andrea suspected that I wanted stealthily to raise the standard of the holy mother Teresa in place of that of St. Francis. God so disposed it, so that I might suffer more, that such holy persons should be mistaken and led into a judgement so erroneous. When I came to know it, they had already been disabused by my good friend, to whom, before she told me, I had revealed all that had happened to Me. In this state of affairs, abandoned by God to my Littleness and inadequacy, my spirit was so uncertain and vacillating that I did not know what to do. "O Lord," I said, "you are playing with me, as a mother is wont to do with her little child. She calls it and then, hiding herself, doesn't show it the way to find her. The poor thing, who is dying to embrace his mother (as I am to fulfill your divine will, seeking only in this way to please you), turns about a thousand times, now here, now there, impatient to find her." But after various occurrences which, besides the opinion of my confessor, made me very clearly realize that it was not the will of God that I join Lapini, I abandoned the idea.

### **Maria finds a kindred spirit**

I wanted to make a few days of retreat in order to obtain greater enlightenment. My position did not give me the opportunity, because with so many duties it was impossible, being present, not to take them into account and be distracted from my recollection. Therefore, I thought of going to the conservatorio in San Giovanni.<sup>215</sup> I left Montevarchi with this intention. On arrival in that town, I stayed at the guest-house of the Poor Clares, where the confessor was Father Caprilli of Montevarchi?" whom I knew well.

Here I must digress a bit. This worthy priest had revealed to me that he felt the same desires I did; that is, what I had begun to do for the education of girls he felt he wanted to do for boys, and that sometimes he had such strong inclinations in this regard as to suffer beyond measure. On the other hand, he experienced a thousand doubts over the difficulties he foresaw, and the knowledge of his own nothingness quite discouraged him. I told him I had been in the same situation and still was, except that I had great confidence that God would help me. I told him to take courage. Unfortunately, it was true that such a martyrdom was a martyrdom for the soul to which we must resist, revealing all to our superiors notwithstanding our reluctance and embarrassment, though uncertain of the outcome, and fearing that we would be laughed at. , It seemed to me that when a thing we were inspired to do was good, even if it was repugnant to our natural inclination, though it cost us, and seemed impossible, we should not neglect doing it. We should even expose ourselves to suffering, although uncertain of the outcome; if no other good resulted, there would at least be our suffering and humiliation.

It seems to me that to follow Jesus one must dive in and swim. Such feelings, though perhaps not all expressed in these same words but in others which I no longer recall, I had disclosed to the confessor Caprilli, in order to encourage him. Seeing him continue in his fears and timidity, I was daring enough (though with great reluctance) to speak about him to the bishop (this had happened when I spoke to him in '53) and even to write to him. Such was my desire that that priest should be helped that I don't know he said. This conduct, which certainly for a person of my little worth was zeal of the most imprudent kind, seems to have been taken in poor sort by the bishop, who charged me with being a fanatic and a visionary (as Fr. Gabellini was instructed to tell me). This weighed on me beyond measure for the fear it caused me, notwithstanding that I considered myself nothing and all that I did was done with reluctance and embarrassment. O my Lord, this too was quite painful, and I remember it still. But, were I to tell all, I would never finish.

### **Maria explains herself**

Because of my manner of writing, I have been told that I have often been charged with being a visionary. It looked as though I wrote so on purpose, but I was only trying to make myself understood. Also, with regard to matters of the spirit, it was more the heart that spoke than the mind. It was because of my lack of instruction that I expressed myself in that way; I know no other grammar than my overwhelming feelings.

It was also thought that I had read a great deal and that I was trying to imitate an exalted style. I confess that I have given very little time to reading, because whatever time I had, I spent in meditating. I have read very few books and can count them by heart, all of them of a modest and ordinary style. Recently, I've occasionally spent a quarter of an hour reading the life of Jesus Christ by Cesari and the life of the holy Mother Teresa,<sup>217</sup> which was given to me I don't recall whether in '55 or '56, but I have read very little of it. Before that time I knew her not at all. I return to where I left off.

### **A nocturnal trip to Florence**

I remained little more than a day in the guesthouse of the conservatorio in San Giovanni without undertaking any further business, it seeming to me that I oughtn't to spend any more time. I thought it better to continue on to Florence, planning to pluck up courage and present myself to His Highness with the help offered me by my good friend Enrichetta. To do so in secret (as was necessary), I left with a carrier of San Giovanni and, I do not recall why, at ten o'clock at night. I had a few of my pupils with me but I took only one, called Candida, now Sister Crocifissa in religion<sup>218</sup> We were alone in the carriage. God alone and the thought of his work could give me such courage. We arrived in Florence at four o'clock in the morning. I rang the bell at the door of my sister's house. As can be supposed, not expecting us, they did not open. It seems that even the maid servants did not hear. The churches were all closed except the Duomo. We took refuge there until a later hour.

### **The bishop pardons Maria**

I regretted very much having displeased my superior. I went to him and lost no time in asking his pardon about the matter referred to above. I threw myself at his feet, told him I was his sheep, and placed myself in his hands. I would be grateful if he would correct me in whatever way he thought I had erred. Being the charitable man he was, he was deeply moved. Blessing me, he told me to rise, reassuring my conscience with tender words, and telling me to mention the matter no more. He seemed to repent what he had caused me to be told. I revealed to him my plan of going to His Highness and I feel sure that I had him read the minutes of the petition which I had composed to the best of my ability.

### **An audience with the grand duke**

We had arrived on the solemnity of St. Peter.<sup>219</sup> I think two days later, on Saturday,<sup>220</sup> conducted by my friend Enrichetta, I betook myself to the Pitti Palace. O my Lord, we are so mean-spirited<sup>221</sup> that we greatly fear men, while we approach you with such license and boldness. I cannot tell how the thought of being received by His Highness impressed me and inspired fear. I tried to avoid the thought as much as possible.

When it was my turn, I went in to the audience. After I had read my petition, His Highness gave me much encouragement. He questioned me confidentially about myself. I answered all his questions in all simplicity and spoke warmly on behalf of the matter recommended to him. He promised to favor it and moreover told me that when I had the necessary personnel, it would be his wish to extend our Institute to the town of Laterina not far from us.<sup>222</sup> He authorized me to wear a religious habit. The conference was quite long, even though many were awaiting an audience. I left thanking the Lord for not making me appear as worthless as I really was.

I went to the bishop to give him the most happy news and to ask his permission to wear the sacred habit, because without his consent I would not have done so. He gave his approval and evidenced great satisfaction. I did too, and in those first moments did not know how I might request approbation in writing; it seemed to me enough to have it orally.

### **Poor Handmaids of the Heart of Mary**

On my return to Montevarchi I gave thought to arranging what was needed for clothing, which should resemble that of the Teresian nuns, since we wanted to affiliate ourselves to that Order. We took the title, The Poor Handmaids of the Heart of Mary, Discalced Carmelites (*Le poverine del Cuore di Maria, Carmelitane scalze*).

I accepted two girls on trial: Marianna Brunetti of Florence and Guglielma Martelli of Montevarchi, where her father, a retired chancellor, had his home, having been active there. I also took in as a boarder one of my pupils, Annina Marrubini, who took the habit in '55. All of them worked assiduously in the schools. Others who aspired to the same state but whom I left in their families also gave much help.

One of the aspirants became seriously ill. The Lord had permitted her to cause me much trouble by wanting to join me in spite of the opposition of her father and also because of difficulties I foresaw in accepting her. Her character

was so difficult that it seemed to me that in accepting her I would harm the Institute or be unfair to her. She caused me to suffer much and gave me much trouble. I was much moved by her illness, and since she showed signs of changing somewhat, I could not deny her the favor of accepting her upon her recovery. I do not recall whether she joined us before our clothing or afterwards.

### **The first clothing, Oct. 15, 1854**

The first clothing occurred on October 15<sup>223</sup> of the same year, 1854. We were Edwige Sacconi, Ersilia Betti, Teresa del Bigio<sup>224</sup> and myself. [The ceremony] took place at the hands of the Reverend Provost Gabellini. I wrote down some rules to be observed, but on the whole I directed by word of mouth. Our food was very frugal; in all things we practised poverty. We followed a schedule. We made an hour and a half of mental prayer daily, we recited the Divine Office, we did everything in common. For the first part of the Office we arose at two o'clock in the morning. As previously, we lived on the little the Bortolea provided and whatever each one brought with her (if she could). What was lacking—and it was a good deal—Divine Providence supplied, and I cannot deny, generously.

The second clothing occurred in 1855 and numbered four girls, one of whom did not persevere and was returned to her family. I accepted on trial other pupils of mine.<sup>225</sup> After having tried them, not being sure that some of them had a true vocation, I thought it best to try them further and sent them back to their homes.

### **A foundation in Laterina**

On the part of His Highness, the bishop had Fr. Gabellini request me to prepare a few subjects for the town of Laterina. In May, I was told to repair to that town to examine a few buildings and choose the one which seemed to me best suited to our purpose. I went and stopped at the farm as I had been told to do. Besides, before undertaking the negotiation, I visited the provost of the place. He warned me that those farm-bailiffs, being quite opposed to having nuns, would show me the worst site and withhold the suitable one. In fact, that is what happened. The one they wished to give us was entirely unsuitable.

### **A problem with religious garb**

I wrote about the matter to Secretary Venturi, if I recall correctly. However, after awhile I thought of going to His Highness and speaking to him in person. Presenting myself in a religious habit caused me considerable concern.<sup>226</sup> I spoke to Fr. Gabellini about it; he advised me not to wear it and to resume it on my return. It struck me as a strange idea, because of what someone would think who might see me. This was also the opinion of my confessor, so I did not think I need obey [the provost]. I wrote to my friend Enrichetta. She replied that I should write to her whatever business I needed to be attended to and I should in no way go to Florence and leave the convent. She told me this in such a way that it seemed an order from some higher authority.

With the need I had to confer in person, I became very troubled. I recommended myself to the Lord, explaining the reason, only too well known to him, of my affliction. While I prayed, the thought occurred to me that really the conduct of my friend was not as ingenuous as it seemed, but that other motives could have induced her to write in the way I have indicated. With this doubt in mind, I decided to leave Montevarchi dressed as a nun and in Florence, to go to the Pitti Palace, find a way secretly to remove my habit.

I left on the feast of St. Peter with one of my companions, Martelli,<sup>227</sup> and had one of my aunts accompany us. With all the fears they had inspired in me and with my little courage in such matters, I was quite upset. It even occurred to me that I might be arrested. To support it all I was helped by the thought that we were doing it for God. On arrival in Florence I went to my sister's house and began to discuss with her what to do. Various plans were brought forward, but they all seemed unsuitable. One, suggested by my sister, finally seemed to answer our purpose. She knew a poor woman, who lived near the Pitti Palace and to whom she used to give alms. She thought we would be able to leave home in a closed carriage together with herself and my aunt and go to the house of the poor woman (who because of her goodness and because she had received alms would keep silent about everything). Having removed my habit and put on secular clothes in that place, I would go to the Pitti Palace with my sister alone. The coachman who had conveyed two nuns and two laywomen, seeing these [two] getting back on with great haste and heavy veils over their faces, would not notice that one of us was the nun.

We had passed the whole night with these preoccupations. Having made our decision, we went to the poor woman in the way described. Her house was so poor, it required a light to climb up to it. Then we found a room so fetid (in my opinion it had to serve all purposes) and with furnishings so miserable and filthy that proper and cleanly religious

poverty was as nothing in comparison. Having removed the holy habit (to allow me to do so the poor woman and my companions had to retire below by means of the stairs), I betook myself with my sister to the Pitti Palace.

I can hardly tell how afraid I was that the person conducting us knew the way through all the turnings [of the palace] and with what a beating heart I awaited the audience. At every footstep of those persons passing here and there, I feared to see the secretary Venturi, who I believed was the source of the intimation mentioned above that I should not come here. I was very worried and had reason enough for sighing. I waited three hours for the audience. When I passed in, I was greatly encouraged to hear that there had been no prohibition to come; in fact, he assured me that any time the affairs of the Institute required it I should come freely and no longer dressed as a laywoman but as a nun. I was anxious to have this permission to be able to go out dressed as a nun in order to be free to beg when the occasion arose. He told me I could do it. After having treated matters concerning Laterina, I took my leave.

There can be no question that our wearing the religious habit greatly displeased the authorities of the town, who were very much opposed to it. It made itself felt in all circumstances; whenever they could obstruct or vex us they did not fail to do so.

### **The Misericordia**

We had in one part of the building the *Misericordia*, which had the use of the church, given it in '48; previously it did not have it.<sup>228</sup> Its leaders were our worst enemies. In emergencies they had the right of passage through a few of our rooms, because these had more convenient stairs. To annoy us they made appear a necessity that which was not a necessity and which they arranged on purpose. Two corpses were brought through and they kept them there more than twenty-four hours rather than carry them where they should be. They kept sick persons there contrary to the custom of the Misericordia. They came without warning, which was no less inconvenient for the schools than for those who directed them, both because of contact with every sort of person and because of the fear and trouble occasioned by the noise of the people and the misfortune of the unhappy person being carried.

When we called their attention to these inconveniences, making it clear that although an excellent work, the Misericordia ought not be involved in the school, we were not heard. In order to offend us, they forgot all propriety and duty. One evening they told us to keep the door open until eleven o'clock, saying a patient would be brought in around that time. This was just an excuse, because they had known since the morning that they would have to go and collect that patient. They continued to annoy us in that way as long as they remained.

### **A troublesome gardener**

At that time, the gardener who rented the garden adjoining the convent turned against us. Perhaps he feared that, being nuns, we would lay claim to the rights of the other ones. I believe that the same suspicions were had by a few gentlemen who possessed properties sold to them.<sup>229</sup> The fact remains that while previously we were allowed to walk in the garden, the gardener began to shout at them take a bit of air I brought them on the roof of the cells. To have good daughters did not complain to me the aggravation of so many sacrifices, I felt the burden on their behalf, and I cannot deny that sometimes I became depressed also on this account. So we went from trial to trial, and many had simultaneously. The weavin school also caused me concern because of the jealousy and pretensions of one who directed it.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

On July 25, the feast of St. James, when I was in the act of receiving Holy Communion, I was seized by severe heart pains, which instead of ceasing after a short time, as they were accustomed to do, continued with extraordinary palpitations. Other kinds of faintness followed, perhaps in progress for some time as a result of my many troubles and sorrows. Variations in my health continued for several months, but I always felt poorly.

### **Trial of faith**

The state of my spirit was pitiable. It seemed as though demons had asked permission to try me to extreme lengths. They plunged me into pitch darkness, and I no longer knew where again to find light. My God, I said, ah me, do not deprive this wretch of the faith, the only refuge a person can have in anguish and trouble! Believing myself the cause of this state and thinking I merited it, I often repeated, Cor mundum area in me Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.<sup>230</sup> In this condition of which it is impossible to describe the suffering, I had no one to afford me relief. No longer finding God, the light of faith extinguished, hope suppressed, charity not felt, prostrate in spirit, I forced

myself at the foot of the naked cross to offer myself as a voluntary victim of every sort of suffering and of death itself (become horrible to me).

### **Fears for the Institute**

To the darkness and temptations was added the fear of seeing the Institute dissolved by reason of and I cannot deny that sometimes I became depressed also on this account. So we went from trial to trial, and many had simultaneously. The weavin school also caused me concern because of the jealousy and pretensions of one who directed it. my insufficiency and inadequacy for assuring its continuity; by reason also of its many enemies, who would not fail to make war against it. I said, "Lord, on my own I can do nothing and even if I could, I would not wish it, because I only desire that your will be done in me, upon me, and around me. *Voluntas tua fiat.*"<sup>231</sup> If the Institute is to continue by my efforts, give me strength, and so be it. If I have to leave it and come to you, fearing the while that it will cease to be when I die, so be it. If you wish me to go on living, troubled and powerless, to see undone what I have done and obtained, so be it. Yes, my God, I will always repeat: whatever you wish, so be it. And with regard to that which I think you permit as a punishment and penalty, I add, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from us<sup>232</sup> The first Sunday in September, for us the solemn feast of the Precious Milk of Mary,<sup>233</sup> I recommended myself to her as to a mother, begging her insistently that she obtain peace for my spirit, troubled by the darkening of my faith. I obtained my wish.

### **Spiritual phenomena**

Because of my ills, I underwent great sacrifices with regard to the doctor and the servants. For this reason, I was seized by the fear of having displeased God. One day, when I was more than usually troubled, I asked the Lord that if that were not so, he assure me of it. At that, a drowsiness came over me which seemed to me a most delightful union and I felt certain that those who are soiled by the filthy slime of the world are incapable of experiencing such delights in God.

That is how the matter went, but I can also have been deceived, because, if I take into consideration my inadequacy, I have serious doubts about what smacks of the extraordinary, and if I could, I would pay no heed [to such experiences], nor recount them. Another time, taken by a fainting spell, while I seemed to die, I felt certain, more so than if I had seen him, that my sweetest spouse was at my side, and I experienced an indescribable delight. He told me that he wished to give me other sufferings and he showed me them in the form of the most beautiful gems with which he was adorning me, in order to endear me more to him.

### **The first flower of the Institute**

Early in November, one of my first companions grew ill, the youngest, who had changed her name from Teresa to Sister Colomba.<sup>234</sup> After a most painful and brief illness, she died on the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple,<sup>235</sup> if hers can be called a death, who was innocent during her lifetime, patient and resigned in death. In the bosom of her family, she was an angel in her ways, a most obedient daughter, industrious, devout. In religious life, her obedience had no equal. Her recollection was extraordinary, and at my request she admitted that she was always aware of the divine presence. She was most devoted to St. Joseph and before becoming ill dreamt that she saw him and heard him say that she would soon go to him. More than once she had a presentiment of her death. Such was the first flower that our beloved Jesus gathered in his garden. At almost the same time, another girl died, who was on trial, a most excellent creature also.

### **Illness in the Institute**

My condition worsened greatly, and all my sisters became ill except one, besides another one on trial, who had only recently come. We had to enlist laypersons to help us, and with all this the house was in such difficulty as to cause me great suffering. It was all a very hard trial without alleviation. I was in a state of extreme desolation.

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception,<sup>236</sup> when I felt myself growing ever weaker, I asked that a crucifix be placed before me and could think of nothing else to do than occasionally lift my eyes and, gazing upon it, repeat with the most heartfelt feeling: I recommend to you your work, I recommend these creatures of yours and mine. All will probably be undone and collapse, when I die! I place all in your hands. *Fiat.* That same day it pleased the Lord that I should feel a notable improvement. The ills of my companions continued on their course; in some their lives were feared for. So many trials and worries in which God placed on me, it seems, made no unfavorable impression on my confessor; rather greater certainty that it was the work of the Lord. The Reverend Provost was of a different opinion.

He went so far as to tell me that I had better send all my companions back to their families and I myself go home. This also I took as a trial and I asked the Lord to give me strength. My physical ills had lessened, but the troubles of my spirit were fearful.

### **A beginning in Foiano**

In the Spring of 1856, although I still was quite ill, I could leave my bed and attend some community acts. For some time, I had received letters asking for one of my companions to be directress of schools in Foiano.<sup>237</sup> Because of the difficult situation in which we found ourselves at the time I received the request, I was quite inclined to reject it, but thinking that beneath that request there might be some disposition of heaven, I did not. I asked for time to decide, proposing to go to Foiano in the good season, in order to treat the matter in person and so better know the conditions of the task to be assumed.

Although, as I said, I was able to remain on my feet, when Spring came, I did not seem able to undertake so long a journey, and inasmuch as the requests were repeated, I was constrained to send two of my companions,<sup>238</sup> whom the Reverend Provost offered to accompany. They passed through Arezzo and, having gone with the provost to ask the blessing of the bishop, from there went to Foiano.

The deputies and gonfaloniere<sup>239</sup> of the town were taken aback at seeing them clothed as nuns, because they said they had not known. They thought we were laywomen and that I was the directress of secular teachers; I do not know why, because in the letters sent to them I had used the title, Sister. Whatever the case, they were surprised. The two teachers in the place<sup>240</sup> were even more frightened, thinking that if we came, they would have to leave. To allay these fears, the Reverend Provost thought it best to say we were not nuns. We wore the habit because we liked to do so and if that very day we wished to abandon it, we could. It can be imagined what very bad effects such a statement could produce: they were presented a dish which was never forgotten nor digested. Every time we requested something because the dignity of the habit required it, it was served up to us on the table.<sup>241</sup>

To return to the beginning, my two companions remained in Foiano without, however, undertaking any engagement (which they would never have done without me), only to direct the schools provisionally, referring every decision to the time I would go to discuss everything. Before going there, I went to Florence and spoke about the matter with His Highness, not with the bishop who had died. I did not have the courage to go to the vicar, because I hardly knew him, having seen him a single time with the bishop. His Highness indicated his great desire that I should arrange matters so that we would remain in Foiano.

Upon my return from Florence, I went there and gave those gentlemen to understand that if they wanted us, it was necessary that the lay teachers be removed. Also, I did not want them left without means. They could retain the salary and we would get along by begging and with the salary of the third teacher who had voluntarily withdrawn in order to take other employment.

### **The situation in Foiano**

The situation of the schools in Foiano was the following: in '48 there were nuns. After I know not how much time they left to return to Arezzo. They had contracted to teach school and therefore were obliged to leave a certain sum for the support of three teachers in the schools. The municipality with the approval of the government placed there three laywomen, one of whom after four years or so took another position. The schools were poorly conducted, the town was dissatisfied, and in a short time the pupils were reduced to only a few. Therefore, the Minister of Public Instruction charged the municipality of Foiano to obtain a directress from Directress Scilli of Montevarchi.

My proposal was accepted only in part. They did not like us to live on alms and go questing. Therefore, the municipality considered choosing us and dismissing the other ladies without providing them with a salary. It seems they could do this without injustice because of occurrences of maladministration of the schools.<sup>242</sup>

I found myself a bit uncertain whether to accept or not. First, because of certain conditions which it seemed to me impossible to reconcile with religious decorum. Secondly, I disliked seeing the other two who were there when we came dismissed without a salary. Thirdly, because we foresaw that there would not be lacking spiteful pharisees, who without considering the public good would think only of accusing us of inhumanity and of being the cause of another's humiliation; if not of the latter, because it was too obvious that they had been humiliated through their own work, at least being the cause of their dismissal.

To discuss my doubt with the Reverend Provost would have been useless, as he would have said all my reflections were frivolous. As to the confessor, whatever advice I asked him for with regard to the Institute, he replied, "Pray, ask Jesus to enlighten you, I am not able to do so. The Lord will help you."

Still uncertain as to what to do, I thought of accepting, if only not to abandon an undertaking which was no less useful to the town of Foiano as to us, and hence we could suppose that it was the will of God in spite of any conflict, and so it was our duty to try. With regard to the teachers, we ought not to omit doing good to many for fear of doing harm to two persons. Having accepted the charge, I sent other companions to Foiano. With those already there our number reached six and, counting the maidservant, seven.<sup>243</sup> At the moment, I could not spare any more. After a few days, at the wish of all I also went. I had not been able to accompany the companions due to the state of my health, on that day worse than usual. I remained about three weeks.<sup>244</sup> A longer stay was not permitted due to the needs of the house in Montevarchi, where the many occupations, meddling, and relationships constantly calling for attention did not allow me to absent myself longer.

### **Trials of travel**

On returning, I passed through Arezzo to speak to Canon Fikai regarding a few girls he had proposed to me. In crossing the city I had to suffer an experience most painful to me, but only to my natural feelings. But reconsidering that my suffering was pleasing to God, I would have done it all over a thousand times. I was with two of my companions. Even though we were in a carriage with a hood, we were somewhat visible, and because we were tightly packed we in no way succeeded in hiding ourselves.

On entering the city, the coachman, who was unfamiliar with it, in order to arrive at our destination took us on a round-about course and made us go down the Corso. It was carnival time. Either they pretended to believe or they actually believed it, but some boys began to say, "Look at the maskers!" and ran after us. We were terribly frightened, because when the crowd, behind us increased, a bit of an uproar occurred. In vain we told the coachman to hurry the horses. The street ran up and down hill and we were obliged to continue suffering derision.<sup>245</sup> Fear and embarrassment made our hearts beat fast. The veils we wore were not sufficient to cover our blushes.

No less worrisome, but of another kind, was the first trip I took to Foiano, when I went to treat of our affairs. I had with me the youngest of my sisters, Maria Angelica<sup>246</sup> (she was also with me on the journey mentioned above). When we left Montevarchi the weather was quite good. Nonetheless, the trip caused me concern because of the state of my health which was still delicate, and I needed more care than ever before. I was put in that condition by the illness of '55; previously, no matter how many ills I suffered, except when they grew so bad that I was obliged to call the doctor, I paid no particular heed. It was a great trial for me when the Lord put me under the necessity and obedience of doing otherwise, an inconvenience he still permits me to have and for which I have to repeat, "May you be blessed, Lord, for humiliating me so. But I do not cease asking you to free me from a way of life which may be a scandal."

When we had gone a certain part of the way, the sky clouded over, and in a very short time a storm erupted of frightening proportions. The horse refused to continue and instead of obeying the driver bent down to the ground. It seemed no longer able to stand. The road was uphill, and so the carriage drifted backwards. The coachman had to tow it, and my companion, who had already stepped down, every so often placed stones behind the wheels. Not a living soul was in sight. It was a part of the road in which the houses were several miles apart. With my palpitations I felt I was dying. I could not get down from the carriage. On my knees and supported by the carriage, I felt myself fainting and told the Lord that I placed my soul in his hands. In that difficult situation we passed several hours. If at one time the storm seemed to lessen, it started up again with greater fury. After a few hours, it grew calmer, and the horse regained its strength. But towards the end of the journey we came upon a stretch of the road in such poor repair and so steep that we were again in obvious trouble. The hour was already late, and because of the bad weather, it was quite dark.

Fortunately, we saw coming toward us some farmers leaving a nearby church. With the coachman they pushed the carriage, although with great effort, up to a better stretch of the road. I had gotten down, because it was impossible to stay inside, and leaning on my companion walked with much difficulty. Both because of my exhaustion and because of the wretched state of the road, it was a miracle that I came out of that trouble without succumbing. By the Lord's grace, I felt no ill effects even afterwards.

### **The Discalced Carmelites**

As I have already said, in that same year, before we betook ourselves to Foiano, Bishop Bronzoli died. With him gone, I felt quite alone, because there was no aspect of the Institute unknown to him, and I can truly say that in all matters I was subject to him, for every time I went to Florence, as I already mentioned, I had informed him of everything and had asked his obedience.

The only relationship I had with the Fathers of the Order<sup>247</sup> before putting on the holy habit in 1854 was with a certain Father Camillo, who, as I mentioned, had given me the habit of the Third Order, when I left the convent of St. Mary Magdalen. I spoke to him that same year, before we became nuns, and told him what I was thinking of doing. He encouraged me, assuring me that God willed it, and that it was his work. I also spoke to another one. I think his name was Father Giovanni Francesco del Santissimo Sacramento.<sup>248</sup> Neither the one nor the other is at present alive. This, as I said, occurred before I took the holy habit, that is, in the summer of '54, and I spoke only a few words nor did I return again, believing for what concerned the disposition and foundation [of the Institute] I should treat with the bishop, and that all good should come to me from him. In 1855, I was paid a visit by a certain Father Serafino, one of ours,<sup>249</sup> of the convent<sup>250</sup> of Prato (at that time). He spoke about me to a certain Father Francesco,<sup>251</sup> of the same convent.<sup>252</sup> The latter wrote to me to tell me about some girls interested in becoming nuns, and in this fashion we became acquainted. When I went to Florence in the Spring of '56, this Father Francesco came to visit me and also another time in Montevarchi. He wanted me to make the acquaintance of the Father Provincial.<sup>253</sup> To me, who was conscious of needing help so badly, it seemed too good to be true, so much did I desire it. He also told me that it would not be difficult to speak to Father General, because he would probably be visiting Florence. In the same year of '56, however in October, when I went to Florence to talk to His Imperial and Royal Highness about the house in Foiano, Father Francesco came to visit me, as I had already asked him to do by letter, to discuss some matters regarding the girls who were to become nuns, one of whom had already been admitted on trial. With great satisfaction, he told me that Father General was in Florence.<sup>254</sup> He had a letter which he was about to send when he received mine, in which he advised me of this fact. He urged me wan'nly to go and visit him.

#### **Fr. General receives the rules**

With my usual timidity I hesitated a bit, but considering that it could be useful to me, I overcame my natural reluctance, all the more because, as I have said, the bishop being dead, I remained without a guide and support. I consigned to the general the rough draft of the rules I had drawn up, with the request that they be put in proper form with the addition of what was lacking. Inasmuch as he was about to leave and he therefore had no time to discuss them, he remanded all to the Father Provincial, telling me to go visit him and that he had recommended me to him. I went but could not see him because he was ill. But I knew from what Father General had told me that I would be given every possible consideration. After this, I remained a few months without hearing anything further, except that he wrote that he had returned the rules to me. Not having received them, I had reason to fear that they had been lost.

#### **Maria takes over the weaving school**

In the same year of '56 or early '57, the weaving teacher asked to place her school under my direction, as the others were. She spontaneously admitted being constrained to this because she could no continue longer because of many difficulties, also on the part of the parents of the girls. Requested by the gonfaloniere and the prefect, I accepted the office. I do not recall if I discussed the matter with my confessor, because he was also that teacher's confessor and I thought he must have been well aware of the situation and perhaps it was even his idea.

It should be noted that before placing herself under the Institute that teacher had shown an incomprehensible antipathy to me. When circumstances led her to join us,<sup>255</sup> she did every thing possible to avoid me, not sparing rude and uncivil manners. All this had given me second thoughts about accepting the office; other things also occur to me which it seems I have related in another place; perhaps what I've just said and not remembering it, I repeated it without realizing. Nevertheless, I hoped to be able to do good, even that her joining us would be a means of winning her. And it seemed to me that it would all redound to the advantage of the pupils, who up till then had been shown ways that were not very edifying.

Having undertaken the direction of the school, I cannot say how circumspectly I went about it. God permitted that that was not enough. Although it can be said in all truth that I took upon myself all the aggravation and not the authority and command, to the teacher everything seemed a continual problem. That was the way she acted and spoke. God permitted that she so yielded to temptation that she turned into evil all the good I did her. It seems that she slandered the Institute, said that there was no peace among us, and I know not what else.

There was also the time I had to send away one of our Sisters, of the second clothing, accepted without undergoing hardly any period of trial, because she had done so in another convent.<sup>256</sup> This taught me how inadvisable it is to accept girls who have not been accepted elsewhere. The pupils of the weaving school were very fond of me. The teacher, ever more jealous, became unmanageable. I tried every means to avoid trouble but without success. She

decided not to go any longer to the school of weaving and to leave it completely, as though she were not responsible. It all caused gossip, not only among the students and in the schools but also outside. The teacher's side was presented in such a way as to win me many other enemies, besides the few I had to begin with.

### **A change of confessor**

The confessor mostly sympathized with her, saying it was all the effect of her character and that she did not know how to overcome it. To tell her she was wrong was to drive her to desperation. My lack of virtue made me unwilling to resign myself to all that. It seemed to me a fraud, and that such wrongfulness was irreconcilable with such piety. I said, if piety does not serve to conquer our passions, of what use is it? I could not persuade myself that a devout person would thwart<sup>257</sup> religious interests and could not protect herself from the many ills which as a consequence overtook her. I thought, how can a confessor allow such an evil mess? Certainly, she has deceived him and gone to him also with lies and tricks.

But when I went to him and sincerely revealed all, and he showed me great trust, I came upon another problem. Among the thoughts which perturbed me was the following: just as she deceived him so can I deceive him; even though I guard against it, it is something I should fear. In this way I came to mistrust him and to think I should leave him. I did not want to do this without advice. I therefore wrote to a certain priest of the Riformati of Montecarlo.<sup>258</sup> He told me he thought it was the thing to do. I then chose another confessor, the one I still go to. The thoughts what made me take this decision were various. Since he was a person who, I believe, had little or no confidence in me, except in matters in which he had little interest, I seemed to be safer from deceit. Since he was a sensible person, it seemed to me that he ought to appreciate true and solid virtue. Being very good-hearted, he would easily be led along a very perfect way, and thus he would be able to do much good. If this has not been the case, it was my fault, my bad example, my insufficient prayers, that is, of little validity.

The *gonfaloniere*, the superintendent, the deputies, and the camerlengo came to see me about the school of weaving. They all took her part, as also did the deputy who was Martini's son,<sup>258</sup> because of his great hostility toward nuns. The teacher did not want to appear while I was there. The camerlengo said she had her reasons. I replied that it would have been well had she stated them in my Presence. The affair grew ever more serious. I thought of presenting my resignation to the prefecture, but my confessor said it was better to wait.

### **The Institute under fire**

I was recalled to Florence by Cavaliere Bicchierai to go to the Minister of Public Instruction. The situation was as follows: Cavaliere Bicchierai wrote to Martini (at least so the latter told me) and told him to inform me to go to him as soon as possible, because he had something to tell me of considerable interest to the Institute. On my arrival I was astonished to hear that it was a question of submitting the Institute to confirmation every three years and that I had been called for the sole purpose of making me agree.

They tried everything, but when they saw that it was useless, because I told them that was something to which I would never submit, since it seemed to me an insult to religion that nuns should be subject to lay persons and be voted on<sup>259</sup> by them, they gave me to understand that by resisting I would place the Institute in danger of suppression. I was running, they told me, into many, many obstacles, a veritable tempest. I was able to say little, even nothing, as is usual with me, because I have great difficulty in expressing my thoughts. Nevertheless, as best I could, I gave them to understand that rather than submit the Institute to their<sup>260</sup> And be voted on by them: sottoposte alla fava e al lupino. With Maria it was obviously a matter of principle. There could be no doubt about the outcome of a vote; reports on her administration were uniformly enthusiastic. demands, I would choose what they threatened me with, namely, see it suppressed. Before leaving Florence, I went to His Highness Leopold II and told him the same thing, recommending to him and any others in his power the survival of something he knew to be so useful. He told me to rest assured.

### **A new bishop's vicar**

It occurred to me to go to monsignor the vicar<sup>261</sup> and tell him all. I do not know how I managed to summon enough courage to carry out such a plan. It required not a little courage. I consoled myself with the thought that with this pretext I would have occasion to begin discussing the affairs of the Institute and end with making him a part of it all and recommending his approval. On being presented, I informed him of my conversations with the minister and with the grand duke himself. I do not recall what else I told him, but I do remember that I felt such awe as not to leave me much room to reflect on what I was saying. Perhaps when I was more open, I was more indecisive.

Given my insufficiency, I always have reason to wonder that God has placed me in the position in which I am. If it was he who wished it, I am equally at a loss<sup>262</sup> if I did not know it was in order that it might be more evident that it is all his work, and that I did nothing worthwhile. I was incapable of it, although I suffered much and in every way. Also my very insufficiency caused me to suffer. It would be like subjecting a poor peasant to an examination in the most abstruse sciences, or setting a small child to carrying a very heavy weight.

#### **Fr. Provincial returns the rules**

I also went to the provincial to make his acquaintance and to ask him for the rules which he still had in his possession without my having heard anything about them. I was able to see him; in fact, he received me very kindly, gave me back the rules, and told me that now that he had made the few corrections needed, I should have them put into final form. When I had them in order, he would give every thought to having them approved. I think it was on this occasion that he told me he had already discussed the matter with the Internuncio. Thinking that because of my ineptitude I had not in fact treated this matter with the vicar, it seemed to me a bit of luck to find someone who would take the pains to do it for me.

I also related to Father Provincial what had happened to me with the ministers and the government. After a long conference in which I informed him about the progress of the Institute, I left very much at peace, hoping to have found a strong support and a sure guide, and that he had treated all our business with the persons who were supposed to help me. I had not yet learned that to entrust oneself to many was to put oneself in danger of being abandoned by all. That I did not have this blessed knowledge, and perhaps prudence itself, I believe was to my harm. Rather, it was perhaps my little virtue, because if I had been virtuous, the Lord would not have failed by way of enlightening me to give me all. All this happened in the Spring of '57, that is, my going to Florence, summoned by Cavaliere Biccherai through Signor Francesco Martini, and my talking to the persons mentioned above. There is no doubt that in the question of submitting ourselves to their decision it was Martini junior who had his finger in the pie; in no way did he want nuns.

#### **A misunderstanding over a will**

In the year '57, hence before what I related above, because it was winter, I had the grief of losing my good friend, Enrichetta Magi. Whenever I have made some creature the object of my particular affection, the Lord has always taken her.

At the same time I lost Signora Maddalena Marrubini, very partial to the Institute. It was her intention to leave to us all she had; she mentioned it during her final illness (which lasted several months) to the Reverend Provost Gabellini, her confessor. He came and told me that she wished to make a will leaving everything to us and that, if the Lord gave her the grace of recovering, she would come to live with us. When the time came to make the will, he advised her otherwise, reminding her that she might displease her brother. Since he was good, had he known her wishes, he would have given us more than she intended to leave us. God permitted that at that time the Reverend Provost should be of that opinion. I think that later he had his regrets.

The sick woman before dying wished to see me, but she was so ill that she could hardly speak to me. She only told me that she wanted me to know how much the Reverend Provost had from her, because there being nothing in writing, she feared that in case of his death the said amount would go to someone to whom it was not due, because in conscience she could leave it only to us or some other religious Order, her husband having left it to her for this purpose. She urged me also to inform the Reverend Provost that I knew about it.<sup>163</sup>

I did so in order to obey her; not to do so seemed to me burdening my conscience, but it cost me a great effort. No matter with what delicacy I treated the subject and told his Reverence that I was doing it, as in reality I was, to fulfill the wish of the dead woman, and that it cost me beyond measure—notwithstanding all this, he took me in such a wrong way as to believe that I doubted his honesty and for this reason he hurt me in a way to pierce my soul. I begged his pardon and showed how much it displeased me to have upset him, even though against my will.

After this, I did not again bring up the subject nor had I any reason for doing it. To me it was enough having fulfilled the wish of the dead woman, because I was totally indifferent to what I was supposed to inherit. And due to the faith I had in the priest, thinking that from ill will he would not have deprived us of even a penny; that he was unable to do wrong—for these reasons also I was at ease. The only displeasure I experienced was in seeing him upset, because he thought I had offended him.

### **The weaving teacher leaves**

Shortly after my return from Florence, there were serious developments with regard to the teacher and the school of weaving. No little scandal was created among the pupils, and as a result, a great deal of trouble, relaxation of discipline, and rival factions. I was very disturbed and did not know how to remedy the situation. I told my confessor everything, I also wrote to the Reverend Curate of Montecarlo.<sup>264</sup> Because of my insufficiency, and because I did not merit enlightenment from Him who could give me it, it did not occur to me to turn to my ordinary superior, the Reverend Vicar. Those mentioned above agreed that I should resign from the school. As soon as I had done so, an even greater inferno erupted. The teacher also resigned. Through a few persons favorable to her in the municipality her resignation was rejected, out of compassion, it was said. Not long afterwards, the prefect in person arrived from Arezzo. He spoke first to the teacher and then to me. Then he summoned us together in the presence of the delegate and the gonfaloniere. It seems that the prefect had given her to understand that I should be absolutely in charge of the direction of the school, and that she had only to think of the execution and supervision of her work.

After he had repeated this in the presence of everyone, she indicated that she was quite satisfied. I was amazed at this change and was confirmed in the idea that her protector had up till then encouraged her, telling her that things had to change, and that rather than she leave, it was we who would be expelled. Later I learned that this was true.

At the end of our meeting, she said that we should no longer think of the past, that we should pardon each other, and that she was most anxious to redeem herself. For my little virtue, I listened to these words, salving my conscience for judging them unsuitable and base by thinking that it was well that it be seen that she had no character and that her conduct become known. I think I desired it for a good, for the peace of both parties, but then I do not know whether I gained or lost thereby. With regard to pardoning each other, I answered that I pardoned her with all good will, but I wanted to know what it was that I needed pardoned, because I felt that I had no reason to blame myself. If there were, I wanted to know what it was; therefore I asked her to tell me. She did not know what to answer to this. Those present, seeing her embarrassment, cut short the meeting, and I followed Suit.

The prefect departed, confident that he had solved everything. The day after, he received the definitive resignation of the teacher. Since so short a time seemed to him insufficient to give us the opportunity to have another falling out, and having on the other hand left her entirely convinced, persuaded, and calm, he said that this showed once more what sort of woman she was. He accepted the resignation, turning the school over to us.<sup>265</sup> Nothing happened that was not the fault of the school. This, too, was because its adversaries made it so, blaming everything on us and sympathizing with the teacher without knowing how matters really stood. I think that the teacher's protector, I don't mean her confessor but the *camerlengo* - about the confessor I'll say nothing - acted as he did from a belief that it was necessary, in order not to lose that soul.

### **Maria's school progresses**

Once we took charge of the school, there was a great deal to do. Although the pupils liked me, at least so they acted, and I think that was the case, there was no way to make them lose certain habits that were improper for a scuola normale and for education itself. I did what I could with kindly manners and with much forethought. The older ones—there were also some over twenty years old of whom I had no hope, I managed to rid myself of, giving them their dole as soon as possible, lest they spoil the younger ones.

The work progressed well. I had the good fortune to have among my novices two quite capable girls (I didn't even realize this about one of them). Their former teacher who had retired in '54, when we came to the Stabilimento, did us the favor of training them further. She had a great devotion to the Holy Mother Teresa and showed that she loved her daughters. She said she did it for this reason. Anyway, at the time she did us a favor, though later there occurred a bit of unpleasantness on her part.

Our enemies did everything to discredit us, even with regard to our work. Contrary to the facts, they spoke evil of us to those who they supposed would not be informed about the truth. If some small mistake was made, unfortunately inevitable in any work and profession, it was no sooner committed than it was broadcast and exaggerated. It was only too clear that the war was on, and that I had to be on guard on all sides. Neither did I know how to defend myself. I was very troubled, because they were matters which regarded not myself but the Institute, for which I greatly feared, seeing it without any human support and myself unworthy of special graces. I continually told Jesus not to abandon his work. I reminded him that I had undertaken it only out of love for him; I begged him to give me light and courage to do it, to know to whom I should apply, and to inspire that person to be deeply concerned on our behalf. Not knowing on my part what to do, I resigned and calmed myself with the thought of his will, disposing and preparing myself for everything he would will or permit.

### **Disagreement with her advisers**

Already for a long time, seeing how poorly matters had been arranged, it had seemed to me better to free myself from the municipality, rent a house, and rely entirely on Providence. I aired this intention with my confessor. He pointed out the difficulty of finding a suitable building, and about this we were in agreement, because I also saw the difficulty.

But this was not the main difficulty for him; more than anything else he was concerned about the means of living, and he was uncomfortable with so drastic a change. He always hoped for the best. He said that rather than upset everything, as I seemed to want to do with my resolve, it was better to suffer the inconveniences involved. I told him that these mattered or worried me little, except that I saw in them the destruction and ruin of the Institute. This he would not understand; he said that it was impossible, there was no way, and that without proof and real reasons the municipality could not obtain its suppression, that is, remove us from the Pious Establishment. All this convinced me that he relied on men rather than God, and consequently, in submitting I was very greatly troubled in spirit.

I thought of discussing the matter with the Reverend Provost. But, what am I thinking, I said to myself; don't I know well enough what his reaction will be: that the idea of being able to provide for the support and stability of this Institute is ridiculous? Hadn't he told me more than once that there was no hope of finding someone who would give us a few thousand *scudi*?

The Lord knows what suffering this caused me. It seemed to me a mistake, I couldn't convince myself. I said, there is no more faith. In not having faith in me they are a thousand times right; but God does not change and he can always avail himself of nothing to achieve great works. And it seemed to me that they who were more able, seeing my littleness united to so great a faith, ought to commit themselves at least to discussing it with my superiors, I not having the courage. When the Reverend Provost set off for Florence, he would ask me if I needed anything, and if I told him the only thing needed, he would answer, "There's time enough."

## **CHAPTER TEN**

In August of the same year, 1857, when I was more indisposed than usual and so was confined to bed, the provincial wrote to me that, since His Holiness was in Florence, it would be well for me to go there and seek an audience. The Lord gave me the grace that on hardly receiving the letter I felt myself quite a bit improved, so I departed the morning after. That same evening immediately on arrival, I sent to let the provincial know that I was there and that I was waiting for him to tell me what to do.

### **The pope visits Florence**

His reply was not very encouraging. I attributed it to the fact that he was very busy and that such a request had come at an inopportune time; yet I could not reconcile such a way of receiving me with his having himself summoned me. I tried to resign myself and decided to go visit him the next morning". I went and with the great awe and respect I felt for him told him that I had not the means of obtaining that which he wished and believed opportune, that is, to have an audience with His Holiness. I warmly recommended myself to him, asking him to help me and tell me what I should do.

He knew that His Holiness was going to visit the nuns in Santa Maria Maddalena, or Santa Maria degli Angeli. He told me to go there and see if I could arrange with them to see him. It seemed to me a hard thing and difficult to obtain. I believed we would embarrass the nuns, because the beginnings of these Institutes are always looked upon with contempt; it seemed to me also that because I had not remained with them, they would not have to oblige me. I expressed my misgivings to the provincial: that it seemed to me that I would obtain nothing. He answered that it was enough to take a position in the visitors' parlor and kiss the Holy Father's foot as he went by. I saw it was my duty to obey. I thought God wanted to mortify me by permitting that my journey resulted only in humiliation.

Resigned, I betook myself to the nuns, though because of my little virtue with great reluctance. I was not able to speak to them. I made a great effort and spoke to the sacristan. He promised to get me into the parlor. It was evening; he told me to return the next morning at nine o'clock, because the Holy Father was coming at ten.

### **Trouble gaining admission**

My sister brought us, and we came a bit late. Arriving at the gate of the courtyard of the church, we descended from the carriage with which we had come. We found a great crowd of people and saw that it ran a long ways from the gate of the courtyard to the main entrance to the convent. Walking to the church, we found the sacristan in a

procession of priests bound for the main entrance of the convent. He motioned to us to follow him. I didn't want to, because it required passing through that great crowd which formed a thick file on both sides of the street. My sister and my sister in religion encouraged me, and I followed them. If I had had my way, I would have taken refuge in the church, where there was nary a soul.

Having arrived with a great deal of embarrassment and blushing at the entrance, which is a sort of parlor, we found also there many persons, obviously of the nobility. How embarrassing! But now we were there and we had to stay. We were courteously received, and a gentleman who seemed to be the factotum said that he would ask to have us admitted to the convent. In fact, he knocked and asked. The vicar appeared at the door (because the archbishop had not yet been named), looked at us, said he didn't know us, and immediately closed the door. A whisper, a murmur followed, and although I understood that it was not about us, I was embarrassed in the extreme, and I don't know where I would have hid myself. The gentleman just mentioned turned against us. When he heard various persons say that when the Holy Father passed they wanted to make us enter with him, he told us to move away from the door. A few ladies who had made room for us stopped him from doing so, and he sent two guards to us, I think grenadiers. Then the whispering increased, I think also on account of my sister, a person of respectable and amiable appearance, who began to cry, unable to bear such rudeness.

### **A friend in need**

Raising my eyes, which I hardly dared do, I saw a certain Father Rosi,<sup>266</sup> a priest whose acquaintance I had recently made in my sister's house. He had close relationships with those nuns and was the director of some of them. I knew this and so believed he had great influence with them, but far from asking a favor of him, I did not dare even look at him, fearing that making it known that we knew each other in these circumstances, so humiliating for us, would cause him embarrassment and displeasure. I turned to my companion and, smiling, intended to encourage her to bear up, but it was evident that she was at the end of her strength. I believe she suffered on my account because on her own behalf I think she would have been disposed to endure even greater sufferings.

Finally, the Lord inspired Father Rosi. He himself went to the prioress, that is, had her summoned to another part of the convent than that in which we were, and making her aware of the criticism to which she was exposing herself in acting in this way, he obtained permission for us to enter. Once inside, I retired to a corner, well hidden. Recognizing that I was unworthy to dwell within that sacred precinct, I could not help feeling profoundly humbled. To my companion this seemed exaggerated; rather, she would have liked me to take her on a visit to the part of the convent where it was permitted, but she resigned herself. What disturbed her more was to see me show such respect for those sisters, while they acted as though they had never known me. I took no notice, nor was I surprised, because in that which in her estimation I should be honored I saw only a reason for disdain. I believed that it was precisely because I was recognized that I was being disdained.

### **Maria meets Pius IX**

While I was standing totally abased in a corner near the choir, His Holiness passed. For I know not what reason, he paused and laid his hand on my head. At the same time, I bent down and kissed his foot. He moved on to visit the body of Saint Mary Magdalen and then to go to the place where all the Sisters (members of other convents were also present) were to kiss his foot. I would gladly have dispensed with going, because it seemed to me improper to go by ourselves as we were, while each community of the other Sisters had someone who accompanied and presented them. With this idea that it was not proper to go by ourselves I remained in my place. A priest who seemed to take compassion on us wanted in every way to place us with the Magdalens,<sup>267</sup> because he said we were sisters in the flesh.<sup>268</sup> Another one came and told us to go away. Afterwards, they came back and told us to come, but one at a time. I can hardly say, also this case, the embarrassment I felt. It all began and ended with humiliations. All for the glory of God. Around the chair of the Holy Father, I was then told, was the court. I saw nothing, but I understood that it was asked who we were, and the answer was given: the nuns of Monteverchi.

Before leaving Florence, I again met Reverend Master Giuseppe Rosi in my sister's house and spoke to him. About a year before, he had offered to come and give us a retreat. Now I asked him to do so. With the same goodness he had shown in volunteering he now accepted on being asked. Before leaving, I spoke again with Father Provincial; I warmly urged him to keep the Institute and us in mind. He told me to give final form to the rules and make a request (supplica) (I understood, to the Holy Father, and I think that was the case). I recognized I was so incapable that I did even know how to think how to do it.

### **Father Rosi reviews the rules**

In October, with the permission of the vicar. I do not know whether also of the bishop, because I did not think of asking it of either one of them, due to my usual inefficiency and lack of experience, but I asked it only of Father Provincial—Father Rosi came to give us the retreat.<sup>269</sup> On that occasion, I showed him the rough draft of the rules I kept with me. He saw it was necessary not only to polish the style but also to put it in proper order, adding much that was lacking. I very much wanted him to undertake to do it, thinking that the provincial, once the thing was done, would not take offense. The more so, because when I handed them over, I would not fail to indicate that I was truly willing and disposed to accept the changes he thought necessary. Father Rosi showed that he was willing to do what I desired, and I begged him warmly to do it. After my request, he raised some difficulties, scrupulous about setting his hand to something that might not be the will of God. I, simpleton<sup>270</sup> that I was, did not understand that those doubts concerned persons and so I repeated the request, begging him not to fear, certain of doing something pleasing to God in making himself available to help in a good cause this poor wretch, of herself good for nothing. He complied and promised to do what I desired and even much more, which I would not have known enough to ask him.

During the time he stayed with us in the course of the retreat, Father Provincial came to see me. Returning to the subject of the rules, he told me to let him have them as soon as possible and he would make sure they were sent to Rome. I said nothing about my plan with the extraordinary<sup>271</sup> retreat master, because I was afraid to do so before they were finished. Neither one nor the other asked to see each other, and after telling each of them of the presence of the other, I did not dare to ask them to. Father Provincial wanted us to adopt the black veil, because until then we had only worn a white one, and before leaving he wanted to invest us with it. The extraordinary retreat master knew of it and saw it. He advised me to remove it, because the way we had made them did not seem befitting for our Institute. I obeyed him, because being aware that I had need of everyone, I could not disobey anyone. I still had no experience of the great harm that can come of it.

The day the retreat master, Father Rosi, left, I felt very upset. I seemed to be left alone in a great labyrinth without the knowledge nor ability to guide and defend myself. I dissolved in tears and felt I was suffering not from attachment to a person but only from a feeling of the need to have someone to guide me. He had promised to do so from a distance, but as if I had foreseen that this would not occur, I had little comfort from that promise.

### **A new superior in Foiano**

With the provincial's permission I had also had the Sisters of Foiano take part in the retreat. In sending them back, it was also necessary to name a new superior (a step approved by the extraordinary retreat master). I sent one of my first companions, Sister Maddalena della Purita di Maria.<sup>272</sup> But while I thus solved a problem on the one hand, I met another no less grave on the other. This companion of mine was a bit delicate in health. Although in the opinion of the doctor I consulted, the air of the place to which I was sending her should do her good, her family, ever our enemies, said that I had sent her away to rid myself of her, that is, so that she would die. But in comparison with the rest, this was little; I mean, for all the trouble I had from that quarter this was nothing.

### **A dilemma over the rules**

In November, or I do not recall if in early December, the provincial wrote to me to send back the rules as soon as possible. He had an opportunity to send them to Rome with two Fathers who were going to the definitory.<sup>273</sup>

When I received this letter, I was in bed, afflicted with various ailments besides the usual ones. The rules were in the possession of the extraordinary retreat master. I did not know how to obey on the one hand and to come off well on the other. I had so many local<sup>274</sup> troubles that with the addition of this one they seemed to me insupportable. My great weakness and physical indisposition made me feel them more.

With regard to the rules, I asked my confessor to please go to Florence and straighten the matter out as much as possible. It was a question either of persuading the provincial to wait a while longer or, if that were impossible, of telling him how matters stood; he should inform the other one of the straits in which I found myself and for this reason ask him to understand and pardon my having requested his help.

The confessor went and had to take the latter alternative, because the provincial urgently wanted the rules and said they should be sent the way they were. It seems he was offended at having others set their hand to the work. I was well aware that while I had offended one party, namely, the provincial, I was ruined with the other. In fact, such was the case. After writing in response to my fears and excuses that I could not do otherwise and therefore should not worry, Father Rosi thereafter kept silent for about a year, although I wrote to him and had two of my sisters write to

him on my behalf. He only answered a letter concerning Sister Maddalena and I noticed confined himself only to her. It all gave me to understand that his relationship with me was in fact terminated.

The rules were in the possession of the provincial. I knew that he had not sent them and was near to finishing his term of office; and it seemed to me that he was giving little thought to doing us the good he had promised us.

### **Heavenly comfort**

It all contributed to my distress. My state of health continued to be quite poor. I suffered from many ills besides heart and liver trouble, which had worsened. This was in regard to physical health; my spirit was troubled with all sorts of worries, and I had no one to help me, except that during the months in which my condition had gotten worse, from November until near Easter, God deigned to console me a few times himself and other times through his dear mother, Mary. I do not say that it was through extraordinary grace, because such favors I perhaps do not even know, nor am I worthy of them. It was a feeling of pleasure and delight, like being clasped in the arms of the one who is the only object of my love. Not having experience of earthly love, I cannot make a comparison. I can only say it is a sweetest languishing and a delight to which I believe there is no equal on earth. And similarly, when I seem to be at the breast of my dearmother Mary—the way in which I am used to comfort myself (when it is given to me to do so)—I experience an indescribable delight.

Since I am unworthy of them, such comforts are not frequent, and at the time to which I am referring, I do not know whether they occurred two or three times. They left me with greater courage to suffer; not that I suffered less, and when seized by anxiety, I forgot it all, and they seemed to me tricks of the imagination.

After the Easter mentioned above. I do not recall in what month it fell,<sup>275</sup> and with January we had begun the year 1858. I found myself considerably improved in health. I had begun to leave my cell, and my spirit was also much improved, though not without anxieties, and the fears I had reason to have for the Institute were not few. O my Lord, I did not want to be lacking in faith and therefore I had hope, but seeing myself without a guide or support, with so many enemies and so little knowledge and power, was a great temptation.

### **The Sacconi will disputed**

At this time, I had news that Sister Maddalena, who, as I have said, was in Foiano, lay seriously ill. As soon as I could do so without grave risk to my health, a few days after receiving the news, I went to see her. Because of the great fear God willed me always to have that persons might die,<sup>276</sup> I did not object to the confessor coming with me. In fact, I think he came because I asked him to. I found the Sister very ill. Her sister-german had already been there for several days; I had given her permission, not being able to do otherwise.

After remaining only two days, in fact, not even that, because I did not think it appropriate to stay longer, I left her. I could not give her [the Sister's sister] all the freedom she wanted, and therefore she was very vexed with me. After I had returned to Montevarchi, I found out that she had written that I had gone to visit her sister for no other purpose than to have her make her will in our favor. She spoke very ill of me both in this matter and in others.

The Sister, after a few days, began to improve. When she was in a condition to travel, I had her return to our house in Montevarchi. I knew that her last will in Foiano had been made in favor of her family, and that she had left only one hundred scudi to the Institute. When she returned to Montevarchi, I was told that she intended to change her will. I answered the one who told me of it, who was her confessor, that she well knew how little I was attached to material concerns. Therefore, in making it, she should recommend herself to God, then take counsel with her own conscience and with whomever she thought best, because I did not want to know anything about it. I had moreover let her know that in whatever way she made her will, I would always remain the same in her regard and I would not fail to do for her and have done for her all I could, both with regard to her health and to her work. She well knew how we had acted with regard also to other Sisters who had brought very little, almost nothing to the Institute. My insufficiency and little influence which my pusillanimity gave me with my betters did not suggest to me that I invite her to take counsel with them.

In all the situations in which I found myself obliged to guide myself, I found peace in feeling myself detached from everything, desiring only the will of God and the good of souls. I was not concerned about failing, not that I believed I would do things well, but as I have said several times, it was a great worry not to have someone to guide me and take over the oars of the Institute.

### **The rules go to Rome**

At this time, or a little later, I learned by a letter from the provincial just lapsed from office that the new provincial had been named?<sup>277</sup> and that the rules had been sent to Rome. This news was little consolation, because I didn't want the rules sent in that form. Also, it seemed to me that the new provincial, not knowing either me or the Institute, could not take all the interest which was required and which I desired. I wrote in reply to the exprovincial, gently expressing my regret that he had lapsed from office without finishing what was necessary to assure the existence of the Institute. I expressed my grief at finding myself almost abandoned with my great sorrow and trouble. He answered that he had warmly recommended me to the new provincial and did not know what more he could have done. I remained disconsolate and afflicted, because in our great need it seemed to me I had no one to help me. I asked myself if that was through my own fault. I believed it was because of my many demerits before God, but not in the matter of obtaining help, because it seemed to me I did not know how to do more to submit to authority and obtain guidance. In the case of the bishop (who had already been named)<sup>278</sup> I could not possibly find the courage even to present myself. But I reflected that I had done what I could in another way, that having appealed to the Fathers was the same thing, and that the provincial had assured me that he would do what was necessary; nor did fear otherwise suggest that it was my duty to apply elsewhere. All this quieted me and I remained resigned in the humble sense of being undeserving that God dispose otherwise.

### **The bishop visits Montevarchi**

With regard to the bishop, he had passed through Montevarchi, I think, in September of '57. He came to visit us, and honored us by saying Mass in our little church. When he visited us, I was so confused that I said little or nothing to him, also because the gonfaloniere, who accompanied him, talked so much and gave others no chance to open their mouth.

### **A priest disturbs her conscience**

Returning to our period, in '58, a priest in whom I had great faith visited me and reduced me to an extremely troubled state of mind. He told me he feared I was being led by a spirit wholly human, abandoned to my own means, and for this reason he was quite concerned for the future of the Institute.

O my Lord, how hard are the worries that come from such sources! To hear myself confirmed in the fears which for the reasons already mentioned I had succeeded in calming was an unspeakable pain. The pain itself, because of my little virtue, caused me to be agitated, and this deprived me of the light to practice humility as I ought. What are we, or rather what am I, if in a moment I fall back upon myself?

I told the priest that I did not know how one could deduce the lack of stability of the Institute from that which God permitted and which I had suffered and not wanted. I cannot express the very great pain it is to hear the fear suggested of having failed in a thing over which we have tried so hard not to fail, but it is pure misery not to be able to resign oneself. I understood that the priest considered my conduct to be little virtuous, but that caused me no concern. I had an even lower opinion of myself than I thought others had. If in the midst of all my troubles he had shown me a way to introduce myself to the right person, I would have considered any contempt and humiliation a gift. When my confessor came to visit me, he noticed my affliction, and I told him its cause. He tried to console me, but God permitted that he did not succeed.

### **The Carmelites accept the Institute**

In September, Father Francesco, of the Cannelite Order, who at the time belonged to the convent<sup>179</sup> of Arezzo, wrote to me that the new provincial was there and advised me to write and ask him to visit us when he passed through Montevarchi. I wrote to him in that vein, and on October 1, the provincial came with the definator.<sup>280</sup>

They told me that the rules had been presented to the definitory, the congregation had been approved, but the rules had to be revised.<sup>281</sup> I answered them that this did not surprise me in the least, because even in my inexperience I had well understood that they were written so poorly they had to be revised, and that I had wanted some capable person to put them in proper form, adding what was lacking, retaining only their spirit which had guided us until then. I had written another copy which seemed to me to be in better form, having myself drawn some information from other rules which had come to my hand and from a ceremonial given me by the former provincial. I presented it to them, and since they were staying with us until the following day, they had an opportunity to read it.

At the same time it seems that they had an opportunity of observing the running of the community. They were very satisfied with everything, and the definator said he was sorry he had not been better informed before he had reason

to speak about us and present the rules; otherwise he would have presented case in another way and would have strongly supported it. They departed, telling me that after a few small necessary corrections had been made on the second version of the rules, I should return them, and they would give them the seal of approval. In the definitory, what had not been done that year would be done the following year.

The visit of the two priests had been most gratifying to me, the more so because it seemed to me that they were taking us seriously; that is, taking an interest in the Institute. But, as there should be no consolation that is not embittered and almost quenched by some disturbance, I was again assaulted by very strong fears as to whether the way I had chosen was the right one. It seemed to me that it was not, and that I ought to go and speak to the vicar.<sup>282</sup>

For this reason I was agitated and in suspense and I did not have the courage to make a decision. O my Lord, I had good reason to repeat: why do you put me in a situation so trying to my insufficiency? I knew I had neither power, knowledge, nor talent. In the midst of such worries, my only consolation was that if I had no other means of merit, I could gain much by making myself a martyr by desire, submitting myself in everything to the will of God.

In mid October, I went to Florence to ask His Highness the favor of the use of a small portion of the garden adjacent to the premises in which we lived (formerly all the property of the nuns) for burying our deceased members. But the principal object of my visit was to ask on behalf of the Sisters of Foiano the necessary freedom of the premises, promised us from the beginning of their return and never obtained.

### **Fr. Rosi is reconciled**

Being in Florence, I looked up Father Rosi, our retreat master. Feeling that he would hardly come to visit me, I had him informed (indeed, I think I even wrote him) that if he would have the goodness to receive me, I would come to visit him myself. He answered me coldly through a third person that I could come if I wanted but he was very busy. It seemed he had no time for me. I understood from all this that I was in fact on bad terms with him and that I had not been mistaken in supposing it.

I visited the vicar, trusting that when I presented myself, I would have the courage to make a complete report on the Institute and to ask him to read our rules, examine everything, speak about them to the bishop, and then do with us what God inspired them to do. I went with this hope, but nothing turned out right. Because of my inefficiency and out of awe for his Reverence, I lost myself in talk that was beside the point without ever arriving at the essentials.

After this, I resolved to visit Father Rosi. I made my way there, prepared for any mortification and trouble, although I was not aware of any other reason for meriting them than my lack of knowledge and experience. In the presence of various estimable persons, he received me in a rude and contemptuous manner, but remembering the nothing that I was, I believed I merited worse treatment. He spoke with the persons present, with my sister and her brother-in-law, the priest,<sup>283</sup> who had accompanied me, taking no heed of me, as though I were not there.

When I asked him to do me the favor of speaking to me in private, he reluctantly consented. Having agreed, he led me to another room, as though I were an embarrassment to him, and heaped reproaches on me. Among other things he declared that were he bishop, my Institute wouldn't last three days. I excused myself as much as I thought necessary. I told him that if I had gone about matters in the wrong way, he should realize it was due to my lack of experience and inefficiency and not to bad will on my part. I begged him, as one who could, to give me advice and help. Because of my humble words, he dropped his imperious and contemptuous tone, but continued to rebuke me for being disobedient to the Church.

God knows what grief this caused me, because that was not my intention at all. At the time, I tried to be courageous, but that same evening I was overcome by such anxiety that I no longer knew what to do with myself. Had I known how to act otherwise, I would have found a solution, but, I said, if by wanting to do only good I find I have done such wrong and I have no one to give me advice and guidance, how can I go on? To what danger will the Institute be exposed? It also occurred to me that persons who wished us ill might have done us a desservice with Father Rosi and the bishop.

Out of the great distress I felt, the idea returned to me to visit the vicar again and him everything, including what had occurred between Father Rosi and me. Distress urged me on, pusillanimity held me back. I think the following day or a little later, I learned from my sister's brother-in-law, the priest, that Father Rosi had accepted an invitation to dinner in my sister's house, where I was staying. At this, I reassured myself, hoping to make my peace with him, and that he could be of use to me with the bishop.<sup>284</sup> It seems that I succeeded. When he came, after some talk Father Rosi showed much interest in the Institute and me and upon leaving asked me to draw up a brief account of my life and of the Institute and to send it to him together with the rules.

### **Foiano rejects her requests**

Not long after I had returned to Montevarchi, I received a deliberation of the municipality of Foiano in reply to my request to His Highness. They granted me nothing of what I had requested; moreover, they repeated that they wanted us subject to triennial confirmation.<sup>285</sup> I was very much opposed to this decision, because it seemed to me a thing unsuited to the dignity of the Institute. I was confirmed in this opinion because it was also that of the vicar. I was convinced that I ought to free myself from the municipality, abandon the Public Establishments, rent a house, open our own school, and with regard to commit ourselves to Divine Providence, upon which I could not but rely. That had always been my desire and that had been the advice the vicar had given me in similar circumstances with regard to Montevarchi.

### **Her confessor's advice**

Through the need we naturally feel to have some one to share our burdens, I spoke about the above to my confessor. God permitted that, as usual, he saw things differently than I. He could not convince himself why, by not subjecting myself to triennial confirmation, I was willing to expose myself to such a risk as my freeing myself from the municipality seemed to him. I told him it was not only my idea but also the vicar's,<sup>286</sup> and therefore I believed I was not wrong. I presented him with various reasons, but he would not listen to them at all. He replied with hard and bitter words that I did not want to submit to anyone.

I grew frightened without being able to say another word. Since the words of my confessor seemed to me so unreasonable, perhaps my excessive self-love made them appear so, and that what the priest mentioned above had told me with regard to confessors seemed to me to be verified. The term here evidently refers to the vicar, because earlier in the paragraph Maria specifically states that her idea had been seconded by the vicar. Thus, I had the impression that the former had pierced me with nails, the second cruelly had done the same, and I felt I had been crucified and violently thrown in a deep pit.

### **Maria prefers the bishop**

In such a state of affairs I wrote to Father Rosi, sending him a letter addressed to His Highness, in which I informed him of my decision. This letter I sent him open, asking him to tell me whether or not he thought it opportune to present it. I thought Father Rosi would not advise me without first consulting the vicar, because in our last conversation I had the impression that his only aim was to make me depend entirely on him [the vicar]. I had accepted this confidently, distancing myself a bit from the Fathers of the Order, because I had been given to understand that this was necessary. With regard to the letter, he answered that he thought it better not to present it for the time being. It was early December more or less. Some time afterward, I do not recall whether it was a month later, I considered returning to Florence in order to treat matters at closer quarters. My health and afterwards the death of my beloved first companion, Sister Maddalena, made me defer my departure. A few days after her death, I lost another young sister, recently clothed, Sister Nazarena.<sup>237</sup> Perhaps the pain I felt at the loss of these two creatures caused the state of my health to worsen yet more. I have so little virtue that it is always a great pain for me to lose my sisters. On account of the worsening of my health I thought of postponing, or rather it was necessary to postpone my trip to Florence until after Easter.

### **The first visit to the vicar**

My first companion died on January 31, 1859. Both in the course of her illness and after the death of Sister Maddalena, I experienced much unpleasantness from her family. Because of certain demands her family made, I had occasion to carry on a correspondence with the vicar. It was this circumstance that encouraged me to pay him a visit. I resolved to depend entirely on him. I had already resolved to do this since my last conversation with Father Rosi, but now I seemed to have found a way to do so. Thus, from the same ill good came; that is, from the trouble I had with the family of my sister in religion came the good of having better entry to the vicar, a thing I greatly desired.

### **The Carmelites refused the rules**

After Easter,<sup>238</sup> when I had decided to go to Florence, I was advised not to go, on account of the disturbances occurring there.<sup>239</sup> The Fathers of the Order had several times asked for the rules in order to affix the seal of approval. I thought it better not to turn them over, until I had first spoken with the vicar<sup>290</sup> and obtained his permission. This was one of the reasons that constrained me to go to Florence. At this time, as I said, the Fathers again urged me to send them the rules, adding as a reason that the defensor<sup>291</sup> would soon lapse from office (I think it

was either he or the provincial who wrote to me), and moreover both he and the provincial were about to leave for Rome. This urgency, together with the impediment I had to going to Florence, placed me in a painful predicament. Without the vicar,<sup>292</sup> as I said, I did not want to proceed and I did not know how, at a distance and by letter, to extricate myself with the Fathers, because I found it 'very hard to do something that would displease them. I seemed ungrateful for so much consideration they had had for me whom they hardly knew. Hence, new anxiety, new tribulation. I discussed this with my confessor. Without further thought he told me to send the rules; if I did not send them, no harm would be done, because if the seal were not appended now, it would be later. I repeated that this was not my problem, but because I did not know how to disengage myself from a distance and I did not want to proceed without consulting the vicar.<sup>293</sup> They were all very respectable persons to whom I owed gratitude, respect, and obedience. Therefore, I asked him to take the idea seriously and understand the ugly dilemma in which I found myself. It pleased the Lord that he should fall in with my idea. He offered to go to Florence and plead my cause. Since he did not leave immediately, because the matter did not seem as urgent to him as it did to me, some days passed, and when he arrived in Florence, the Fathers had already left for Rome. As a consequence, he only spoke to the vicar, and afterwards to the bishop; with the vicar he left the rules, asking him to recommend them and the Institute to the bishop. So he told me. O my Lord, what a trial it is when the persons with whom we have to do are all of consequence, to whom reverence and respect are owed! One would want no one to be offended, and all to be of one mind. When I found myself in the situation of having offended one, because I had agreed with another, I said to the Lord, "After all, they are all your friends. Why cannot we please some without displeasing the others?" I wrote in this vein to a priest who had told me I shouldn't talk to others about what I discussed with him. "Father," I told him, "I don't know why not; they're all friends of Our Lord." I did not believe it was a case of having a clear choice between two extremes; such as, that one who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God. I am convinced that this was not meant. It was my lack of discernment which did not know how to conduct itself with prudence and wisdom, so as to assign to each his part. However, I had not acted for crooked ends and from duplicity, yet I bore the weight of much suffering.

### **The Sacconi will settled**

The family of the deceased sister Sacconi wanted to sue us with regard to her legacy in our favor. Because I was never attached to material things, I was inclined to leave them everything. This I could not do, both because it was a matter of something which was not mine, and in order to respect the will of the testator. My confessor had also spoken with the vicar about this, and so I relied entirely on him. After I had made a declaration before a doctor of law in which I ceded almost half the legacy, the matter was settled.

### **Scruples about chastity**

At almost the same time, God permitted my spirit to be pierced,<sup>294</sup> or put to the test, by certain matters which I had always despised, because I was consecrated to God, who I knew was no less jealous of bodily chastity and modesty as of the affections of the heart. This was on account of a doctor whom I had to approach for reasons of health.<sup>295</sup> How difficult this was for me! I feared I had besmirched my virginal integrity; I feared I had been taken from Him! It was so intense and tremendous a pain I seemed to leave my senses, but only for fear that without meaning to I had been unfaithful to my dear spouse, my God. My confessor assured me that I had won rather than lost.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

After the change of government,<sup>296</sup> one heard it said that our enemies would try to obtain the suppression of the Institute. Already one of them belonging to a family God had blessed through our means (without merit on my part) had declared it: he to whom God had given life and health in order to help us; I say, he was the one who wanted it [our suppression].<sup>297</sup> For a while, I was not worried; I thought that, whatever the government, when we had informed it of the beginning, purpose, and character of the Institute, it would respect it. I intended to go to Florence to discuss the matter with the vicar and the bishop, but my health constrained to me to defer going from day to day.

### **Troops billeted in the convent**

On June 18, the Piedmontese troops passed through Montevarchi for the first time. Although the *gonfaloniere* could have provided lodgings for them, this was not done. Rather, such as there were had all been rented to the French *semai*. I heard it said that for some time our enemies had gone about saying that the first troops to come would be

billeted in the convent, and they were glad about it. The *gonfaloniere* knew it, but being fearful and pusillanimous, considered it prudent to let matters ride in a way pleasing to them for fear of taking a false step. Perhaps he also did it in order not to exacerbate them more with us, even to pacify them, giving them a bit of vent, just as Pilate acted with those who wanted the death of the good Jesus, having him scourged to see if they would stop crying, "Crucify him".

As soon as the officers arrived, the *gonfaloniere* accompanied them to the convent, saying he had no other premises to give them. Already one of those individuals who in such circumstances have something to gain, perhaps paid by our friends,<sup>298</sup> ran to knock at the door, telling us to open it, because the officers and the *gonfaloniere* were close behind, come to visit the building in order to quarter the troops there. The poor sister porter who answered the door and to whom this individual spoke, became extremely frightened, the more so because she did not know how to warn me, also because of the state of my health. The bold fellow repeated his order to open and knocked on the door with frightening violence. The poor sister left him to his own devices and went to the part giving entrance to the schools. The fellow ran there too, seeing that in the part where he wanted to intrude in the convent, no one heeded him.

A few moments later, the *gonfaloniere* and the officers arrived and told the portress to call me. On hearing the news and rising from my bed to which I was confined by my ailments, I went to the *gonfaloniere*. As soon as he saw me, he told me that for a few evenings I should find a place elsewhere for me and my sisters, because where we were in the convent it was necessary to billet the troops.

I was so frightened and surprised at the news that I do not know how I managed to reply. I thought, how can I in an instant abandon this place (where there were also so many sacred objects) to the mercy of the troops? How could we move with fifteen creatures grown attached to that holy retreat; in what confusion of mind I would put them, also with regard to a lack of security in the future. All this passed through my mind with the rapidity of thought. I told the *gonfaloniere* that what he ordered me to do was impossible to require, and if they did not want to respect us as Sisters, they should respect us as any other municipal employee; that we had the use of the building in recompense for our work, and since they could not expel other employees, he should realize it was an injustice to require it of us. He told me he had no other alternative.

When I was presented to the officers, who I already knew to be surprised at being so freely admitted to a place where there were Sisters engaged in teaching a large number of pupils, I appealed to them. They seemed to take pity on me. The senior of them admitted that it also seemed to him to be most inconvenient, but being new to the place, he had to adjust to the dispositions of the *gonfaloniere*. To the latter he addressed a few brusque words, promising me that he would do all he could not to disturb us and if he could do no better, he would occupy only the ground floor of the schools. With this, I had perforce to admit them.

With my heart trouble, which had become worse, I know not how to express what a worry was for me the thought of having armed troops in the house. I placed myself in the arms of Our Lord and there I no longer feared anything. But every repeated noise without my wishing it caused me palpitations and faintness. The doctor, seeing that this could also threaten my life, said I should go elsewhere. He had his daughter with us in school and proposed to bring her, myself, and a Sister of my choice to his home not far from the convent. It was situated in the countryside, and we could approach it from the side of the garden without being seen. Although I recognized that it was true that remaining in that situation was to compromise my life, I reconciled myself with difficulty to accept the plan of my leaving, because it cost me too much to leave my Sisters. I went at ten o'clock at night, to do the thing more secretly; it seeming better that way. During the night I could not rest a moment. Early the following morning, I begged to be taken to my community, not bearing to be away from it under such circumstances. On returning, my suffering was no less than before I left, but I managed to hide it and I asked Our Lord to give me strength enough to bear it.

### **Fire! Fire!**

The following night, after the troops had left to make way for others, I do not know whether by accident or design, straw was set on fire, and outside they began to shout, "Fire! Fire! Let us in! Open up!" and pushed mightily at the door as though to unhinge it. My Sisters and I woke up at this noise. When some took courage to descend, they were suffocated by the smoke, not knowing from what direction it came. We were very frightened, until the gardener came and assured us that the affair was almost over. It seems they had done it for the sole purpose of frightening us.

After such emotion, my spirit again grew weak, and my body had no more strength. I resolved to leave again, but also to take my companions along. I was prevented from doing so, and it was a great worry for me. Where I saw harm and its hurtful consequences others 'did not see it; where they saw it, I did not. O Lord, what difficult trials these are,

when we hold the opposite view from the one who is guiding us, and God permits the idea to occur to us either rightly or through temptation, that the one who is guiding us does not sufficiently regard things as they ought to be regarded and does not see them in the light in which they should be seen. O my Lord, I repeat, a great trial is this, when we do not know if the one who commands is the one you want to be obeyed! When the one who should do so commands, and to whom we should submit, either from authority or by order of the same authority, we should not follow our judgment, and we do well to rely on him, no matter how things go.

Such turmoil rendered me so confused that I did not succeed in even writing to whom I should. It seemed to me impossible to treat by letter an affair so complicated and confused. On the other hand, my health prevented me from travelling. I began to fear that the Institute would be suppressed. Thus, I went from trouble to greater trouble; or in other words, I was overwhelmed by a thousand troubles at the same time.

### **The decree of Aug. 23, 1859**

In August, there arrived the famous decree according to which all governmental institutes should present their rules (I do not recall the limit of time allowed).<sup>299</sup> I had already written to the vicar that I needed to confer with him and that, not being able to come to visit him, either because of ill health or the circumstances of the times, I thought that the Oratorian, Father Marchesini:<sup>300</sup> if he were in his confidence, would be able to take upon himself to relate to His Most Illustrious Lordship everything I would have told him in person, and that through the same priest, His Lordship could give me the counsel and orders he thought opportune. If this was his pleasure, I begged him to send and let me know. I do not recall whether I told him what had occurred with Father Rosi. If I did not, it was because, as usual, it seemed to me to be something not to be treated by letter, and I never had the courage to do so by word of mouth. However, I had told Father Marchesini, asking him to relate it to him. Father Marchesini, sent by the vicar, arrived the same day the delegate repeated to me the decree already mentioned, adding the absolute order to present the rules. Until now, my confessor did not know how to advise me about the matter. The provost told me to pay no attention to decrees, and if we were called up as contumacious, to answer that we were only simple teachers and as such we did not believe the decree applied to us. To act thus seemed to me a mistake which would without doubt compromise me, because, although not yet formally approved like other older Institutes, everyone knew us to be nuns, and we dressed and followed rules as such; finally, we were called Sisters in the decree of the government entrusting the schools to us. While waiting the help of advice from the other side, I thanked the Lord that the confessor had not opposed me,<sup>301</sup> and I managed not to worry about the ideas of the Reverend Provost, because I was too preoccupied with matters of much greater importance.

When the above mentioned priest arrived, it seemed to me that a consoling angel had come. After he had examined the rules as much as the brevity of the time permitted, it seemed to him opportune to make a few corrections before presenting them. For that purpose, he took them with him to Florence, after settling that I should follow him two days later, if God gave me the health to be able to do so.

He granted it to me, though I did not make the journey without suffering. It seemed to me well that the rules be presented by me personally to the minister who requested them, and that I should relate to him in a few words the history of the Institute, its beginning, its purpose, and its functioning. But through reluctance I did not tell the vicar. Because of his great goodness toward us, he did all in his power to have the bishop add his seal of approval and accompany it with a letter. The Lord permitted that he refused to do it. I believe it was because he had not examined them, and also because he found himself in such difficulty through the circumstances of the times that he was fearful in everything, fearing to compromise himself. Perhaps this indecision and extreme perturbation caused him an illness called vespaio, from which he died in a few days.

### **Waiting for the ax to fall**

The rules were consigned with an accompanying letter and nothing else.<sup>302</sup> After that, we remained for a long time in the dark with regard to what our enemies were plotting against us. They sent a short biography of me to the newspapers, ridiculing my faith, which they said was great—in this they were not mistaken—and other things. Our Lord gave me the grace to consider it a thing of glory to be despised for his sake. I was sorry for the displeasure it might cause my father, my mother, and my sister; I did not want anyone to suffer on my account.

I often urged my Sisters to pray to God, to do for him all they could, because I saw looming over us a great trial; I saw the Institute in danger. My health grew even worse. I could devote myself little to them; but to my greater sorrow it was not hidden from me that instead of progressing they were very much falling behind, not comporting themselves with that virtue which was even more required in such times of impending calamity. I tried to make some

observations about this to the confessor, asking him to be more severe. But as God often permitted me to be humiliated and tried by a superior, so also this time I heard myself being told in an imperious tone that I should think of being the superior and he would think of being the confessor without my help. I was extremely worried, because I seemed to be the only one to know the needs and the danger of the Institute. I saw it every moment growing weaker in the eyes of men, less pleasing to God. Every moment its fatal fall echoed in my heart.

The convulsions or attacks of my heart occurred frequently. To restore circulation, mustard-plasters were applied, which, we do not know whether for their nature or for being too frequently applied, caused a great sore on the sole of my foot, covering it entirely. The inflammation, which was also external, extended up to my waist, and appeared also in the external nerve of the arms. The suffering was so great it seemed to me a veritable Purgatory. I could rest neither day or night; seated in bed, not being able to remain in any other position, I chafed without being able to stop. In order not to cry out from the pain, I asked to be given a crucifix and, clasping it closely, I told him that, as always, I wanted to suffer for love all that my resignation and my strength were no longer able to endure. In this way, several days passed, and it was a wonder that I survived.

### **The opposition of the Martini**

On the feast of the holy mother Teresa,<sup>303</sup> I had not yet risen from bed, when I was again disturbed by the news that we had to lodge the troops. Although I was convalescing from a very serious illness and with my usual troubles, I made an effort and went in a carriage to the new gonfaloniere, who was staying in the country, to ask him to find another location for the troops. It was not possible.

He was the younger Martini. He received me with the greatest kindness, (which I certainly did not deserve), both because of that familiarity we had since childhood, as well as every other relation-ship. It was, and still is, a great trial to see myself treated by that whole family with much love, deference, and respect, and almost, I might say, with veneration, and to have proof positive of the great harm that came from them, who in no way would hear of nuns. We know that if the gonfaloniere and his father, well aware of the situation, had represented to the government the truth about so many lies and calumnies that were told against us, it is certain that we would have been respected, at least until the arrival of the decree, which we now fear, of the suppression of every Institute and convent.

Knowing, therefore, how much harm the heads of that family had done us, it required great strength of mind to endure regard and fondness, because these also made us appear culpable in the eyes of a part of the people which that family, to defend themselves, tried to persuade that the suppression of our Institute had been a governmental measure, in reprisal for my having erected it without approval and permission. What a trial that way of acting was and still is! May the Lord enlighten me to know how I must comport myself both for his glory and the salvation of those souls and the benefit of their spirit.

### **Fr. Rosi consoles the Sisters**

This time, I not only left the convent on the arrival of the troops but arranged to have all my Sisters come with me. We returned the day after the troops left. I did not make known all these troubles to my Sisters in Foiano in order not to upset and worry them. I loved them so much that I wanted to be the only one to suffer.

Two days later or a little more, I do not recall, I had the consolation of a visit from the priest I have mentioned several times, Father Giuseppe Rosi, master of clerics<sup>304</sup> at San Lorenzo. He was surprised when he heard and saw our sad story. I say "saw," because he arrived exactly when the straw pallets of the soldiers were being removed. He showed himself very well disposed toward us and preached us a long sermon to encourage us.

### **The Institute is suppressed**

Toward the end of November my health again worsened.

On the thirtieth, I had already been confined to bed for several days, and besides my usual ailments increasing in severity, another was added with fever. On the thirtieth, after so a long a silence, the expected and painful announcement arrived. The gonfaloniere insisted on bringing the news himself. After he had arrived in the convent, he said he needed to see me. In view of the critical times in which we lived, I thought it best to receive him, and without any preamble or warning, he told me that my Institute by order of the government was suppressed,<sup>305</sup> adding we were requested promptly to remove our religious habits and leave the premises. However, before leaving —I do not remember how he got on the subject - he asked me to remain temporarily in the schools with my Sisters, until new teachers could be found and elected. I answered that I would gladly fulfill that task as though no injury had been done me. I gave him to understand that I well knew that the order from the government was due to a plot on

the part of my enemies who had obtained it by means of lies and calumny. Because, although delicately, I included him also among them, to defend himself without wishing to discuss the matter, he admitted that he was also opposed to nuns and certainly, if the government had asked him what course was best, he would have said to remove them. He angered me by saying that things went well because I was there. It was a grace that in my state of health such a blow delivered without any consideration did not cost me my life.

### **Maria receives the decree**

The following day, two messengers came from San Giovanni with the decree addressed to me.<sup>306</sup> It ordered us to abandon the building within a fortnight. I saw that with the exception of the order to remove the habit, it was all twaddle of the delegate, who at the request of our enemies wanted to expel us. We were not allowed to remain in the building, and the very shadow of the Institute was dispersed, because besides abandoning the building, we were told each to return to her family.

Since I saw that most of the prescriptions did not come from the government, I called attention to the fact that there might be a remedy. But all those around me, fearful, agitated, upset, and confused, would not listen to what I thought. Had I been well enough to travel, I would have gone to Florence, because it was my wish to be guided in everything by the vicar.<sup>307</sup> I also said that I did not intend to judge by myself whether anything could be salvaged or not; that I wanted the opinion of my superior, the vicar. Therefore, someone needed to go to him. They would not agree to this either, saying it was all useless. What a hard trial! You alone, my God, know how much I suffered! It was like finding oneself faced with imminent ruin without anyone trying to avoid it.

After a few days my health improved considerably. Even though it seemed to me a bit late for doing anything, I thought I would take advantage of my improved health to go to Florence and talk to the vicar. I knew by chance that when he had notice (obtained from me) of the sudden orders we had received, he had requested that the decree be sent to him, but it had not been done. More trouble for me, and another motive to make me resolve to leave. However, I had quite a bit of opposition and had to do it against the opinion of all those around me.

### **The confessor of Foiano consulted**

The confessor of the Sisters of Foiano came to visit me, as I had requested, and I asked him for advice and an obedience, because I thought anyone's was enough. He said he thought it well that I leave, and so on the following day I departed. The Sisters in Foiano had not yet been disturbed. I wondered about sending two of the younger Sisters in Montevarchi to Foiano before leaving for Florence. This plan was also approved. Therefore, this priest took them with him. It was necessary first to agree whether it were best that they first remove their religious habits. It appeared best to do so at Monte San Savino,<sup>308</sup> a few miles distant from Foiano, where the coachman would leave them. O my Lord, what trouble, what worry, what agitation! To describe it all in detail would require skill, health, and time. Lacking them all, I therefore say little and poorly.

### **Maria goes to Florence**

On arriving in Florence, after speaking to the vicar, it seemed right that I present myself, I do not recall whether to the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Salvagnoli,<sup>309</sup> or to His Excellency Ricasoli.<sup>310</sup> I think it was the latter, because the letter of recommendation the vicar provided me with was directed to Ricasoli.<sup>311</sup> My health did not permit me to go right away; when I went, I was not able to have an audience.

Between one thing and another, we reached the vigil of the day on which according to the decree the premises of the Institute had to be vacated by all my sisters of the Institute. From there, I was being continually asked what they should do, whether to leave or not; and since the gonfaloniere had requested that some remain as temporary teachers, whether they should accept or not; whether they should remove the religious habit and when. I answered all the questions, taking counsel with the vicar, who visited me several times in my sister's house. It was a great comfort to me and I acknowledged myself most undeserving in every respect that he should honor me so; I would not have dared to ask it, were it not for the good of the Institute. Father Salvatore also came, of whom I availed myself as an intermediary with the vicar<sup>312</sup> every time I needed to speak to him and I was not able to see him.

To return to the subject, I answered all questions as advised by the vicar,<sup>313</sup> and it was a continual bustle to write or have my companion write, when I was unable. But the multiplicity of the problems and the shortage of time together with my poor health caused such confusion that I no longer knew what to do. Nevertheless, in all this I was reassured by the awareness of acting under obedience and with advice.

My God, I have always ardently aspired to a condition of subservience and obedience, but now I desired it more than a starving person longs for bread. I also desire it more now, when I want to be the least among my companions.<sup>314</sup> Not being able to have an audience [with His Excellency Ricasoli], I sent the letter of the vicar<sup>315</sup> together with a declaration of the progress, beginning, and purpose of the Institute.<sup>316</sup> Thinking that there was not enough time for an answer, it seemed advisable to write to the Sisters in Montevarchi to remove the religious habit at once and, when the time had lapsed, in order to know what to do, to leave the place and return home, as we had decided in advance. I asked the gonfaloniere to allow two to remain to take care of our things until I had returned. I did not fail to notify the sisters about these matters.

### **The Institute in a rented house**

I returned, I think, on the nineteenth. I could not do so earlier. The weather was terrible, and with my poor health and so many worries it was a grace that I arrived at the end of the journey and did not become ill again after my return. In fact, for some time I was quite well and went out to receive Holy Communion.

I omitted to say that on my return I went 'directly to my parents' home, not to the convent; this on the advice of the vicar<sup>317</sup> It was convenient for me to remain there, at least at night, with some of my sisters, because in the house we had rented there was not enough room for all, and another which seemed to me more suitable was not free, and while I was in Florence, my father gave it up. It seemed to me more suitable, because in that on which we had agreed there were still bricklayers, which seemed to me to be harmful to the health of my Sisters, and therefore I in no way wanted them to return until it was dryer. All saw that there was no suitable room for me and my many ailments. For these various reasons, we were all of the opinion that it was better to take the other, and it was no small disappointment, when we heard it had been given up. O my Lord, if all our troubles had to be recounted, we would never finish! With regard to our temporary employment, since the gonfaloniere did not want us all, but only six, I had told him I could not comply with his wishes; that we intended all of us to stay or none. Also, a smaller number were not enough to conduct the school. However, after scarcely twenty-four hours, always with the advice of the vicar,<sup>318</sup> I had written to him that I was disposed to leave the number he wished. There was not enough time to receive an answer. When I returned to Montevarchi, he gave me to understand he no longer wanted us, the matter not being of his competence. He showed that it was the government that did not want us, not even as teachers.

### **Intrigues of Martini**

From a letter written to the vicar and other letters written to me, we knew that the latter had not excluded us as teachers. Therefore, it was evident that our removal as teachers was all a scheme of our enemies and of the delegate of San Giovanni, who we know was paid by them. To recount all the schemes concocted by the gonfaloniere and to what pretence he had recourse to show he wanted us and then arrange matters so that we should not stay; I say, to recount all this one would have to be partly what he is, and not being so, one is incapable of doing so. We do not know how one conducts such malignant politics; we know only its effects.

### **Nostalgic memories**

Returning from Florence, I went, as I said, not to the convent but to the home of my family, as agreed upon with the vicar, as seeming the better thing to do. I had our goods consigned to two of my Sisters and the confessor; the state of my health did not permit me to go and do it myself. I went to the church there a few days to receive Communion, until the worsening of my health hindered me from doing this also.

What memories! To find myself where from my earliest youth I had such longings and then to arrive at the desired moment! What emotions, to find myself within those walls, but excluded, where I had spent more than seven years in continual difficulties to arrive at the goal. We were beginning to enjoy a bit of peace, both with regard to the premises and other matters, while our enemies were conspiring to expel us. More than once I called to mind poor Jacob, who had to serve seven years, in order to have his beloved Rachel, and then had to wait seven more.<sup>319</sup> But what kind of desire was that? One cannot compare things so far apart in time. This was the motive that rendered the bitter sweet: the privation of those secondary things desired by me, through love of the Object loved, became agreeable and an offering to him.

### **The Sisters remain together**

The matter did not end with abandoning the religious habit and leaving the building. Having left the convent, we had returned, partly to the rented house and partly to my father's house, until Providence should dispose otherwise. It

was painful to see my father extremely dejected from the sorrow and fear he felt for us, and the confessor without the courage to make him feel they were vain. I knew, and there were also those who told me, that some of our friends were of the opinion that to free my father and me from so many worries, fears, and vexations I ought to send the Sisters to their homes. For a moment I strongly suspected that these friends would manage to have that decision laid upon us by the vicar.<sup>320</sup> On the other hand, I feared that our enemies would conspire to bring about the same end through the government. Therefore, I feared danger on every side and could think of nothing that gave me comfort. The suppression of the Institute with all the emotional, unjust, humiliating, offensive, false circumstances that accompanied it was no grief compared to what was to follow. I know not how to describe my state of mind. It was not that I did not feel myself resigned to the complete dissolution of the Institute, if God wished it. If God wished it, I was most resigned. But God himself permitted that at that time I should see that just the opposite was the case, if, indeed, it were not he who suggested it to me. I knew, on the other hand, how many enemies plotted that dissolution, and that there was no one at that time capable of impeding it. Others, as it were, out of fear set their hand to the work, or advised it, while I was unequal to sustaining it [the Institute]. I found myself, besides, in the position of having among those who advised me some who were of one opinion, others of another, and for various reasons I held myself obliged to obey both sides. In a difference of opinion, I wanted to hold to that which seemed to me best; and with the other, being closer at hand, I had regretfully to disagree. Amid so many worries, contradictions, and fears, it all seemed to me to combine to undo what God did not want undone, and I suffered the pangs of death. In March, one of my younger Sisters died. As she had always tried to practice virtue when she was healthy, so she was patient in sickness, resigned in death. My little virtue was only able to make this sacrifice with great effort. And since everything had to contribute to my greater suffering, many circumstances that accompanied her illness served to increase it.

### **Disagreement with the confessor**

It was a great trial always to see matters differently from him who had to advise me close at hand. Since I could not in any way find peace without the advice of my superior, [our difference] seem to me a trial permitted by God rather than that I should obey. If my conscience had been quieted by obeying one who differed with me, I would have thought God willed it and would have done it in spite of any sacrifice and difference of opinion. God knows that, although I am not virtuous, I have always desired to be subject and that I have never refused to obey, except when my conscience dictated otherwise. It may be that sometimes, or even always, I deceived myself, but being guided by the sentiment just mentioned, and having myself suffered much more in differing than in agreeing, I would like to hope that Our Lord has not been displeased. Nevertheless, I can only humble myself greatly, because who knows how hidden from me are my defects and sins. My God, grant that this not be so, that I do not arrive at such a point, because your goodness does not deserve it. Yes, my suffering was great in going against the judgment of my confessor; also, because I felt myself so obliged to him for that great desire he always had to be of use to us and for having been so according to the means he thought best.

It was also a temptation which worried me that I always wanted him to be very virtuous and holy. It seemed to me that since in our differences of judgement he remained firm in his, he did not have confidence in me, and therefore that I could not obtain from him what I wished, namely, that much good be accomplished. I humbled myself before God for that which appeared to me a means to obtain it and I grieved that it was not. I mean, I regretted that he was not as good as I wanted, and it was a great hardship for me not to have the means to make him so. Since it seemed to me that with confidence much can be done, and it was the desire of that means that caused me worry and grief, since for no matter what good end would I have wished to desire that anyone have confidence in me.

### **Victory in Foiano**

Also, not long after us the order came to the Sisters of Foiano to remove the religious habit.<sup>321</sup> It seems that some persons there had been instigated by our enemies here, and that those here had become those there for the injury they wanted to do us;<sup>322</sup> I mean, it seems that, being instigated, they brought it about that the pretore (or cancelliere) of Foiano gave our sisters there the same sudden order we had received to leave the building. But in this case there were those who had the courage to prevent it with the help of the population (which was considerable), which in general for the most part—I would say, almost all—were in favor of the Sisters. Our adversaries had won over the population here with calumny, insinuating that we were a great inconvenience, and that by ridding themselves of us the poor people would have many advantages. A lie, because they gave us much less than they had given the three former teachers and that they now gave to the new ones; with this difference, that we were fourteen to serve the

public, and these are three. But it had to be so as a punishment to that same public and as a mortification to the Sisters, trying them as gold in the fire. May the Lord grant that it prove to be so, and if not, let him make it so by his power. That much I desire for his glory and the good of souls. The week before Easter,<sup>323</sup> when the agitation against us in Montevarchi had somewhat died down, I joined the Sisters in Foiano. For more than three weeks I enjoyed a peace there such as I have never known. Much was due to the fact that I was not the superior; I was subject to the superior there like the other Sisters. During that time, as I had been ordered, I continued the narration of the more particular circumstances that accompanied my life and that of the Institute.

#### Postscript.

On May 15, 1860, the Sisters left Foiano for Montevarchi.

According to the account book, in September of 1861, Maria paid £72.50 for three months rent to Sig. Antonio Rosai and £141.12 to Sig. Domenico del Nobolo for another house. In December of 1861, she paid £97.02 to Sig. Rosai for four months rent. The last entries in the register are from February of 1862.

— Ed. note.

#### NOTE

- 1 I.M.I.: Iesus, Maria, Ioseph.
- 2 Maria Scritti was baptized in the collegiate church of San Lorenzo in Montevarchi. Her parents were Ireneo Scritti, a tailor, and Serafina Checcucci, crestiaia, or milliner. Libro dei battezzati, May 15, 1825.
- 3 Montevarchi, 31.5 km. NE of Arezzo, diocese of Fiesole.
- 4 Maria's godparents were Luigi and Margherita Checcucci, brother and sister of her mother. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, *ibid.*
- 5 According to the register, Jacopo Pulini, curate of San Lorenzo, performed the baptism.
- 6 Maria's sister's name was Cesira; he was baptized Maria Cesira Assunta, July 13, 1823, two days after birth. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, Libro dei battezzati.
- 7 Marias paternal grandmother was Elisabetta Mini; her maternal grandmother, Maria Felice Rovini. — See the entry for the marriage of Ireneo Scritti and Serafina Checcucci, July 18, 1822. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, Libro dei matrimoni.
- 8 Nevertheless naughty: *non per questo lascio di credere che sarò stata cattiva*. This phrase Maria adds in a note. The Autobiografia, p. 16, has: *Non che io creda, per questo, di non essere stata cattiva*.
- 9 Provocation: tentazione.
- 10 The two sisters were Giuseppa and Luisa Corsi, in 1832 aged 19 and 17 respectively. — Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, Stato delle anime, 1832. The *Stati delle anime*, one volume for each year, record the members of the parish.
- 11 *Io mi parto da Voi, fiamma di amore, e in pegno vi lascio questo mio cuore*.
- 12 Fastidiousness: *lindura*. The Autobiografia, p. 20, note 11, suggests the meaning, *nitida ed elegante pulitezza*.
- 13 Tendency: *rapporto*. The Autobiografia reads *trasporto* and suggests the meaning, *tendenza* (p. 20 and note 2).
- 14 Luxuries: *gale*. The Autobiografia, p. 20, note 3, suggests the meaning, *lussi, ornamenti vistosi*.
- 15 Impulses: *moti*.
- 16 This was the family of Georges Perrin, agronomist, whose villa lay six km. from Montevarchi. He and his family had fled from their home in Neuchatel, due to religious differences between Calvinists and French immigrants who had acquired citizenship in Geneva. Emanuele Ripetti, *Dizionario geografico, fisico, storico della Toscana*, Firenze, 1833.
- 17 Convent school: *conservatorio*
- 18 The new teacher was Caterina Cini (1809-1871), spinster, who lived in the home of her sister Gioconda, wife of Francesco Martini, superintendent of the Scuole Normali of Montevarchi, who will play an important role in Maria's life. — Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, Stato delle anime, 1871.
- 19 "The good lady," who plays such an important role in Maria's youth, has not been identified.
- 20 In vacation time: *nelle mezze stagioni*. The Autobiografia, p. 32, note 1, suggests *nelle vacanze*.

- 21 Antonio Gaetano Graziosi, 1761-1838, was named provost of the collegiate church of Montevarchi in 1791, a post he retained until his death. Francesco Martini, *Biografia del prete Antonio Graziosi, proposto di Montevarchi*, Pisa, 1839. Provost: "the chief dignitary of a collegiate or cathedral chapter." Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.
- 22 The two years I mentioned: *nelle due stagioni* indicate. Maria refers to the two years mentioned in connection with Provost Graziosi. See the previous note above.
- 23 But I continued to please her. Maria adds this phrase in a note after the word, "negligence," above, where Sister Maria Stella also places it in her transcript. According to this version, Maria's efforts to please her mother were known to all. The *Autobiografia*, p. 26, inserts the phrase after the words, "the good lady." This would have the meaning that the negligence of Maria's mother was known to all. This seems to be the intended order and has been followed here. Translator's note.
- 24 Registers of First Communion for this period are lacking in the parish archive of San Lorenzo.
- 25 Cross: a reference, it seems, to a crucifix in the church.
- 26 This was Pier Santi Scilli and his wife, Antonia (1810-1830), younger sister of Maria's mother, married in 1833. Their occupation is given as innkeeper and ironer respectively. They had two daughters, Zelinda and Giuseppa. Zelinda (1832-1865), by trade a seamstress, later entered the Institute, being professed in 1855 with the name Chiara Costante. On Giuseppa, born in 1845, no further information is available. — Montevarchi, *Archivio della collegiata, libro dei battezzati, 1832, 1845*.
- 27 I do not recall what condition I was in: *non mi sovviene in qual considerazione mi fossi*.
- 28 Ways or manners: *moti o modi*.
- 29 Carriage: *legno*.
- 30 Devil: *tentennino* (the little tempter). *Autobiografia*, p. 31, has demonic.
- 31 Witless: *imbalordita, sbalordita*
- 32 "To call that way... tender an age." In the original ms., this phrase by way of an explanatory parenthesis immediately follows, "I mean with regard... crosses and dangers," but it seemed less cumbersome to place it after the end of the sentence. The whole passage forms a note added in the right margin.
- 33 Maria's little cousin was Zelinda Scilli. In spite of the pranks she played on Maria here, she later, in 1855, entered the Institute. Perhaps Maria's reaction is a case of her "excessive sensitivity."
- 34 Evidently Giovanni Battista Martini; if so, this incident is to be taken into consideration in their later relationship.
- 35 Maria seems to be referring to her teacher here
- 36 Awoke in me a desire for them: *insinuava il trasporto*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 34 (last line), suggests *ne insinuava in me il desiderio*.
- 37 Frenzy: *ismanie: smanie*.
- 38 Francesco Martini will be discussed below in connection with the Scuole Normali of Montevarchi. The Martini family, especially the male members, played an important role in Maria's life.
- 39 The family, that is, her uncle's family, which was a financial burden on her father.
- 40 Hope: *speme*, an obsolete word from the Latin accusative *spem*.
- 41 In the liturgical calendar of the time, the first Sunday after Easter.
- 42 Affected: *gestrosa*. Idiomatic expression in Tuscany. The *Autobiografia*, p. 38, note 1, suggests *smorfiosa*.
- 43 Third floor: *secondo piano*.
- 44 Second floor... third: *primo piano... secondo*.
- 45 Sorghum: *padule*.
- 46 A bit of ice cream: *slitte [=stille] di gelato*.
- 47 My throat was continually constricted: *la convulsione alla gola era ridotta continua*.
- 48 A word at a time: *interrotte parole*.
- 49 Contracted and twisted: *ritirato e sconvolto*.
- 50 Viaticum: a Latin word meaning provision for a journey; hence, the last reception of Holy Communion.
- 51 Fragile body: *frale* (obsolete). The *Autobiografia*, p. 43, has *caduco corpo*.
- 52 Ice cream: *stille di gelato*.
- 53 Develop sores: *macerarmi*.
- 54 Extreme Unction: a sacrament today called the Anointing of the Sick. Until recently, it was administered to persons thought to be dying, hence the superstitious fear of it and of Holy Viaticum manifested by Maria's

family, particularly her father fear, for that matter, common at the time. Later, Maria will disapprove strongly of withholding the sacraments from the seriously ill.

- 55 I do not know... done: *non so a che più altri potesse condurmi*.
- 56 The feast of St. Lawrence, then as now, was celebrated on August 10.
- 57 Blurt out my thoughts: *esprimere tutto con forza*.
- 58 The feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, then as now, was celebrated on August 15.
- 59 If it was not possible to receive Holy Communion, it was recommended in those days that one make thanksgiving as though one had.
- 60 Rev. Prospero Dotti, 1781-1849, pastor of San Lorenzo and provost of Montevarchi, died January 7, 1849 — Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, xxviii.B.79.(1849); xxviii.B.131, pp. 363, 496, 575.
- 61 Rev. Prospero Dotti.
- 62 Canon Giovanni Regini (1795-1866), whose mother, Luisa Mirri, was an aunt of Maria's father. Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, xxxviii.B.179, Giovanni Regini; xxviii.B.131, pp. 49, 90,
- 63 Romances: *lettere romantiche*.
- 64 Wasted: *sacrificata*.
- 65 Condemned: *accusai*. The Autobiografia, p. 45, has also considerably shortens the whole passage, which, to be sure, is rather repetitive and rambling, because added in a note.
- 66 Which cousin this was is not known.
- 67 Scolopians: Piarist Fathers (Ordo Clericorum Regularium Pauperum Matris Dei Scholarum Piarum). Their church in Florence is called San Giovannino degli Scolopi; Firenze e dintorni, Milano, Touring Club Italiano, 1950, p. 221.
- 68 St. Florentius Luceius, son of Sextus Luceius Rufinus, a Roman, lived between 259 and 312. He was fourteen when he was martyred. — Stanislao Gatteschi, Piarist, Del martirio e culto del giovanetto S. Florenzio commentario, Firenze, 1843. (copy in the archive of the Institute, Rome).
- 69 St. Lawrence's feast, then as now, was celebrated on August 10.
- 70 Doubles were being rung: *suonavano li doppi*; two bells were being rung.
- 71 Maria must have written this part of her diary before November, 1859, when, as will be related, she and her companions were expelled from the former Augustinian monastery.
- 72 Surprized: *compresi*. The Autobiografia, p. 47, has *sorpresi*
- 73 St. Alphonsus Liguori, 1696-1787, founder of the Redemptorists, moral theologian, preacher, composer of spiritual works and hymns.
- 74 What I was: *cosa mi fosse*. The Autobiografia, p. 49, has *come vivessi*.
- 75 Canon Giovanni Regini.
- 76 When he answered in the affirmative: *rispondendo che si*. The Autobiografia, p. 49, has *rispondendomi soltanto si*, including this phrase as part of Maria's words.
- 77 Inclination: *trasporto*.
- 78 Antonia Checcucci, 1810-1845, younger sister of Maria's mother and wife of Pier Santi Scilli.
- 79 Stunned: *imbalordito*. The Autobiografia, p. 50, explains: *sbalordito*.
- 80 Attracted: *trasporto*. The Autobiografia, p. 51, has *attratta*.
- 81 In that house and family: *nella casa e famiglia che sopra espressi*. The Autobiografia, p. 51, specifies, *la famiglia di mia Zia*.
- 82 Near the garden: *corrisponde nell'orto*. The Autobiografia, p. 51, has *vicina all'orto*. Above, Maria says that the house was almost in the open country: *quasi a tutta campagna*. The convent garden, then at the edge of town, looked out on open fields.
- 83 The reference seems to be to her sudden cure on August 15, 1841.
- 84 St. Florenzio seems to be referred to.
- 85 The Feast of the Birth of St. John the Baptist, then as now, was celebrated on June 4.
- 86 Lady: *quella*. This feminine pronoun could also refer to the antecedent "family," as it is made to do by the Autobiografia, p. 53.
- 87 The relatives, who lived on the via della Scala, were Maria's maternal uncle, Antonio Checcucci and his wife, Maria, née Manetti. Their children were Zelinda, Enrichetta, Annibale, and Argentina. Florence, Archivio parrocchiale di Santa Maria Novella, Stato delle anime, 1840
- 88 Signora Fossombroni: not otherwise known.

- 89 Giovanni Inghirami (1778-1851) and Stanislao Gatteschi (1805-1849), Piarists. Roma, Archivio generale degli Scolopi.
- 90 On June 26, 1843, Father Giovanni Inghirami, Piarist, wrote to the provost of Montevarchi, requesting a deposition from the Scritti ladies regarding the miracle obtained through the intercession of the martyr, St. Florenzio. The pastor, Prospero Dotti, forwarded the requested deposition. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, "Fogli diversi." The miracle was reported in detail by the Piarist, Stanislao Gatteschi, *Del martirio e culto del giovanetto S. Florenzio commentario*, Firenze, 1843, p. 52-57 (copy in the archive of the Institute, Rome).
- 91 Maria Luisa Amalia, of Naples, widow of Ferdinando III, grand duke of Tuscany (1814-1824). Her niece was Augusta Fernanda Luigia, wife of Leopold Wittelsbach, prince of Bavaria.
- 92 Costantino Paoli, 1788-1864, Piarist. Roma, Archivio generale degli Scolopi.
- 94 Renounce: *ricedere*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 56, has *rinunciare*.
- 95 Misfortune: *miseria*.
- 96 Trust: *soggezione*. This word can also mean subjection or uneasiness.
- 97 Frivolity: *frascherie*.
- 98 On February 1, 1845, Cesira Scritti, seamstress, was married to Serafino Baldassini, book-keeper, son of Jacopo and Luisa Prucher, of the parish of San Remigio, Florence. — Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, *Libro dei matrimoni*, 1845.
- 99 From the time... actually died: *dal transito alla morte medesima*.
- 100 Lying down: *diacere*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 61, has *giacere*.
- 101 Pity: *attrito morale*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 61, has *pena*.
- 102 Antonia Checcucci Scritti died on April 5, 1845, aged 35. Montevarchi, Archivio della Collegiata, *Libro dei morti*, 1845.
- 103 The church of the Carmelite monastery of Our Lady of the Angels, or St. Mary Magdalen, situated at the time in the Piazza Savonarola, Borgo Pinto. "Cinque secoli di vita carmelitana a Santa Maria degli Angeli," *Il Monte Carmelo*, 36 (1950), 136-47.
- 104 Evidently at this point Maria had already decided to enter the monastery of Santa Maria Maddalena, as she actually did on her next visit to Florence.
- 105 Cent: *picciolo*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 65, note I, adds, *Monetina di valore minimo*. The modern spelling is *spicciolo*.
- 106 In this case... consanguinity: *qua del suo volere non posso consultarne la natura il sangue*; an obscure passage omitted by the *Autobiografia*, p. 65.
- 107 If unfortunately... that of my father The *Autobiografia*, p. 65, omits this sentence also.
- 108 Much stronger: *ben forte*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 66, has *meno fort*
- 109 The Carmelite monastery of St. Mary of the Angels, or of St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, after its most illustrious member, was founded in the 15th century in the Borgo San Frediano, Florence. It was transferred in 1628 to the former Cistercian convent in the Piazza Savonarola, borgo Pinti. "Cinque secoli di vita carmelitana a Santa Maria degli Angeli," *Il Monte Carmelo*, 36 (1950), 136-47.
- 110 My comportment: *miei portamenti*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 66, note 1, suggests *mio contegno*.
- 111 The feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, then as now, was Celebrated on September 15.
- 112 Third floor...second: *secondo piano... primo*.
- 113 In 1845, the Baldassini family lived in Florence in the via Nuova (today the via Magalotti, no. 1). It consisted of Jacopo Baldassini (1780-1837) and his wife Maria Luisa, née Prucher (1784-1859), their son, Serafino and his wife, née Cesira Scritti, and their other sons, Ernesto (1821~1875, a priest), Rodolfo (1823~ 1905, painter, bachelor). Not resident with the family was Lorenzo (a Jesuit). Florence, Archivio parrocchiale di San Remigio.
- 114 Silene Rosai (1828-1852), seamstress, was the daughter of Tertulliano, property-owner, and his wife Regina, née Regini, who was the sister of Canon Giovanni Regini and cousin of Maria's father. — Montevarchi, Archivio Parrocchiale, *libro dei battezzati*, 1828; *libro dei morti*, 1852.
- 115 As it turned out, either by accident or design, Maria did not return home from her visit to Florence. Here it is not clear whether she is looking back on the past or whether at the time she did not intend to return. The latter would seem to be the case from the vehemence of her feelings.

116 I needed to pretend to arrange for a confessor: *abbisognai del mezzo di prendervi il confessore*. The Autobiografia, p. 67, has *dissi che avevo bisogno di prendervi un confessore*.

117 Fathers of St. Philip: Oratorians. Their church in Florence is dedicated to St Firenze. For a description see Firenze e dintorni, Milano, Touring Club Italiano, 1950, p. 133.

118 Evidently, they had arrived at the Carmelite monastery of St. Mary Magdalen.

119 Blessed Maria Bagnesi, 1514-1577, a Dominican tertiary, had a close relationship with the monastery of St. Mary Magdalen and was buried in its chapel at her death. Her feast is celebrated on May 28. Bibliotheca sanctorum (12 v., Roma, 1961-1969), II, 707-9.

120 The prioress was Mother Anna Maria Luisa del Divino Amore, of German origin. Florence, Archivio del Monastero di S. Maria Maddalena de, Pazzi.

121 Francesca Teresa dei Santissimi Angeli (Falconcini), 1779-1849. Her biography was written by Maria Maddalena Costante del Santissimo Sacramento (Picchi). Alessandro Gallerani, S.J., Memorie edificanti della Madre M. Madalena Costante, al secolo Adele Picchi (2 v., Modena, 1896-1897), I, 86. Maria refers to her subsequently as la Madre inferma.

122 The crosses in a Carmelite monastery lacked the figure of the Crucified.

123 This difficult paragraph, omitted in the Autobiografia, p.74, occurs in the manuscript as a note by Maria to the words, "sought comfort." The discourse is continued in the next paragraph from the preceding one. Like the mystics, Maria sometimes has difficulty explaining her interior experiences.

124 Senses: *sentimenti*.

125 Nor was it made clear to me: *né venivami fatto*.

126 Senses: *sentimenti*.

127 Thoughts: *cognizioni*.

128 Those who would be reached through my means: *quelle cui per mio mezzo daddovero toccasse*.

129 Escape: *iscampare*. The Autobiografia, p. 75, has *scampare*.

130 I seem: *a me par*.

131 Love me less: *degradarmi*. The Autobiografia, p. 75, has *meno amarmi*.

132 Here: that is, in Montevarchi.

133 Ernesto Baldassini.

134 To assure me: *accertarmi*. The Autobiografia, p. 76, has *accertarsi*.

135 The Third Order Secular of the Discalced Carmelite Order.

136 Father Camillo's full name in religion was Camillo di San Luigi (Romoaldo Gani), 1777-1856. — Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D. The Discalced Carmelite friary of San Paolo Apostolo, popularly known as "San Paolino," was located in the via San Paolino. See Bemardo Puccioni, O.C.D., La chiesa di S. Paolo Apostolo in Firenze, Firenze, 1980. From 1630-1810, 1815-1866, the Discalced Carmelite nunnery of St. Teresa was situated in the via Borgo la Croce. Ambrosius a Sancta Teresia, O.C.D., Monasticon carmelitanum, in Analecta Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatomm, 22-23 (1950-1951), "Firenze, VII."

137 Maria was enrolled in Discalced Carmelite Third Order on July 30, 1846, receiving the name Maria Teresa Giuseppa di Gesù. — Firenze, Convento carmelitano di S. Paolo Apostolo, Registro delle vestizioni dei Terziari (1816- ), p. 66. She made her solemn profession on August 14, 1847. — Ibid., p. 1. Her solemn profession formula is preserved in the archive of the Institute of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Rome, a/10.

138 In my retirement I lessened my comfort: *con la mia ritiratezza toglievo comodità*. An awkward phrase, omitted by the Autobiografia, p. 79.

139 Senses: *sentimenti*.

140 Inappropriate: *sproposito*.

141 Maria later identifies this "good friend and relative," who features largely in her life, as Silene Rosai. She died on April 21, 1852, about thirty years of age (see below).

142 Watered-down soup: *poche minestre nell'acqua*.

143 Cesira had five children, four boys and a girl: Ferdinando (died at 27 years of age), Cesare (remained a bachelor), Maria Maddalena ("Marietta," who married a magistrate, a widower with two sons, Eliseo Ghidoli, by whom she had two sons, Silvio and Augusto), Augusto (who married Maria Corsi and had three children, Carlo, Ernesto, Maria Teresa), and Giovanni Battista (who married Argia Bargilli, who died giving birth to Dina, reared by her grandmother, Cesira). — Florence, Archivio parrocchiale di San Remigio.

144 The Capuchin church in Montevarchi, dating from 1540, is dedicated to St. Lawrence, the Martyr. — Lexicon capuccinum, Romae, 1951, col. 1173. The Portiuncula Indulgence, a plenary indulgence (formerly toties quoties) granted to the faithful on August 2 under the usual conditions upon a visit to any Franciscan church.

145 Giovanni Battista Martini (1825-1908), like his father, Francesco, became gonfaloniere of Montevarchi and several times deputy until 1892. — Fiesole, una diocesi nella storia, Fiesole, 1986, p. 432.

146 Maria is writing these lines in the midst of her troubles with the authorities in Montevarchi and elsewhere over the religious character of her school. Though they may have been occasional benefactors, the Martini family never donated the house Maria thought they owed her. The menfolk of the family frustrated her work in Montevarchi and with higher authorities. By the "crosses of continual illness" Maria is referring to the chronic ill health of Giovanni Battista Martini's wife.

147 Perhaps a reference to the political disturbances in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. In February, 1849, Leopold II was forced into exile at Gaeta under the protection of the king of Naples, while Tuscany was governed by a triumvirate, Domenico Guerrazzi, Giuseppe Mazzoni, and Giuseppe Montanelli. Leopold was able to return two years later.

148 It: what was about to occur; presumably the difficulties she would have in founding her Institute, which she contemplated with serenity.

149 *Migliara*. The eruption of numerous small cutaneous vessels which accompany or follow increased perspiration. Autobiografia, p.84, note 1.

150 *Timor el tremor venerunt super me, et contexerunt me tenebre*. Fear and trembling are come upon me: and darkness hath covered me. Ps. 54, 6.

151 cf. Mt 27, 46; Mk 15, 34.

152 "To suffer, not to die," a saying attributed to St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi.

153 *Veni, sponsa Christi, accipe coronam, quam tibi Dominus praeeparavit in aeternum*; third antiphon of Vespers and Lauds of the common of a virgin in the Divine Office.

154 Margherita Pulini much to Maria's disappointment eventually joined the Poor Clares. See below.

155 Antonio Corsi, 1798-1875. — Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, Libro dei battezzati, 1798, and dei morti, 1875.

156 Enrichetta Pozzolini (1811-1857), wife of the Sienese sculptor, Luigi Magi. A close friend and collaborator of Sr. Anna Lapini (see below), she died in 1857 and was buried in the church of the Stigmatine Sisters in Portico in Rornagna. Information obtained by telephone from the Stigmatine Sisters.

157 Called in attention to it: mi avvisarono di ciò. The verb in the plural is evidently a lapsus calami, because Maria seems to have had only one companion: *chi era con me*.

158 Clothing: vestimento; i. e., the ceremony of accepting a person into the novitiate of a religious institute, at which he or she is clothed in the habit.

159 The parish in which the Baldassini lived.

160 Bp. Francesco Bronzuoli, 1795-1856, a Florentine, in 1848, was named bishop of Fiesole, the diocese in which Montevarchi lay. He was the author of an important catechetical work, Libro delle istituzioni cattoliche. — Fiesole, una diocesi nella storia, p. S5.

161 Unbecoming: *inconveniente*. The Autobiografia, p. 87, has *sconveniente*.

162 The former monastery of Augustinian nuns, as will be related below.

163 Giacomo Gabellini (1786-1868) became provost of Montevarchi at the death of Prospero Dotti, January 7, 1849. He assumed office on March 2, 1851, in the presence of Jacopo Pulini, Giovanni Regini, and Angelo Brandi. Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, xxviii. B.79 (Gabellini); xxviii.B.131, p. 131.

164 "It is good for me that thou hast humbled me." Ps. 119, 71.

165 This is Maria's niece Marietta Baldassini; she later always remained in close contact with her aunt and many of her letters are preserved in the archive of the Institute in Rome.

166 Not otherwise known.

167 Consumption: *etica*; the Autobiografia, p. 89, has *tisi*.

168 Luigi Magi d'Asciano, noted sculptor and author of important works such as the statue of Cosimo Medici at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. He was a close friend of Jean Dupré, who remembers him in his Ricordi. — G. F., Pietro Magi (1862- 1913) in memoria, Firenze, 1914, p. 3

169 This convent: When Maria wrote this part of her autobiography, she was already living in the former monastery of Augustinian nuns, to be more fully discussed below.

- 170 *O quam suavis est, Domine, spiritus tuus, qui, ut dulcedinem tuam in filios demonstrares, pane suavissimo de caelo praestito, esurientes reple bonis, fastidiosos divites dimittens inanes*; then as now, the antiphon of the Magnificat of first Vespers of the feast of Corpus Christi.
- 171 The statue by Luigi Magi d'Asciano is found in the mother-house of the Institute in the via Crocifisso del Lume, 15, Florence.
- 172 Margherita Pulini entered the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli of the Poor Clares in San Giovanni Valdarno on October 14, 1850. Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, register of nuns'
- 173 Signor Casalini: not otherwise known.
- 174 The monastery of Augustinian nuns, dedicated to Our Lady of the Milk (Santa Maria del Latte), in Montevarchi, was founded in 1557 by the Monte Pio, or Monte di Pietà e Carità, a bank for lending money on pledge, in tum founded in 1551. The monastery was suppressed under Napoleon in 1813. Aldo Anselmi, *Il monastero delle monache di Santa Maria del Latte in Montevarchi e Ze vicende delle istituzioni che si insediarono nei suoi locali dopo la soppressione*, Fiesole, 1981, pp. 12-20.
- 175 Francesco Martini (1788—1868), brother of Maria's teacher. A rich landowner, he was twice gonfaloniere of Montevarchi (1817- 1822, 1841-1843). He was an enthusiastic promoter of education and superintendent of the Scuole Normali from 1825 to 1855. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, libro dei battezzati, 1788- libro dei morti, 1868.
- 176 In 1599, Ser Andrea Bartoli, being childless, left his fortune to the Augustinian monastery, in which his sister was a nun. After the suppression of the monastery, the Bartoli inheritance was constituted a benevolent institution with the title, Opera Pia Bartoli, popularly known as La Bartolèa. A decree of the grand duke of 1815 placed the municipality of Montevarchi in charge. Through the instrumentality of the gonfaloniere of Montevarchi, Francesco Martini, part of the funds of the Baitolea was dedicated to scholarships for poor girls. In 1825, three Scuole Normali, or public elementary schools, for sewing, knitting, and weaving, were opened in the upper story of the former monastery. Martini was made superintendent of schools. By 1852, as Maria relates, the schools had fallen on evil days. Anselmi, *Il monastero delle monache*, 15, 21-23.
- 177 Maria left the date blank, but the sisters definitively left the monastery in 1813. — Anselmi, *Il monastero delle monache*, p. 20.
- 178 This would have been after the restoration of the grand dukes upon the fall of Napoleon. The Catholic monarchs of this time had no more use for contemplative nuns than Napoleon, but they tolerated Sisters who made themselves useful as teachers, nurses, etc.
- 179 Edwige Sacconi, a lacemaker, belonged to a distinguished and wealthy family of Montevarchi. Her name in religion was Maddalena della Purita di Maria. She died in 1859, aged 37. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, libro dei morti, 1859.
- 180 Antonia Gori, in 1854 aged 50, daughter of Giovanni and Caterina Bartolommei. Caterina in tum was the widow of Santi Battagli. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, stato delle anime, 1854.
- 181 Margherita Pulini.
- 182 At his explanation I was somewhat taken aback: all'esposto vi conobbi qualche turbolenza. The meaning of the passage, omitted by the Autobiografia, p. 98, seems to be that Maria was taken aback at Martini's conditions.
- 183 Antonio Corsi.
- 184 Wise: sapienti. Maria underlines the word.
- 185 On January 12, 1852, a decree of the consiglio comunale appointed Maria directress of schools with two companions (Edwige Sacconi and Silene Rosai) and to have the use of the premises of the schools of knitting and sewing. To Luisa Panunti were allotted the premises of the school of weaving. Maria was granted an annual gratuity of 400 lire. Montevarchi, Archivio comunale, consiglio comunale, libro 252, no. 11.
- 186 Showed him so many mistakes he had made: *li messe tante traveggole*. The Aurobiografia, p. 99, has *gli fece intravedere tali ostacoli*.
- 187 On March 22, 1852, the prefecture of Arezzo confirmed the act of the consiglio comune of Montevarchi. Montevarchi, Archivio comunale, filza III, no. 290.
- 188 On January 12, 1852, the consiglio comunale provisionally appointed Luisa Panunti, formerly assistant to Luisa Borghesi, in charge of the school of weaving. On March 18, 1852, the prefettura of Arezzo approved this decision. Archivio comunale of Montevarchi, filza III, n. 290, and libro 252 of the consiglio comunale, 1851-1852.

189 Silene Rosai died on April 21, 1852. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, libro dei morti, 1852.

190 This was Ersilia Betti,(1835-1904), in religion, Vittoria delle Sacre Stimate, daughter of Angelo and Irene Checcucci, who subsequently participated in the whole troubled history of the Institute. After the suppression of religious Orders, she joined Maria Scilli and Giovannina Mantovani in 1877 to refound the Institute. At the death of Giovannina in 1897, she was nominated superior of the tiny group of seven Sisters but out of humility refused the office. She lived to see the revival of the Institute through the efforts of Maria Mosca. — "Cenni biografici di Suor Maria Mosca," *La fiamella del Carmelo*, 13 (sett. 1943), 2-3.

191 To scheme and gain some advantage: *per volere armestare* (=armeggiare?) *e farci interesse*. For *armestare*, the *Autobiografia*, p. 102, has *intrigare*.

192 Maria is writing this after she and her companions had been discharged and expelled from the building, just as her work seemed to be succeeding.

193 Prophetic words: the Institute survived suppression and exists in its present flourishing condition today.

194 Pious Establishment: Pio Stabilimento, a name Maria applies to the former Augustinian monastery which housed her schools.

195 The *consiglio comunale* gave its consent in the session of November 12, 1853. Archivio comunale of Montevarchi, Consiglio comunale, seduta del consiglio, libro 253.

196 Convent school: *conservatorio*.

197 Giovanni Battista Martini.

198 In 1852, the commission for the Scuole Normali presented to the municipality two plans of reform. One signed by Giovanni Battista Martini and Luigi Bazzanti emphasized the lay character of the schools and forbade entrusting them to a religious institution. The other, signed by Giacomo Gabellini, did not specify the status of the teachers in charge of the schools. Montevarchi, Archivio comunale, seduta del consiglio, libro 85.

199 Leopold II (1797-1870), grand duke of Tuscany from 1824-1859, son and successor to grand duke Ferdinand III.

200 On Luigi Venturi, secretary to the grand duke, see Giovanni Baldasseroni, *Memorie 1833-1859*, ed. Renato Mori, Firenze, 1959, p. 95.

201 Presumably, the agreement with Francesco Martini to take over the school under her conditions.

202 Zanobi Bicchierai, 1816-1887. Baldasseroni, *Memorie 1833-1859*, p. 99.

203 While the participle, *compromessa*, is feminine, it refers to the antecedent persona, so the sex of the person in question cannot be ascertained from the text. Presumably, the person in question is a man, because some sort of revolutionary activity seems to be involved.

204 Evidently, Maria, according to her usual custom had consulted her confessor about doing the favor asked of her.

205 Cosimo Buonarroti, 1790-1859, became minister of Public Instruction in 1852. Baldasseroni, *Memorie 1833-1859*, p. 216.

206 Leonida Landucci, 1800-1871, previously a fiery liberal, changed his views at the restoration of Grand Duke Leopold and became one of his most reactionary councilors. Baldasseroni, *Memorie 1833-1859*, p. 84.

207 Giovanni Battista Martini's wife, Virginia (1830-1862), was the daughter of Cesare Capoquadri and Fulvia, née Franceschini. She gave birth to two children, Vincenzo and Maria. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, Libro dei battezzati, 1830, and Libro dei morti, 1862.

208 My relative: *la parente* (also the reading of the ms.). The *Autobiografia*, p. 105, has *la malata*.

209 Very strange: *stranissima*. The *Autobiografia*, p. 105, has *bruttissima*.

210 Skid chains: *ferrì a diaccio*. Diaccio (also used on the line above) = *ghiaccio*, ice.

211 Andrea Bindi da Quarrata (1808-1879), reformed Franciscan, famous preacher and founder of l'Incontro, a convent in Florence of the most rigorous observance. Information obtained from the Franciscans by telephone.

212 Anna Fiorelli Lapini (1809-1860) in 1850 founded the Institute of the Poor Daughters of the Holy Stigmata in the house called "La Fantina," in the via dell'Erta Canina, Florence. — *Dizionario degli Istituti di perfezione* (Roma, v. 1- 1974- in progress), VII, 207-8.

213 Canon Angelo Brandi, 1803-1879. — Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, xxviii.B.79 (Brandi); xxviii.B.131, pp. 179,

214 Penitentiary: "An officer in some Roman Catholic dioceses vested with power from the bishop to deal with cases of a nature normally handled only by the bishop." Websterk Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

- 215 The conservatorio of the Oblates of the Annunciation (Oblate della SS. Annunziata). On San Giovanni Valdarno, 38 km. NE of Arezzo, diocese of Fiesole, see the Encic. itaZ., XXX, 660-1; Annuario generale 1961, p. 765.
- 216 Agostino Caprilli di Antonio (1826-1860), in September, 1853, was appointed chaplain of the Poor Clares in San Giovanni Valdarno. — Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, xxviii.B.79. (1851); xxviii. 13.13, pp. 44, 54.
- 217 Antonio Cesari, *La vita di Gesù Cristo e la sua religione*, Milano, 1841, 6 v. It is not clear whether the life of St. Teresa was the autobiography or a life by another author.
- 218 Sister Crocifissa was a member of the first community of Foiano in 1857. See below.
- 219 The feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, was celebrated then as now on June 29
- 220 In 1854, this Saturday fell on July 1.
- 221 Mean-spirited: *pochezza* here seems to be better translated by this word.
- 222 On Laterina, 18 km. NE of Arezzo, diocese of Arezzo, see Annuario generale 1961, pp. 407-8.
- 223 The feast of St. Teresa of Avila.
- 224 Teresa del Bigio, or Teresa Bigi, in religion Sister Colomba, was born in Montevarchi, July 6, 1836, and died on November 21, 1855. — Roma, Archivio dell'Istituto, stato delle anime, 1855.
- 225 The four clothed were: Sisters Eletta Martelli, Fidamonte Brunetti, Chiara Costante Scritti, Umiltà Foggi. Those accepted on trial were: Annina Marrubini, Polissena Prugnoli, Candida Dendi, and Antonia Dendi, a boarder. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, stato delle anime, 1855. An examination of the stato delle anime of the Institute reveals that it was Umiltà .
- 226 Evidently in the grand duchy religious garb was forbidden in public. In small towns infractions were probably overlooked, less so in Florence itself. On her previous visits to the grand duke, before the clothing on October 15, 1854, Maria had worn secular clothing. The grand duke had given her permission to wear a religious habit.
- 227 Guglielma Martelli, in religion, Sister Eletta, one of those who were clothed in 1854, at the first clothing. See above.
- 228 The *Compagnia di Misericordia*, founded in 1845 through the initiative of Dr. Luigi Dami, operated a hospital on behalf of the poor. The municipality of Montevarchi gave it the use of the second floor of the former Augustinian monastery; the Scuole Normali occupied the first, or ground, floor. The following year, the bishop of Fiesole, Vincenzo Menchi, also allowed them to use the monastery church. Anselmi, *Il monastero delle monache*, p. 24-25. On the subsequent history of the Misericordia, which today operates an emergency ambulance service, see *ibid.*, pp. 30-35, 37-38.
- 229 Lay persons who had acquired possession of the property of suppressed religious Orders were in danger of being obliged to disgorge it in the shifting political situation.
- 230 "*Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels.*" Ps. 50, 12.
- 231 Thy will be done; cf. Lk 1, 38.
- 232 "*My Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from me.*" Mt 26, 39.
- 233 In 1855, the first Sunday of September occurred on the second day of the month. The "Milk of Our Lady" was a relic preserved in the collegiate church of San Lorenzo in Montevarchi. It was bestowed on the church by Count Guidoguerra dei conti Guidi, who in turn received it from Charles of Anjou for valor shown in the battles of San Germano and Benevento (1266) against Manfred. Aldo Anselmi, *L'insigne collegiata di San Lorenzo in Montevarchi e il suo museo di arte sacra*, Montevarchi, 1990, p. 12.
- 234 Sister Colomba (Teresa del Bigio) was one of the original four to be clothed in the Institute (see above).
- 235 Then as now celebrated on February 2. But the records show that Sister Colornba died on November 21, 1855.
- 236 Then as now celebrated on December 8.
- 237 On Foiano della Chiana, 28 km. due south of Arezzo, diocese of Arezzo, see the Encic. itaZ., XV, 600; Annuario generale 1961, p. 322.
- 238 Sisters Vittoria Betti and Chiara Scritti, Maria's two cousins previously mentioned, arrived on April 15, 1856. Foiano, Archivio comunale, seduta consiliare, May 14, 186.
- 239 At the time, the on aloniere of Foiano della Chiana was Luigi Neri Sernerri, about whom no further information was available. See the session of the council, cited in the previous note.
- 240 The two teachers were Emilia Fabini and Anna Nerotti (see below).

241 The good provost was not that far wrong; the Institute at that time was not a religious Order but a pious association. However, as Maria points out, his canonical accuracy was subsequently to prove an embarrassment to the Sisters.

242 In the session of August 8, 1856, the municipal council decided to dismiss the teachers Emilia Fabini and Anna Nerotti without any gratuity, because this was not foreseen in the case of municipal employees. Also, they did not consider it a good thing that the Sisters destined for teaching should live by the quest, as the directress Maria Scritti had proposed, so they fixed an annual gratuity of Lit. 1,400 to the directress and the three teachers. — Foiano, Archivio comunale, seduta consiliare, Aug. 8, 1956.

243 In 1857, the community consisted of Sisters Eletta Martelli, Vittoria Betti, Chiara Scritti, Cherubina Gabrielli, Giovannina Mantovani, and Crocifissa Dendi; the servant was Annunziata Pucci. — Foiano, Archivio parrocchiale, stato delle anime, 1857.

244 Maria arrived on May 3, 1856, and remained until the 10th "to know what provisions were necessary to set on foot that system of instruction she had found so useful in the municipal schools of Montevarchi and for which she had assumed the care of the schools of this town. Foiano, Archivio Comunale, seduta consiliare, May 14, 1856.

245 Derision: berlina. The word can mean a pilloiy, a type of carriage (Berlin) or automobile (sedan).

246 Sister Maria Angelica (Annina Marrubini), born in 1837. Her later career is not known. Her date of birth is a calculation: in 1855 she was 18. Montevarchi, Archivio della collegiata, stato delle anime, 1855.

247 The Discalced Carmelite Order.

248 Giovanni Francesco del Santissimo Sacramento was provincial of the Tuscan province of the Discalced Carmelites, 1837-1840 and 1849-1852. Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D.

249 That is, of the Discalced Carmelite Order. The Serafino referred to is Serafino di San Raniero (Francesco Fracassi), 1812-1876. —Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D.

250 Convent: famiglia. On the convent of Prato see Efiemerologio carmelitico teresiano, Arezzo, 1840, p. 211.

251 Francesco della Santissima Trinita (Domenico Bechelli), 1822-1889. — Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D.

252 Convent: famiglia.

253 Provincial of the Tuscan province at the time was Anselmo di San Luigi Gonzaga (Francesco Fauli), 1817-1876. In 1867, he became bishop of Grosseto and among other things founded the newspaper, *La sentinella cattolica*. -P. Fanfani, Mons. A. Fauli, vescovo di Grosseto, Firenze, 1876.

254 From 1853 to 1859, the preposite general of the Italian Congregation of the Discalced Carmelites was Natale di Santa Anna (1804-1868), a Belgian by birth but professed in Genoa. Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D.

255 When circumstances led her to join us: *portando la circostanza di combinarla*. This obscure expression is omitted by the Autobiografia, p. 123.

256 The reference is to Sister Umilta Foggi (see above).

257 Thwart: intraversare. The Autobiografia, p. 124, has *ostacolare*.

258 Reference is to the Franciscan convent of Montecarlo in San Giovanni Valdarno; Armuario generale 1961, p. 515.

259 Giovanni Battista Martini.

261 Since the death of the bishop, the capitular vicar was Lorenzo Frescobaldi, d. 1874. He remained vicar until named Bishop of Fiesole, October, 27, 1871. Fiesole, una diocesi nella storia, p. 56. From now on, Maria was to do most of her business with him as the bishop's representative rather than with the bishop himself, as formerly.

262 At a loss: *ne dubito*. The Autobiografia, p. 125, *ne stupisco*. The sentence is very awkward.

263 Presumably, about the amount of money for the Institute Signora Marrubini had left with the provost.

264 The curate was Leandro da Partina (1794-1864), who obtained this office in 1827 and held it until his death. Florence, Archivio provinciale dei PP. Francescani Riformati, registro dei religiosi, 147 II 147.

265 On May 30, 1857, the prefecture of Arezzo turned over to Maria Scritti the school of weaving, until then entrusted to the teacher, Luisa Panunti. In the Archivio municipale of Montevarchi there is a thick bundle of documents which confirms Maria's version of the affair.

266 The Reverend Cavaliere Giuseppe Rosi, honorary canon of the cathedral of Fiesole, died on August 5, 1873. Florence, Archivio vescovile.

267 The name given to monasteries for fallen women; that in Florence seems not to have survived the suppression of religious Orders in 1860.

268 Sisters in the flesh: *sorelle*.

269 Presumably, it was Fr. Rosi who had asked the vicar's permission.

270 Simpleton: *buacciola*. A Tuscan expression for a person of limited ability, good for nothing: The Autobiografia, p. 134, note 1.

271 Extraordinary: a canonical term, e. g., "extraordinary confessor," for a cleric not engaged in the ordinary service of a religious community, but called in on special occasions.

272 Edwige Sacconi, one of the original four Sisters to be clothed.

273 Possibly, a meeting of the definitory or council of the Order.

274 Local: *interni*. The word might also be translated "spiritual."

275 In 1858, Easter fell on April 4.

276 That persons might die: *di pensar sempre morire*. This seems to be the meaning, rather than that Maria feared to die. The latter meaning is suggested by the Autobiografia, p. 137, which has *di morire*.

277 The new provincial, Salvatore della Presentazione (Serafino Francesco Giannelli), 1805-1883, was provincial from 1858 to 1861. Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D.

278 Giovaccino Antonelli (1792-1859), became bishop of Fiesole in 1857. Fiesole, una diocesi nella storia, p. 55.

279 Convent: *famiglia*. On the Discalced Carmelite convent of Arezzo see Ambrosius a Sancta Teresia, O.C.D., Monasticon carmelitanum, Roma, 1950-1951), "Arezzo II."

280 Amadeo di Gesu Nazareno (Giacomo Bartolomeo Bolgi), 1811-1892. He was definitor general from 1847 to 1859 and provincial from 1861-1864. Roma, Archivio generale O.C.D.

281 In the session of June 7, 1858, the definitory recognized the Institute as a society (*sodalitia*, a canonical term) of Carmelite tertiaries and permitted the Sisters to wear the habit of Discalced Carmelite nuns. However, it found the Institutes rules (*szatuta*) unsuitable for Carmelite tertiaries. Instead, they should follow the *Regula pro piis magistris carmelitis Tertii Ordinis, Romae, apud S. Eustochium, 1773*. — *Acta definitorii generalis O.C.D. Congregationis S. Eliae (1766-1863)*; ed. Antonius Fortes, O.C.D., Roma, 1983, p.557-8.

282 Vicar: *Monsignore* In this part of her account, Maria uses this word to refer both to the bishop and his vicar. Bishop Antonielli, unlike Bishop Bronzuoli, seems to have left the affairs of the Institute largely to his vicar, Lorenzo Frescobaldi.

283 Ernesto Baldassini, 1821-1875.

284 Bishop: *Monsignore*. Maria seems to be referring to the bishop with whom she needed influence, because she suspected enemies of the Institute had tried to turn him against it. (See above.)

285 In the session of February 16, 1858, the municipal council discussed and rejected the requests of Sister Maria Scritti. She had asked: 1) Premises sufficient for her Sisters and the girls' schools, which should be separated one from the other and inaccessible to outsiders. 2) Immunity from a triennial confirmation. Foiano, Archivio comunale, seduta consiliare, Feb. 16, 1858.

286 Vicar: *Monsignore*.

287 Giuseppa Pazzagli, 1833-1859, in religion, Nazarena della Santa Obbedienza. Roma, Archivio dell'Istituto, registro anagrafe suore, L.

288 In 1859, Easter fell on April 24.

289 Disturbances: *rumori* - the second war of independence. On April 27, 1859, Leopold II left Tuscany, and a provisional government was erected under Bettino Ricasoli.

290 Vicar: *Monsignore*. Here the word seems to refer to the vicar, with whom Maria was accustomed to confer.

291 No doubt the definitor, Amadeo di Gesu Nazareno, who had accompanied the provincial on his visit to Montevarchi, in October of 1858.

292 Vicar: *Monsignore*

293 Vicar: *Monsignore*.

294 Pierced: *crivellato*: riddled.

295 This was on account... health: Maria adds this sentence in a note after the phrase, "put to the test."

296 As noted above, the reign of the grand dukes, in the person of Leopold II, ended, when he was forced to leave Tuscany on April 27, 1859.

297 As noted above, Giovanni Battista Martini.

298 Italics Maria's.

299 A circular from the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to the prefects appeared in the *Monitore Toscano*, no. 243, August 25, 1859, requiring all religious societies or aggregations not approved by the Tuscan

government to submit their rule to the Ministry within eight days or be dissolved as an illegal association (collegio). Signed: Florence, August 23, 1859. V. Salvagnoli. -Copy in the Biblioteca Civica in Arezzo, Per. Ant. 3.

300 Salvatore Marchesini, C.Or. (1841-1878), a well-known confessor. Florence, Archivio provinciale dei Filippini.

301 I thanked the Lord that the confessor had not opposed me: ringmziavo il Signore per timor di contrasto che il Confessore non scemlesse a darmelo; an obscure passage omitted from the Autobiografia, p. 136.

302 Letter of Maria to the minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Vincenzo Salvagnoli, September 5, 1859. Roma, Archivio dell'Istituto, a/7, a.

303 Then as now celebrated on October 15.

304 In charge of seminarians.

305 See the letter from the prefecture of Arezzo to the gonfaloniere of Montevarchi, November 29, 1859. Montevarchi, Archivio comunale, libro 297, rif. n. 1761, filza X.

306 The notification from the Delegazione Governativa of San Giovanni, dated November 30, 1859, is published by Anselmi, Il monastero delle monache, p. 28. A comparison with the letter of the Prefecture of Arezzo to Martini mentioned above, in fact reveals that it contains more restrictions.

307 Vicar: *Monsignore*.

308 Monte San Savino, 21 km. SW of Arezzo, diocese of Arezzo. —Encic. ital., XXIII, 754; A1/muario generale 1961, p. 528

309 Vincenzo Salvagnoli, 1801-1861, a moderate liberal and friend of Ricasoli, he left Tuscany during the exile of Leopold and returned after his restoration. — Baldasseroni, Memorie 1833-1859, p. 62.

310 On Baron Bettino Ricasoli (1809-1880), president of the ministries, prominent political figure in the Risorgimento in Tuscany see the Encic. ital., XIV, 225-6.

311 Letter dated Fiesole, December 12, 1859. Fiesole, Archivio vescovile, Atti straordinari, I 857, p. 444.

312 Vicar: *Monsignore medesimo*. The reference is to the mention of the vicar a few lines earlier.

313 Vicar: *Monsignore*.

314 Maria obviously wrote this sentence from Foiano, where she was living at the end of this autobiography.

315 Vicar: *Rev.mo Monsignore*.

316 See the vicar's letter of December 12, 1859, referred to above. -In the archive of the Institute in Rome (a/2) there is a copy of a memorandum which may be the "declaration" Maria enclosed with the vicar's letter.

317 Vicar: *Monsignore*.

318 Vicar: *Rev. mo Monsignore*.

319 Gen., ch. 29.

320 Vicar: *Monsignore*; possibly, also, the bishop is meant.

321 In a letter of December 11, 1859, the prefect of Arezzo, F. Dami, to the gonfaloniere of Foiano declared the Institute there suppressed. — Foiano, Archivio comunale, Filza Ordini, circolari e corrispondenza uficiale per la comunità di Foiana, 1859, dei gonfalonieri Semeri e Magi, pezzo no. 253.

322 It seems... wanted to do us: *Pare per essersi indettati alcuni di là coi noistri nemici di qua, che questi si erano fatti quelli pel male che ci volevano*. An involved passage omitted by the Autobiografia, p. 157.

323 In 1860, Easter fell on April 8.