The Little Flower at School

By

ONE OF HER TEACHERS

We are now going to let little Thérèse herself speak. Here is what she tells us in the story of a Soul, chapter 11.

"I was eight and a half when Léonce left school and I took his place at the Abbey." Then she adds: "I was put in a class of pupils who were all bigger than I."

This was the classe verte, the "Green Class." I should explain that there were five classes, each having two or three divisions according to the number of pupils, who usually remained for two years in a class. Each of different colors, worn with the uniforms, distinguished the various classes: red for the lowest class, the fifth; green for the fourth (preparatory), violet for the third (elementary), orange for the second (intermediate), blue for the first (primary), and white for the students who had won their first diploma and were continuing their studies.

Her Classmates

Thérèse never wore the red belt and had the green for only one year. Thanks to the attentive care of her "Little Mother" (her sister, Pauline), our new pupil was in no way backward. Does she not also say in her autobiography that from the beginning success fell to her, bringing encouragement and confidence. Our industrious pupil held this gain of a year until she left the school. She was intelligent and fond of study, but her spirit of faith was too strong to let her take things easily just because the Lord had endowed her with natural gifts. Thérèse brought a serious and disinterested application to her work. The high marks and first places she won in the weekly tests were the reward of her diligence. Undoubtedly she had to strive hard to withstand the competition of class mates who were older than she and not less gifted nor less ambitious.

It has seemed surprising to us that Thérèse has written: "I had very great difficulty in learning anything by heart." Quite on the contrary the Mistresses are agreed in testifying that she showed excellent powers of memory, doing well in all subjects that demanded these more particularly, such as history and geography. She could recite by heart stories and long passages of poetry with delighted spirit and feeling into her recreation of the poem entitled "Le Pain de Chef Noint"—a touching story of a little French boy, sick in Paris, who, in order to get well asked his father for "a piece of bread from home"—that the whole audience was moved by it. And when she said: "In heaven, our home and our fair fatherland, there is life-giving Bread, bestowed by God's hand.

Further Memories of St. Thérèse as a Pupil of the Benedictine Nuns in Lisieux... Written for The Far East

by a Member of the Community

"Tis the商报 of the dear that is ground for our joy;
"Tis the remedy divine, it is Jesus indeed!
all her own ardent love for the Blessed Eucharist came out in her gestures and in the accent of her young voice.

It would not be correct, however, to think that Thérèse had no difficulty with her studies. No, far from it! She had her good times and her bad times of success in French and arithmetic that she felt keenly. The dear child did not become angry, and she did not lose heart, but she shed an abundance of tears which showed an excessive sensitivity. She blamed herself greatly for this and later she was to master it. It is the only fault—and a very light one—that we observed in the character of our lovable pupil. We were upset on seeing her give herself up to such grief. We could not console her when her marks or her place in the tests did not come up to her desires.

It would be a great mistake to think that these tears of Thérèse came from self-love or ambition. She fancied that God would be less pleased with her and that she would grieve her good father, who manifested a certain disappointment when her marks were as low as 3 (out of 6) and on the other hand, seemed so happy when his daughters brought him reports showing high marks and first places. The dear child had to bring work with them to do at home in the evenings. M. Martin and the older girls took the greatest interest in the studies and progress of the children. The truth is, then, that the tears shed by Thérèse came from her deficiency of conscience and her extreme goodness of heart.

Petty Persecution

In the class there was one pupil of limited intelligence, very backward and mortified at finding herself with little girls much younger than she. It is not surprising that she became jealous of the successes of her youngest..."
At 8 a.m. the pupils go into study, which opens with the "Psalm, Sancte Spiritus." As we have said (see The "Paw East" for March) the day-boarders must be here between 8 and 8:30. From 9 to noon there are various classes. At 10 there is a recess—short recreation—of ten minutes. This recreation is taken in the playground when weather permits.

During dinner, when everyone has been served, a pupil recites for a few minutes from the lives of the saints. The recreation which follows ends at 1:15 p.m.

Eucharistic Visit
Ten minutes before the signal for going in, the girls who wished were permitted to go to the chapel for a little visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Pupils of the Abbey School in recreation
(From a photo taken about 1885, when St. Thérèse was attending the school)

IN outlining briefly the day of a pupil at the Abbey of Notre-Dame du Paix, we shall follow St. Thérèse step by step.

A little bell-hand announces all the exercises by loud ringing or by a slight tinkle as the case might be. Every week a "vétementaire" or time-keeper took up duty. This was not regarded by any means as an arduous task but rather as a mark of trust, marked by good conduct. Accordingly Thérèse had the honor pretty often of ringing the bell.

For the older boarders rising was at 5:35 a.m. The mistress gave the signal by reciting the words of the sign of the cross quite loudly followed by the short, customary offering: "My God, I give You my heart..." At 6:10 morning prayer was said—a pupil saying it aloud. Then came le petit déjeuner [the light French breakfast]. Pupils who intended to receive Holy Communion went directly to the chapel to have a quarter-hour's preparation before Mass, at which all assisted.

At Recreation
In connection with recreation, we recall in the autobiograph: "I was so good at games...I did not care for games, especially noisy ones." That is true, but at Thérèse was above all faithful to duty, she took part in the general games; pupils were not permitted to go off on their own. Let us hear some of her companions:

Thérèse loved to gather around the smallest pupils around her and to tell them children's stories, and her young audience, enthralled by her words, forgot about playing. So the mistress one day made this remark to us: "Children, I prefer to see you running around than talking."

"Sometimes Thérèse would leave the games of the bigger girls and would turn to see the fun of the little ones. When she spied someone up mischievous, she would come, all smiles, in the middle of the happy frolic and would take the little rogue gently by the hands to make her confess her tricks. With her deep, penetrating gaze she seemed to plumb the depths of these little souls."

Thérèse, we see, had already a liking for the apostolate.

"I take pride, in a supernatural sense, in having been the companion of Thérèse and in having shared her games. With her I heard little birds under the lime-trees or at the foot of the pear-tree that was growing along the drive. Our cemetery was there in the corner formed by the chapel, close to the entrance to the cellars. We were very much afraid when passing that dark opening...But one day it was forbidden to go beyond certain bounds, an account of the difficulties of supervision. Hence, in order not to disobey, we had to move funnels of birds in that spot.

One concluding point will show how, even amid games, the little one's mind was directed towards the supernatural.

"Thérèse was, I believe, nine years old. She was a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Angels. According to the custom of the school, the young children who had some little troubles could go and confide them to the girl who filled the office of President in one of the sodalities (of the Holy Angels or the Children of Mary). One day Thérèse told me: "Marguerite, I would like to ask you something."

"Yes, Thérèse, I will talk to you at recreation."

"When the time came, I drew the child aside, and as we walked along together, I said, "Well, Thérèse, what is the matter?"

"I wish you would teach me how to make a meditation."

"Quite surprised, I told her to go and find the catechism teacher who could advise her much better than I. Thérèse then confided in me how she practiced recollection beside her set and said to me: "I think."

"Without knowing, the little girl was already very expert in the science of prayer."

Recreation in bad weather, was spent on the terrace, which was spacious and had a southern exposure. There the children could have their fun and enjoy the fresh air in shelter. But to get there, one had to go through part of the monastery and therefore..."
This precious crucifix is to be seen in the Oratory of the Sisters.

Trials and a Great Favor

At this period our Little Therése had to undergo two great trials, but she received an extraordinary grace. On January 2, 1883, she reached the age of ten when children were then admitted to the Holy Table. Also, a diocesan synod had just been held and had decreed that heretofore children should have completed their tenth year before the first of January. So Therése was two days short. What a sacrifice for this little soul that wished so ardently to be united to Our Lord!

In spite of her resignation, she remained a sense of sorrow in the depths of her heart. One may ask if this had not something to do with the continual headaches that afflicted her at the end of 1882.

At Easter these became extremely severe, and thus began that strange and mysterious illness that she described in detail in her autobiography. The latter trial was ended, as we know, on May 15, 1883, by that incredible grace of the “Smile of the Blessed Virgin”—the fifteenth anniversary of which has just [1933] been celebrated at the Carmel.

Her cure was complete, and two months remained before the school year would be finished. Therése did not resume her studies but came occasionally to let us see that her health was restored. It was admirable how this privileged child of Mary never said a word to anyone about the great favor that she had received; and the same silence was observed by all the members of her family.

When the school reopened in October, Therése continued to be the simple, frank schoolgirl of old, but she was more and more rallying. Far was it not to be for her the great year. A few months more and the longed-for day would dawn!

Her state of health now allowed her to follow the regular course of studies. She resumed her work with enthusiasm, while giving pride of place to religious instruction, even more markedly than before.

(The story continues.)