

[WRITTEN FOR THE TRUE WITNESS.]

THE POOR CLARES.

The Life of St. Clare, and the Introduction of the Order into Ireland
—A Most Interesting Sketch.

Religious communities of the Second Order of St. Francis are called Poor Clares, a name derived from the extreme poverty of their rule and the name of their foundress, Saint Clare.

Those who adhered to the rule in its original form were called Poor Clares and those who followed it as modified by Pope Urban IV. were called Urbanites. The Bernardines, from St. Bernardine; the Coletans, from St. Coleta, and the Capuchinesses from the Capuchins—are all Poor Clares. All these, though having different constitutions profess the rule given by St. Francis to his first spiritual daughter, St. Clare, and can, therefore, as they generally are, be called Poor Clares. They are also called Minor-esses, as the Franciscan Friars are called Minors.

Saint Clare was the daughter of a high born knight who lived in Assisi in the thirteenth century. This nobleman and his wife were distinguished no less for their exemplary piety than for their rank and wealth. They had three daughters, Clare, Agnes and Beatrice. Clare, the eldest, was born in 1193; she was so devout from her earliest childhood that she seems to have been predestined for the holy life to which God called her.

When she was eighteen she heard of St. Francis, who was then much spoken of in Assisi. This holy man confirmed her in her resolution to abandon the world and devote herself entirely to God in the religious life. Her parents had in view for her an honorable match, but she declined, pleading her intention of renouncing the world.

On the evening of the Monday after Palm Sunday in the year 1212, Clare left her home in the company of another pious young woman and went to the convent and church of St. Mary of the Angels, where St. Francis and his monks resided. She was met at the church doors by the community, holding lighted tapers in their hands and singing the "Veni Creator Spiritus." Before the altar of the Blessed Virgin she put off her rich apparel and received the dress she was to wear in future—a coarse gray habit with a cord for a girdle. St. Francis cut off her hair as a sign of her complete separation from the world. She was placed with the Benedictine nuns until a convent could be erected for the new order.

Her parents and relatives were indignant at what they termed her folly in thus disgracing them by adopting such a poor and lowly state of life. They used every means to induce her to change her mind, even resorting to threats of violence. One of the party went to the convent to compel her to return home, who having seized her would have dragged her from her retreat, had she not clung to the altar. In the struggle her veil fell off, disclosing to her friends her shorn head. This convinced them of her sincerity in her intentions and they left her in peace to serve God in the way she had chosen. The opposition of her relatives was caused by the fear that her lowly mode of life would bring ignominy on her family. Alas! for the wisdom of human foresight. Had Clare ignored the call of God and embraced the life intended for her by her friends, the family name would have centuries ago been lost in the mists of the past. As it is, Clare ennobled it, making it famous for all time.

St. Francis soon removed her to the Benedictine convent of St. Angole, where after an equally strong opposition from her friends her sister Agnes took the veil. Eventually a convent was fitted up for the two sisters near the Church of St. Damien in Assisi, where they were joined by fifteen ladies, some of whom were her own relatives and three were members of the noble family of Ulbaldini of Florence. Clare was appointed Mother Superior; she rapidly extended the order to Italy, Belgium, France, Germany and Spain. The Order was approved by Pope Innocent III. and confirmed by Honorius the Third in 1223. The rule at first was very austere, being drawn up by St. Francis on the model he had prepared for his religious men. The sisters went barefooted, observed perpetual silence and practised severe fasts, they were also

debarred from possessing property even in common.

Great numbers joined this poor austere Order, including a long line of noble ladies, amongst whom were Agnes, daughter of the King of Bohemia, Joan, daughter of the King of Navarre, Isabel, sister of St. Louis, Blanche, daughter of Philip of France, and Marie, sister of King Philip of Spain.

The rule was considered too austere for women and was mitigated by Pope Urban IV. in 1263. He gave permission to the Clares to possess incomes.

Some of the convents preferred the original rule of St. Francis, hence arose the distinction between Urbanists and Poor Clares. In Paris they are known as "Filles de L'Ave Maria."

Blanche, Queen of Navarre, introduced the Order into England in the year 1293. The convent was situated near Algate, they possessed incomes and were known as Urbanists. There is no authentic record of their mission in England beyond the date of their introduction and the fact of having three houses in the Kingdom.

In 1625 six Irish nuns left Belgium with the hope of introducing the Order in the land of St. Patrick. With some assistance they established themselves in a house in Dublin. Unfortunately the annals of the Order in Ireland are very unconnected; the first two centuries the nuns had so much to suffer, they had little time to think of records or annals, so posterity has little information as to what these noble women had to endure during the dark days of persecution, living in hourly dread of being discovered by the authorities. It can be easily understood how difficult it would have been to have kept a history of their work, a history that if written would fill volumes, telling of heroic faith, constancy, and in many cases martyrdom—for in a time when the religion of Christ was prescribed by law, when priests were hunted like wild beasts, there was little respect or consideration shown to these defenceless women, whose homes were often consigned to the flames or leveled to the ground by the brutal followers of the infamous Cromwell. It is related that notwithstanding the disadvantages of the times quite a number of ladies joined the Community, and the rumor of their lives going abroad, they had many visitors of their own sex, nuns at that time being a novelty in the country.

Amongst the visitors was no less a personage than the wife of the Lord Deputy, who went in disguise; she was much pleased and interested in all she witnessed, but unfortunately she related the particulars of her visit to her husband, who immediately sent the mayor of the town with a company of soldiers to take possession of the convent and bring the abbess before him to be questioned as to the mode of life embraced by the sisters in her charge. She made such calm and judicious replies that the Lord Deputy instead of carrying out the full rigor of the law, contented himself by ordering them to leave Dublin within a month. They separated and were cared for by certain Catholic families until such time as a house could be secured for them.

The spot selected for the new convent was near Athlone, a very unhealthy site, but possessing the then almost priceless advantage of being remote and solitary. The convent was called "Bethlehem."

In 1641 they were driven out of this poor retreat by the Cromwellian soldiers, their effects plundered and their house burned. The nuns fled, some to Wexford and Athlone, some died on their way from cold and exposure, others fled to their houses in France and Spain, a few remained with friends. These, in 1648, obtained from the Corporation of Galway a grant of an island in the river close to the town where they built a fine convent which was destroyed four years afterward when Galway surrendered to Cromwell's army. Some time after a convent was established in Market street, Galway, where they received day boarders, thus passing for a school rather than a religious house.

With many vicissitudes they continued to reside in Galway, six of their number removing to Dublin and founding a house in that city.

In 1636 two of the sisters undertook the perilous task of travelling to London to ask for a grant of three acres on the little island, which had become vested in the crown. Lady Hamilton, one of the ladies in waiting, obtained for them an interview with Queen Caroline, Consort of King George the Second. Their mission was successful, and the Poor Clares have held the ground ever since.



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ROMAN NEWS.

The exequator granted to the Patriarch of Venice has been published in the official organ of the government.

It is said that the Sultan has refused to Mr. Azarian permission to go to Rome in answer to the invitation of the Pope.

His Beatitude Mgr. Bonni, the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, left Paris on the 9th of October for Lourdes, whence he went to Rome.

The history and texts of all the concordats concluded under the pontificate of Leo XIII. have been bound together in an elegant volume.

The Holy Father has received Monsignor Gennardi, Bishop of Aci Reale, Monsignor Emard, Bishop of Valleyfield, in Canada, and Abbe Castongey.

It is said that the encyclical to the American bishops will be printed and published in Washington in order to avoid incomplete or incorrect summaries.

The Apostolic Legate to Chili, Mgr. Macchi, has received a most enthusiastic welcome in Santiago, the population raising cheers for Leo XIII. as his cortege passed.

M. Zardetti, until lately bishop of St. Cloud, in Minnesota, but now Archbishop of Bucharest, Roumania, while on his way to his new See, visited Rome and was received in audience by the Holy Father.

The Holy Father has been pleased to nominate Commendatore Henry Stevenson, director of the numismatic section of the Vatican museum, which post was left vacant by the death of Commendatore Visconti.

We regret to have to announce the sudden death from apoplexy of Mgr. L. M. Pellegrino, titular Bishop of Troade, Archbishop of Altamura and Acquaviva. The deceased was the unconquerable champion of the Italian episcopacy. R.I.P.

Mgr. Panici, Sub-Datario, accompanied by the Superior of the Dutch Franciscans and an engineer, visited Amaseno to lay out a convent of the Order on the sanctuary of the Virgin called Lericola, the site and funds for constructing which have been generously conceded by the reverend prelate.

Two professors of the Catholic University of Fribourg, who are stopping in Rome for scientific researches, have had the honor to be received familiarly by the Pope in the gardens of the Vatican. They are the Vice-Rector Sturm and M. Kirsch. His Holiness made minute inquiries as to the progress of the institution.

A Catholic Congress has been held at Tarragona under the presidency of the Archbishop of Seville. The affluence of ecclesiastics and laymen was extraordinary. The first act of the assembly was to pass unanimously an address to the Pope announcing the wishes of those present for the restoration of the temporal power of the Papacy.

The Piccolo di Trieste says the Sovereign Pontiff has for some months past been admitted as the owner of property in that city. Count Edward Ginzel, who died on the 27th of September, 1893, left by will two houses in the V. a. Commerciale of Trieste to "His Holiness the Pope of the Holy Roman Catholic Church." The local civil tribunal has recognized the inheritance, and ordered the houses to be inscribed on the registry with the name of Leo XIII. The example of Austria should not be without its influence on the judges of Paris.

The Mhadi has declared a holy war against the Italians along the west shore of the Red Sea.

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