



A CHAPLET OF YEARS



At school she was known as the first scholar, the most endearing companion, and the best skilled in needlework. To this day pieces of altar linen, which she made when far advanced in years, are exhibited, and excite the wonder of adept needlewomen. Her respect and affectionate attentions for the aged were eulogized far and wide in the neighbourhood.

After the example of her mother, who was well known for her charities, Marie Esther felt great compassion for the poor. By a hundred and one little means suggested by her industry, she tried to lessen their needs. To work for the poor and to talk with them, was veritable joy to the refined and dearly loved girl.

One very hot summer day Marie Esther happened to be at a friend's house, when she saw a poor old man come painfully along. He entered the house and without a word sat down. He was middle sized, pale, and haggard; his long, white, unkempt hair fell on his shoulders; his face was soiled, and wet with perspiration. He was exhausted with fatigue and want. His large, black, luminous eyes seemed to appeal to the little girl for help. An ordinary child would have been frightened, but Marie Esther was deeply touched. At that moment, too, she remembered that her mother had said that Jesus Christ sometimes hides Himself under the guise of a beggar. This thought sent an indefinable current through her soul. Instantly, she approached the poor old man, and, full of compassion, asked him to let her wash his face and comb his hair. When this was done, the poor old man, whose voice sounded rather choked, thanked the little girl—she was then only eight or nine—and asked her for something to eat. Very sadly, she explained that this was not the house of her parents, so she was not free to take anything, but if he waited, she would go and ask permission of the lady of the house to give him food. She at once started out and having soon found the good lady, immediately came back with her, but to their surprise the beggar had disappeared. They made inquiries everywhere to find out where the stranger had come from and where he had gone, but neither then nor at any later time was anything ever heard of the mysterious old man.

Already at this early age Marie Esther showed ardent love for the Blessed Sacrament, for the Passion of Our Lord, and for the Blessed Virgin. She was often seen before an image of Our Lady as if pouring out her heart in loving confidence.

So careful and earnest was the preparation for First Communion made by this child of predilection that it influenced others for good. It also intensified the candour of her features and made the beholders say that she seemed like an angel. Those who assisted at the ceremony