

MOTHER MARIE DE LAROCHE

Foundress of the Sisters of Divine Providence

By

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Saint Louis Province

C O N T E N T S

Life of

Mother Marie de LaRoche

MOTHER MARIE DE LAROCHE
(Fanny de LaRoche)
1812 – 1857

Mother Marie was born on October 28, 1812 in the Castle at Wieblingen, near Heidelberg, in Germany. Her parents were William Louis de LaRoche and Amelia Baroness von Glosen. The child was baptized on the following November 9, according to the Evangelical Reformed Rights in the Chapel on the family estate. An authenticated copy of this Baptism is preserved in the Diocesan Chancery of Mayence. In Baptism, the child received the names Stephanie (Fanny as she was ordinarily called), Amelia and Fredericka. Her sponsors were Lieutenant Heinroth and the Countess of Lerchenfeld.

The LaRoche family was of French nobility of Burgundy. They were Protestant Huguenots who had left their Fatherland in 1645 and settled in Germany to escape the persecution of their religious sect.

Fanny's Mother was short-lived, dying in her thirtieth year when Fanny had not yet completed her fourth year.

Fanny was a highly gifted, cheerful and sprightly child. In her youth and maidenhood she received an excellent and broad education in the arts, sciences, literature and languages as is usual among the Nobility. In society she much preferred to associate with her Catholic friends. She often remarked that they never indulged in uncharitable remarks and criticisms as did her Protestant associates, who on all occasions ridiculed Catholicism.

Once when on a pleasure trip, a serious accident occurred, endangering their lives. Fanny and Emma, her sister, at once resolved to embrace the Catholic religion, if protected from injury. God heard their prayer, and both were preserved from all harm. They considered this protection miraculous. A more accurate description of this incident is nowhere recorded although many wish to know more about it; because of her modesty Fanny never related matters pertaining to herself.

Fanny wished to attend to the fulfillment of her vow without further delay. Soon after, she paid a visit to her Catholic relatives in Speyer. There she became acquainted with Nicholas Weiss II, Bishop of Speyer. In confidence she related to him the conditions of her home, and the events of her past life. Her conversations with him and his impressive Lenten sermons of 1851 definitely influenced her deeply and she resolved to enter the Church at once. The Bishop recommended to her as Spiritual Director one of his Cathedral Canons, the Most Reverend William Molitor, a very learned and pious Priest and a great writer, who had charge of the nearby Parish at Schifferstadt. This zealous Priest took a great interest in Fanny. He instructed her thoroughly in the Catholic faith, and when she was well informed, he administered conditional Baptism to her on June 14, 1851. The next day, Trinity Sunday, she received her First Holy Communion.

This was a very happy day for Fanny, but concealed in her heart was a secret fear, that this act would alienate her from her Parents and relatives. Although she surmised that they had some knowledge of her becoming a Catholic, she deemed it her duty to acquaint them personally with the fact that she had embraced the Catholic Faith.

On the day of her Baptism she wrote a most pathetic letter to her Mother, asking her to acquaint her relatives with the step she had taken. Her letter breathed love and affection for her family, but never again were they reconciled with her; on the contrary they disowned and disinherited her. This caused her untold sorrow and distress. Time and again she contacted them in writing, but never again could she regain their love and good will. The letter she wrote on the day of her Baptism follows:

To the Countess de LaRoche,
Born Countess of Usküll

Schifferstadt, June 14, 1851

Dear Mother,

It is impossible for me to let this beautiful day come to a close without imparting to you, in a childlike and sincere manner, what you already may surmise; nevertheless, let me be the first to confide it to you.

I have today prayed fervently that God may dispose your hearts, my dear ones, not to blame me for taking the step to which my firm faith and joyful hope induced me, in order to find the entire truth, which I possessed before only partially. May the heavenly Father hear my prayer, and grant that you, my dear ones, may not be angry when I tell you that this afternoon I joined the Catholic Church. Little Amelia, carrying a candle, led me to the Altar.

An interview with the Bishop of Speyer, induced me to reach this beautiful goal sooner than I myself had expected. In order to become clear and firm in my resolution, I attended the impressive mission sermons at Speyer.

Immediately after the sacred act I confessed to Father Ignace, and tomorrow, on the exalted feast of the Most Holy Trinity, I will receive Holy Communion. I will remain here yet a few days, and then go to Mannheim to visit Emma, who is understanding yet a little sad; good Leopold, on the contrary, is very happy and very brotherly toward me. Often do I think of Good Udo, and desire to see him, in order to convince myself that he still bears love for me in his heart. Please acquaint him with the contents of this letter since I do not know whether he is in Karlsruhe or Baden.

Now I will increase my fervent prayers for all of you, so that the bond which unites us may not be broken. May God give me the grace to prove by my future life that no other than holy intentions prompted me to increase my old faith by the new.

In all things I see so clearly the wonderful heavenly guidance, and still endeavor to strengthen in me childlike confidence. To this fatherly guidance may be attributed also the death of the good Governess, which was instrumental in bringing it about that Clara surprised her mother here, and through my resolve found an unexpected joy for her and for me. She sends kindest regards to you and brother. I too send hearty greetings and recommend myself to you most sincerely, and also lovingly ask pardon, dear Mother, for all in which I have failed in my life. I would like to write to the good Minister myself, but I fear he will be shocked, therefore I beg you to inform Louise first, so that she may gradually, in my name, acquaint him with the truth.

Oh may these excellent persons not cease their love for me, and may they not be angry with me, because I did not grant their request. Indeed, my health suffered much from the struggle. The hardest trial will be for me, when again I see Wieblingen and the Protestant Church, but all this cannot be compared with the joy of being back in the old Christian Church.

Hearty greetings to my dear Brothers and Sisters, to Udo and Matilda, and with you, dear Mother, I kiss the beloved little ones.

Your Fanny

Her family, especially her step-mother, the Countess Usküll Gylebrandt from Norway, unrelentingly disapproved the step she had taken. In her letter to her family on the day of her Baptism Fanny says: "May God grant me the grace to prove by my future life that no other than holy intentions prompted me to improve my old faith by the new." Some time prior to this, another Huguenot maiden, Marquise de Montenon, returned to the one true Church in lawful marriage with King Louis XIV, which caused great popularity and renown, but she was falsely accused of betraying her faith for glitter and luxury. Such motives could not be attributed to Fanny's change of faith, for she renounced royalty and wealth for life-long poverty, and worldly pleasure for a life of labor and sacrifice.

In her heart she nurtured the desire to give her life entirely to the service of God, and thus make a complete sacrifice of herself. She revealed this desire to her Spiritual Director, Canon Molitor, and he approved her intention, and advised her to seek admission by the Franciscan Sisters at Nonnenwerth. This she did at once, but Mother Agnes, the Mistress of Novices, knowing her to be a convert, refused her admission.

Later on, when hearing of the great work the Baroness did, Mother Angela, the Superioress, bitterly regretted that she had been rejected, saying that Mother Agnes was too scrupulous in granting admissions and that thus a most valuable member had been turned away. But, above all human thought, the refusal by Mother Agnes, came from the heavenly Father's Providence, Who had destined Fanny for a greater work in the Church, and soon this revealed itself.

The following is taken verbally from the "Life and Letters of Mother Angela" by Sister Paula, Kloster Nonnenwerth. She wrote:

"It was of great consequence for the exterior growth of the community that Mother Agnes was entirely ignorant of the conditions of the Rhine District, and too scrupulous in admission of applicants. Otherwise she would not have rejected the convert, the Baroness de LaRoche, an extraordinary soul, who was converted by the well-known Director, Canon Molitor, who had recommended her for admission. She would not have treated her so discouragingly, simply because the family conditions were not known to her."

With deep sorrow Mother Angela saw the rejected one depart. She knew her many prerogatives, and from Faber she quoted: "She was lost to us forever, a pearl in full sense of the word." When later she learned what excellent work was lost to their house, in the rejection of the Baroness, she uttered as she was wont to do in like occurrences: "God did not want it; His Name be forever praised."

"How great, indeed, was our loss, we see from this that the Bishop of Mayence, who merely heard of her, invited her to call on him. He found her willing to help in the new foundation to teach girls and do nursing. He sent her to France to make a good novitiate, and then placed her at the head of the new community and when all was in bloom there, he sent her to make another foundation and then again another, elsewhere."

So far taken from the "Life of Mother Angela" by Sister Paula. Fanny remained ever faithful to Nonnenwerth, and Mother Angela. Later on she was once heard saying: "Never, never, will I forget Nonnenwerth and Mother Angela".

Soon after becoming Bishop of Mayence, Ketteler realized that he must have assistance to teach and train his neglected youth in the country districts. He tried to get his own teachers from Munster, but without success. He was advised by his well-meaning fellow Bishops to found a religious community especially for his purpose. After fervent prayer and all-sided considerations, he resolved to do this, and Divine Providence in Whom he placed all his confidence opened the way and led him onward.

At about this time Reverend Father Autsch, Pastor of the Church in the nearby village of Finthen, informed him about four young ladies, who recently had expressed their desire to become religious, and asked him for advice. This was glad and surprising news for the Bishop, and he at once recognized God's Providence guiding the work he had in mind. On interviewing the four applicants he found them fit instruments for the foundation he was planning. Two of them were from Mayence, one from Wackersheim, and the other one from Heidesheim. He told them about his plans, and all were willing to assist in the work he was undertaking. He admonished them how to prepare themselves for the new state of life, and told them that the foundation would be made as soon as preparations were completed.

In conversation with his intimate friend, Max Baron von Gagern, he learned that a close relative of his had recently returned to the bosom of the true Church. This was happy news for the Bishop, and being interested he expressed his wish to meet the noble Lady. Soon after, Fanny de LaRoche called on him, and this first meeting was of far-reaching consequences. Noticing that the Bishop was interested in her, she acquainted him with the conditions and circumstances of her life, her return to the true Church, and also of her desire to give her life to the service of God and souls in the religious state. The Bishop in wondrous surprise visibly saw God's Providence in all he heard. He then told her that he was planning to found a religious community, since his diocese was sorely in need of religious teachers for his youth, and that for this he needed help. He asked if she were willing to assist him in this good work. She readily and cheerfully seized the opportunity to join in so great a work for God and souls. This highly pleased him; it gave him much relief and courage and strength to continue with his plans.

But the joy was not alone the Bishop's. Only recently Fanny had applied for entrance at a convent and was flatly rejected. This was a hard trial for her, and she was at a loss what to do; yet her faith and trust in God wavered not. She firmly believed that God would take care of her, and now God's Holy Will was revealed to her through Bishop Ketteler on her first meeting with him. Her heart and soul thrilled with joy, praise and thanks to God. She felt that God was with her and leading her. She was ready and willing to do whatever the Bishop would ask of her.

He had listened attentively to all she said, and had observed in her rare qualities, which eventually would fit her to assume the government and guidance of the community which he had in mind to bring into life. To have a competent leader for this community was of much concern for him. He had already applied in different communities for a person qualified to undertake the management of his new community, but all in vain. God willed otherwise, and he now realized that this lies in God's Providence. But, he, too, understood that this new candidate must first be tried to ascertain if her vocation be true and God-given. He submitted her, as was his wont to do in similar instances, to a time of strict probation, of which no more is said but that she showed her deep spirituality and proved that her vocation was a true one.

From then on she kept in close contact with him. Frequently they discussed matters relative the foundation he was planning. At the same time he gave her necessary information and knowledge of the religious life, and she always was much interested. He told her that recently four young ladies had announced their intention of entering the religious state of life, and that he explained to them his project, and that they at once volunteered to become foundation stones for the new community. This filled Fanny with zest and fervor for the new work.

By this time Max von Gagern, Fanny's first cousin, had been informed of her intercourse with the Bishop and what resulted from it. She wrote him the following letter:

To Max, Baron von Gagern

Schifferstadt, Aug. 31, 1851

Dear Cousin,

Today I have the confident hope that I shall afford you some pleasure by these lines, since I am closer to you spiritually, as an aspirant of Divine Providence. May the all-bountiful now grant me so abundant grace, that this joy maybe a lasting one, since we can accomplish all god through Him alone.

In my retreat I understood clearly, through my meditations in Manresa, that if we wish really to follow Christ, we must divest ourselves of all our own desires, and that I must sacrifice to God my love for the convent of Nonnenwerth and the Angelic Mother Angela (Augusta v. Kordie), in order to follow a more meritorious, because a more difficult vocation. My hesitation to undertake this vocation, in view of my utter incapability, I recognize as a lack of trust in God, Who can give m all the gifts I need for it, if I am to become His instrument.

Yesterday the communicants at Sacred Heart and at Peltre offered their Holy Communions for me and this will certainly be touching to you also, dear Max. The prayers of so many pure souls consecrated to God, will certainly not remain unheard. I myself on the feast of St. Augustine received Holy Communion with Madame Desoudin, this angel on earth, and I placed my trust in the intercession of this Saint, to whom I have a special devotion. I thought of you especially in my prayers, and it is a pleasure for me to think that the days of our entering the Church were feasts of two great Fathers of the Church.

I beg you, dear Cousin, to consider well the letter of Pere . . . who did all that he could, not only in the conduct of my retreat, but also in the interest of the new foundation about to be commenced. Yes, I would like to make it a matter of conscience for you, to do all in your power, in the name of all those mentioned in P . . . 's letter, and in the name of the Most Reverend Bishop of Speyer to warn the Bishop (Ketteler) and Pastor Autsch not to begin the work without a secure foundation stone. The Bishop of Speyer told me that just as all Priests would regret it for all their life if they had not been trained in a seminary, so it seemed to him that a novitiate is indispensable for every sister in the convent. And certainly for me is this the greatest necessity, if any little good is to be made of me.

The reason of Abbe Hetzel, on the other hand, wanting no novitiate lies especially in this, that he fears the good German character of the young ladies

may, in a French convent, become half French, that is, as he thinks, narrow-minded. But this concern falls aside if, for instance, we make a novitiate with the school Sisters in Munich. The Bishop of Speyer speaks highly of the religious spirit of this community, and its instructions for children should be excellent. Although Ribeauville lies at the German border, still the instruction is as in the rest of France, even if the character should be German.

In case the other candidates should receive their religious formation entirely in Finthen, I hope the Blessed Virgin will, as model and protectress, grant her assistance, so that all who aid in this holy work will be in conformity with the intentions, and purposes of experienced, spiritual, and certainly of the God-animated men and women of Metz and Peltre, and will consider it as indispensable, that I, at least, for eight months or a year, prepare myself in some convent for so great a work. Nothing will be too hard for me during my novitiate. But if this is not granted me, then I must at least obtain permission from my own spiritual Superiors to work according to the wish of Father Autsch. I do not believe that this permission will be granted me, although one may not object to my living in the convent. They who lived so long in Sacre [sic] Coeur know how much depends on the religious spirit which Pere du B . . . emphatically set above all else, and that without this, the work cannot succeed, although we have the greatest confidence in the sanctity of the Most Reverend Bishop of Mayence, let us not forget that a crusade failed, even though it was preached by St. Bernard.

The Cross of the postulants of Peltre was presented to me for Finthen; their pattern for the caps and bonnet I also have, but these may not be wanted. If wanted I can make them myself. Their pattern will not be used, since the Superior and the Director, and the Grandvicair Beauvallet refused to send sisters now and later to Finthen to assist in training new members, or to admit and train postulants for Finthen in their own novitiate because as they said, they were short of sisters themselves, and they did not want to affiliate with Germany.

Toward me personally they were, on the other hand, full of charity. Yes, they put me to shame by giving me souvenirs, and by showing me attentions of all kinds. I was there two days, but was not admitted to the enclosure, and therefore can say little about the interior of the convent. About the Sacred Heart Convent, and my impressions, however, I would like to relate much, but that would be too lengthy; only this will I yet impart to you. You won there the esteem of all, and they yet speak of the time of your sufferings and resignation. All onto the faithful Valentine, most dear to them, send you greetings, especially Madame Des . . . Rosalie and Madame Maas, whom you certainly yet remember.

I am very sorry to say that after receiving your last letter, it was no more permitted to bring Glennchen, and we both felt sad about it. But soon the happy hour for Glennchen will strike. With her I am sending the statues, etc. Some changes have been also made in Peltre, owing to the new directory, so it was told me.

From Abbe Hetzel and especially from the Most Reverend Bishop Weiss I bring greetings to many. Both these begged me not to be in haste with the foundation, and that wherever this was done, reforms were soon necessary.

Good Abbe Hetzel bade me farewell twice, and perhaps may bring a postulant who is yet a Protestant, but wants to be a nun. She is from Zweibrücken, and is employed in Metz.

Of the beautiful day, yesterday, I will say no more, but God willing, it will remain forever in loving memory.

Farewell, dear Cousin. Kind greetings to the dear children. Write soon about your decision.

Your sincere cousin,
Fanny

Clara greets you heartily; she wrote again to Clementine that she will meet her at Hamburg.

The Bishop had not yet made mention of his plan, but he well realized that for leadership, Fanny would need special religious training in a well-ordered community, and he resolved to send her to a model convent, to make a good novitiate, and thus become imbued with the correct idea of the life consecrated to God. He consulted his colleagues, especially Fanny's former Spiritual Director and Bishop Weiss and others. Many convents were mentioned. Dr. Pfulf, SJ says the choice lay between a convent in Munich and the Sisters of Providence in Ribeauville, in Alsace, Lorraine. He says further that the first mentioned convent was entirely German, especially in its instructions and conversations, that the sisters lived solitary in their homes in Bavaria, doing no nursing or missionary work. The Sisters in Ribeauville on the contrary were known for their spirituality, spoke different languages, did nursing, were good teachers and did other works of charity. After hearing this, no choice was needed. The Bishop said: "Fanny will go to Ribeauville." When asked, Fanny was not only willing, but happy to leave home to make a good novitiate, whenever the time would come. Again the Bishop plainly recognized the heavenly Father's Providence in the execution of his plans.

He began at once to draw up the rules for his new community, and for information read rules of different communities, and also commissioned Fanny to observe and note down and then inform him of whatever might be of service to him in this work. She at once began to make inquiries and in the following letter she tells the Bishop of her experience.

Having been honored and made happy by your kind letter, I feel it my Duty to reply as soon as possible, and to give you all the information the Most Reverend Bishop of Speyer could give me relative the community in Munich and in Ribeauville.

He made many recommendations of both communities, and is much interested in our work, the more so, since he himself hopes to found a similar institution. For several years past he has some novices of the Rhine District by the Sisters of Providence in Munich, who, when the time comes, will be recalled, for out of his domain the Motherhouse was implanted there. To this place the Lord Bishop gives preference above Ribeauville for the novitiate of German postulants; although both these houses have an excellent religious spirit. The

instruction in Munich, he thinks, is preferable, and naturally given entirely in German, while in Ribeauville these are given in French, and in German for such as do not understand French. On the other hand, the Sisters in Munich seem to do little for the care of the sick. The sisters are scattered around in the country districts and observe conventual seclusion in the house and in the school, without going abroad, while in France, certainly to the edification of the entire population, do more activity for the public, so that they call themselves, "Missionaries." For the practice in Bavaria the personal opinion of the Superioress is responsible, and thus the practice could be changed at any time.

The Director at Ribeauville, Pastor Bacher of Mayence, it is said, rules preeminently. He is a youth friend of the Most Reverend Bishop of Speyer, who visited him and the institution the last time four years ago, and therefore he could not give particulars about them of recent times. But I heard in Peltre, that that community numbers already 600 Sisters, who have other rules and a different habit than is worn in Peltre, and owing to the excellency of their organization and their activity are held in high regard.

In compliance with the wish of Your Episcopal Grace, I will come to Mayence in about ten days and I desire to receive from your hand your Episcopal Blessing. O, may God make me more worthy of the blessing of my vocation to your new institution, dedicated to God's Divine Providence.

Finally, and certainly not in vain, do I beg, to be remembered sometimes in the prayers of your Episcopal Grace.

Your most obedient servant,
Fanny de La Roche

Schifferstadt, September 9, 1851

To his great joy the Bishop clearly recognized the heavenly Father's Providence in the execution of his plans in founding the new religious community, and this encouraged him to hasten the project. He had now five prospective candidates, and he thought they could begin living together without any further delay.

Father Autsch wished that they begin in his parish in Finthen, for he hoped that a religious community would bring peace and harmony into his parish where often serious disturbances occurred, and the Bishop acceded to his request.

The candidates were much pleased to hear that soon they would begin their new manner of life. They prepared the poor little house on the Kirchgasse 53 which had been leased for them. To distinguish them from ordinary secular people, as persons retired from the world, the Bishop had asked them to prepare for themselves simple wrappers, garments of a dark color, and a matching head-dress for going out.

The day set for the founding of the new institute was September 29, the feast of the great St. Michael, the Archangel. On that day the Bishop said Holy Mass in the Church in Finthen, and the candidates assisted and received Holy Communion. Thereafter the Bishop

blessed the uniforms they had made, and at the Altar he gave to each Candidate the attire she was from henceforth to wear. Certainly Fanny was with them that day and shared their joy. After the Divine Services they all repaired to their little house, which the Bishop blessed to be their convent home. Fanny became well acquainted with the Candidates and spent the day with them; she saw their first poor convent, the cradle of the community. She would have liked to stay with them, but God and the Bishop had other plans for her.

The Bishop drew up an order of the day for them. He assigned the time for prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, study and other work. This order the Candidates observed faithfully and found happiness in doing so.

Since the institute was established for the sole purpose of supplying teachers for schools for the girls in the villages and country districts, the Bishop attended to it that the Candidates began their studies at once. Evidently they could not afford salaried teachers; therefore the Bishop asked learned Priests and Professors to undertake the work of education and they gladly undertook this work of charity. They drew up a curriculum for their classes, and both teachers and students observed it conscientiously. Most of the instructors lived at a distance from Finthen, and in lieu of convenient means of travel they made their way by foot. But charity counts no cost. Besides their parish work, they attended regularly to this additional time-absorbing labor. The Candidates much appreciated their sacrifices and charity and did their very best to acquire all possible knowledge, and the teachers enjoyed their strenuous task.

After making a mission at Rastatt, and going to confession to Reverend Father Hasslacher, SJ, Fanny left for the novitiate in Ribeauville on October 10, 1851. A few days after arriving at the novitiate Fanny wrote to Bishop Ketteler the following letter.

Ribeauville, October 12, 1851

Most Reverend Bishop,

Gracious Lord,

Perhaps you expected before this a short account of my arrival at Ribeauville, but your gracious writing, for which I can only with deep appreciation express my thanks, was sent me from Schifferstadt, through Lichtenthal, and reached me only on the seventh, just when I returned at the close of the mission at Rastatt, and with strengthened and joyful mind, through confession and Holy Communion, and an impressive sermon by Father Haslager, SJ, using the text: "And I will be thy exceedingly great reward." Two days thereafter I was ready for the trip, and arrived here in the afternoon of the day before yesterday, just in time to witness the beautiful close of a retreat of 300 Sisters, who will now go to their appointments in the country.

Almost all the postulants and novices are on vacation, and will return only after All Saints Day; therefore Superior Backer thought it best that in the meantime I remain with the children in the boarding school, separated from the novitiate, and under the directress of a mistress, who already has won my heart. She wisely considers what is of best advantage for me, so that I, in order to learn and understand the entire method of training these young girls, occupy with them the same dormitory, attend the instructions

of the higher classes directed for advanced education, and besides make the spiritual exercises, and for this reason I rise an hour earlier in the morning.

As much as I could observe until today, the rules and the order of the day and the exercises are similar to those observed in Peltre. St. Vincent de Paul is considered the founder of this Congregation, and is therefore especially honored as their Patron Saint and Protector. This community considers itself a branch of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy, having the same Founder, and each in its activity bears holy fruit. After the storm of the first French Revolution, thirty members of the congregation gathered at Ribeauville, and now they have over 700 Sisters, and this shows visibly that God's blessing is resting on the Community.

The surroundings here are beautiful, and remind me of my home in Heidelberg, and the climate is said to be healthful, and this makes me feel happy for the future postulant whom I am expecting with great desire. It will be good if she understands some French, since no German is spoken in this house, but in consideration for a few German Sisters, the religious instructions in the novitiate are partly given in German.

The Reverend Superior sends you his respects, and thinks that your Episcopal Grace would do well by sending one or more postulants. He will in all events do for our new foundation what is in his power, for it seems to him to be a great affair. He himself attends to his vocation so magnanimously that the Sisters call him a second St. Vincent de Paul. All this affords me a joyful courage during this time of probation, and if something becomes somewhat hard for me, I look at the Cross of our Divine Savior, and this gives me a blissful consolation, as does also the knowledge that some pious souls are praying for the success of the good work to be done for me. Especially in the early morning at five o'clock, the High Altar in the Cathedral of Mayence is distinctly present to my mind.

Doubtless your Episcopal Grace will soon be convinced of the superiority of this institution. Your blessed presence would add happiness to your postulant. At this time your presence would most likely coincide with the visit of the Most Reverend Bishop of Strasburg, since Sigelheim is only two hours distant from here. I also wish most earnestly that Reverend Father Autsch could once visit here, and stay awhile. In three hours one can travel from Mayence to here.

With the mercy of God I will in the meantime strive earnestly to advance in the religious spirit and in all necessary to glorify God by obedience, and the blessed protection of your Episcopal Grace, and with joy I consecrate to God my poor efforts.

Your prayers, the love for the Savior, and your strong courage in His imitation will certainly not remain unheard. I daily implore in Holy Mass heaven's mighty grace to descend on your Episcopal Grace, and with this wish and prayer, remain ever,

Gracious Lord,
Your obedient servant,
Frances

Shortly before Fanny went to Ribeauville, Bishop Ketteler administered to her the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation, and she took the name Frances, and so she signed herself in the first letter thereafter.

For rather a long time Fanny was alone in the novitiate at Ribeauville. In December 1851, the Bishop in writing to Fanny said: "I well know that for the Community to prosper and increase, both spiritually and in its activities, it is necessary that more persons be thoroughly trained in a good novitiate. The Candidates in Finthen seem to be good and willing, but they are not yet well tried. The sole reason for not sending more persons to you is that I have so far not found any qualified. As soon as God wills to send me a person, of whom I can expect that after a thorough training she will be a support and pillar for the new institute, I will send her at once, and the more the better. They will come, but God has His time set for everything."

A second candidate, Caroline Janotha, was really sent to Ribeauville sometime later, and she seemed to be doing well. The Bishop gave Fanny the name Sister Marie and to Caroline, Sister Anna.

Letter from Sister Marie to Bishop Ketteler:

Most Reverend Bishop,

Your Lordship,

Since on the feast of St. Vincent, the new novices will receive the blessing and their new names for the religious life, I humbly beg Your Grace in the name of my dear co-sister, Caroline Janotha, for the favor to give her the name she is to have in her religious life, which I know she will greatly appreciate. May I ask Your Grace to designate whether Caroline should receive her new name at once, or should she wait until the day on which it is customary here to make this known to her? She recommends herself most reverently to Your Grace, and she has asked me to assure you that she can never thank you sufficiently for the great favor you granted her by allowing her to come here, for although she is acquainted with several other convents, she believes that in no other could she find the means for sanctification like here, but she also realizes that for this very reason the responsibility is greater for those whom God has given the grace to seek their eternal salvation here. She has the best will to progress in virtue, and her endeavors seem to be blessed by God. Like myself she feels herself drawn to the wonderful Mistress of Novices and her guidance, as well as to our Father Canon Cocker. She also has become quickly accustomed to the German Sisters here, who in their homes, as in the whole of Alsace, use the German language, which in this convent for practice sake is to be avoided, and the French spoken.

We are 120 novices and postulants, and it is good that there is always an increase entering, since in this beautiful vocation, despite the great precaution for prevention, many young Sisters die of tuberculosis. Only yesterday God again called an eighteen year old to Himself, who was very dear to me, and for that reason I was permitted to be at her bedside in death.

Yesterday, perhaps at the very same [moment], the solemn entrance of my dear Sister, Emma, into the true Church took place. Her resolution to embrace the true Faith, and that the accomplishment of it followed so soon borders on the miraculous. This fills my heart with renewed thanks, and strengthens my confidence in God. The all-merciful God granted me through this information holy joy, and strengthened me to bear the sad message which soon followed and which in my higher vocation can be borne, namely when I learned for certain that you, Gracious Lord, will in the future continue your blessed activity from the Episcopate of Freiburg, in a more extensive field of activity. I heartily thank God, that he has mercy on my dear old Fatherland, Baden. Since my return I tried to prepare myself for this event, by praying that God's Holy Will be done. Nevertheless I must accuse myself of selfish tears. With unreserved confidence I had placed myself under obedience to your guidance, without knowing the conditions of Hesse, nor the name of Finthen, nor that of the Spiritual Father there. I beg you with the same childlike confidence to decide over my future, and beseech you not to withdraw from me. Your Grace, your kindness and your words are for me the words of the Holy Spirit, and what I say of you, Caroline Janotha says likewise.

From Finthen we have so far heard nothing. But I hope the little community there continues to prosper.

On St. Vincent's Day the Bishop of Strasburg will visit here, and likewise in July the Bishop of Speyer. A few weeks ago Father Rohe was here for a short time. Three days ago the Niederbrunner Saints with their Mistress of Novices were here. They were shown everything, the arrangements, the furnishings and details of the entire convent. After they had received in the convent Church, I saw Mother Marie Alphonse. I noticed in her expression something supernatural. O how blissful must be the faith of those Saints.

We poor novices, who stand yet on the lowest round of the ladder, plead in this month especially, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for His grace and help in the practice of Christian virtues, and all of us have the Following of Christ as point for our particular examen. In accordance with your wish, Gracious Lord, I daily read extracts from Rodriquez, Christian Perfection. On this our Mistress puts much importance. She at once gave me for this purpose Part Two to study. This is one of my favorite pursuits, and if God wills it will be a means for my advancement. For this, as well as for all else I have received from you, I thank you daily from my inmost heart. To this kindness of yours belongs also the picture of Christ you gave me, with the words on it: "If you want Me, you must also want My Cross."

May this Cross in the future never become too heavy and the Peace of God speed you, on the path of your Episcopal duties. For this she will ever pray who places so much confidence in your intercession by Jesus and Mary, and who recommends herself in deepest reverence to

Your Episcopal Grace
Your obedient servant,
Sister Marie.

Ribeauville, June 12, 1852

Most Reverend Lord Bishop,

Gracious Lord,

I am happy to have the occasion to address Your Episcopal Grace, in writing, in which I want to express my deepest thanks to God, that we have again the blissful hope that you will remain with us in Mayence. God willing, we shall partake of the blessings that He through your hands imparts to many, very many, to whom you are a gracious Lord and Father.

O that I may once become worthy to have such a Leader and Advisor, and thus for certain be united with many thousands, sending unending thanks to heaven. To the Eternal Merciful God will I, with childlike submission, from now on commit all I have, desire nothing, refuse nothing what he desires of me, in imitation of St. Francis de Sales. If your wishes did not coincide with those of your entire diocese, I would not now rejoice over their fulfillment; but now I wish Your Graciousness and us success and happiness.

Our Father Superior and our beloved Mistress of Novices have asked me to inform you that all who with me became novices will be invested and take the Holy Vows in September before the feast of Our Lady's Nativity. Toward the end of the month they all will leave the convent, and almost all of the new novices and postulants will have a six weeks vacation – some for their health, but the main reason is to make room for 300 Sisters who will come to the Motherhouse to make their annual retreat. Now I wish to ask you, Gracious Lord, where you wish me to spend these six weeks. My good sister, Emma, already in spring expressed her hope to have me with her in the autumn, since she lives in the country, yet not far from the distractions of the world. I therefore beg you to dispose of me as you see fit, and Sister Anna requests the same.

The holy name Anna made her very happy, and likewise the consecration before the short retreat in which she was enlightened concerning her true religious vocation, as she said. I desire to make the five days retreat with the dear novices, which precedes the investiture, and in which I have permission to partake. The Lord Bishop of Strasburg will receive the Vows and he ordered that the solemnity take place sooner than usual.

Bertha Miller, daughter of Professor Miller, is since recently here in the boarding school. Her childlike demeanor at once won the hearts of all. I foster the hope that one day she will become a Sister of Divine Providence. Recently Father Autsch, Pastor in Finthen, wrote me many nice things about the Sisters there, which gave me much joy. I dearly love the good children there, and in their progress I see God's blessing over the new institution wherewith God crowns the sacrifices which they have brought. To You, Most Gracious Bishop, do I submit it,

if I perhaps soon may see Finthen again with Sister Anna even during my novitiate.

O what a happiness it would have been for us both, to see You, Gracious Lord, here in the dear convent walls, and to receive Your Episcopal Blessing, but in the far distance, you will certainly not deny it, that I know, and it is a great consolation for me to know that you pray for me. To your prayers do I also recommend our Mother Superior who is a bed patient, suffering from a breast fever, and is very weak.

The Superiors unite with me in assurance of our deep reverence with which remains,

Your Episcopal Grace,
Your most obedient servant,

Sister Marie

Ribeauville, Feast of the
Assumption of Our Lady.
August 15, 1852

It is certain that the Bishop never visited Ribeauville while Sister Marie was there, but he had been there before to make arrangements for her.

The Bishop allowed Sister Marie to spend her vacation with her sister, Emma, at Mannheim, and she was very happy to do so, for her sister had recently, in fulfillment of her vow, returned to the true Church, and her spouse Baron Leopold von Leoprechting, whom Sister Marie had described as being at all times friendly and kindly disposed, was well advanced on the way of returning to the Church. Thus Sister Marie could be, and was, of much assistance to them. They were the only ones of her family with whom she yet found understanding and kindness. When the allotted time for her vacation was at an end, she returned to the novitiate which closed in the beginning of October, 1852.

Sister Anna Janotha had also been permitted to leave for a vacation, but sad to say, she never again was heard of. She did not enter at Ribeauville, nor at Finthen, and it is not known whether she entered any other convent or remained in the world. This was a great disappointment to the Bishop, as also for Sister Marie and the Candidates at Finthen.

The Sisters at Ribeauville would have been much pleased to keep Sister Marie with them, but she faithfully returned to Bishop Ketteler, bringing with her excellent reports. She had learned much, and now understood the life of a religious. "In a short time she had fulfilled long years." She ever remained grateful to the Bishop for giving her so wonderful an occasion for her religious formation.

The German chronicle says that sixty-seven years later, a Sister from Ribeauville, a contemporary of Mother Marie in the novitiate, related that when a novice, Sister Marie was a model for all in the novitiate, by her modesty, piety, and spirit of sacrifice, and that their Mistress often said to them: "My children, show good example to Sister Marie for she is destined to be the Foundress of a religious community."

By orders of the Bishop Sister Marie stayed with her sister Emma at Mannheim, until he had the Book of Rules finished, and all preparations made to install her as Superior in the convent at Finthen. During this time Sister Marie wrote the Bishop the following letter:

Most Reverend Bishop,

Gracious Lord,

Since by so many useless words concerning myself, I used so much of Your Episcopal Grace's precious time, that I must now reproach myself, all the more bitterly, for having out of forgetfulness on the last morning, left the holiest thing unmentioned, in which the Rules in Switzerland differ from those in Ribeauville, in referring not only to the living, but also to the deceased Sisters; who by their gratitude and blessing would obtain yet greater graces for you, the Founder of the Community.

The Sisters at Ribeauville in their same difficult vocation are given heavenly strength by receiving the Bread of Life three times a week, the younger Sisters during their first five years twice a week, Sundays and Thursdays, and besides on feast days, which is also permitted the novices. Moreover, after the death of a Sister, the entire Community receives three times, and for a novice once.

When entering the Church, the psalm, "Laetatus sum" is always said aloud, and when leaving the "De Profundis." On Sundays after Mass when the main meal is taken, the "Te Deum" is said. After the examination of conscience the "Miserere" is said, and when entering the refectory the "De Profundis." The Sisters are obliged to say the morning prayer, to make meditation, to assist at Holy Mass, to make spiritual reading, the particular examen, and a half hour visit to the Most Holy Sacrament, to attend the instructions, to say the Rosary, and to say the evening prayer at nine o'clock. Every Sunday and Thursday the Office of Divine Providence is said in common. All this is mentioned in the Rules, but not the order of the day since that is subject to changes in the schools.

Confiding in Your truly Fatherly Goodness, I permit myself in the name of my sister to make a request. For a long time already, she, as well as my Brother-in-law, Leoprechting, have wished personally to express their respects to Your Grace. She shares my faith that the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation by the hands of Your Episcopal Grace will bring her a very special blessing, and I, besides, entertain the hope that she will then bring the dear Savior the sacrifice, to separate herself from me entirely, as she has already learned, and to be thankful for me spending my vacation with her. She has requested me repeatedly to express her deepest thanks, united with mine.

Since Your Episcopal Grace will recall me by writing, would you perhaps have the kindness, if until then your time will permit the performance of this holy act. If my petition is not too impolite, may this sacred ceremony be administered in Your Episcopal Chapel, since my sister is yet affected from the sea bath, and

is still suffering. If her health permits it, she, with my kind brother-in-law who with deepest respect recommend themselves, will then accompany me to Mayence, since my sister desires, and my heart unites with hers, that I might be present at her confirmation. May the good God permit it, that a Saturday closely precedes this ceremony, so that a second wish of ours may be fulfilled, namely that we have the consoling grace that absolution in Confession be given us by Your Episcopal Grace.

With childlike confidence begging your blessing, I remain in deepest reverence,

Gracious Lord,
Your most obedient servant,

Sister Marie

Mannheim, October 7, 1852

In the fall of 1852, the Bishop had completed the Constitutions, the Rules for his new community. He had read a list of constitutions of other communities, but drew mostly from the Sisters of Providence at Ribeauville. Sister Marie assisted him in this work by collecting information of the manner of living in communities known to her. The Bishop himself gave the approval, that is the "Imprimatur" to his work on the feast of St. Martin of Tours, on November 11, 1852.

He put his Rule into print, and had the book bound. It was a small book measuring 5 ½ by 3 ½ inches, with 68 pages. Up to this time the Candidates had no officially appointed Superior, but one of them had been assigned to take the lead and to look after the daily affairs. Father Autsch had attended to the instructions, using the book, "Spouse of Christ" by St. Alphonsus Liguori as guide. The Bishop had kept in touch with them from out his Episcopal See. But with Sister Marie, God had provided that the Bishop could now place at the head of the Community an official Superior in accordance with the laws of the Church, and this was a real consolation for him.

On November 15, 1852, he visited the Candidates, still living in their first poor little convent on the Kirchgasse 53. With him came Sister Marie. He introduced her and installed her as Mother Marie, their first Superior. The Candidates warmly welcomed her, and received her with great joy, and called her "Dear Mother Marie" and so they called her as long as she was with them. In every way Mother Marie was capable and well prepared to fill the office given her. She was described as being of medium stature, and having an attractive and winning demeanor. Her manner was simple, refined and motherly, yet dignified. In short she impersonated a well cultured dame and an accomplished religious. At first sight the Candidates lost all fear of her nobility, for her look revealed her motherly heart.

The Bishop also gave them their official title, "Sisters of Divine Providence" by which they were henceforth known, a name which every member of the Community has ever loved and cherished. On this occasion he also gave every Sister a copy of the Rule he had drawn up and approved. He called it "the ladder of Heaven" for them. The Sisters were thrilled with joy on receiving this treasure, and ever held it sacred. This day their happiness was complete. They

had received a Superior, a good Mother, their confidence-inspiring Name, and their Holy Rule, their definite plan for life. They began studying their Rule most diligently, and to observe it conscientiously. The Rule in Chapter Five, Article Three, prescribed the daily recitation of an Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, their choice of one found in their Diocesan Prayer Book. This new obligation was a pleasure for them.

When Mother Marie was installed there were with her ten members in the Community. They were: Vincentia Schultheiss, Josepha Wallstadt, Dominica Feuerstein, Magdalene Scheurig, Martha Becker, Francisca Yost, Aloysia Dickscheid, Veronica Rubinac, and Paula Yost.

The Bishop appointed Vincentia and Josepha Assistants and advisors for Mother Marie, and she herself was appointed to take charge of the novitiate. They were now an Approved Diocesan Community. Mother Marie at once began attending to the duties of her office; she instructed the Candidates, and all began anew to strive earnestly for the acquisition of virtues and sanctity.

Some time prior to this, the Hotel zum Engel, a fairly large building, was for sale, and since their living quarters were much too small, and the Church to be built was located much nearer the Hotel, and there were prospects for expansion, the Bishop purchased it for a reasonable price. At once the hotel was repaired and remodeled more suitably for a convent, and by the following December 6, the house was ready for occupancy. Mother Marie and the Candidates left their poor little convent on the Kirchgasse which had become very dear to them, for it was the cradle of the Community, and moved into the house prepared for them. Here their living quarters were much enlarged and improved, and soon they became accustomed to their new habitation.

Soon after on December 21, 1852, Father Autsch received a letter from the Bishop, confirming the appointments made on November 15, plainly specifying how in compliance with the Rule, the Community was henceforth to be governed. The Bishop's letter follows verbatim.

William Emmanuel, Bishop of Nayence,
To the Reverend Pastor Autsch of Finthen.

Reposing full confidence in the Mercy of God, in the foundation of a religious Community for the education of feminine youth, and the nursing of the sick, to be known as the "Institute of the School and Nursing Sisters of Divine Providence," and having given to these same Virgins copies of an Approved Rules of the Congregation on the feast of St. Martin, in this current year, We do now consider the appointment of a Sister Superioress for this Community, in accordance with Article V mentioned above.

Since there are as yet no Professed Sisters, as required for regular elections, this procedure cannot be followed at this time. Trusting fully in the spirit that animates all members, believing that all desire rather to obey than to command, feeling themselves ineligible to fill so responsible an office, and they will be thankful to God if so heavy a burden is not placed on their shoulders; since no Community can continue to exist without government, We hope that all submit to God's Holy Will, and be prepared to follow His Ordinances.

In the Name of God We, therefore, appoint as Administrator and Mother Superioress of the Community, Sister Marie de LaRoche; as First Assistant, Sister Vincentia; as Second

Assistant, Sister Josepha. All rights and obligations defined in Article V, now devolve upon Sister Marie as Superioress. At the same time until the Community contains more members, Sister Marie will also fill the office of Mistress of Novices.

The Reverend Father Autsch will appoint one of the two Sisters, whom he deems the more capable of fulfilling the duties prescribed in paragraph Five, Article five. This Sister will then fill the office of Assistant; the second will complete the Council of the Community, according to paragraph six of Chapter One of Section Five.

The duration of these assignments, and the setting of the time for election of Superiors will be arranged as further circumstances may require.

Finally We hereby confirm Pastor Autsch in his position as Ordinary Confessor, and Spiritual Director of the Community of Sisters of Divine Providence. At the same time We wish to express Our appreciation for the great love and care shown by Father Autsch and the sacrifices he has made in behalf of the Congregation in the past, and We trust he may not tire in his efforts for the Sisterhood in the future.

May the Community grow and thrive for the Glory of God, and for the salvation of souls in our Diocese.

On this occasion I wish to remind the Sisters that they have been called to a great work. Let them ever bear in mind that the solidity of a building depends upon its Foundation Stones; and above all let them remember that the foundation of all good works is profound humility.

We implore the Divine Savior, Whose Presence with us we are anticipating, to look graciously on our young Congregation. We confer upon you, Reverend Father Autsch, and the dear Sisters, Our Episcopal Blessing.

Kindly acquaint the Sisters with the contents of this letter.

William Emmanuel

Mayence, December 21, 1852.

(This letter is a written confirmation of the appointments the Bishop had made on November 15, 1851.)

In compliance with the Bishop's letter and the Holy Rule, and united with heart and mind with Mother Marie, the Candidates undertook their new duties in the service of the Community. They all loved and revered Mother Marie, and she was well deserving of this esteem. Her piety, her humility and her charity were genuine, and far from her were sentimentality and affectation. At all times and under all circumstances she departed herself with recollection and refinement, ever walking in the presence of God. She was a model in mortification and self-denial, always choosing the meanest and poorest for herself; she was charitable and kind toward others, especially the sick, the poor and suffering. The warm clothing she had brought from home, she used not for herself, but gave to those poorly clad. She was a soul of prayer, both vocal and mental, which her maxims yet preserved clearly show. She was concerned especially about leading her charges into the life of prayer, without which there can be no sanctity. She earnestly

strove to give them assistance in their daily mental prayer. Not finding a suitable book for this in the German language, she took upon herself the task of translating a five volume meditation book, according to the method of St. Ignatius, SJ, from the French into the German. The Candidates observed that in order to save light, Mother Marie made much of the translation by the open stove door, certainly a practice of strict poverty.

Regularly she gave the Candidates instruction on prayer, both vocal and mental, on observing the presence of God, and on the virtues that should adorn a religious: mutual Christ-like charity, interior and exterior obedience, on holy Poverty and strict observance of the Holy Rule. Her words and her example deeply influenced the Candidates. She gave edification to all within the convent, as well as without, with whom she came into contact. All well knew that she had been reared in comfort and wealth, and that she had made a life-long renunciation of all, choosing to live in privation and poverty for love of Jesus Christ, Who chose to live in extreme want of all earthly goods for love of us. A number of young ladies who had come under her influence followed the call to the religious life.

The Bishop was undoubtedly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and guided by God's wonderful Providence when he had Mother Marie trained for leader and the first Superior of his new Community.

In addition to her wise ruling and example of virtue, she had brought with her to the new Community, the advantage of a higher education and learning, her fortune, and the prestige of her nobility, which gave inspiration to persons of all ranks to follow her, for her example was known far and wide. She was much help and consolation to the student candidates, who at times were discouraged and weary. In fact, her example was edifying and inspiring to all who came into contact with her or heard of her.

Mother Marie and the Candidates were living happily in their so-called new convent since December 6, 1852, but to the regret of all, they were deprived of the Sacramental Presence of the Savior, Who remained for the Parish in the provisional Church of their first convent on the Kirchgasse. The Candidates had accustomed themselves to living and laboring under the roof with their Lord and God. Every morning they had now to walk a considerable distance back to their first home for Holy Mass, even in the cold of the winter time. But Mother Marie was with them, and felt the loss with them. She prudently and motherly attended to all affairs, and soon she had devised a plan to regain their lost Treasure. A large room on the first floor of their convent, she thought, could be used as an Oratory. Father Autsch agreed with her and the Bishop sanctioned her plan. The converting of this room into an Oratory meant that the Candidates now use their community room for an all-purpose room. And they were willing to make this sacrifice, so that the large room in their midst could be offered their dear Lord and Master as residence. Soon the Sacramental Savior entered the newly prepared Tabernacle, and was most heartily welcomed with love and gratitude. Now their newly repaired convent was in marked contrast to the poorly heated and lighted old house they had occupied for fourteen months. They knew that this great improvement had come to them from Divine Providence, and they understood that their name was no empty title. It can be imagined with what love and gratitude they hovered around their Eucharistic King and Lord.

Before long their convent grounds were enlarged by the purchase of additional lots. They were now a well established Community; they lived in a more convent-like home, and above all, the Sacramental Savior was again dwelling in their midst. They followed an Approved Rule, had an Official Superior, and a number of them were well advanced in their studies. With confidence they could look into the future. Astonishingly much had been accomplished in the

short time of one and one half years since their foundation. They were living serenely in their convent, but so far they had not made an annual retreat, which Holy Mother Church prescribed for all religious communities. Mother Marie requested the Bishop to grant them this favor, and he gladly acceded to her wish. He much preferred the Jesuits for retreats, for he considered them masters in the spiritual life and all soul affairs. He asked Reverend Father Anna, SJ to conduct a retreat for the Candidates, according to the method of St. Ignatius. On April 26, 1853, Father Anna came to Finthen, and opened the retreat. In his first conference he explained the fundamental truths of our holy religion, and this made a deep impression on the retreatants, for never before had they so clearly understood them. He stressed the strict observance of the Holy Rule, and the virtues that every religious must necessarily practice. The Master emphasized in particular how important it was that the first members of the Community acquire the true spirit of their holy vocation, shown them in their holy Rule, so that they can impart it to future members. He closed the retreat with the words: "Woe betide the religious through whose fault the Community might relax in its primitive fervor; her judgment would be a serious one, she having to answer for all the good that was not accomplished."

These earnest words induced the Candidates to do all in their power to attain religious perfection, and the sanctity that God requires of them. This first preached retreat was never forgotten, but was recalled even after many years.

From the beginning on the Candidates devoted all time possible to their studies, and they received much assistance from Mother Marie, which greatly alleviated their heavy tasks. At about this time the annual examinations were held, and soon the announcement was received that on July 18 and 19 of that year the tests would be given in their home in Finthen. Vincentia, Josepha, Martha and Paula were to take the first exams. The Sisters joined in prayer that all might do well. To the astonishment of all, all passed with high grades. Yet the public authority was not at all friendly disposed about employing religious teachers. Bishop Ketteler with his prudent and juridical negotiations with them did after a long time succeed in obtaining schools for the Sisters. It was quite natural that the work of the Sisters excelled that of the seculars at that time, although seldom acknowledged by the public authority. On several occasions, such as were most opposed to employing religious teachers, were compelled to admit that the schools taught by the Sisters surpassed the others. A public examiner once remarked: "Why do our teachers not have the same success as these Sisters?"

For the past several years the Candidates received the generous and gratuitous services of being taught by learned Priests and Professors. Mother Marie considered the great sacrifices of time and travel it meant for them, and she felt that this could no longer be expected. These Instructors were, indeed, great benefactors. Mother Marie and the Sisters expressed their deep appreciation and gratitude, and since they could make no other recompense, they promised their life-long prayers for them, which they did appreciate. Thus the Instructors were relieved of this additional heavy work, done so generously for the honor and glory of God, for the Church and the Community, and their reward will be exceedingly great.

Mother Marie and the four degreed Candidates now undertook the task of educating the younger members. Mother Marie arranged the schedule. She herself, besides instructing the Candidates in the spiritual and religious life, taught French, Pedagogy and composition for nine hours a week. The other studies were divided among the four teachers. Aloysia and Dominica being farther advanced in their studies taught sewing and handicraft. The German Chronicles have it that never a Sister failed in her State Examinations.

The Candidates related to Mother Marie about the pilgrimage they had made the foregoing year, on September 17, to the shrine of the great St. Hildegarde in Eibingen, in the

Rhine District. Mother Marie was much interested, and God-loving soul as she was, at once suggested that they again make that pilgrimage and said that she would be pleased to go with them. The Bishop was delighted that the Candidates again wanted to perform that pious veneration in honor of the nation's much beloved Saint, and Father Autsch expressed his wish to accompany them, and this he did. That pilgrimage was not an easy task, since the shrine was at a considerable distance, and it had to be made by foot and fasting, for they wanted to receive during the Holy Mass at the shrine. In preparation they went to confession the preceding day. This pilgrimage was, indeed, a penitential act which they offered for the spiritual and temporal blessings for their little Community. At day-break on September 17, they all were on the march. It was a dreary foggy morning, but onward they walked, paying no attention to the weather. When they reached the Rhine, the sun began to pour forth brilliant rays. Across the water they sailed, singing in joyful strains, "Geleite durch die Wellen". Reaching the opposite shore, they hastened to the shrine of their beloved Saint, where they assisted at Holy Mass and received Holy Communion, and thereafter prayed fervently for a long time. The Reverend Pastor Schuetz invited them to breakfast in the rectory, and they much appreciated his kindness, and gladly accepted the invitation, and enjoyed the warm meal, and then heartily thanked the good Pastor.

After making a farewell visit to the shrine of their beloved national Saint they continued their pilgrimage, praying and singing, to Marienthal, to Our Lady Help of Christians, where they prolonged their devotions and petitions. When rising to leave, Father Autsch called out, "Let us say three Our Fathers for the protection of our convent home." All again fell on their knees and devoutly prayed as the good Father bade them. Yet no one had the least idea of what was happening at Finthen in that very hour. Father Autsch was, indeed, inspired from above when he asked the Sisters to pray for the protection of their convent, for at that very moment a great conflagration was raging in Finthen, causing much destruction, and the convent was in great danger. Children had been roasting apples near a straw-stack which quickly ignited, and the fire spread wildly and soon became uncontrollable, reducing homes and barns filled with farm products to ashes. The burning embers were blowing towards the convent, but the All-powerful hand of God stayed the flames and sent a wind which caused them to turn the opposite way, and thus save the convent. Priests had hurried by and one of them set a ladder to the open windows of the upper stories to see if any burning sparks had been blown in, but found none. He then closed all the windows for protection.

The Chaplain at the Church exposed the Most Holy Sacrament, and many hurried to the Church to pray for protection and safety. At intervals he gave Benediction in the direction of the raging flames, and several times it was noticed that the flames turned in other directions, thus sparing homes and filled barns. The great fire was brought under control only after dark.

At that time Father Autsch and Mother Marie with the Sisters were returning from their pilgrimage. When yet at a distance, a man informed them of the great disaster, which filled them with fright and fear. When coming nearer they saw houses and barns still burning and smoldering, but their convent stood unharmed. With tear-filled eyes and fast beating hearts, they thanked God's Almighty Providence for the protection of their convent in which they had not yet lived a year.

The Blessed Mother and St. Hildegarde had most certainly interceded for them. Now they were positive that Father Autsch was inspired by God, when he said: "Let us pray three Our Fathers for the protection of our convent home," for it stood unharmed amid the debris. It was visible that the convent was spared by supernatural protection, and that, everyone acknowledged.

The following day was Sunday, and the Right Reverend Bishop with his Brother, the Reverend Father Bonaventure, OFM Cap, and many people from Mayence visited Finthen, and the poor, hard-stricken homeless families. They heartily sympathized with all who had lost their homes and filled barns. Many charitable people performed heroic acts of Charity for the bereft. The Bishop ordered collections to be taken up in the larger parishes, and thus help was given to the poor deprived people of Finthen. Mother Marie ordered that at the evening prayer an Our Father be said in honor of St. Hildegarde for protection against fire. Since then this is done in every house of the Community.

After this dreadful occurrence, Finthen began to rebuild gradually, but hard times followed for a number of years. Since the little convent had endured no harm whatever, all continued to go on smoothly as before, and the thanksgivings continued with fervor for the supernatural protection given them.

By the end of 1853 the number of Candidates was fourteen and still increasing. By this time the original house on the Kirchgasse had been disposed of, and Father Autsch was building a new Church on the site of the old one, and the parish was still using the Sisters' Oratory for Holy Mass.

Mother Marie was now in her second term of office, and very much had been accomplished. The Bishop realized that some of the Candidates should be given the religious habit, and by taking the Evangelical Councils vow themselves to God, and thus become real religious. He informed Mother Marie of his intention, and they decided that this solemnity should not be unduly postponed, but take place as soon as the necessary preparations were made. He asked her to design and make the habits, and to prepare all things needed for the reception and profession services. Mother Marie with her Assistants planned the pattern for the habit, similar to that worn in Ribeauville, but simplified and improved.

The Bishop wished that in preparation they make their second annual retreat. The Reverend Father Sandhier, SJ began the retreat on May 16, 1854. Again they had a fine impressive retreat, a real spiritual renewal. The Master closed the retreat with the words: "The heart on Heaven, the eyes on the grave, the hands at work." These words deeply impressed the retreatants and became a by-word.

After the retreat the Bishop interviewed each Candidate individually, and found them all to be happy, contented and fervent. He permitted the elder ones, those who were longest in the convent to be clothed with the religious habit, and to espouse themselves to Jesus Christ by taking the Evangelical Councils, the Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, as prescribed by the Holy Rule. The day set for this extraordinary solemnity was June 18, 1854, that year the Sunday in the octave of Corpus Christi. This happy news spread quickly abroad, that the Sisters would soon have a grand festivity, by getting the religious habit and consecrating themselves to God. This was glad news and all Finthen wished to join in the celebration. The streets and buildings around the Church and convent were lavishly decorated by the parishioners. Early in the morning of the eventful day, a joyous salute greeted the Sisters; volleys were fired, bells rung, and the music of melodious chimes swelled the air, hailing the dawn of the happy day, and sending the news far and wide into the Rhine Province, announcing that an unusually great and happy event was taking place in the little village of Finthen.

The new Church was by this time so far finished that the solemnities could be held therein. The Most Blessed Sacrament was borne by the Bishop in solemn procession, formed by the Festal Virgins, the Sisters, relatives and others, bearing lighted candles and singing

Sacramental hymns, proceeding from the Sisters' Oratory to the new Church, where It was placed on the finely decorated provisional Altar for adoration. The new Church was densely crowded for all were eager to witness the religious services held in their Church for the first time. The Bishop celebrated the Solemn High Mass and preached the sermon. For his text he took the words of St. Paul, "I live, now not I, but Jesus Christ Who liveth in me." In touching words His Lordship depicted the nature of the religious state, its duties and its perfections.

After this impressive sermon, the Sisters, led by Mother Marie, in single file approached the Altar and alternately pronounced their Holy Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. They then received from the hands of the Bishop the new blessed habit, the Crucifix to wear on their breast, and the Rosary at their side. The Crucifix was to remind them that the world must be dead unto them, and they unto the world, and that they now must seek their glory in the Cross of Jesus Christ; the Rosary, that being children of Mary, they should love and honor their Mother and Queen, and daily recite the Rosary.

Carrying the blessed Habit on their arm, they withdrew and clothed themselves with their new garment. The following are the names of the first professed Sisters in the Community: Mother Marie de LaRoche, Sister Vincent Schultheiss, Sister Josepha Wallstadt, Sister Francisca Yost, Sister Dominica Feuerstein, Sister Magdalene Scheurig, Sister Martina Becker, and Sister Aloysia Dickscheidt.

Another solemnity enhanced the festivity of the day. After the celebration of the Divine Services, the Bishop administered the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation to Emma, the Baroness of Loeprechting, a sister to Mother Marie. The Honorable Max von Gagern, her first Cousin, was her Sponsor. This was a very happy day for the Most Reverend Bishop, who saw his great undertaking accomplished and progressing. Now he could reap the fruits of his institution. He spent a rather long time with his Sisters, and with them partook of the festive meal. He advised that the head-dress of the newly invested be changed so as not to obstruct the side-view, which is necessary in the class-room. Mother Marie attended to make the change, and the habit of the Sisters remains to this day as it was patterned by Mother Marie. Often times the Sisters are complimented on the pattern of their habit, even by Bishops and Priests.

The first Profession Services were attended by relatives, friends and others who wished to see the Divine Services for such an occasion. All were deeply impressed and edified, and many changed their minds about convent life. From thence it was looked on as a special grace and an honor to have a member of family among God's chosen ones, and it was not long until more young ladies entered.

Also for Mother Marie was this a day of supreme joy and happiness, for by espousing herself to Jesus Christ, she reached the pinnacle of her heart's desire to live only for God and souls. All through her many troubles and sorrows, she preserved this holy desire which grew strong and more ardent in suffering. Now she felt at ease, but the all-wise God Who willed to make a Saint of her had yet more crosses designed for her.

The day following the reception, Mother Marie with Sister Vincentia, her First Assistant, visited Baron Max von Gagern, living in Wiesbaden, to express their appreciation and gratitude for his kindness in being Sponsor in Confirmation for Emma, his cousin.

After the reception there remained yet nine postulants. Mother Marie gave them the white veil of novices, as was done in Ribeauville, and these formed the first regular novitiate, with Mother Marie as Mistress, as the Bishop had assigned. Before long seven new postulants

were added to their number. Then the Community numbered twenty-four persons, and was still increasing. Before long their number was beyond the convent's adequate capacity. The duty to provide for proper accommodation for the increase of membership now rested on Mother Marie and her Assistants, and they met in consultation. To refuse applicants was out of question, for the Community must increase and prosper. Now the question arose: "Should a new addition be added to the present well-worn building or should an entirely new Motherhouse be erected?" The present house was in constant need of repairs, which was an ever increasing expense to the Community. Finally it was decided, on advice of the Bishop, to build an entirely new Motherhouse, which was by far the wiser and better way.

Since the old convent stood flush with the high-way, the Sisters had to endure the annoyance and the dust of the traffic. Therefore the new structure was to be erected farther to the interior, and reached by a private driveway. Mother Marie at once began to draw up plans for the new building. She well knew what would be needed in future for a growing Community, and for this she planned. By fall, 1854, the plans were completed, and the Bishop approved them, and gave his permission and blessing for the new structure.

But for the building much money was needed; where from get it? The chronicle states that Mother Marie made a financial statement of the Community for the Bishop. This showed that her fortune was the financial basis on which they depended. Several Sisters had received smaller sums. The Duchess of Dahlberg, a friend of Mother Marie, had made a sizable donation, and Mother Marie was yet expecting a larger sum from her Uncle Glosen. Trusting in God's good Providence, Who so far was their only and sure help in all needs, the work was begun. On the death of a relative Mother Marie was bequeathed 6000 Gulden. The Will specified that the unmarried beneficiaries first receive their share, and therefore Mother Marie applied for her bequest. She anticipated the happiness of contributing this sum toward the new building. Her brother, an officer of renown in Baden, however, objected to this, saying: "Since she has chosen a Heavenly Bridegroom, money would be of no avail to her," and on this objection her legacy was refused her. Mother Marie was deeply grieved at this unjust refusal, and as usual she sought advice from Bishop Ketteler, who in his energetic manner replied: "Let him keep his ragged money; the heavenly Father will take care of His children." Shortly thereafter he sent Mother Marie \$4000[sic], which he said a Westphalian Nobleman had sent him for his Sisters.

All the preliminary work for the structure being completed, and trusting in God's wonderful Providence, the excavations were begun toward the end of the fall, 1854. On December 3 the first stones and bricks were delivered on the building site. The hauling of the stones and other material was done almost entirely gratis by the teamsters of Finthen, for they considered it an honor to give assistance in whatever way they could for the building of the Sisters' convent. This the Sisters much appreciated, and Mother Marie ordered daily prayers to be said in common for them and all benefactors. The building was progressing nicely and smoothly and hopefully the Sisters looked forward soon to dwell in a well arranged Motherhouse.

In the beginning Father Autsch was helpful in many ways assisting the new Community; he instructed the Candidates and attended to business affairs. He was considered a Priest, active, sacrificing and pious, but was of a whimsical and critical character which he did not keep under control. Gradually disagreements arose between him and the Bishop, relative the Sisters. Father Autsch gave way to his ill humor, anger and disgust, which the Sisters often had to endure. He nurtured an ill will especially against Mother Marie. Tradition has it that once when she was going through the yard to the laundry, she met Father Autsch who, in answer to her

friendly greeting replied with the imperious words: "I do not want to see a court lady, but a religious." His prejudice and aversion toward Mother Marie were clearly expressed in his letter to the Bishop on April 20, 1855, in which he said among other things: "Moreover, I have convinced myself that the Superior, of herself alone, will not breathe into the institute the spirit with which at least I wish to see it animated. I cannot resist the thought that under the guidance of our Superior, without further assistance, there will be founded in our diocese, besides the institution of the English Ladies, an institution of French Ladies, while I desire to see an institute of thorough German Sisters for our German people. If this is not granted, I already see the moment in which I will unrelentingly withdraw from the institute." In the same writing Father Autsch mentioned many more of his wishes, for instance the appointment of Assistants against the Rule, and Consultors, an Econome, for which office he suggested a postulant, whom he wanted admitted to holy Profession without having made a novitiate. He also wanted Brothers of the Third Order for the garden, for weaving and shoemaking, for the sacristy and for the ringing of the Church bells, etc., etc.

In answer to this letter the Bishop released Father Autsch from all responsibility with the Sisters, and appointed other Priests to attend to their spiritual needs, but this did not remedy the trouble. The Bishop said he could not remove Father Autsch from the Sisters without removing him from the parish, and this he did not want to do, but before long he made so much trouble in the parish that he had to be removed.

Conditions became ever more tense. Mother Marie felt that she was the main cause of Father Autsch's dissatisfaction, and naturally she took recourse to the Bishop, to whom she ever revealed matters of concern. There is sufficient evidence to believe that she herself requested the Bishop for her removal from office, which he reluctantly did, but otherwise could not have done so, since he well knew that not she, but Father Autsch was at fault. Since there is no document to verify this supposition, she must have made this request verbally.

That any of the Sisters found fault with Mother Marie, and complained to Father Autsch, is an unfounded supposition, which arose only many years later. The chronicle does not say a word other than that the Sisters all loved and revered Mother Marie, and most bitterly regretted her quitting her office and her leaving Finthen. She being of nobility, highly refined and of French nationality made her unbearable to Father Autsch and this his letter to the Bishop clearly proves. In his letter he makes no mention of any other Sister.

The Bishop appointed Mother Marie Superior at Herrnsheim, the Community's first mission, where the Duchess of Dahlberg had a convent prepared for the Sisters, and wished them to take charge of the school. Mother Marie, herself, had suggested to the Bishop that her Assistant, Sister Vincentia, although only 23 years of age, but firm and energetic, replace her in office, for she was a child from the parish in Finthen, thinking that this might help to remedy the trouble, but all in vain. Father Autsch did not change his attitude in the least toward the Sisters nor toward the Bishop.

When the Sisters heard of their good Mother's departure from Finthen and that this would take place soon, already on May 11, 1855, they all were filled with deep sorrow, to part with their dear good Mother, who had led them so securely on the path of perfection and holiness. All wept bitterly when bidding her adieu, and seeing her leave the convent where they had dwelt together so happily for the past two and a half years. Submission to God's holy Will was their only, but hard lot, to which they tearfully submitted. Not until June did the Bishop finally but reluctantly appoint Sister Vincentia to attend to the official duties. As has been said

above, Father Autsch remained as he was before, while Sister Vincentia attended to the daily affairs.

At Herrnsheim there was great joy at Mother Marie's arrival; she was received as an angel from Heaven. She and the Duchess of Dahlberg, who lived in her palace near the convent which she had built for the Sisters, were old friends. Mother Marie being conversant in Italian, the Duchess was overjoyed that she could be near her and they familiarly conversed with one another in her mother tongue. Soon the school opened and Mother Marie taught the little ones. Children and parents dearly loved Mother Marie, and with motherly kindness she and her Sisters took care of the sick and the poor in the parish.

In her leisure hours, Mother Marie took walks with the Duchess through the beautiful park that surrounded the palace, while conversing on pious subjects. On the trunk of a mighty oak the Sisters had fastened a picture, Our Lady Help of Christians, and before it they placed a large kneeler and a bench. In lieu of a Chapel the Sisters, Mother Marie with the Duchess, and other clients of Mary often visited the sacred spot to pray and read. Mother Marie ordinarily recited her office there, which she always said in French, her favorite language. Later on her office book was attached to the tree, and is now preserved as a relic.

A remarkable incident is connected with this tree, and the picture of Our Lady. Once a mighty stroke of lightening shattered the sturdy oak, but spared the picture of Our Lady. Now the splintered tree was bereft of all its [branches?], and the picture was then hung on another attractive tree nearby, where to this day pious venerators of Mary come to perform their devotion.

At the close of the year 1855, Mother Marie wrote the following letter to Mother Vincentia, which gives deep insight into the depths of her soul, and shows the heroic virtues she practiced.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Herrnsheim, December, 1855

Reverend and dear Mother,

At the close of the year 1855, we cannot refrain from following the dictates of our hearts, and at the same time to follow the call of duty, by expressing our heartiest wishes for you. If God answers our prayers, He will grant you abundant graces in your office as Mother Superior. With child-like confidence we appear before God's throne as humble subjects, and we feel that He will give you all that we ask for you. May He bless every day of your life, and ever be with you to lead you on.

When I review the past year, especially the last months, a hazy dream seems to hover over my soul. Thank God this state is slowly disappearing; I now see that God has not destined me for the office of Superioress. I have many occasions to serve Him here, and to do much good. I do not expect more, and feel myself unworthy in my wretchedness. Since Heaven called you to a charge which you did not foresee, may He strengthen you ever more, dear Mother, the wider the circle of your activity may extend, and make of you a saintly Superioress, as

so many others have been in the centuries gone by. May St. Vincent especially aid you, dear Mother, and look down upon our work from the heavenly realms.

Your loving lines and the kind wishes they contained pleased and encouraged us all. The dolls are very nice; we all admired them. Hearty thanks for all. Your prayers for our sick Sisters were really necessary. Sister Scholastica is still confined to bed; the doctor says she has a very delicate constitution, and that she is extremely irritable. He fears that her stomach trouble has assumed the character of gastric fever. However, today he has found her changed for the better. If I do not write in a few days, you may console yourself that she is improving.

Our dear Lord seems to wish me to be a nurse, as you perhaps notice. I am at present afflicted with an indefinable melancholy and reserve, which I feel positive you understand, dear Mother. Do not worry about my health. I am a deep rooted old seed and dare not overwork myself, according to your wish.

I hope, dear Mother, that you spent the holy days joyfully with your children. Our beautiful little crib was admired by all, especially the smaller children. We are touched by the friendliness and generosity of the Herrnsheim people toward us. The gracious Duchess particularly surpasses all in her attention to us. She sends greetings to you, dear Mother, and to all the Sisters. She really deserves Heaven in this world by her charity to us and to the poor.

Sister Paula has changed completely in her exterior, thank God. Would that Sister Emmanuella had also improved. She possesses so little self-knowledge, that it is difficult to make an impression on her. Pray much for your Herrnsheimer children, especially for me, for my position is not an enviable one. In spite of my efforts not to be particularly friendly toward any one Sister, but to try to please them all as far as I can, there are so many miserable petty jealousies, especially on the part of Sister Emmanuella, which are directly opposed to the religious spirit. I am reporting this to you, dear Mother, in obedience, and would much rather relate joyful encouraging matters to you.

“Peace be to men who are of good will.” How much meaning lies in these words. I am striving for this peace, and recollection of spirit, as a gift of the Divine Infant. May the peace of God be with you, and the dear Sisters. Better wishes than these I cannot entertain for you.

With childlike love and gratitude, I am,
Your obedient daughter,

Sister Maria

N. B. The doctor just now called, and pronounced Sister Martha much better. Thank God.

On the paper used by Sister Marie in the foregoing letter, she painted in water colors an Angel of Peace, holding a crown of thorns in the right hand, and a golden crown in the left.

How ingenious, what precious and noble thoughts, Mother Marie expressed in this letter. O that she had remained the Guiding Star of the Community. But God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, and we must submit to all His decrees, for they are infinitely wise and merciful.

For a long time already the Bishop was occupied with the intention of erecting an orphanage for girls, and also one for boys. He had already decided to place the girls' orphanage under the direction of the Sisters of Divine Providence. He had not yet made mention of this to anyone, for he had not yet a place nor the money to carry out his plans.

Providentially he came into contact with prince Karl Löwenstein, who having no knowledge of the Bishop's plans, related to him that his Grandmother, Sophia Wilhelmina, had bequeathed #16,000 [sic] for the erection of an orphan asylum on the Prince Löwenstein territory, and that it was her expressed wish that the institution be placed under the supervision of a religious Sisterhood. However, the project was befallen by insurmountable difficulties so that the erection of the asylum in Bohemia had to be abandoned, and that another location was being sought. On hearing this astounding news, the Bishop disclosed plans to the Prince, and stated the necessity of such an orphanage in his own diocese. The Prince was delighted to hear this, and at once placed \$15,000 [sic] at the disposal of the highly astonished Bishop. Again the Bishop's sincere confidence in Divine Providence was visibly rewarded. Now he began to carry out his plans.

A place for the orphanage was soon found on a visit to the Odenwald, where he related to Reverend Father Helferich, the Pastor of a new Catholic parish in a Protestant section, his plans and how he got the money, but had not yet found a place to carry out his intentions. This priest at once took the Bishop to the so-called Zoological Gardens. On seeing the place the Bishop cried out: "Excellent! This is the most beautiful place for my purpose, and moreover it lies in the Prince Löwenstein Domain." He had found a place without loss of time. He at once set out to purchase the site from the Prince Löwenstein Chancery, and got it for \$1000 [sic].

As soon as the plans were completed, the erection of the building began, and progressed smoothly and rapidly, and in less than a year's time was so far completed that several Sisters could take residence there, and make preparations for the dedication which was to take place in August, 1856.

The Bishop well understood that for Superior and Directress at the orphanage, a person with equal rank with the Princely Family, who, being great benefactors of the orphanage, would come into frequent contact with her. This was the Bishop's reason for appointing Mother Marie as Superior and Directress of the institution. On receiving her appointment Mother Marie left Herrnsheim with pleasure, and promptly made her way to the orphanage in Neustadt. She well understood that an orphanage was a wider field for soul-saving activity, which was ever her aim, than her present sphere of labor.

The dedication and the opening of the orphanage were set for August 24, 1856. Four Sisters had been appointed for the orphanage; namely Mother Marie, Sister Johanna Seckert, Benedicta Bauer, and Raphael Desoy. There was much to do to arrange the house, and to get things ready for the poor orphans, who began coming in on Dedication Day.

Mother Marie with her Sisters worked hard and diligently. She performed her duties in this new sphere of activity with such love, mildness and kindness, that she won the hearts of all; they revered and esteemed her as their Mother. For the training and education of the orphans,

Mother Marie drew up a definite plan, which the Bishop read and sanctioned, and asked the Sisters to follow it conscientiously. She insisted on motherly treatment of the orphans, whom they were to call "Our Children," so they would consider this place their home, and to which they would return with gratitude in later years. Her own motherly treatment of the dear children can be deducted from the following letter she wrote to Mother Vincentia on January 1, 1857.

St. Mary's
Neustadt in the Odenwald,
January 1, 1857

Reverend Mother,

Two months have passed since I last wrote to you. The change of the years urges me strongly, to add to my enclosed report some lines of heart-felt wishes to you, dear Mother, for your eternal and temporal welfare. May you and all entrusted to your care receive God's graces to enrich and encourage you. May the dear Sisters grow in virtue and happiness, and one day add to your luster and glory of your Heavenly diadem. May they all in your charge be a source of consolation to you.

If your labor seems heavy at times, the Crucifix on your breast will be a source of strength and encouragement in your arduous calling. My present position seems lighter to me. I can say that I feel happy. May God grant me the grace to make myself worthy of my vocation, and may the Holy Spirit enlighten me to lead myself and my Sisters on the path of virtue and holiness.

It is highly recommended by all that we do not inflict corporal punishment on our children; nevertheless they are obedient and are trying to become good Christians.

We had a very solemn Christmas celebration. Reverend Father N. prayed the Litany of the Holy Child Jesus in the Chapel and the little ones sang a Christmas hymn. After receiving the blessing of the Reverend Chaplain, we all repaired to the school room, where we had erected a little Christmas tree and a crib. Each child received a little remembrance in the form of gifts, which were donated by my Sister for this purpose. My own outlay for the occasion was very small. I too was remembered by the Christ Child. From my Sister Emma, I received wide lace for a communion cloth, her own work; from the 80 year old Countess Gagern there was a fine black jacket, her handiwork. Besides these I received a pair of lined shoes and some money (interest due me). I wish to ask you, Reverend Mother, if I may keep these articles here. According to Bishop Ketteler's wish, all things needed by the Sisters here are to be supplied by this mission. So I take it for granted that all gifts received by us are to remain here. Will you please inform me how I am to act in this case? For myself I will soon have to request a habit, if I do not wish to surpass St. Elizabeth in her poverty.

Not having heard from the Motherhouse for two months, I do not know how many children you have there at present. Please greet them all heartily from us all, and extend our New Year's wishes to them. I hope that Greta Görz feels perfectly at home by now, and has won your good will. She will bring blessings on our convent. May the little Wieblingen child, my home child, continue to walk in the path of virtue and salvation.

On a recent visit to Herrnsheim with Sister Johanna, I noticed how frail Sister Emmanuella looked. She complained about her throat. Since, I have heard that she is

not improving. May I call your attention to this, dear Mother, for there may be bad effects. Fresh warm milk morning and evening might prove successful as a cure, as it did in my case some time ago. One of our larger girls, who was already hemorrhaging was relieved by this treatment remarkably soon. Our little cow supplies our needs for the present very well. Do you wish, dear Mother, that I buy a case of butter for you? The cost of transportation is not great from here.

I beg you to include in your pious prayers, your poor old and little orphans in the far distance. In this Valley of Peace we are surrounded by the hills and secluded from the world, and are trying to serve God in holy solitude. May I in particular ask for prayers for dear Sister Josepha? With repeated love to you and all, I remain,

Your obedient daughter,
Sister Marie

On the original letter paper Mother Marie had painted in water colors a beautiful sketch entitled, "View of St. Mary's, Neustadt.

On January 29, 1857, the new Motherhouse in Finthen, which Mother Marie had planned and had begun building, and which her fortune made possible, was dedicated. Yet nowhere is it mentioned that she was present for the Dedication or that she ever saw the Motherhouse when finished. It was the first properly planned Motherhouse that the Sisters so far possessed, and it is still being used. The present Chapel connected with it was not built until 1887, thirty years later. Until then a large room served for a temporary Chapel.

The number of orphans increased rapidly. It was a very hard task for Mother Marie and the few Sisters to give the poor neglected waifs, many yet helpless, and others sick, the proper care. Poverty made it difficult to supply the necessary food, and at times the task seemed insupportable. But with strong faith and firm confidence in God's Almighty Providence, they persevered in their selfless work of Charity. Not seldom did Mother Marie have to take recourse to generous benefactors and others, in order to supply the children with the necessary food. But when the need was greatest, help always came in due time, for their trust in God's Providence never wavered. No Chapel had been erected with the building. But a large room was arranged for an Oratory. It was a ten minute walk to the nearest Church and this was a great inconvenience for the Sisters and the children.

The Most Reverend Bishop esteemed Mother Marie highly, and the Sisters at the orphanage looked up to her with veneration, and her example was to them a constant admonition for the practice of virtue. Mother Marie preferably loved the virtue of holy poverty, for it constantly recalled to her the extreme poverty of Jesus, and she left no occasion to practice it pass by. She always chose for herself the poorest clothing and the simplest food at table. She often ate dry bread and potatoes with the jackets to mortify herself, and denied herself many delicacies, and then gave them to the children. The small stove in her room poorly heated it. On the stove she placed a stone on which she had painted a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and when the Sisters or the children came to her room, she placed this warm stone into their hands to make them feel more comfortable. She had no warm clothing for the winter, since she had given all she had to the Sisters who were in need. She had kind words of advice and encouragement and consolation for everyone who spoke to her. On wash days she endeavored to be first in the laundry. The washing of clothes had at that time to be done by hand or on a washboard. The strong suds were hard on her hands, unused to such work from her youth, and

it made them sore and caused bleeding, but she paid no attention to this. She never avoided, but on the contrary preferred and sought the things and work of a penitential nature.

Things were going on rather smoothly in the orphanage when Mother Marie wrote Mother Vincentia the following letter.

St. Mary's
Neustadt, in the Odenwald

Reverend Mother,

July 4, 1857

I am not punctual in sending you my monthly report, but this is caused by the lack of time and leisure. After my favorable report in my last letter, I must now tell you that we have a number of sick children. The girls whose Mother died several weeks ago of Typhus, became ill with gastric fever which developed into typhus. Soon after, a third child was smitten with the same disease. Thank God all are somewhat better at present, but some of the smaller children are also ailing.

Brother Sebastian has been removed, and another Brother has been assigned to replace him. The latter brother having made a pilgrimage to Waldürn had exhausted himself to such a degree that he had to go to bed when arriving here, for his feet are very sore and he suffers from fever and is still confined to bed. So you can understand that we are all overladen with work. I think that we need a fifth Sister. However, as traveling expenses are very high at present, we are waiting for a more opportune time. If you are thinking of sending Sister Gabriella, may I ask you to send several guimpes, and two pairs of stockings for Sister Anna? It is impossible for us to find time for knitting; for it is with greatest difficulty that we can mend our clothes. We are imitating the example of the Apostles by "using all things in common." Unfortunately most of our children are yet young and cannot be of much use in these straits, and others are ill, as I mentioned above.

At the present, with the permission of the Most Reverend Bishop, renovations are being made in the house. He has sent the plans to the contractor in Umstadt. Our garden is in good condition, owing to Sister Johanna's supervision. Sister N's health has improved; she is now engaged all day long.

Since His Honor, the Cathedral Provost, wished to come to Neustadt soon, he may decide to postpone his visit if by any means he has learned of the illness. Will you kindly tell him, that every precaution has been taken and that there is now nothing to fear. In case that our good Bishop fears for the children, will you please allay his fears, by telling him that they are improving daily.

I congratulate Sister Aurea and Sister Hildegarde heartily that they are now Spouses of Christ. If the postulants (including my good Wieblingen, Gretchen, whom I know and love), have received the habit of our Community, I wish them God's richest blessings. Oh, what a happy day that must have been! What joy for you, dear Mother.

The Princely Family is making renovations in the Breuberg Castle, in our neighborhood, since they wish to spend more time here than they did formerly. In some regards this is an advantage; in others, not.

Begging you to extend greetings to our Spiritual Director, who has probably received my last letters, and sending hearty wishes to you and all the dear Sisters, I remain in childlike love, dear Mother,

Your most unworthy daughter,

Sister Marie

P.S. The holy water fonts have not yet arrived; but the Crucifix was in excellent conditions. Thanks for all.

Little did Mother Marie think that this would be her last letter in life to Mother Vincentia. But only God knows our future.

In the latter part of July, 1857, the typhus broke out in the immediate surrounding districts of the orphanage, and all possible precautions were made to keep the epidemic outside, so that the children might escape contagion. Yet despite all this tender solicitude, the children and the Sisters became infected. Mother Marie alone was spared for some time. Kind solicitous Mother as she was, she, day and night, hovered from bed to bed, bringing relief and consolation to her dear children, and soon all, Sisters and children were restored to health. But how sad, Mother Marie had overtaxed her strength in her heroic charity, and before long, she became infected with the dread disease. Being completely exhausted from lack of proper food and rest, she felt compelled to retire to bed. But before doing so, she went to the kitchen for a hot drink, and there she was rudely thrust aside by a co-sister, who on similar occasions had treated her in like manner. Shocked and grieved by this unworthy treatment she made her way slowly to the Oratory to find consolation in prayer, but there she became unconscious and fainted. Assisted by the Sisters she was taken to her room and to bed. Mother Marie had fought the good fight and was ready to receive her Eternal Reward. When soon after a Sister came to look after her, she was no more; her soul had taken its flight to Heaven. What consternation overwhelmed the Sisters. Mother Marie had died all alone. No one to pray at her death bed, to console her, no Priest to give her spiritual assistance. She died as she had lived, for God alone. Her reward must have been exceedingly great, as were the sacrifices she brought for God and man.

When preparing for her burial, it was found that there was a deep ulcerous cancer wound on her breast, which must have caused her intense sufferings, yet she never uttered a word about it, but endured all in silence for the love of God. Besides the typhus, this cancer certainly helped much to bring about her early death. Sufficient and proper clothing for her burial was not found among her effects, and had to be substituted. During all her life she had practiced unexampled poverty, as a true Spouse of Christ.

The Very Reverend Dean Goy of Dieburg, in the presence of a large number of the Clergy and the laity, blessed the corpse in the public cemetery in Neustadt, where she was temporarily laid to rest. No record whatever, tells of the presence of Bishop Ketteler, or Mother Vincentia or of any other Sisters than those at the orphanage, who attended the funeral to bestow the last honors on saintly Co-foundress, and first Superior General.

Mother Marie had lived in the Community four years, eight months and sixteen days. At the time of her death she was professed three years, one month and thirteen days, and died on August 1, 1857, in the forty-fifth year of her earthly life; a short life well-filled with eternal merits for Heaven. Mother Marie was the first Sister in the Community to be called to her Eternal Reward.

The sorrow of the Sisters and the children at the orphanage was, indeed, inexpressible, and others who knew her and her work with the poor orphans felt likewise, and deeply sympathized with them for their irreparable loss, for there was no other like Mother Marie. How empty and sad did the asylum now appear, for the loving eye and the warm heart of their dear Mother, dispelling griefs and healing sorrows was seen no more. With loving gratitude the Sisters and Children offered their prayers and sacrifices for the repose of her soul. Emma, Baroness of Leoprechting, in honor of her dear departed sister, had a statue of the Blessed Virgin made of red sand stone, and placed in the niche of the gable façade above the main entrance of the orphanage.

Sister Nothburga replaced Mother Marie as Superior at the orphanage. She was a sincere venerator of Mother Marie for she rightly considered her a Saint. It was the ardent wish of the Sisters, especially of Sister Nothburga, to have the remains of their beloved Mother nearer them, for the Sisters and the children wished to visit and pray at her grave, and the cemetery was a ten minute walk from the orphanage. Sister Nothburga readily obtained permission from the city officials to lay out a small cemetery on the grounds of the orphanage for the burial of deceased Sisters. For this she selected a peaceful quiet spot on an elevation in the rear of the orphanage, overshadowed by pine trees. Reverend Father Appel consecrated the grounds, and called it St. Mary's Cemetery.

Having this completed, Sister Nothburga again approached the officials for permission to translate the remains of Mother Marie, the Foundress, from the public cemetery to the private St. Mary Cemetery. This permission was not obtained so easily. Only after a long time, and repeated petitions did she succeed in August, 1866. She then at once employed men to open the grave. At the appointed time all the Sisters were present to witness the pious act. The digger laid open the grave and soon the coffin was raised, and the Sisters . . .

[The above paragraph is on page 52 of the original book. Page 53 is missing, as it is missing in the copy in the Pittsburgh and in the St. Louis archives. We will continue the search for the page, but for now, we will continue with page 54. But know that it will say that at this first exhumation of her body, it was found to be incorrupt. We continue with page 54]

...relinquished all, both in the world, and in the house of God, but great is her reward in Heaven. May she be our intercessor at the Throne of God."

Many Sisters in the Community had been awaiting the return of Mother Marie to her rightful office as Superior General and Co-foundress which she so generously relinquished. That the Bishop did not confirm Sister Vincentia in office until after the death of Mother Marie shows plainly that he had in mind to reinstate Mother Marie. The General Chapter in 1861 would certainly have elected her if she yet had been living.

It is very sad and much to be regretted, that Mother Marie's writings and letters she received were not preserved for the knowledge and edification of the future Community. Sad to say, that a Sister, whatever her intentions may have been, cast all her documents and writings received

into the flames at once after her death, and so these treasures were lost to the Community forever.

After her death the saintly Co-foundress was honored and invoked by the Sisters, and by others who knew her, or heard of her. However, it was not until many years later that a general veneration of her took place in the Community. In 1916 when Mother Maria Josepha Schmidt became Superior General she began to collect all possible knowledge of the saintly Founders. She wrote the life of Bishop Ketteler which contained very much of Mother Marie, and sent a type-written copy to the Province in the States as a gift for their Fiftieth Anniversary there. This copy was translated by Sister Immaculata Schutte into English, when later on she was in the St. Louis Province.

It certainly was providential that during the First World War the Sisters on the battlefield in Germany met with a General called Baron de La Roche, and thinking that he might be a distant relative of Mother Marie, they informed Mother Josepha at once about the happy incident. On hearing this she resolved to get into contact with this General and learn whether or not he was a distant relative, or perhaps knew about her, and thus be able to furnish some information about her former years and may even have a photograph of her. The Community had no picture of their Foundress, and was much interested to see and possess one. When the summer of 1920 arrived Mother Josepha would wait no longer, and got into contact with the General, who lived at Wieblingen Alighting from the train at Heidelberg, they met a man who introduced himself as "Baron de La Roche". He said he feared that they might make a mistake in changing trains at this place and so he came to meet them. This kindly act of the Baron at once filled the Sisters with confidence. Having arrived at the Castle in Wieblingen, they were conducted to an exquisitely furnished reception room. After an ordinary conversation, the Baron invited them to his private office, and being seated he asked them in what way he could be of service to them. Mother Josepha explained that their purpose in coming was the hope that he might be able to furnish them some additional information about Fanny de LaRoche, their revered foundress. Mother Marie was a sister of the Baron's Father and thus his aunt. Mother Josepha also explained to him how Fanny, after becoming a Catholic, became the Foundress of their Community, the Sisters of Divine Providence, and thus their first Superior General. Furthermore she said that the Sisters loved and revered her, and bitterly regretted her early death, and that she is still held in high veneration; and that her body had been translated to the convent grounds so that in death she would still be near them.

Deeply moved he replied, "How happy you make me when you say that she found peace and happiness, which, sad to say, she did not have in her family circle. Thanks be to God that she found it elsewhere, Fanny in the convent, and Emma in a happy union. How wonderful that I learned to know you Sisters during the war, and that we came to the exchange of thought. He added that there is a peculiar phenomenon in the LaRoche Family, traced for centuries, that at periods of time, one or the other of the family, urged by an irresistible impulse, entered the Catholic Church. He said he knew that Fanny and Emma had become Catholics, and for that reason were disowned and disinherited, and this brought tears to his eyes. He said that his Grandfather, Mother Marie's Father, often remarked, especially during his last years, that he always considered it an act of injustice that Fanny and Emma had been exiled from the family for becoming Catholics, since in the history of the family, others had done the same, but were never ill-treated for doing so. He also said that in that family was everything one could wish for, but no peace and no happiness, and he added that Fanny and Emma may have left their home for that reason, and that for the same reason no picture of the two could be found; although he had searched the files and records, no trace of them could be found.

On hearing all this Mother Josepha could not refrain from saying: "Even if our dear Mother Marie chose a life of poverty and renunciation, I can tell you that she was a heroine, worthy to take her place at the side of any one of her ancestors." The kind Baron visibly moved, replied: "How happy you make me when you say that she found peace and happiness among you Sisters." Mother Josepha responded: "And we Sisters of Divine Providence feel and know that we have a kind solicitous Mother in Heaven, who presents our needs to the heavenly Father, and His Providence cares for us."

Again and again the Baron expressed his joy and satisfaction to them that his Aunt Fanny had found happiness and contentment in the convent, and to hear of the great work she had accomplished, and that she is honored and revered as Foundress and Mother by a Community of Sisters.

When he heard where Mother Marie was buried and that her sister Emma had a beautiful monument erected at her tomb, he promised to visit her grave, and this he did some time later.

On expressing their thanks for his kind efforts, he assured them that their visit had been a satisfaction for him, and that they had revealed so much to him that was in the dark and almost forgotten on the pages of the family chronicles. He had noted much down of what they told him. Although disappointed in not obtaining a picture of Mother Marie their visit to the Baron was most gratifying, for much was learned which hitherto had been unknown to them. Besides, it banished the prejudice and sad feeling that so far existed. They had also acquired knowledge about Mother Marie's relatives.

Before leaving, the Baron showed them the room where Mother Marie was born, which was then a brilliantly lighted library. On the wall hung a large bronze Crucifix, which was much admired by all who saw it. He showed them the section of the library, stacked with French books, which belonged to his Grandfather, Mother Marie's Father, who spoke and read only French. This accounts for the fact that French was her favorite language.

Nothing more is known to the Community about Mother Marie's Father, than what the Baron told Mother Josepha and Sister Cecilia on this visit with him. Yet from what the Baron told them, it is known for certain that her Father had regretted the heartless and unnatural treatment that Fanny and Emma received for becoming Catholics.

Several weeks later the Baron sent a number of post cards of the Castle to the Sisters, and a note which read: "Since your departure, my thoughts often dwell on my Aunt Fanny, my Father's sister, who passed so silently through life, yet so heroically, and whose memory, so to say, had disappeared from among the members of the family, but in return is so highly honored by the Community of Sisters she founded. Up in her Heavenly Home, all her sorrows and misunderstandings with her family have long been obliterated."

Baron de LaRoche

Sister Angela, still residing at the orphanage in Neustadt, was ever diligently engaged in searching for yet more information about Mother Marie, and so again she got in contact with the Baron at Wieblingen. He, interested as he was, again searched the family archives, and to his great surprise, he found the original touching letter that Fanny had written to her family on the day of her Baptism, and entrance into the Church.

The Baron at once wrote to Sister Angela that he had found that letter. This letter revealed astounding news for the Baron as well as for the Sisters. E told Sister Angeline (in his letter) that he had firmly resolved to keep this letter from his Aunt Fanny secretly in the family archives for

future generations. In answer, Sister Angela, however, besought him most intensely to give this treasure to the Community she founded, and finally he yielded to her urgent persuasion. On March 16, 1924, he wrote to Sister Angela from Heidelberg, saying: "Your letter has done it that I changed my mind. A higher and stronger will has changed my first decision, and I must submit. The letter is now at your disposal, but I beg you not to put it into print anywhere." He also told her that she need not call for the letter. On April 26, 1924, Lord Baron de LaRoche had the kindness to bring the letter personally to the orphanage. With the letter he brought the poem Fanny had written, "To Mama for Christmas, 1845." The promise not to publish the letter was kept during the life time of the Baron.

The Community was now in possession of this precious letter which so clearly revealed mother Marie's soul's sentiments. It is found on page 4 of these memoirs. [Page 3 of original manuscript.]

Now the Sisters became more anxious than ever to see and possess a picture of their Co-foundress and First Mother General; but to get a photograph of her was no easy task, for in Mother Marie's parental home no picture of her was preserved, and it seemed that nowhere one could be discovered. Mother Josepha commissioned Sister Angela Molitor, her zealous co-worker in the cause, to continue the search, and to do all in her power to accomplish the task. This Sister Angela faithfully did, and eventually Prince Löwenstein in Klein-Heubach advised her to inquire by the daughter of the niece of the deceased Baroness of Leoprechting, the sister of Mother Marie who was known as Baroness of Rink, and who lived in the Castle of Waldürn. Sister Angela at once began this long-way search, and persevered until she got into contact with the Baroness of Waldürn. In answer to her inquiry about a photo of Fanny de LaRoche, the Baroness replied that she knew of none. But noticing how interested and concerned Sister Angela was about getting the picture, she began searching her collection of antiques, and finally found a picture bearing the name "Fanny de LaRoche." At last! What a surprise! A picture of Fanny was found! It showed Fanny with her escutcheon. She was clad as a young lady, sitting in an easy chair, in her parental home. This picture as it was when found, is preserved in the Generalate. From it Sister Cherubim, an expert artist, reproduced the facial features, and clothed her with the religious habit. This is the origin of the picture the Community now possesses. It brought great joy to the entire Community. Many reproductions were made in all sizes and postures, and distributed among the Sisters.

Love, devotion and confidence to the saintly Foundress increased rapidly among the Sisters. August 1, 1957, the centenary of her death, was piously observed by the entire Community. Reverend Mother Ansberta Mühling, at the time Superior General, in due time sent a circular letter to each Province, reminding the Sisters of the on-coming Hundredth Anniversary, so significant for every Sister. For uniformity sake, she outlined a few devotions and practices to be observed, which made the occasion more impressive and memorable. The outstanding events of Mother Marie's life were drawn up, for the better knowledge of the Sisters. Soon after the Anniversary, the Superior sent every Sister as a remembrance of the first Centennial of the death of the beloved Foundress, a printed pamphlet, depicting pictures and relating incidents of her life.

After the elapse of many years, the Superiors General, for greater veneration of Mother Marie, desired that her remains, buried in the St. Mary Cemetery at the orphanage in Neustadt, be again exhumed, and placed in a more worthy shrine, for this would ever keep her memory before the Sisters, and she would be more honored and invoked, and that, in course of time, as was hoped, would lead to her Beatification. Their intention was to do this before the translation of the Generalate to Rome, which was to take place in September, 1960. August, 1960, marked

the One Hundred-third Anniversary of Mother Marie's death, and so it was decided to make the unearthing and translation of her remains on August 23, which was the centenary of her first exhumation in 1960[sic].

The Undertaking Company of Aschaffenburg was engaged to do the work of exhuming. In the same grave with Mother Marie was buried Mother Walburga, who died in 1899, and her remains were discovered first. Digging much deeper, Mother Marie's remains were found. All stood in silent anxious waiting. Present at this inspiring event were: Mother Ansberta Mühling, Mother Elizabeth Kaul, Mother Lucina Goedecker, and Sister Malvina Becker. Mother Mary Kenneth, the First Assistant, was at the time a patient in the Hospital at Aschaffenburg, and could not be present. Besides the Superiors General, a large number of Sisters witnessed the solemn but seldom performed act. In the grave of Mother Marie were found pieces of her habit, several larger and a few smaller bones, two rosary beads and small pieces of the wooden coffin. The habit material and the beads compared perfectly with the relics preserved in the Motherhouse, and so there could be no doubt about the reality of Mother Marie's relics. Reverently these relics were placed in a beautifully carved wooden chest, to which the Sisters piously touched articles of devotion, while Mother Ansberta collected in small metal containers ground that had been shoveled up with the relics. This she later on sent to the Provincial Houses. Then a procession was formed, carrying the relics to a mortuary on the lawn, especially prepared for the preservation and veneration of the relics until a more worthy shrine be erected. Reverend Doctor Wettig, a great venerator of the saintly Mother, as Representative of the Bishop, was present and witnessed all. He blessed the relics and the Sisters with the relics.

Pious Sayings of Mother Marie

"Call me, Lord, if Thou hast not yet called me."

"I have the firm faith and the joyful certainty of having through my step found the full truth."

"Nothing can be compared with the joy of being in the ancient Christian Faith of the Catholic Church."

May God grant me the grace to prove through my future life that no other than holy motives have moved me to increase my old faith by the new one."

"Silent be all complaints. The darkest paths lead to Light through Love and Grace."

"Pray that through suffering we become nobler and better, before entering the Kingdom of Our Heavenly Father."

"May God grant me the grace to follow worthily my holy vocation, and to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that I may lead all our dear Lord's children by and by to Jesus."

"Be ye angels of peace and silence among one another, calm in endurance. Let each Sister strive to give the best example in these virtues."

"I recognize so visibly in all events of life, the wonderful ways of God, and will always strive to have a firmer and more childlike trust in God."

“Let us with childlike trust always appear before the Heavenly Father’s Throne as humble beggars. God will then certainly grant us all we need.”

“Let it be your constant aim, ever to have God before the eyes of your soul, and to please Him only.”

“May the Holy Will of God be done in all things.”

“Grant, dear Lord, that I may ever resignedly and peacefully, accept all it may please Thee to send me.”

“We can never admire and praise God’s providence sufficiently, that He so visibly cares for us.”

“Visibly do I see in all things the wonderful Providence of God; may my trust be ever firmer and simpler.”

“Should anything in your holy vocation become burdensome, you have the image of your Crucified Lord on your breast to strengthen and console you.”

“May we be ever filled with joy and thanks toward the most excellent and best of Fathers.”

“My ambition is always to live in the presence of our dear Lord, and to please Him alone.”

Extracts from Mother Marie’s letters:

From a letter to Mother Vincentia:

“Oh, may you, in view of the eternal reward and in conformity to our Divine Model, never relax in your zeal and love. When things become hard, you have on your breast the Savior on the Cross, as your strength and encouragement, in difficult assignments.”

To her nephew she wrote from Schifferstadt on August 31, 1851:

“We are capable of doing all that is good solely through God . . . It is very evident to me that if we wish really to follow Christ, we must renounce all our own wishes and inclinations.”

To Bishop Ketteler she wrote on December 30, 1856:

“Recently a Sister sent your Graciousness a report, in my name, saying that in regard to the children, I fail more by being too kind than too strict. This must be true, although I do not have the knowledge of it, but believe myself to be strict and harsh. O Gracious Lord, pray for me that I may obtain the right balance between severity and kindness, which here seems to be my most difficult task.”

On March 20, 1857, she wrote to the Bishop:

“Here in this solitude, where the good Lord speaks intimately to the heart, I see ever more clearly, how much blame-worthy is still within me, and that the Lord requires more from me than

I give Him, especially in the so-called trivial matters, in which I so often let the opportunity pass by to mortify myself, by the practice of self-denial. This last mentioned I have taken for my particular examen, and this makes me more attentive, and thus I see how little I have accomplished. Often trifling things annoy me, or at least momentarily irritate me.”

Mother Marie was gifted with poetic talent, and she composed many beautiful poems with deep import and meaning. The two following poems are the only ones that have been preserved.

To Mama, Christmas Eve, 1845

For you a star did once arise
In purest, brightest glow,
Your every hope and fond desire
In it entwined did grow.

From heav'n it came, just lent to earth
This blessed messenger of joy
And oh! The bliss and precious grace
In brief effulgence did bestow.

It shone in splendor soft and blest
Of your dark nights the very light
Whate'er the load your soul oppressed
It vanished at its soothing sight.

The star did fade. – Yet greater grace
Now leads the soul to truer Light.
'Tis Faith's rare flower that now unfolds
And sorrow deepens inner sight.

'Twas love alone smiled out to you
Dispelling every pain and care,
For love so sweet, for bliss so true
You sent to Heav'n a grateful pray'r.

He calls to you: "Your angel lives!
Ere long his bliss you, too, will share."
Oh! Hope, endure! For lo, your child
Doth hover round you everywhere.

You deemed yourself thus blest for life
But tears now fill your eyes:
For you, O Grief! Your star did see
Go home to heavenly skies.

Today, on this great Feast of Joy
He'd send you solace, precious boon!
For 'twas today the Highest, Best,
The Light Eternal pierced our gloom.

Our Model Friend, our Love, our Bliss
Our comforter in all life's threats.
To wand'rer in this darksome vale,
The Glorious Sun that never sets.

Fanny

In Memory of Paulchen

Verily thou hast gone to the Father of Light,
Lovely Angel before God's throne,
Pure wilt thou stand on Judgment's dread day,
For, spotless still, thy loving soul fled
All radiant to heavenly Light!
Praising the guidance of a Father's great love,
Full conscious of thy brief life's aim,
Thou'rt blissful now in home above.

Serenely my yearning I bear in my breast
Ne'er to forget thee, thou darling beloved.
'Tis to the Father of Love thou surely hast sped
And knowest now bliss, 'stead of earth's woe.
Here below was thy springtide not destined to bloom
So sweet May hath already carried thee home.
He Who in life strewed thy pathway with joy
Hath now called thee to greater bliss still,
Called thee as saint, as wholly God's own
Lovingly back to His glorious home.

Cease then, thou sad lament! – Darksome pathways
Lead to the light, -- yea, are very Love and Grace.
Surely thou didst haste to Father and Son,
Didst haste to join the ranks of the blest
There to enjoy, 'mid that glorious throng,
Faith's great promised eternal rest.
Flooded now thy soul with jubilant delight
With grateful love for thy Father benign.
For each of those dear ones thus glorified
Thou shalt see again resplendent in light.

Cease, O Lament! – I have not lost thee
The love born with thee never shall die.
In our Father's mansions with Alfred united
Look down on us now with gaze unclouded.
See the tears that for you are still flowing.
Love ye us still as once we did love.
Then, ye brethren of angels, plead with the Savior
To dry the tears for you still copiously flowing.
Pray that, refined and ennobled by pain
We soon may enter our Father's domain.
Trustingly, then, resigned, serene
I bear what e'er Thou dost send – Thy will is supreme.

Fanny

Mayence, Germany
January 26, 1953

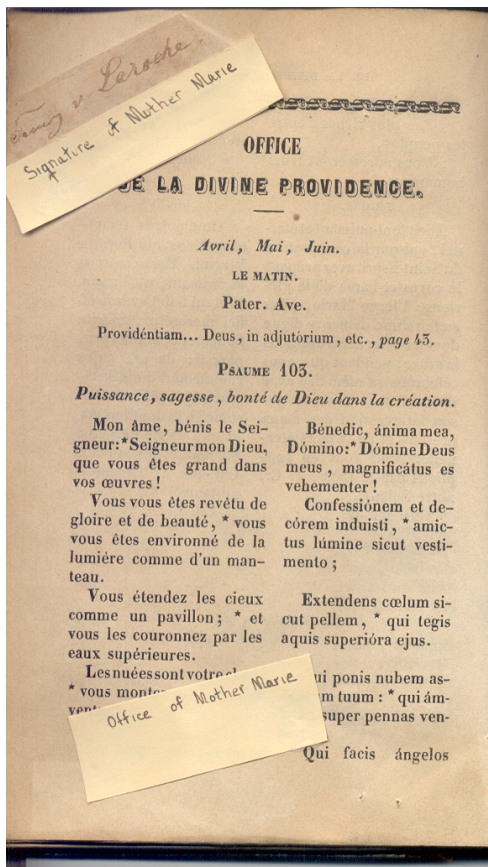
CONFERENCE DELIVERED
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THE VERY REVEREND CATHEDRAL PREBENDARY, DR. WETTIC

More than a century ago a prayer was written and pasted on the back of the title page of a prayerbook called "Temple of the Saints for God's Honor." It was a complete book of prayers and devotions by A. Hungari.

The prayer read as follows:

"Thou, O lord, art my patience and my strength. Thou art my light and my counselor. Thou hast entrusted and submitted to me this little flock; do not abandon me to my own strength. O my God, impart unto me the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Fortitude, the Spirit of Knowledge and Piety, and the Spirit of the wholesome Fear of the Lord, so that I may lead and direct others, and I, myself, attain to eternal salvation. O my God, grant me an untiring zeal, meekness and kindness of heart, and invincible patience, with the moderate earnestness of a good instructor. Amen."



This prayer was written with a script as may be seen in a classroom for pupils, even, exact and easily read. In the upper right hand corner was seen the name "Fanny LaRoche: written in a different handwriting. Comparing the writing of this name with the signature found in her letters, it was evident that it was written by Mother Marie. It cannot be known by whom the prayer itself was written nor who composed it. But since Mother Marie gave it a prominent place in her prayerbook, it cannot be doubted that she made it her own prayer. It is now possible for us to learn, after a lapse of a hundred years, directly of her life of prayer and receive from her methods and instructions for our own prayer.

Her prayer is clearly divided into two sections: acknowledgement and petition.

Acknowledgement: "O Lord, thou art my patience and my strength. Thou art my light and my counselor."

Petition: "Thou hast entrusted and submitted to me this little flock. Do not abandon me to my own strength."

These words reveal and say that patience is needed in every way and in every walk of life. Not only is it necessary in our relationship with others, but more often in the analysis of our own affairs. Perhaps we have long been waiting for a decision of personal importance, which we await with fear and trembling, but which lies not in our power to decide. In such instances our patience and our willingness to wait is put to a hard test. Impatience and fear can become so overpowering that we may explode. What should we do in these moments and how protect ourselves against our own weakness? Only by a living faith and confidence in God's Providence, Who permits and rules the most insignificant details of our life. Only the soul that commits herself and her imposed waiting into the Hands of God will stand on a firm ground, and in peace can she say: "Thou, O Lord, art my patience and my strength."

“Thou art my light and my counselor.” Light and counsel are needed in the night of darkness. When our solicitude is tortured by not knowing how to meet the state of affairs; when in the pains of inadvisability our strength weakens, then we seek for light and counsel.

We all know that in the life of Mother Marie such dark hours besieged her soul. When on the day of her Baptism, June 14, 1851, she wrote to her Mother at Wieblingen, she begged her to keep her in her love, and in the future not to be angry with her. Reading these letters, one feels her intense love for her family and her home. Now, as well as in earlier years, came back vividly to her mind what the years of her childhood, her youth, and her later years in the quiet and security of her home and family meant to her.

When one carefully considers the years and the incidents that led up to her conversion, one can understand the painful struggle that the necessity of the great sacrifices that would be required of her, and the necessary distressing decisions to be made, brought upon her the extreme dark night of the soul, and hence the pressing need of counsel and light. In such a state of mind, one may seek help from others, but one feels that their advice and assistance are human and limited.

Mother Marie overcame her own impotence, her painful anxiety and the perplexing darkness of her mind by her faith in the guiding hand of God’s fatherly Providence. Only the soul that is led by Divine Guidance through this dark night can say: “Thou art my light and my counselor.”

To the above acknowledgement was joined the real prayer of petition. This, too, first commits itself to faith in Divine Providence. “Thou hast entrusted to my care this little flock.” We do not know what circumstances caused the utterance of this sentence. Nor is this knowledge necessary. However, it is important that we acknowledge God’s Providence in the situation that urged its expression. “Thou hast entrusted.” God directs, obliges and commands. The work and the office imposed on us may not be in accordance with our own wishes nor inclinations and capabilities. It is a gift and a duty from God. “Thou hast entrusted to me this little flock.” Out of this state of affairs arises the petition: “Abandon me not to myself.” The decrees of God cannot be solved by natural talents and powers.

What does man do when left to his own will in fulfilling his tasks? If the task is in accordance with his own inclinations, capabilities and wishes, he embraces it with enthusiasm and energy. But as soon as difficulties arise, when his efforts lack success, when insufficient means disappoint him, when disillusioned by unexpected occurrences, then he becomes overpowered by discouragement, ill humor, and sadness. He begins to compare his situation with those of others round about; he imagines that with smaller tasks there is more possibility for success and advancement for one’s plans and talents. Easily the human heart is then captured by sadness and envy. Thus the way of man when left to himself.

The petition: “Abandon me not to myself” contains a deep realization of man’s weakness and impotence. God’s works and dispositions cannot be rightly judged nor understood by the spirit of man, but only with the help of the Divine Spirit. Hence this prayer pleads for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Fortitude, the Spirit of Knowledge and Piety, and, especially, for the Spirit of the wholesome Fear of the Lord. The understanding, the strength and consciousness of the responsibility in the discharge of duty can be given man only by the Holy Spirit through His gifts. Every God-given office should be begun and carried on by the Holy Spirit. Hence the prayer ends with the petition for those gifts and graces which one needs in the fulfillment of one’s daily duties: zeal that never tires, meekness and kindness of heart, an invincible patience. Zeal that never tires is necessary to

oppose the dangers of ennui; meekness overpowers the unrestrained will and desires; kindness of heart and unwearying patience must fit us for refusals, must strengthen us to wait for the moment when a heart that is closed and opposed to us will soften and open to the saving, helpful and healing word of true Christian charity and guidance.

Mother Marie enclosed the words of this prayer as a treasure into her own prayer. Thereby she reveals her confidence in the protecting hand of the Father in Heaven. She pleads earnestly that she may be able to fulfill the duties of her God-given office by the strength of the supernatural life, through the power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. She implored God that she might be capable to handle the duties and difficulties of everyday life with zeal, with meekness and kindness of heart, and with an invincible patience.

May Mother Marie's prayer assist you in making a careful examen of your own prayer and manner and way of thinking and doing. May her prayer accompany you, and may her spirit and her intercession ever more and more intimately unite you with the words of her prayer: "Thou, O Lord, art my patience and my strength; Thou art my light and my counselor. Amen."