

Mother Mary of the Cross: O.D.C.

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A Memoir

by Robert Speaight

I

Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, Third Marquis of Salisbury and three times Prime Minister of Great Britain, was a man of many principles. One of these was that the more public houses you had in a place the fewer people were likely to get drunk; another was that in the town of Bishops Hatfield, over which he ruled with a benevolent and unquestioned authority, the Roman Catholics must be kept on the other side of the railway. The 'other side' is all that most people now see of Hatfield, as they rush northwards along the double lanes of the A.1; but in the days when I lived there the Great North Road passed through the middle of the town, and I can remember at least three public houses – one of them the *Eight Bells* where Bill Sykes ordered his pint after the murder of Nancy – which the eye of an alert traveller might have caught within the space of sixty seconds. To catch sight of the Roman Catholics you would have had to go a mile or two up the St Albans Road where the Oblates of St Charles maintained their unobtrusive Oratory. The old part of the town was dominated by the spire of St Ethelreda's church, with the Old Palace of the Bishops of Ely, and the great house and park beyond, and the statue of the third Marquis meeting you as you came out of the station. If 'Establishment' means anything, it meant everything at Bishops Hatfield.

One day, in 1925, a strange new building began to go up in the privileged part of the town, within a few yards of the railway. We learned to our astonishment that this was to be a convent of Carmelite nuns. There seemed no reason to suppose that the fourth Marquis of Salisbury was any less resolved than his father to keep the Roman Catholics in their proper place, and we wondered by what virtuosity of ecclesiastical cunning a convent was coming to be built only a few doors away from our favourite fishmonger. We knew nothing, then, of Mother Mary of Jesus from Notting Hill, who had her own ways of getting what she wanted. Neither I, nor my parents, were Catholics in those days, and although we had no prejudice against nuns, we knew very little about them – and about Carmelite nuns we knew nothing whatever. The Sisters, when they arrived from Notting Hill, sensibly took account of an ignorance which we shared with everyone else, and of a prejudice from which we were immune. For several days before the ceremony of Enclosure they threw the place open for inspection; showed us how they sat on the floor; explained their way

of life; and demonstrated the discomfort of their beds. The principal cicerone was the Prioress, Mother Mary of the Cross, who endeared herself to everyone she met. The Roman Catholics had acquired, in a matter of days, the *droit de cité* which had hitherto been denied them.

It is a popular fallacy that because Carmelites are enclosed, they are therefore inaccessible. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is far easier to get an appointment with a Carmelite than to get an appointment with a dentist. For one thing, you look forward to the appointment, and you feel no desire, as you wait in the parlour, to distract yourself with the *Tatler* or the *Illustrated London News*. I had many long talks with Mother Mary of the Cross, both before and after I became a Catholic, and I made my first Communion in the Convent chapel. She was quick to recommend to me the doctrine of St John of the Cross, little equipped as I was to understand it; and it was impossible, after these long conversations, to misunderstand the intense realism of the contemplative life. Her feeling for history was very strong, and although she never made the slightest attempt to proselytise, she left one in doubt as to what she thought of the Anglican claim to continuity. Her appearance – round faced, smiling, and robust – and the singular beauty of her voice matched the balance of her mind and the firmness of her character. Her sense of humour was clear and direct, and very much in the spirit of her founder. She seemed to be on terms of candid familiarity with God. The last time I saw her was on the day when the Carmel, finally maddened by the *Flying Scotsman*, had moved its quarters to Hitchin. Nevertheless whenever I pass through Hatfield station on my way north, I remember the morning I stood there on the ‘up’ platform with Bernard Shaw. ‘Those women’ he said, motioning to the bleached walls of the convent which contrasted so poorly with the mellowed red brick of Cecilian Hatfield ‘have really got hold of something.’ Shaw had just been writing about Saint Joan, and the rumour was around that he was proposing to write about St Teresa. It was occasionally suggested that they were getting hold of Bernard Shaw.

Grace Elphick was born in Dublin on December 8th 1891, of an Irish mother and an English father. Her father was not a Catholic at the time, although he was received into the Church ten years later. The girl had a touch of Irish temper, and the unsuspecting guest might have regarded her as something of an *enfant terrible*. ‘Make it strong, Mr Kennedy – Mother likes it strong’ she observed to a gentleman invited to mix the punch; or ‘My Nanna says those Proddies will go to hell’ to a party of Protestant friends – sentiments which she certainly would have repudiated in after life. She was warmly devoted to her ‘nanna’. When ‘nanna’ fainted towards the end of Mass and fell with a sinister thud between the benches, Grace set up a disconsolate wail: ‘My lovely Nanna’s dead!’ Nanna was anything but lovely and anything but dead, but Grace would only believe in

her survival when she had been promised Nanna's egg for breakfast as well as her own. Her faith did not usually require this material reinforcement, and in recalling the incident she would emphasise the contrast between herself and St Therese of Lisieux who wanted the people she loved to die so that they could get to Heaven as quickly as possible. Mother Mary of the Cross was just as anxious that her friends should get to Heaven, but she was herself too much in love with life not to understand the normal human desire that arrival there should be reasonably delayed. She was trained early to be a good loser for lesser stakes; indeed she had learnt to play cards before she could read or write. On one occasion, when the silver stake had been won by her grandmother, she slipped down from her chair, walked to the door, and turned round with indignation quivering in every curl. 'You pair of wretches' she exclaimed, before fleeing from the room.

She had two brothers, both of whom died in infancy. She was old enough to remember the younger of these; by accident she had strayed into the room where he lay in his diminutive white coffin, and reported that she had seen 'little brother asleep in a chocolate box.' Two more brothers, Kevin and Patrick, were born later. Somewhere around the turn of the century the family moved to England, and Grace was sent to school with the Mary Ward nuns at Cambridge. Here she spent seven happy years; made her first Communion; and was confirmed. Among her school-fellows was Maisie Ward, who remained a friend for life; and among the celebrated people who came down to speak was Hilaire Belloc. She would later recognize the ring of truth in Belloc's admission: 'I look at these two great countries – England and France – and I remember with pride that I belong to both, yet am entirely of neither.' At the time she would feel very much the same thing herself about England and Ireland; when she was with the English girls all her Irishry came out, and when she was with the Irish she remembered she had an English father. She was backward in her Latin, reducing her coach to desperation. As one mistake followed another, he would exclaim: 'It's a howler!' – 'It's a barbarism!' – 'It's a solecism!' Her *forte* was mathematics. But the person who influenced her most, then and for many years to come, was Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson. He became her spiritual director and taught her the contemplative way of prayer. A contemplative vocation – not yet defined – was quick to declare itself; but in the meantime she was sent for six months to a school at Le Havre, where a community of teaching nuns had preferred to change into secular dress rather than face the exile which anti-clerical legislation then prescribed. She liked the nuns, disliked the schoolgirls, and missed the games. For compensation she would be taken, in the afternoon, to see places of interest in the neighbourhood, and to meet people with whom she could practise her conversation. This might have been good enough for the classroom, but it

was not thought good enough for the confessional. Accordingly she was made to sit up on a high stool in the sacristy and write out her sins in green ink. 'You write . . . I burn – I absolve . . . we go to the box' were the laconic instructions of a doubtfully bilingual abbé. To the end of her days Mother Mary of the Cross had an allergy to green ink.

Benson wrote to her continually, and one regrets that many years later, in a supreme effort of detachment, she destroyed his letters. It was not in the least that she had ceased to value them; she only feared lest she was valuing them too much. Meanwhile she had come across an early copy of the Autobiography of S. Therese of Lisieux, and she would listen with passionate interest to one of the nuns who had met Therese Martin, with her father, when they happened to stop for an hour or two at the same convent. Lisieux is not very far from Le Havre, but there is no record of Grace Elphick going there. She was never tempted to undervalue the Saint of Lisieux, but I noticed in such conversations as I had with her that her reference was nearly always to S. Teresa of Avila. She had the cast of mind that goes back to original sources.

Her knowledge of France was not confined to Le Havre and its *environs*. At the beginning of each holiday her father would take her to Paris before bringing her home. But the normally sunny horizon of home was presently overcast with material and emotional worries. Mr Elphick's income was suddenly reduced, and his wife was incapacitated by a slow but mortal illness. There could be no question of a university career for Grace, and no question either of her entering Carmel so long as her mother was alive, for the household now depended on her. She would arrange small bridge parties to relieve the tedium of her mother's inactivity, and if she were away for only a few hours, would telephone an account of her doings. The later stages of Mrs Elphick's illness were complicated by dropsy – with symptoms so distressing that her daughter flinched when she had, in time, to face them herself. The mother was already in the secret of Grace's call to Carmel and was only with difficulty reconciled to it. Why could she not make use of her obvious talents in some active order, when she would be separated less drastically from a family that might well be needing her? These arguments have been put to many would-be contemplatives, and in the nature of this particular case they could only be answered with time. Benson had already introduced Grace to Mother Mary of Jesus at Notting Hill, who had recognized in her at once the signs of a genuine vocation. It remained to be seen if, and when, it could be tested.

Mrs Elphick died in January 1913, and Monsignor Benson later in the same year. Grace had only just come of age, but the household relied on her more than ever. That wise and good man, Monsignor Jackman, secretary to Cardinal Bourne, now became her spiritual counsellor. In 1914 the outbreak of war naturally disturbed the

family pattern. Kevin, fresh from Stonyhurst, joined up and was killed when he was little more than 18 years old; and on one of Grace's visits to Ireland the boat narrowly escaped an enemy torpedo. She would say afterwards that she loved her life in Ireland so much – as indeed she loved it everywhere – that if she had stayed in Dublin, she might have lost her vocation. She and her father were now living at Barnes, and it was about this time that she made friends with Monsignor Duchemin, already Rector of the Beda, and with Dom Roger Huddleston O.S.B. who was attached to the Benedictine Priory at Ealing. She had felt, like many other young women of her age, the call of some form of war work, but Dom Roger suggested that she join the teaching staff at the Priory school. This would enable her to companion and support her father, and fill the gap left by some young master who was then serving with the armed forces. No woman had ever taught at Ealing before, and Dom Roger warned her that she might not find the boys easy to control. In fact, she had not the slightest difficulty in doing so; Father Alfonso de Zulueta was among the pupils who became her friends for life.

Another friendship formed in these years of waiting and of war had important consequences. Mr Alec Whaley was a wealthy convert of Jewish birth, who had been left a widower with two young daughters, one aged seven and the other just leaving school. He invited Grace to spend the holidays with them, and eventually persuaded her to live with them altogether. Her experience in bringing up younger brothers of her own made her an ideal companion. Cardinal Bourne was a close friend of the Whaleys, and whenever he came to visit them in their Hertfordshire home, or they called upon him at Hare Street, the duties of hostess fell upon Grace. 'Now, Miss Elphick, be mother to us all' he would say, with the rather frigid ecclesiastical manner courteously relaxed. She told him of her desire to be a Carmelite, and Monsignor Jackman was at hand to give moral support. It was now clear that Mr Elphick, with the help of a devoted maid, could manage for himself, and he generously agreed that Grace should be given the chance to try her vocation. For some time she went back and forth between Monsignor Jackman – who was unwilling to make a decision on her behalf – and the Prioress of Notting Hill. It was finally agreed that she should enter in the New Year with the name of Sister Mary of the Cross.

In the autumn of 1918 she paid a farewell visit to her Irish relatives, and arrived home drenched and shivering from a stormy crossing on a crowded boat. This brought on a sharp attack of rheumatic fever, from which it took her two weeks to recover. She was nursed in the Hospital of St John and St Elizabeth, and was still there on November 11 when the Armistice was signed. A further period of convalescence was obviously required, but she was impatient for Carmel, and the Prioress agreed that she should enter, as arranged, on the Feast of the Epiphany, 1919. Just as she was about

to leave the world whose fullness her rich nature had so abundantly enjoyed, she was taken for a drive by one of her priest friends who asked her if there was anything she would like before crossing the threshold. 'Yes' she answered 'I should like a cigarette.' Very many important things were happening around her in the world as she stood at the door of the Enclosure with her friend Lady Minna Kerr, but they did not prevent Lady Minna from exclaiming: 'Oh, if the half-penny papers only knew what is happening!' And in fact there is nothing more momentous than the descent of a contemplative into obscurity.

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Sister Mary's health was in no way to withstand the austerities of an unaccustomed way of life, and for a time certain exceptions were made in her favour. These were naturally humiliations and she soon begged to be relieved of them. We next meet her as Sub-Prioress and Mistress of Novices at Notting Hill in 1923 – a rather quick promotion to responsibility. The first impression she made on one of her postulants was of 'a face of character, peace and prayer – not unlike a Spanish Carmelite Prioress in St Teresa's time.' This was exactly the impression I had of her myself whenever she raised her veil behind the grille. 'In Carmel' she told this young aspirant 'we are hermits, we don't concern ourselves with what happens around us. If you see a Sister standing on her head in the passage, you may take it she has permission to do so.' With this her ready smile broadened, and she tucked up her habit, explaining that this was Carmelite practice when they were working in the house, in the garden, or at the wash-tub. She was not discouraged by slow progress when the vocation was a sure one. She would recall St Anthony's reminder to a novice to 'take heed to his ways that he sin not with his tongue'; and how the novice returned after 30 years, and on being questioned about so long an absence, replied that he had only just learnt to practise such difficult advice. Girls – even Carmelite girls, on occasion – are given to giggling. Sister Mary of the Cross could appreciate the difference between laughter and giggling, and indeed illustrated it in her own comportment. She encouraged the one and was down like a ton of bricks on the other.

In 1925 she was named Prioress of the Hatfield convent. Mother Mary of Jesus was busy emulating St Teresa in the number of her foundations – a rivalry that brought in its wake a good deal of material embarrassment. The seven Sisters who so fluttered our Anglican dovecotes had to pay their own way and find their own means of support. They were expected to make ginger bread without ginger margarine, and the time came when it was impossible to cook anything because the last piece of coal had been consumed. When she was told of this, Mother Mary of the Cross could only reply that there

was nothing to be done because the exchequer as well as the coal bin was empty. Half an hour later a neighbour arrived with a carton of coal, thinking the Carmelites might be cold; another brought an iron for altar breads; and soon the Sisters were making vestments in a small way. I remember that my mother always made them a cake for Christmas, and indeed it was not long before they could draw upon an unlimited store of local good-will.

If it was true that Carmelites are hermits, each convent is none the less a family, where the Prioress stands *in loco parentis*. Mother Mary of the Cross was very much the mother of her brood; even an outsider, admitted to her friendship, would not have thought of her otherwise. The Sisters were sisterly to one another – and, in the way of sisters, perhaps not always seeing eye to eye – but they were daughterly to her. Her sense of justice was very strong; she had no respect of persons; and although she expected a Sister to have the metal to stand up to an unmerited reproof, she was quick to acknowledge her own mistakes. She had no patience with pride or self-pity, and her observance of the rules and customs of the Order was meticulous without being finicky. When there was question of changing some of these, she was among those who respectfully but energetically protested. When Rome confirmed the changes, she ordered a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving.

She instilled into her novices, of whom she remained in charge until her final illness, the sense of liberty as well as the habit of obedience. 'No' she would say 'I want you to tell me what *you* think. God has given you common sense.' She was certainly not lacking in common sense herself. Her faults, such as they were, were only the faults of a very strong character; and she was occasionally misjudged by people who mistook her strength for pride. 'Jesus, gentle me' was a prayer constantly on her lips. She did not suffer fools gladly. 'God has given me quite a lot of one kind of patience' she told a Sister 'but He has given me none whatever of the other kind. Read that'. And she handed the Sister a letter from a lady describing herself as a 'great friend of God', and demanding to enter Carmel at once on the grounds that visions and ecstasies had been vouchsafed to her. Nothing escaped Mother Mary's notice, although she admitted that it would be much easier to shut her eyes. She had no wish, she said, to see her Sisters wearing a 'paper crown in Heaven'. But she was as sympathetic as she was exacting. The sun was never permitted to go down upon her wrath, and if a Sister was ill she was tireless in her practical attention, often sitting up with her all night. She also understood, from her own experience, the obstacles that family ties may put in the way of a vocation. Although she tended to underestimate the difficulties of converts, she had special consideration for the non-Catholic parent of an intending postulant. She invited the father of one of these to stay at Hatfield; found him lodgings in the town; and gave him good meals at the Convent, even ordering in

some beer. This was in 1936 when Carmelite hospitality was severely restricted; even special visitors were allowed no more than a cup of tea and a biscuit. The parent was received into the Church on his death bed, leaving his widow very badly off. Mother Mary of the Cross made her an allowance out of some money she had at her disposal and encouraged her frequent visits. The lady's tolerance of Carmelites, and no doubt her gratitude to them, did not extend to a tolerance of the grille which cut them off from the world. She called it 'that damned thing', and the more she damned it the more Mother Mary of the Cross reciprocated her curses with affection. Her ideal of Carmel was a 'heaven on earth', but she was quite free from the snobbery which sometimes afflicts the more ambitious religious orders. She was a Christian before she was a contemplative, and there was need for all sorts of Christians in a world that had to be won for Christ.

It was this genuine catholicity, no doubt, that gained her so many friends among the clergy; more than 130 of them signed the testimonial for her Jubilee. She depended, in any doubtful matter, on their advice, and gave as freely of her own. When a number of students from St Edmunds asked her to pray that their names might appear on the Ordinations list, she replied with devastating realism: 'Indeed, I won't, unless you are going to be good, holy priests. I'll beg our Lord to stop you in time, if you won't be.' She regretted having no contacts with the Dominicans, but she made up for this by purchasing the English edition of St Thomas, volume by volume, as it came out. She ordered these to be kept on the open shelves in the Community room, where they would be available at any time, not forgetting that St Thomas figured in the Carmelite Breviary as 'the Preceptor of our Order'. Other books at her side were the Knox New Testament, the works of S. Teresa and S. John of the Cross, and Frank Sheed's *Theology and Sanity*. The last of these she wrapped in brown paper to keep it from the wear and tear of constant use. 'Give me Frank', she would say when she was too ill to reach for the book herself.

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By the time the Community moved to Hitchin at Michaelmas, 1938, it numbered 18, and for the next nine years Mother Mary of the Cross maintained its stability and assured its spiritual growth. But the term of her long life of leadership was now approaching. In fact the bout of rheumatic fever which had nearly delayed entrance into Carmel was indirectly the cause of her leaving it, for it had left her heart permanently affected. One day in 1947, as she hurried downstairs rather more quickly than usual for the morning office, she was so out of breath that it was only with difficulty that she could get through the prayers. The doctor certified abnormally high blood

pressure, and a serious weakness of the heart, and ordered her to stay in bed for a month. In May 1948 she went to see Sir Maurice Cassidy. He told the friend who had arranged the consultation that Mother Mary was a very sick woman and had hardly a year to live. During the following winter she spent periods of a month at a time in bed, and in May 1949 she had an attack of pneumonia. This postponed the elections, at which she was again elected Prioress. In August of the same year she had two severe attacks of cardiac asthma, and received the Last Sacraments. The Community were told that she was unlikely to live for more than six months. At the same time her Extraordinary Confessor, on whom she greatly relied, was seriously ill with angina pectoris and unable to come to Hitchin. She was never to see him again; and neither was well enough to correspond by letter. A further deprivation was the departure of her doctor from general practice, although she was fortunate in his replacement.

In November, 1949, she was again ill with pneumonia, followed by a third attack of cardiac asthma, and was given the Last Sacraments for the second time. But the specialist who came to see her on the Feast of Epiphany, 1950, gave a fairly encouraging report of her condition. 'This is a very muddling illness' she observed – and she was a woman who hated muddles. Two weeks later she had a further attack, which everyone believed would be her last. A Sister was due to be professed the next morning, and Mother Mary managed to gasp out: 'Mother Sub-Prioress, if I die tonight the Profession will take place.' She had been moved downstairs into the Community room, which was the best and airiest in the house, and when the doctor arrived he believed her to be dying. But she did not die, and the Profession did take place, the Sisters passing through her room in procession on their way to Chapter. At one point in the ceremony her voice was heard joining in the prayers, and the newly-professed Sister went in to her to make her vows.

On February 26th Mother Mary of the Cross had a severe heart attack, and was again thought to be dying. She lay unconscious all night and the Last Sacraments were again administered. But she regained consciousness in the early morning, and by March 9th she was well enough to have a 'trying-on' for a Clothing in her cell. She was still very ill, however, and a night nurse was engaged for a month. When she had left, the Sisters looked after their Prioress. By now she was suffering from dropsy and other discomforts and was confined to bed, except when she was wheeled into the garden. This was a special delight to her. When she entered Carmel she knew nothing of gardening; told to pull up the weeds at Notting Hill, she noticed that they grew in straight lines, and the gardener noticed that she had pulled up all the spinach beet. But when she realised that the community at Hatfield, and later at Hitchin, would have to grow their own flowers and vegetables, she took every opportunity of consulting gardeners and periodicals as to how this could best be

done within the means at her disposal. During the Second World War she mastered just as thoroughly the management of goats, cows and hens. One year when the hay was in short supply the cow was threatened with starvation. By relentless enquiry she found that she could lay her hands on some, and the old gardener observed: 'There's not a farmer in the whole of Hertfordshire can get a morsel of hay for his cows, but Reverend Mother has got a load.' Where there was a will there was a way.

The Sisters made a network of paths for her chair, so that there was no corner of the garden which she was not able to visit. On June 14th she attended Mass, and received Holy Communion through the Sisters' grille for the first time since the previous December. The Eucharist and the Scriptures had always been the root of her spirituality, and she kept abreast of liturgical developments. The Hitchin Carmel was among the first to have a dialogue Mass. Although she was now able to walk a little, another heart attack on the eve of her Feast, September 11th, 1950, again brought her to death's door; but on November 1st, when the dogma of the Assumption was declared by Pius XII, she was able to walk into Choir and Recreation. Indeed she regained a good deal of her normal energy, and on November 12th she could once more walk in her Habit – for it was almost a year since she had been fully dressed. The Sisters stood up in their astonishment and delight, and recited a *Te Deum*. The Prioress was now sometimes seen at Vespers; she presided at the weekly Chapters; and although she was still not allowed to walk more than a few steps at a time, she was out in the garden a good deal, and was in choir for the clothing of a novice, actually performing the clothing herself. At Christmas she could not attend the Midnight Office or Mass, and as the Sisters came out of Choir after Lauds to sing before the Crib, they lowered their voices so as not to waken her; but they heard her voice, high and clear, joining in from her cell. I used to recognize that voice, in the Convent chapel at Hatfield, soaring unmistakably above the others.

Her malady returned in January 1952, and did not leave her until she died. It brought not only its usual discomforts, but it also induced in Mother Mary a quite unaccustomed spiritual dryness. She was subject to great depression; found it increasingly difficult to see the Community; and was unable to speak for long stretches at a time. Once she called the Noviciate and gave them a short instruction, but the effort completely exhausted her. When the novices had left, rather abruptly, she burst into tears. She could now no longer stay for long in bed, moving backwards and forwards between her bed and chair, and holding her hand to her side where a new pain was hurting her. 'What is it?' she would say, for she was a person who liked to get to the bottom of every question, whether of life or of death. She never knew that she was suffering from cancer.

At the beginning of April the doctor declared that she must go

into hospital. She accepted the necessity without fuss, and since she detested emotional display the Sisters had to hide their heartbreak at what they feared would be a final separation. She received Holy Communion for the last time on the evening of Palm Sunday, and the ambulance came to fetch her the next morning. Two Sisters accompanied her. As she caught a distant view of the convent from the window she remarked 'That is our house'; but that was all she said. A private room and special bed were waiting for her, and as soon as her things had been unpacked she sent the Sisters away.

On the Thursday in Holy Week two specialists gave their opinion that Mother Mary of the Cross was suffering from cancer. Her own doctor had said nothing earlier because he believed that it was better for Mother Mary not to know; and also that if he had told the Sisters they could not have kept the matter to themselves. In fact the end came as quickly as he had foreseen. When the Parish Priest of Hitchin brought her the Apostolic Blessing she held out both her arms to him and exclaimed 'Oh, Father, give me everything that Mother Church can give', and the priest remarked to the extern Sister in attendance: 'There's a true daughter of St Teresa for you!' Mother Mary had a Catholic nurse or the Matron of the Hospital to look after her, and her own Sisters came down in pairs and occupied an adjoining room. Early in the morning of Holy Thursday one of them found the Prioress asleep in the sitting posture to which she had accustomed herself for the past three years. Her head was slightly to one side and her face looked very gaunt and thin. To this Sister, and indeed to many others who saw her during these last hours, she gave an extraordinary impression of the *Ecce Homo*. She rallied a little in the early morning, but at 7.30 her pulse was failing; the priest arrived quickly to say the prayers for the dying; and the Sisters put the Profession Crucifix to her lips, and recalled the Sisters who had been with her the night before. All this time the tears which Mother Mary of the Cross had generally known how to restrain were streaming down her face. When she died peacefully at 9 o'clock the Sisters stood up and recited the Magnificat.

Her body was brought back to the Convent just as the mid-day Angelus was ringing, and exposed on a white couch in the Choir. It was thought at first that this would be impossible on account of the nature of her illness and the discolouring of her face. But the Community – which now numbered 21 – were forewarned and wanted, at whatever shock to their sensibilities, to see her once more. As the hours wore on, the stamp of suffering gradually disappeared from her features, which took on the colour of deep ivory, and her face became round and young and even smiling. She had come to look in death exactly as her friends remembered her in life. The coffin was closed on the evening of Good Friday, and covered, at her request, with flowers which were renewed each day. She was buried on Easter Monday, after a Solemn Requiem. 'I want my funeral to be a happy

one' she had said. 'No tears, please. And if you let them put any chocolate-box frills on my coffin, I shall haunt you.' More than 100 priests and seminarians from St Edmund's overflowed the Choir, and these were only part of the great company which followed Mother Mary of the Cross to the grave. Among those who could not be present but sent messages of sympathy to the Sisters were a girl from the dairy at Hatfield and a German prisoner of war who had worked in the garden at Hitchin. An Anglican clergyman spoke of Mother Mary's 'mantle of generosity and thought', for she had made everyone she spoke to feel that they were the only person who mattered to her – whether they were a priest or a chimney-sweep. But only her daughters in Carmel could know how well she had earned the name she had given herself in religion, and how faithfully she had followed her own precept: 'It matters little if you have 10d. or £10,000, whatever you have, Our Lord wants the *last farthing*. When we make our Profession we hand in a blank cheque: He is free to fill it in.'

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