

Saint Clare Of Assisi

By Very Rev Dominic Devas O.F.M.
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INTRODUCTION.

To visit Jerusalem, Rome and Assisi for the first time, and all within a month, is to lodge in the mind a memory not likely soon to be lost. Jerusalem is fortunate in its walls, for the cramped city, within their narrow compass, retains much of its ancient ways and antique buildings steeped still and richly with the emotion of bygone multitudes. Rome is Rome — immortal despite all the ravages of "progress ", but old and new jostle one another so closely that the atmosphere of antiquity can only be caught here and there in this quarter or in that building; the prevailing note is strident and modern. How different is Assisi! As the train moves down out of the hills and then pushes on discreetly up the wide Umbrian valley, it seems to know its place and deliberately to refrain from drawing in too closely to the beautiful white city set midway on the eastern slopes. One feels that a thirteenth-century friar whom the Jerusalem of today would mystify, and modern Rome utterly bewilder, would know Assisi at once and be quite at home there. Comparatively speaking, it has changed little during these intervening centuries ; and even that mingled masterpiece of audacity and calm, the church and convent of San Francesco, though Francis did not know it, was certainly known to Saint Clare, even though invisible from her home at Saint Damian's.

But indeed Clare had a beauty all her own to gaze at if she would. Most cities, hurriedly visited, leave in the memory some vivid core or centre, that the name evokes at once, and around which the other memories gather tardily and with effort.

For some, at least, the so-called Garden of Saint Clare in the convent of Saint Damian fulfils that office for Assisi. It is quite tiny, enclosed by lofty masonry on three sides, but the fourth, bordered by a low wall, looks straight down on to the beautiful plain or wide valley of Umbria, with the outline of the far hills rising mistily out of the blue distances and closing the horizon in — a perfect view quite beyond adequate description in words. It is a place of utter peace, so calm, so alien to the world's rough noise and ceaseless questionings, so responsive to man's own inward witness to the invisible that one almost waits for the old door to open softly and to admit Clare herself to her garden with a greeting for the visitor. That may not be, but at least one may strive to recall for a while the memory of a very noble figure in the Franciscan past, and of one whose inspiration, after seven centuries, still glows in the heroic lives of many generous souls.

HER EARLY YEARS.

CLARE was born at Assisi in July 1194. Her father was called Favarone; her mother's name was Ortulana. She had, it would appear, an elder brother called Martin, and in time two younger sisters, Agnes and Beatrice. There was also an uncle, Monaldo. Sixteenth and seventeenth century writers, with their insatiable itch for nobility at all costs, have sedulously got their Clare into the best society and present her to us as one of the great Sciffi family. Contemporaries knew nothing of this; they were, in fact, more like ourselves, and were content when they found that true nobility of which

sanctity is so sure a school, without bothering to look around for escutcheons. All then that we know for certain of Clare's family — and it is illuminating enough in view of her subsequent character — is that she came of great fighting stock. *Pater ejus miles et tota utroque parente progenies militaris*: 'Her father was a soldier and her ancestry on both sides, military'. We know also, from the same source, that the family, from the material point of view, was very well off. One might, then, hazard the suggestion that Clare's family at Assisi was of much the same local standing as that of Antony at Lisbon — of the urban nobility or, as we should say, of the upper class. But how trifling all such inquiries seem when our business is with a soul of such outstanding "greatness" as that of Clare. It is sanctity that ennobles souls and makes them truly *generosi* — of high birth — no matter what their origins.

Clare owed much to her mother, Ortulana, a woman of real piety. In her younger days, Ortulana had been on pilgrimage to the holy places in Palestine, and to Saint Michael's shrine in the south of Italy; and in her day — in marked contrast to our own — to go on pilgrimage both required and was itself an evidence of a spiritual sincerity of no common order. Just before Clare's birth Ortulana was praying in church before a crucifix for a safe delivery when an interior voice reassured her; she was to set all fear aside, for her child would be safely born and become a great light in the world.

At baptism in the Cathedral of San Rufino — and at the same font, still to be seen, wherein Francis was baptized — the little one received the name of Clare. With a sigh for what is so swiftly passing from amongst us, we read how Clare learnt the *fidei rudimenta*, the "rudiments of faith", from her own mother's lips. No wonder it all held so firmly; no wonder it is apt to sit so lightly on so many of the modern generation who learn these same rudiments of faith in conjunction with Latin grammar and ancient history, and much else besides, that are all apt in time to go the way of "school stuff", carrying — alas only too often — the rudiments of faith in their train. As a child, Clare showed unselfishness in her alms-giving, the beginnings of self-mastery in the penances she would impose upon herself, and a certain determination to be thorough with God by counting her little prayers with loose pebbles to make sure none were left out.

When Francis came back from Rome with verbal approval of Pope Innocent III for his way of life and was gathering followers around him at his new home of 'Saint Mary of the Angels', the Portiuncula, Clare was about fifteen years of age. Assisi was now ashamed no longer of her wayward son; and amongst the earliest to be drawn towards one who was already beginning to lead souls with a touch as sure and direct as that which the world has seen more lately in the Cure d'Ars, was the young girl Clare. We have a fine example here of that remarkable insight into character which Francis possessed, and for which only the tardiest recognition has been forthcoming. To handle a soul like Clare's with such unerring skill, such perfect assurance, and such complete success was a great achievement; and is an instance alike of the value of sound direction, when it may be had, and of the chief source of its efficacy. For some three years, Clare, accompanied by her maid, used frequently to visit Francis when he was staying at the Portiuncula. There is little difficulty in following their talk. It was all, as Thomas of Celano puts it, *vivo sermone*, with speech alive, vivacious; Francis spoke to Clare of the world's emptiness, of the life with God, and of Jesus Christ, *Quem amor humanavit*, 'Whom love made man'.

The issue could hardly be doubted. On Palm Sunday, 18th March, 1212, Clare, dressed in splendour beyond the ordinary, went with the crowds to the cathedral for the distribution of palms; but when the time came to receive her palm, she felt she could not rise with the rest and move up towards the sanctuary. Issues so vast and novel for this girl of eighteen were to be put to the test that night that it

hardly surprises us to find her here, for once in her life, overwrought. The chronicler quietly covers all with a discreet *prae verecundia* — just shyness — and there she remained in her place, more conspicuous now than ever. The Bishop of Assisi was officiating. This was Guido, true friend of both Francis and Clare, and close sharer of their counsels. Seeing Clare still kneeling in her place, he came down the sanctuary and gave the blessed palm into her hand. It came to her from God's minister as a pledge of conflict and of victory. That night, with one to bear her company, Clare left her home by a disused door and came straight to Francis at the little chapel of Saint Mary of the Angels. He and the brothers were waiting with torches to receive her. She came to the tiny altar, and, at the hands of Francis, vowed herself to God absolutely, irrevocably, keeping nothing back. The actions were swift, but the work itself unhurried. Three years had gone to the fashioning of it, years of prayer, reflection and wise counsel; and now at length the gauge Christ had cast into that generous soul was taken up and His gentle challenge, 'Come, follow Me', met. And it was at Mary's own shrine that the dedication was made, so that, as the Chronicler puts it, Mary might become the Mother of this family also, the religious daughters of Clare; as already she was the Mother of the family which Francis had gathered around this little chapel of hers in the woods.

When the ceremony was over and Clare had set aside her worldly adornments, she was conducted at once to a neighbouring convent of Benedictine nuns, dedicated to Saint Paul. Soon enough her warlike relatives discovered her retreat and appeared at Saint Paul's bent on regaining her, if need be, by force. Clare was adamant, clinging to the very coverings of the altar, and baring her head that all might see it, shorn in token of her consecration. For several days, the conflict continued till at length, realizing the futility of trying to shake her resolution, her relatives left her in peace to God, and returned to Assisi.

In reality, this strange scene — soon to be repeated in the case of Clare's sister, and with even greater violence — is very typical of an age wherein thought was the handmaid of action and not — as so often today — its substitute. One remembers Saint Bernard and the opposition he met with and triumphed over so completely, or the revolting endeavours employed to hamper the young Thomas Aquinas in achieving his purpose, to see how this sort of physical constraint was common enough. Today it finds its softened counterpart in the worldly-wise endeavours to distract from foolish visions of the cloister those whose future careers we have hopefully mapped out on other lines. There is nothing anti-clerical in either case, but just two different fashions of showing displeasure at personal disappointment. Shortly after this conflict — likely enough because of it, for it ill-accorded with the peace of the house, and, who knows, might perhaps be renewed — Clare moved to the convent of Saint Angelo di Panso, Benedictine likewise. Here she made her earliest conquest.

Between Clare and her younger sister, Agnes, there had long existed a complete harmony of thought and will. The latter shared in all her sister's hopes and plans, and must have known full well of her devotion to Francis and of her purpose to consecrate her life to God under his guidance. Once the venture had been made, Clare did not cease to pray for Agnes that she might soon join her. Her prayers were heard; and we are thus confronted with the first notable instance of the wonderful efficacy of Clare's prayer. Little more than a fortnight after Clare herself had left her home, and whilst she was still with the Benedictine nuns of Saint Angelo di Panso, Agnes fled alone and in secret from the house of Assisi and joined her sister. It was 2nd April 1212, and she was fifteen years of age. Most people are familiar with the scene that followed and the violent efforts — miraculously frustrated — that were made to drag the unwilling Agnes away from the life of her

choice. During all the shouting and tumult, Clare prayed, and praying won. The only consoling feature in this brutal assault on one so young is the absence of the immediate family of Clare. The villain of the piece was the uncle Monaldo, who disappears henceforward from history. Let us hope the double miracle, the sudden weight of Agnes so that strong men could not lift her, and his own arm raised to strike and itself struck temporarily useless and for long afterwards often in pain, may have helped to turn his mind to better things. Such events, however, were disquieting for the generous hosts of the two sisters, and doubtless served to hasten on the needful work of preparation going on all the while at Saint Damian's, Assisi.

A few days after the rough scene with Agnes, all was sufficiently ready and the two sisters entered the walls of that historic house, still redolent of Francis's own work and rich with his prophetic utterance that soon it would shelter holy women dedicated to God.

SAINT DAMIAN'S.

AT the convent of Saint Damian, then, just outside the walls of her native town, in this same eventful year 1212, Clare dropped anchor at last, and, in the beautiful words of her first biographer, 'broke the alabaster vase of her body so that the whole church was filled with the odour of the ointment'. That this was not rhetoric merely is shown by the number of those who came so soon to Saint Damian's to associate themselves with Clare and Agnes in their new life; and equally, too, in the strange, indefinable way in which Clare's influence and example reached and entered and permeated other convents of women, already pursuing an ordered way of life and long established in the Church, and led to their inclusion in the new Order.

Once enclosed within the walls of her new home, Clare never left it; and it now remains to treat — and how superficial, even at the best, must such treatment be — of the forty years and more she spent there. As one looks back over these seven hundred years of Franciscan history, Clare still towers over it all serene and radiant, with something of that brilliance which so plainly impressed those of her own day. She was of the very few in whom Francis found an utterly congenial spirit, and among these very few she entered as fully as any into the Franciscan ideal; she was a perfect flower on the Franciscan tree. Saint Bonaventure tells us that Francis aimed at combining in his Order three hitherto disparate movements. He would have the following of Christ in an ordered conventual life, such as he established at Saint Mary of the Angels; he would add a measure of the eremitical life by initiating such solitary homes as those of the Carceri or La Verna, and on this twin basis he would build up a vast missionary enterprise, that would stretch out brave arms to the remotest corners of the known world.

That Clare, enclosed at Saint Damian's, could share in the ideals of conventual life and retirement is plain enough, but for her also, life was to be apostolic. Clare's old friend, Cardinal Ugolino, now Pope Gregory IX, would often appeal to Clare for help in the many cares and difficulties of his pontificate. As the chronicler puts it, *sciebat enim quid potest amor*, 'he knew the power of love', and looked to Clare and her daughters to help the Church everywhere by their apostolate of prayer and sacrifice.

One is reminded at once of an earlier Gregory, the seventh, the great and saintly Hildebrand, and of his beautiful letters to the monastic house he loved so well, to Cluny and its abbot, Hugh. Hugh is implored to secure the prayers of those 'whose holy lives assure fulfilment' for himself as representing that 'universal mother', the Church. And again one is reminded of our late Holy Father Pope Pius XI, and of the confidence he assured us he felt in these other martyrs, as admirable and so

numerous, who are hidden within the cloister of a religious house... innocent victims indeed, with no other desire save to turn aside from the world — as many times they have done — the rigours of divine justice. Clare was well aware of this and of the work for souls that lay at her hands to do. Her cloistered life was no life of idle dreaming, aloof from the world's cares and the countless needs of souls. We have a tiny but vivid illustration of this in a later incident in Clare's life. Assisi was being beset by a marauding band, nominally Imperial troops, under the immediate command of one Vitalis de Adversa. Saint Damian's itself — we shall see why later — they would not touch, but the walled city was thought to be an easier objective than any convent of women with a Clare within. But they were still reckoning without her. The needs of Assisi were ever her own, and so she set herself with her daughters to pray earnestly for its safety. The bandits found, to their surprise, that they could make no headway against the city, and soon abandoned the assault and went elsewhere for easier conquests.

It was certainly a delight for the inmates of Saint Damian's to listen as they did, from behind the grille, to the accounts the friars brought to them of the labours and even the martyrdom of the sons of Francis in distant lands, but their interest did not end there; by prayer and love and sacrifice they entered into those very labours themselves. Emphasizing though she did the life of contemplative solitude, Clare was not, and her family never has been, aloof from Franciscan activities. In his anxious musings as to whether he should surrender his active life for the delights he so relished of complete retirement, it was to Clare that Francis turned instinctively for guidance. From Clare he received the only answer a real Franciscan could give, *non sibi soli vivere sed aliis proficere*, as the liturgy puts it; that is, to live for others rather than himself; and Clare's advice to Francis has become timeless and for all.

Clare was always cheerful in look as well as manner, and Francis in his sorrows felt, like many others, the consoling and uplifting force that emanated from her. It was in a hut, by night, in the garden of Saint Damian's, that Francis, suffering sorely in the eyes, and sleepless and worried with the rats which infested the place, revealed his yet untroubled soul in the sweet, brief Cantic of Praise. And if the charming legend that tells of Clare leaving Saint Damian's to sup with Francis and the brethren at the Portiuncula lacks historic foundation, it does emphasize the truth of the perfect harmony that knit together these two great souls and of the immense help each drew from the other in their persevering loyalty to great ideals. The wood around Saint Mary of the Angels, all brilliantly lit that night with a supernatural glow, which brought the neighbouring peasants, as the legend tells us, in hot haste with water to extinguish the fancied conflagration, is but a telling symbol of that warmth of love, which true Franciscanism was in fact to carry throughout the world. These holy souls loved the world too much to remain in it and be served by it; and so they left it that, aloof from it, they might serve it the better.

As numbers grew, Clare — all unwillingly — accepted the inevitable office of Superior which Francis wished her to hold, and became the first Abbess in the new Order. She was an ideal Superior, for she recognized at the outset that "office" implies not more liberty for self but more devoted service to others. She led, and therefore never needed to drive. She had the discerning eye that detects at once the genuinely sick and was prompt to succour them with liberal dispensations. Equally, she knew when any were discouraged, and comforted them out of the strength of her own brave heart. She was ready on occasion to rise and rouse from sleep the younger ones, and then to hasten herself to the little choir to light the lamps for the Night Office, that grand prayer of the Church she loved so well and of the efficacy of which she was so completely assured. On cold

nights, she would steal quietly amongst her sisters, as they slept, and adjust the coverings to keep them warm. Despite much sickness, she was untiring in manual work especially in weaving corporals and making silk burses to be distributed amongst poor churches.

Her teaching mirrored her life. She spoke of self- mastery and of the need of penance, but wisely, with detail adjusted to the individual. Because she knew some practice to be wise in her own case, she did not conclude at once that it must be wise for all. One can see her smile when an over-zealous sister who had been allowed to have her own way and borrow Clare's hair-shirt, returned it to her within three days with no more to say upon the subject. Much more anxious was she to ensure in her community peace of heart and that spirit of detachment from home and country, which does not diminish our love for these but raises to a higher level than ever the charity we have for all.

There were miracles, too, to enhance, if need be, the position Clare came to hold both within and outside her cloister. The bread was multiplied on one occasion, the oil on another. This latter was particularly remembered because, before Clare had appeared on the scene, the anxious sister in charge had sent an urgent message to the lay-brother, whose business it was to go on quest for the nuns, to come at once. This he did, but on his arrival discovered, to his annoyance, that his hot haste had been quite needless: Clare had forestalled him, and he was not wanted after all. Little wonder he found the sister's joke — as he thought it — rather out of place.

It would be a difficult thing to speak of Clare's prayers, as also of her temptations. Even had she possessed and used that gift of descriptive writing and intimate self- revelation that distinguished Saint Teresa of Avila, it would remain true of Clare, as it still remains true of Teresa, that of these things, by far the greater part must ever be " the secrets of the King," known only to Christ and to the soul.

Like Saint Francis, veritable Apostle of the Holy Eucharist in the thirteenth century, Clare also had a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. This has become immortalized in a famous scene, often reproduced on stone and canvas. The earliest life of the saint makes it quite evident that Clare did not actually carry the pyx or ciborium containing the Blessed Sacrament — though we may easily pardon this later adornment of the story — but she accompanied the chaplain, whom she had summoned that he might confront the rough intruders with Him in whom all her confidence lay. It was a bold, unprecedented step; but it throws into high relief Clare's simple, childlike grasp of spiritual realities. As she stood erect and imperturbable for one tense moment facing the mob, she heard a tiny voice, as of a little child, saying, ' I shall shield you always '. The triumph was complete and instantaneous. The wild Saracen auxiliaries, in the pay of Frederick II, who had thus rudely attempted, as they roved lustful and undisciplined over the countryside, to assault the calm of Saint Damian's, fled pell-mell from the scene, utterly overwhelmed by the two silent figures and the sacred burden they bore. Needless to say, the Emperor Frederick was at the time in one of his bouts of fruitless hostility to the Holy See and that Assisi and its district were under Papal suzerainty.

Although this well-known incident has rightly grouped Saint Clare among the many saints who showed conspicuous devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, her love was far from depending on such unexpected crises. It was with Clare as with Francis; devotion to the Blessed Sacrament glowed warm and life-long in her soul, and marked emphasis is laid by the chronicler on her Holy Communion. Another devotion remarked in Clare was to the Sacred Passion, and embedded therein a special love of the Five Wounds — that grand old devotion once so popular in Catholic

England. There is extant a Prayer in Honour of the Five Wounds of Christ, attributed to our saint, but its authenticity is doubtful.

With all her tenderness and deep piety Clare was, however, a very determined woman, with a very strong will, definitely knowing her own mind, and overriding opposition with a strong hand even though it lay in high quarters. When, on one occasion, whatever the reason; the chaplain, Father Philip d'Andria, was withdrawn from Saint Damian's, Clare was stirred to immediate action, and forced the issue at once by dismissing the lay-brothers who, in those times, were allotted to the convent to 'quest' alms for the sisters. 'If our spiritual nourishment is to be neglected', was her argument, and Clare relished the conferences of Father Philip, let them trouble no more about our corporal sustenance '. The Poor Clares could not be left to die of starvation; a chaplain was reappointed and the brothers resumed their very essential duties.

More striking still was Clare's attitude in the matter of poverty. Nothing would move her in her determination to win and to hold the unusual privilege of having no conventual property at all. Innocent III, tentatively, and probably only by word of mouth, acceded to her wish; but Gregory IX definitely proposed that, in view of their circumstances, some material source of regular revenue was most desirable. No, Clare would have none of it; but 'if it is your vow that makes you anxious ', said the Pope, 'I can dispense you from that'. 'Holy Father', replied the saint, 'I have no sort of desire to be dispensed from the lifelong following of Christ.' Wise Pope Gregory — who knew courage when he met with it, and prized it at its right worth — left it at that. But as Clare lay dying, Pope Innocent IV visited her and left to her in writing the Holy See's assent to her cherished Privilege of Poverty. She had strained for this all her life, and now at last it was hers, and she was utterly at peace.

The years moved swiftly on. After her husband's death, Ortulana joined her daughter at Saint Damian's. Clare had great supernatural powers from God and to be marked by her with the sign of the Cross was a swift way to relief from pains, mental or physical. Sometimes Clare would send the sufferer to her mother that she might mark the Cross on the brow of the patient, and thus vicariously was the work of healing done.

Francis himself had unbounded confidence in Clare's power of intercession, and on one occasion sent to her a Brother Stephen who was much afflicted in mind.

He returned to Francis completely cured. The sign of the Cross worked wonders at Saint Damian's, and both Agnes and Ortulana were often the vehicles of God's mercy to the stricken.

What was the Rule of Life followed at Saint Damian's? This question, if pursued, would lead us into a great morass of discussion and argument. It is enough to recall two established facts. Clare certainly received a Rule of Life of some kind from Saint Francis not long after settling at Saint Damian's, and it can hardly be doubted that, apart from recognizing the wholly enclosed life of the Sisters, it resembled the Rule of Life he had given the friars themselves. As with them, so with the Poor Clares, oral approval from Pope Innocent III must suffice. Mention is made of this rule later on by Pope Gregory IX in a letter he wrote to Blessed Agnes of Bohemia [canonised in 1989]. He speaks there of the formula vita, or "way of life", which Francis had given to Clare and her daughters at Saint Damian's. Then, before the saint's death, a definite rule was drawn up under her direction and fully in accord with her life-long hopes and ideals; and this was confirmed in writing by Pope Innocent IV in 1253.

The whole exterior fabric of Poor Clare life is "contemplative"; that is to say, its whole purpose is to facilitate and foster the contemplative life of the individual nun; it is bent uniquely to that goal. But this is far from implying that it is the one exclusive path thereto. The interior life with God is open to every sincere soul whether in the world or in the cloister. We have universities everywhere, which profess to be seats of learning, to encourage and to provide special facilities for the acquisition of learning; yet learning may be pursued elsewhere by all with the necessary aptitude and desire for it. So it is in the things of the spirit; a "contemplative order" claims no monopoly of contemplation, but its purpose is to eliminate as many obstacles as possible and to provide as many helps as possible to enable its members to develop a deep interior life: in a word, as our Lord once said to Saint Margaret of Cortona, it is to be a collegium divini amoris, a university of the love of God, helping those who live in it, and inspiring to emulation those who are outside.

HER DEATH.

IT now remains to speak of Clare's wonderful and most happy death in August 1253. She had long been ailing and often in pain, but now at last it was evident that the end was near. It is astonishing to read of the many and distinguished visitors who felt it a privilege to be able to visit the dying saint. Nothing shows more clearly, how deeply her example and her long cloistered life, and her fine personality, which no mere walls could close in, had impressed all classes round about her little convent. The odour of the ointment had indeed filled all God's house. She lives in the pages of Celano, more vividly than ever as death draws near. Her words remained indelibly imprinted upon the minds of all who heard her. When a priest, the Franciscan Raynaldo, came to condole with her in her sufferings and — most foolishly — to exhort Clare of all people to the anaemic virtue of mere resignation, 'Father' she replied, 'since, through His servant Francis, I came to know the sweetness of my Lord Jesus Christ, no trial has ever been a burden to me, no austerity has ever been irksome to me, no sickness, my dearest Brother, has ever been bitter to me'. Her words are almost fierce in their vigour, martial in their ring: they unveil for us very clearly a splendid example of the strong woman, the mulier fortis of Holy Scripture (Ecclesiasticus 26:2): they reveal the fact, so often overlooked, that for soft, languishing, sentimental souls the convent offers no refuge at all.

A visitor of another kind was that Servant of God, Brother Juniper; and what a joy it is to find him portrayed here as he really was, egregius Domini Jaculator, 'the most excellent Jester of the Lord — Christ's Lancer', full indeed of quick wit and very human sympathies, but far from being the mere knockabout comedian he is represented as elsewhere. When he entered the sickroom, Clare jokingly greeted him by asking what spiritual toy he had brought for her up his sleeve; but all the saints have a way of talking deeply, without being solemn and ponderous, and the conversation that followed between these two grand souls was of just that sort, and left Clare wonderfully comforted.

Another visitor was Cardinal Raynaldo, Bishop of Ostia, who later became Pope Alexander IV. He gave Clare Holy Communion and later preached words of comfort to all her nuns.

He was the Order's Protector, and Clare profited by his visit to implore him to do his utmost to win for her definite and official assent to her cherished Privilege of Poverty. He promised and succeeded.

Finally, came a visit from Pope Innocent IV himself. Here, indeed, we have the climax of this great stream of visitors, drawn, as by a magnet, to Saint Damian's. A personal visit from the Pope himself was an absolute unprecedented honour done to the dying Clare.

On the morning of the day he came, Clare received Holy Communion at the hands of the Minister Provincial. When the Pope entered her cell, he drew near the couch on which the saint lay, and, with immense reverence, she kissed his feet. Once was not enough; and, to satisfy her ardour, he raised his foot on to a little foot-stool, that she might the more easily reach and kiss it again. Clare's love of the Holy See was very real — ardent, as was that of Francis — and her loyalty absolute: and the Pope knew it, and would, by such courtesy, acknowledge it. She then begged of the Holy Father to grant her, in God's name, full forgiveness for all her sins. 'Would my need was as yours ', he answered, and willingly gave her plenary absolution: and before he left, Clare held in her hands from him that cherished approbation from the Holy See of her Order and of her beloved Poverty. No wonder, when all was over and Clare could reflect in peace on the events of that great day, that she expressed her sense of immense privilege in having been allowed with so short a space to receive her Lord and Master in Holy Communion, and then to have seen His Vicar on earth. But, as ever, Clare's thoughts cannot rest for long upon herself; she has others and the future in mind. From her sick-bed, Clare, like Francis before her, blessed from her heart all houses of Poor Clares actual or to be.

Still the stream of visitors flowed in and out; but now that the end was so plainly at hand a few privileged ones remained, notably those famous sons of Francis, Leo and Angelo. It is a wonderful group, for we must remember that Agnes was with them at Saint Damian's again. As is natural, it is Agnes who feels most the coming separation. 'Do not weep ', Clare says to her; 'soon will you follow me.' Then the dying saint murmurs on, half to herself, hardly aware of others. 'Go forth with confidence ', they hear her repeat, 'go forth with confidence; you have a good guide for the road. Go forth, for He who created you has sanctified you; He watches over you; and, as a mother her child, so He too with tender love has cherished you. Blessed are You, my Lord, my Creator.' As the last moments draw near we are not surprised to find how thin grow the veils hiding from human eyes God's invisible creation around us. The dying have sight more keen than the living. To the dying Clare comes the vision splendid of the King.

Enraptured she gazes forward; then turns to the sister at her side, 'Daughter,' she whispers, 'do you see, as I, the King of Glory?' Then suddenly she is struck, as with a blow, by a shaft of intense sorrow. How can littleness, such as hers, ever have access to such splendour? Averted eyes move towards the open doorway of her cell. Lo! It is filled with Angels grouped together, white and brilliant, and in their midst, Mary. The Blessed Virgin draws near the bed, bends over it and kisses the dying saint. In that flood of Heavenly radiance Clare passes. It is 11th August, the morrow of Saint Laurence's day.

The burial was a triumph. One might have fancied some great prince was being carried to his grave, so vast and distinguished was the gathering. Innocent IV was there and many Cardinals. In fact, the Pope was so carried away by his enthusiastic faith in Clare's sanctity that, but for Cardinal Raynaldo — who deemed it premature — he would have substituted in the burial service the Office of Virgins for the usual Office for the Dead. All went forward, however, as prescribed in the Ritual. The body of the saint was taken to the Church of Saint George, or probably, to the little chapel adjoining, in which the body of Saint Francis had rested for four years. When the Clares, for greater security, moved later to Saint George from their convent of Saint Damian, this little chapel was incorporated in their new home; and there the body of Clare rests to this day.

Two years later, and after the usual careful investigation into the many miracles wrought by the saint, Clare was solemnly canonized at Anagni by her old friend Cardinal Raynaldo, reigning now as Pope Alexander IV.

NOTE — Recent research has established the fact that, during the communal rising at Assisi, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, Clare's family was among those forced to take refuge in Perugia, and their house in Assisi was sacked. Clare, then, certainly spent some of her childhood years in Perugia; and it is not unlikely that her warlike father and uncle were engaged in the victorious battle of 1202 against the communal forces of Assisi in whose ranks the young Francis himself was fighting, and in which he was made prisoner. When hostilities were over, one of the conditions imposed on Assisi was to allow the peaceable return of those who had been driven out. Thus, the same occasion brought back, though in very different groups, both Francis and Clare to their native town; and Assisi, even in those distant days, could watch the return of prisoners-of-war, and displaced persons.
