

# The Miracle Of Fatima

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## CHAPTER ONE.

The year 1917 was a sad one for the world. For three years, man had been bitterly experiencing the folly of almost universal war. At first, as with all new experiences, its very novelty gave war a compensating glamour, and the thrill of excitement. But that soon wore off, leaving nothing but the weariness of life at home, ever waiting for news from the trenches, ever waiting for news of peace; and for those at the front, day-long and night-long struggle and fatigue, peril and death. No country in Europe was entirely unaffected by the war. Some countries were fortunate to keep out of it for some time, but eventually they too were caught up in its toils. One such was Portugal. She did not declare herself on the side of the Allies until 1916, and then, she too knew what it was to be a country at war. Lisbon, like the capitals of all the other warring nations had her share of excitement; soldiers going to or returning from the front, anxious to enjoy either their last days on their native soil, or else making the most of a short leave from the trenches.

Away up in the hill-country, far away from the big cities and all the excitement of modern life is the little village of Aljustrel. Even by moderate standards of comparison, the word village is almost too grandiose for this little group of houses. The people of this hamlet are simple hard-working children of the soil, whose livelihood is dependent on the seasons. So remote was it then (and even today, despite new roads and modern means of transport and communication), that life throughout the centuries changed but little for the people there. Sheep-raising and cultivating the crops for the men; weaving and housekeeping for the women — that was the daily round. There was very little to break the monotony except the weekly meeting of the neighbours and the usual gossip after Mass on Sunday, in their parish church in the village of Fatima about a mile away. True enough, from time to time, news of what was happening in the world outside would reach them. They were, for the most part, unable to read, so their knowledge of affairs, national and international, depended on some chance visitor who might have picked up some of the Lisbon news. Then of course, the local Paroco, the parish priest, would be able to tell his little flock what was happening of importance to them. And what was happening in this year of grace 1917? They knew about the Great War. More than that, it touched the life of Aljustrel, since some of the local young men had been called to the colours. Amongst them was one Manuel dos Santos, only son of Antonio dos Santos and his wife Maria Rosa.

Lucia, the youngest of the seven children of Antonio and Maria Rosa was born on March 22nd, 1907. She made her First Communion at the age of six, unusually early for a Portuguese child. But she had the advantage of having a mother like Maria Rosa, who lost no time in fulfilling the primary duty of a mother, the instruction of her children in the love and knowledge of God. (In September, 1948, the saintly priest who gave her First Communion, Padre Cruz, S.J., died in Lisbon at the age of eighty-nine. He was regarded by all classes in Portugal, as a saint, and the formal process of his Cause for beatification has begun.) Her temperament was unusually gay. Her sister

Mary of the Angels, who still lives in Aljustrel, tells how popular Lucia was with all the other children. In her, they found a fund of natural gaiety and good spirits which automatically made her the leader in any of their games and dances. There is no need, nor is it right, to emphasise this fact. To do so is to give rise to the suspicion that sanctity and good cheer do not go together, and that when they do, it is a cause for wonder and something which has to be explained. Rather is it a cause for wonder if we find a saintly soul who is not filled with the joy of life. The saints alone know how to live properly. Sharing as they do, to such a large extent, in the goodness of God, they too can look out over the world and see that all things (in His plan) are good. It is only when man breaks away from this plan of God's that evil enters in, and gloom.

When she was six years old, Lucia took up the duty of shepherdess. Even for a child of the Serra, this was an early start at a job which meant a long day out in the hills from dawn to dusk. But her family was poor, with little to spare for the support of idle ones, and besides, Lucia was a strong healthy girl. Up to that time, her two constant companions were her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto. It came as an unwelcome break to have Lucia away all day in the hills — a break which lasted two years until the young Martos had at last pestered their parents into giving them permission to take to the hills also. So all day long, the three would be together. Little actual work was involved in the duties of sheep tending. They had to keep an eye on their flocks to prevent them from straying too far, and to bring them into shelter in bad weather. The rest of the time, they spent at their games, and saying prayers — not very many prayers, just a few from time to time. One prayer they never forgot to say and that was the Rosary. This is not surprising, when we remember how devoted this little corner of Portugal was to that particular prayer. But it must be admitted that the “rosary” said by the three was one that had as its outstanding quality, brevity. They knew nothing about “brevity being the soul of wit,” but they did know that they enjoyed their games, and so even their prayers were curtailed, that there might be more time for fun and frolics. They would very conscientiously recite the five decades, but only saying the first two words of the “Our Father” and the “Hail Mary.” How Mary must have smiled up in Heaven! She was soon to teach them how to say her own prayer properly, and by their example, the whole world.

Francisco Marto was born on June 11th 1908, and his sister Jacinta on March 11th, 1910. We have already said something about their parents. Francisco was a full-faced boy, handsome in the Latin manner. He was intelligent, and early in his short life gave evidence of being the possessor of a strong character. A natural nobility gave him a gentleness and tolerance of spirit which was amazing in one so young. He took his part in all the fun and games concocted by Lucia and the others, but from what she tells us, his conduct was always marked by an “otherworldly” spirit. This does not mean that he showed early signs of sanctity, but it does mean that he was by nature unusually detached from the things of this world. Whether his thoughts were with God or not at that time is a secret. But again, it shows us how God selects for high things one who is already fitted by nature for the task. He was a normal little boy in all things, at times good, at other times mischievous; at times well-behaved, at others, but not often, troublesome. But there were those definite flashes of the “out of this world” spirit which were definitely his.

Like her brother, Jacinta had in her features the promise of the Marto good looks. In character, she was quite different from him. She had an extraordinarily sensitive soul — sensitive to the sufferings and feelings of others and especially for the Passion of Our Lord. But it was not only to sorrow and suffering that her soul went out. She had all the joy of a poet in the things of nature — the flowers, the animals, the changing moods of the weather. She joined heartily with her companions in all their

merrymaking, especially in the dancing of which she was so fond. As Lucia says of herself and Jacinta, so much were they given to dancing that it was enough for them to hear the sound of music, even of a shepherd's pipe, to set the pair of them on their feet. Again, it is not to be wondered at when two healthy young Portuguese girls show all the love for dancing which is so characteristic of their people. It is merely to be noted as an indication of their personality. Such were the three children chosen to be the recipients of such singular favours from Heaven. Light-hearted children, full of the joys of life and attentive to their religious duties, they were to become as a result of the apparitions, filled with an insight into the things of God, rarely granted to ones so young, impassioned lovers of Mary, and ardent apostles of reparation for the outrages constantly offered to God by a sinful world.

## CHAPTER TWO.

The first sign that Heaven gave of the wonders that were to take place at Cova da Iria was in the year 1915, when Lucia was eight years old. At that age she was quite unable to tell the days of the week, nor had she any conception of time, so it is difficult to fix the exact time or date of this incident. All we know is that it must have taken place shortly after she began to go out to the hills with the sheep. She herself says that it was about the middle of the year. One day she was on a hillside, called Cabeco, with three older girls, Maria Rosa Matias, Teresa Matias and Maria Justino. Towards midday, after their simple meal, they began to say the Rosary. Let Lucia tell us what happened:

“We noticed that at some height above the groves that sloped down to the valley at our feet, there appeared something like a white cloud, whiter than snow and somewhat transparent, shaped like a human being” On the other occasions they saw the same thing. It would be rash to attribute any significance to these appearances in themselves. It is so easy for children, or adults for that matter, to imagine things, and we must be careful to have a reasonable approach to the happenings at Cova da Iria. Admittedly, if they were heavenly visions, it is difficult to see the reason for them. Of them Lucia says: “My impression on this occasion was something vague and passing and I believe that were it not for subsequent events, I would have forgotten it completely.”

It was one year later, more or less about springtime, that “the first definite sign of what was to come took place. One fine morning, the children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, set out with their flocks to a place called Couza Velha, a little to the west of Aljustrel, and at the foot of the hill we have already mentioned, the Cabeco. The sky was unclouded, but towards midday, a slight drizzle began. Cautiously they began to take shelter. Up the side of the hill they went with their sheep, in search of some cave or overhanging crag. They were happy in their search, and in a cave they had never visited before, while the rain lasted, they stayed, eating their lunch and playing their games. As usual they began to say their Rosary, (their own curtailed version), and then resumed their games. They had not been playing very long, when suddenly a strange wind began to blow across the valley. It caused the trees to sway strangely, and all the time there was an eerie moaning sound in the air. Startled from their games by this, the children ran to the entrance of the cave to see what was happening. Far away from over the treetops in the direction of Nascente they saw a light “whiter than snow, transparent, and in the form of a young man.” It was “more brilliant than crystal through which the sun's rays are shining” as Lucia describes it. With bated breath and with a certain amount of apprehension, they watched this figure as it approached across the valley. As it came nearer, they began to distinguish the outline more clearly. It seemed to be that of a beautiful young

man in his 'teens'. When he had come to within a short distance of the children, he spoke: "Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me."

Then he knelt down on the ground and touched it with his forehead. Moved by some supernatural instinct, the three children did as they were bidden, and imitated him, repeating the words he said: "My God, I believe, adore, hope in, and love you. I beg pardon of you for those who do not believe, adore, hope in, or love you." These words, he and the children said three times, and then he arose saying: "Pray like this. The hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to your requests." Then he disappeared. That was all. So intense was the supernatural impression invoked by this apparition that the children remained rapt in ecstasy for quite a long time. They repeated many times the prayer of the angel. They felt the presence of God so strongly that they did not speak of it even amongst themselves. Many wonder why the children, especially Lucia in her later years, kept the fact of this appearance to themselves for so long. Lucia's explanation is this. The angel of the apparition had made no mention of secrecy, but so intimate was it, and so charged with supernatural significance, that it was not easy for them to speak of it, even in the smallest detail.

The effect of this manifestation of Heaven's future dealings with the three children lasted some days. But they were still children and they were soon back at their normal lighthearted way of life. If they thought of it at all, it was only to dismiss it as something which could not be explained. Children of course, are never very surprised, no matter what happens. They live in a world where fairies and spirits of all sorts are liable to show up at any moment. When they do come, they may cause a feeling of fear, or possibly joy and gladness. But their occurrence is something quite logical to the child mind, something to be experienced for a time and then to be forgotten.

So the year passed on and brought to the Serra the brilliant splendour of a Portuguese summer. Up there in the exposed hill-country, the summer heat can be very intense. But the children were used to it and enjoyed the longer days for sport and play. Yet despite the fact that they were so acclimatized there was one day in the summer of 1916 when it was so terribly hot that they had to return from the hills with the sheep and put them in the sheds. They themselves went playing in the cool garden behind the dos Santos house near a well. This time there was no warning wind, no moaning in the air, to tell them that they were again to be visited by one of God's messengers. Looking up suddenly, they saw standing beside them at the parapet of the well the same youth-like figure, they had seen earlier in the year at the Cabeco. He spoke to them again: "What are you doing? Pray. Pray much. The hearts of Jesus and Mary have merciful intentions for you. Offer constantly to the Most High, prayers and sacrifices." At this point, Lucia asked a question for herself. The fact that she did so shows us that she was becoming accustomed to the supernatural atmosphere brought by the heavenly visitations. God, in accordance with the principal of grace always working through nature, was systematically preparing her faculties for the greater things which were to come. "How are we to make sacrifice?" she asked.

"By everything possible to you," was the reply. "Offer a sacrifice to the Lord, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and as a prayer for the conversion of sinners. In this way, you will bring peace to our country. I am its Guardian Angel, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear with submission the suffering which the Lord will send to you." With these words, he disappeared. As later in the vision of Mary herself, Francisco, although he saw the angel, heard nothing of the conversation. Later when Lucia told him what the angel had said, the importance of the message seemed to grip his imagination. She tells us that from that moment a deep change came over their lives. They now knew what the love of God really meant, and how the sins of the world

frustrate in so many cases, this love. They realized too, the meaning and value of sacrifice, and in their own little way, they began to practise the penance advised by the angel. Daily they sought opportunities of mortification, and prostrate on the earth, frequently repeated the prayer they had learned.

Summer passed into autumn, the season of mellow fruitfulness, without the mists, when in Portugal, the grape ripens and the new wine flows freely. Once again, the children found themselves playing in the cave on the Cabeco, which held such wonderful and pleasant memories for them. It must have been about the middle of September or the beginning of October. They had stopped their play and were saying the Rosary with the prayer they had learned from the angel on his first appearance to them. Once again, they became aware of something unusual in the atmosphere; that indescribable brightness, that eerie moaning followed by an uncanny hush, just as before. Then the angel came for the third and last time. He told them to make reparation for the sins of men and “console your God.” He prostrated to the ground, and then disappeared. As before, the children experienced a strange reluctance to speak. Darkness was beginning to fall, and having repeated the prayer of the angel three times prostrate on the ground, they left for home. Lucia’s later reflections on the visits of the angel and their own reactions are very interesting. “I cannot say why,” she tells, “but the apparitions of Our Lady produced a different effect. There was the same inward joy, the same feeling of peace and happiness. But instead of a feeling of, as it were, physical deflation, there was a certain sense of uplift or expansion; instead of that difficulty and hesitance about speaking of what had happened there was the urge to communicate it to others. Yet despite feelings, I felt inspired to be silent.”

### CHAPTER THREE.

It was the Sunday before the Feast of the Ascension, May 13th 1917. The three children went to an early Mass in the parish church of Fatima, and towards noon, they set out for the hills with their flocks. This morning they chose to graze them in some land belonging to the dos Santos family at Cova da Iria, about two miles from Aljustrel. The usual programme was followed. Coming towards noon, they had their meal, followed by prayer, and then they looked about for something to pass the time. A favourite game of theirs, was to build a “house,” and of that, they never grew weary. As usual, it was Francisco who was the master-builder. While so occupied, they were startled by a brilliant flash in the sky which they afterwards described as being like a flash of unusually bright lightning. They looked at one another anxiously, knowing that lightning is always the forerunner of those violent thunderstorms of the hill-country. They were nervous, not for themselves only, but also for their sheep. Well they knew what a loss even one animal would be to their poor parents. They scanned the sky, but it was clear of the thunderclouds. The sun still shone from that cloudless indescribable blue of the sky over Portugal in May-time. After that first brilliant flash, all was calm, with that strange time-banishing calmness which they had come to know so well.

Nevertheless, they were keenly aware of their responsibilities and were taking no chances with the safety of their flocks. “Let’s go home,” said Lucia. “There may be a thunder-storm on its way.” Just as they were about to follow her advice, there was another flash even more dazzling and intense than the first. They stopped in their path. Slowly they advanced towards a small holm-oak, or to give it its Portuguese name, an “azinheira tree,” which stood on their right. There standing on top of it they saw a “beautiful lady clothed in white, more brilliant than the sun, surrounded by a light more intense and clearer than a tumbler of crystal-clear water through which the rays of the sun are shining” (Lucia). In their astonishment, they stopped short. Then with a wonderful, fascinating sweetness and sympathy in her voice, the Lady spoke. “Do not be afraid. I will not harm you.” As if

disappointed, or amused at the idea of any of her children being frightened by her, she smiled a little sadly. Lucia quickly recovered herself and began to speak with the Lady. Naturally, she first of all had to satisfy her quite understandable curiosity about the strange and lovely lady. “Where do you come from?” she asked.

The Lady answered: “I am from Heaven.”

“And what do you want from me?”

“I have come to ask you to come here on the thirteenth day of each month, at this same hour, for six months in succession. Then I will tell you who I am and what I want.”

Lucia made good the opportunity by asking if she and the other children would go to Heaven. The answer was yes, but that Francisco would have to say many Rosaries. She asked about two of her friends who had died some time before. “Maria das Neves,” said the Lady, “was in Heaven, but Amalia would be in Purgatory until the end of the world.” Many people have been troubled at this, but it must be remembered that Amalia was a young woman of eighteen. As Lucia herself said later when questioned on this point, she did not think it very remarkable, since one could go to Hell for all eternity for missing Mass on Sunday. Having listened to and answered patiently, Lucia’s questions, the Lady now spoke to her at length again.

“Do you wish to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the suffering that He may please to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and to ask for the conversion of sinners? In the name of all three Lucia replied: “Yes, we do.” “Then,” said the Lady, “you will have much to suffer. But the grace of God will be your comfort.” Lucia tells us that as she said these words, the Lady opened her hands, and from them came two streams of light, so brilliant and piercing that it seemed to penetrate the depths of their souls, and “to make them see themselves as God saw them.” Moved by an irresistible impulse they fell on their knees and repeated the prayer:

“Most Holy Trinity, I adore You. My God, my God, I love You in the Blessed Sacrament.”

For some time they stayed like this and then the Lady spoke again. “Say the Rosary every day, to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war.” And so ended this first conversation between the Queen of Heaven and Lucia. Slowly and serenely, she began to ascend towards the east, until she disappeared in space. (It is of interest to note, with some writers on Fatima, that on that same day, May 13th, 1917, the late Pope, Pius XII, was being consecrated bishop in the Sistine Chapel in Rome).

The children stayed a little longer, enchanted by the wonderful thing that had happened. But on returning to face the ordinary workaday world again, their first thought was one of consternation. What had happened to the sheep while they were having heavenly visions? It is quite in order to speak with a beautiful lady from on high, but that excuse would not serve if some of their flock were lost. But they need not have worried. The sheep were grazing contentedly where they had left them. The rest of that day of days, they spent going over again and again the details of the Lady’s visit. Jacinta was especially enraptured by her beauty, Lucia’s imagination was more captured by the need for penance stressed by the Lady. She it was who warned the others not to tell anyone of what had happened. What prompted her to do this? She probably knew full well what kind of reception their story would get in the village.

And what of Francisco? Poor Francisco. Just as in the case of the angelic apparition, he had seen, but had not heard anything of what had been said by the Lady. On the way back to Aljustrel, he was

unusually silent, and the two girls were too occupied with their own thoughts to make much conversation.

Alas for promises! Jacinta had promised fervently that she would tell nobody about what had happened, but her tongue proved looser than she thought. The poor child was not to be blamed if she found her heart almost bursting with eagerness to tell of the great joy which was hers. When her father and mother returned from Batalha where they had been marketing, they were met by Jacinta, a veritable volcano of suppressed excitement, waiting to erupt with the wonderful news she had to tell. She gasped out that she had seen Our Lady at Cova da Iria. As one would expect, her mother did not take her very seriously at first, considering it just the babble of a child. But faced by her daughter's obviously sincerity and excitement she had her and Francisco tell the story to the whole family after the evening meal. It got a mixed reception. Some were frankly sceptical, and scornfully sarcastic at the idea of Our Lady appearing to three little children. But on the whole, it was received better than might have been expected. Their father, especially, if not quite prepared to give his full assent to Jacinta's story, at least believed that something extraordinary had been seen. This, he said, could easily have been a vision of heavenly origin. One thing he knew for certain, his own children and Lucia were not in the habit of telling lies, and they had not the imagination to invent such a tale as they had told.

On the following day, Olimpia was not able to keep the tale told her by the children to herself. Nor did she want to. There never was much in the way of news in Aljustrel. The war of course, as always and in all places, cities and villages, had provided a fruitful topic, but even that palled. She did not, as might have been expected, go straight to Lucia's mother to find out if she had heard anything of the vision from her daughter. Instead, so great was her excitement, that she unhesitatingly told the neighbours all about it. The strange story spread quickly in the small village, and soon it came to the ears of Maria Rosa, Lucia's mother. She rushed to her daughter immediately and demanded an explanation. Lucia's reaction to the news that poor little Jacinta had proved faithless to her promise was naturally one of disappointment. But faced with an angry mother she had not time for indulging in feelings of disappointment. She repeated her account of what she had seen and heard and could not be shaken. Maria de Rosa, coaxed and threatened, but all she could get from Lucia was that they had seen a Lady at the Cova, but she was not sure who it was as the Lady had not identified herself.

It was a sad little party that set out with their flocks that afternoon. Lucia was feeling depressed at the upset to the peace of her own family, and her mother's incredulity. Jacinta, feeling remorse, was keeping silent, afraid or reluctant to speak. Francisco, although blameless for his sister's indiscretion, could not help feeling the gloom in the air, and was sad. When they reached the Cova, they felt too dejected to play their usual games. Truth to tell, their thoughts were filled with the idea of sacrifice that the Lady had put before them. They said the Rosary — this time the complete Rosary, and as their first act of sacrifice, gave the little food they had with them for lunch to the sheep. Later on, they improved on this by giving it instead to some little beggar-children. From that day forward, they began to practise little acts of mortification every day. Apart from these voluntary mortifications, they had ample opportunity of practising the greater mortification of the will, by bearing patiently with the criticisms and ridicule of others. Daily they had to face the anger and distrust of their parents, Manuel Marto excepted. The neighbours taunted and ridiculed them, seeing in the whole affair, just an opportunity of having a bit of fun at the expense of the children. Lucia's mother especially, caused her to suffer much. She had done her best against difficult odds to bring

her girl up as a good Catholic and to teach her a love of the truth. Now she was regarded by neighbours as a silly little liar, who made liars out of her cousins too. All day long, she nagged Lucia. But Lucia bore it all in patient silence. Even when Maria Rosa's vexation drove her to threaten a beating unless she admitted that she had been telling lies, Lucia had nothing more to say than what she had already told. But she was suffering terribly. It was only out in the hills with her cousins that she could relieve her suppressed feelings with tears.

At length, her mother saw that she was up against something that was too much for her, and that she would have to get help. So one morning, she set out for the parish priest's house, taking Lucia with her. On the way, she told her daughter that she must kneel before him and confess that she was a liar. That, she thought, should put an end to the business once and for all. But the visit was a failure. And how could it be otherwise? The priest, Fr. Manuel Marques Ferreira, heard Lucia's account of what had happened at the Cova, and sent her home with the advice that she should be discreet and patient. In Portugal, the advice offered in all situations is "paciencia." But it was difficult for the children to bear patiently with the taunts and jeers which were constantly being hurled at them. The villagers had at first found some amusement in the affair of the children and the Lady of the Cova, but now some of them were openly insulting to them and their parents. It was the beginning of the suffering which the Lady had foretold for them.

#### CHAPTER FOUR.

The 13th of June was the Feast of St. Anthony of Padua, who was born in Lisbon. It is a great day in Portugal. Notwithstanding the wonderful celebrations of Fatima, the children set out for the Cova after an early Mass. Some fifty people accompanied them. On arrival, they all began to say the Rosary. It was coming towards noon, and the people began to feel impatient. "When is this Lady of yours going to come?" they asked. They were soon to be answered.

Suddenly Lucia cried out, "Jacinta! Here comes the Lady. There is the light now." The children ran up to the azinheira tree and the people followed them. They knelt down and Lucia began to speak. They heard her say, "You told me to come here. Please tell me what it is you want." From Lucia herself we know what the Lady answered: "I want you to come here on the 13th of each month, and to say the rosary; between the mysteries you must say: 'O my Jesus pardon us, save us from the fires of Hell; take all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need.'" The Lady continued: "I also want you to learn to read and later I will tell you what else I want."

The Lady then told Lucia that Francisco and Jacinta would very soon go to Heaven but that Jesus wanted her to stay and help to establish in the world devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. With these words, she opened her hands, and from them came a light which enveloped the three children. In one part of the light "that went up to Heaven" were Francisco and Jacinta; and in the other "which spread itself over the ground" was Lucia. "Before the palm of her right hand was a heart encircled with thorns that pierced it. We understood It was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of mankind and desiring reparation." Our Lady told her so. "See, child, My Heart, encircled with thorns, the blasphemies and ingratitude of men, which continually pierce me. You at least, must console me, and make it known that at the hour of death, I will assist with the grace necessary for their salvation, all those who, as an act of reparation, on the first Saturday of five successive months, confess, receive Holy Communion, say a Rosary, and spend a quarter of an hour with me, meditating on the fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary." Then Lucia arose from her knees, crying out: "Look. She is going away." All present looked in the direction in which she was



pointing, but of course, it was only the children who saw Our Lady. But even the others saw what looked like a small white cloud rising, from the tree and floating eastwards. They also noticed that the leaves were bent and pointing towards the east, as if they had been pressed down by some weight.

They all began to say the Litany of Our Lady and returned to the village reciting the Rosary on the way. And so began the Fatima pilgrimages. With the beginning of a cult to Our Lady of Fatima, there began also the real suffering of the children. Scepticism is hard to kill, and when the sceptic is confronted with evidence, he frequently resorts to abuse, cheap sarcasm and invective. There were some people who questioned the children with a genuine desire to know what had happened. There were others whose only object was to make fun of them and their story. To the mockers, their only reply was silence. To the others all they said was that daily recitation of the Rosary was necessary, and that the Lady would return on the 13th of each month and that in October she would reveal her identity. If questioned any further they would refer to certain things that were Secret. This is the first mention of the famous secrets of Fatima. But more of this later. During all the events of June 13th, Maria Rosa preserved an unwonted calm. She still thought her daughter was a liar, and the thought that some people were prepared to believe her only annoyed her all the more. The parish priest had said that the children were to be let go to the Cova on the 13th and then brought back to him for interrogation. At this stage, his attitude to the affair was neither sceptical nor credulous. He tried to preserve an open mind. Time alone would tell whether the apparitions were genuine or not. In the meantime, he was in duty bound to make investigations.

Poor Lucia was frightened at the prospect of an interview with the priest. Her own family did not do much to comfort her but delighted in painting a picture for her of what was going to happen. On the following day, accompanied by Maria Rosa, the children went to Fatima to see Father Marques Ferreira. Nothing very much came of the interview. They told the same story that they had told so often already. Eventually after much interrogation all that was left for priest, was to warn them that the apparitions might be the work of the devil. On this unsatisfactory and ominous note, the much-dreaded interview ended. But the last words rankled in Lucia's mind. She had never thought of that possibility. Since Jacinta had blurted out the news of the apparitions, she had suffered much mental agony, but this was worse than anything else. She could not help but realise that she was merely a poor ignorant child and the priest was a sincere man and one learned and experienced in the ways of God with souls. The poor child was tortured by the thought that she might be the plaything of the devil, and that through her others might be led astray. She also had to contend constantly with the opposition of her family. Her mother expressed this not only in words but also in beatings. She regarded her daughter as if she were a changeling child left by the devil in a God-fearing family.

The only comforters she had at this time were Francisco and Jacinta. They refused to accept the possibility that their lovely Lady could be from the devil. As Jacinta said: "The devil is ugly and lives underground and the Lady was lovely. Besides we saw her go up to Heaven." Still, Lucia was troubled. The poison of doubt had set in, and had begun to destroy the grand enthusiasm she had known. She felt a kind of apathy for the whole affair that was bringing so much worry and unhappiness to all of them. It would be so easy to say that the whole story was a concoction and then everything would be pleasant again. She said as much to her cousins. They were horrified, and pointed out to her that in no circumstances and for no reason could she tell a lie. This was the advice that Lucia wanted and needed. It restored her confidence in the Lady of the Cova, even though the devil still tortured her with temptations to doubt.

## CHAPTER FIVE.

The 13th of July approached. Francisco and Jacinta were filled with a wonderful anticipation of another visit from the Lady. But Lucia, remembering the warning of the parish priest, was still troubled, so much so that she decided not to go to the Cova. On the night of the 12th as literally thousands of people were pouring into the Cova, she went to the Marto's house to tell her cousins of her decision. They were disappointed and upset, but not sharing Lucia's tortured mind they said that nothing would stop them from being there on the following day. Sadly, the girl returned to her own house. But she was not reckoning with Providence. The following morning, despite her decision, she was compelled by a strange force to set out for the Marto's house. There she found the others, sad and dejected at the thought of having to go to the Cova without her. But now she was with them again, and all three set out to keep their appointment with the Lady of the Cova.

As they drew near, they had to push their way through a dense crowd of people from all over the Serra. Their parents were also present. They had come not merely out of curiosity. They had a real and understandable fear, that if nothing happened to justify the excitement their children might be in need of protection from an angry and disappointed mob.

Led by the children they all said the Rosary. Just as it ended, there came the flash of light, which they knew by now heralded the coming of the Lady. When she appeared, Lucia felt a sudden reluctance to speak. Perhaps she was somewhat ashamed of the doubts which had troubled her since their last meeting. It was only when Jacinta prompted her that she asked the Lady what she desired. Again, the daily recitation of the Rosary was asked, "to obtain peace for the world," and she promised that in October she would tell them her name and work a miracle "so that all might see and believe." Feeling much happier and more at her ease now, Lucia asked for the cure of some sick people. The Lady listened to her and said that some of her requests would be granted. Then she said: "Offer sacrifices for sinners and say frequently, especially when making some sacrifice:

O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Let Lucia herself tell what followed.

"As she said these words she opened her hands, as she had done at the other apparitions. The light from them seemed to penetrate through the ground and we saw a sea of fire in which devils and souls were wallowing. The souls were like burning coals, dark or bronzed, with human shape, and they rose and fell in the fire, moved by the flames that came out from themselves, with a lot of smoke, like the sparks of some huge fire. There were shrieks of pain and groans of despair that horrified us and made us tremble with fright. The devils had the horrible forms of strange and terrible beasts, but they were transparent, and glowed like red-hot coals. Had not Our Lady promised that we should go to Heaven, we should have died of fright."

This terrible vision, the Lady told them was Hell, and that God wished the devotion to the Immaculate Heart to be established in order to save souls from damnation. "The war will end," she continued, "but if people continue to offend God, another and worse one will begin. When you see the night illuminated by a strange light, you will know it to be the sign that God is about to punish the world, by means of war, hunger, and the persecution of the Church and the Holy Father. To prevent this; I shall come and ask for the consecration of Russia to My Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation of the first Saturday of the month. If my request is granted, Russia will be converted and there will be peace; if not she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing

wars and persecution of the Church; the good will suffer martyrdom; the Holy Father will have much to suffer, and various nations will be wiped out. In Portugal the faith will never die. Do not speak of this to anyone except Francisco.”

Having said this, the Lady disappeared heavenward. Immediately the people began to press in upon the children and to overwhelm them with questions. They all noticed how sad Lucia especially seemed. To all their questions the only answer was that the Lady had told them a secret, “good for some but bad for others.” Just before the twenty- fifth anniversary of the apparitions, Lucia made a written statement about the secret, “out of pure obedience and with the permission of Our Lord.” She says: “The secret consisted of three things, distinct yet closely related. I shall reveal two of them, but the third must remain wrapped in mystery.” She then goes on to tell of the vision of Hell and the prophecy of the Second World War. The third part of the secret, was written down by her, enclosed in a sealed envelope and entrusted to the Bishop of Leiria.

[The contents of the sealed envelope and therefore the whole of the third part of the secret were released to the world by the Vatican on 26 June, 2000. It can be viewed online at:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html)

It provides much to pray about.]

## CHAPTER SIX.

Peace and confidence had again returned to Lucia with the coming of the Lady in July. She knew now that all was well and she had the strength to face the trials that lay ahead of her.

The thousands who had been to the Cova, soon spread far and wide the news of what had happened. Every day visitors came to Aljustrel to speak with the children and find out for themselves all about the secret. Some, the poor and the sick, came out of genuine devotion and in hope of a cure. They flocked to the Cova, and in their unthinking eagerness to pray at the place of the apparitions, soon made a barren waste of what had once been a fine pasture. This was not good for the children, and especially Lucia, whose family owned the field. They reproached her with being an idle dreamer, who had now reached the age when she should be working, and instead she was wasting a great part of the day speaking with visitors. Her cousins fared better. Their father Manuel Marto, right from the beginning, had shown an attitude by no means unfavourable, and was by now a stronger believer in the truth of what the children had told him.

The parish priest, Father Marques Ferreira, was still silent. He had received instructions from his Archbishop, the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, not to countenance the apparitions, nor on the other hand was he openly to disapprove of them. We can imagine his feelings. It is so easy to counsel prudent reserve when miles away from the scene of the events. But for the parish priest, the centre of life in the village, the leader of the people, the authority on all things spiritual and theological, it was no easy matter to keep a balanced outlook. Yet such instructions were very necessary. The anti-clerical papers of Portugal, of which there were many, openly accused the Church of engineering the whole affair at the Cova. Like Zola in his mad hatred of Lourdes they distorted the facts and invented all sorts of details to make the story told by the children seem ridiculous or fraudulent. Actually, the fact was, that any of the clergy who showed an interest, were inclined to be sceptical. Their apparent indifference is easily understood, when we remember that they were living under an actively hostile government, with the memory of a revolution still fresh in their minds.

Under this government, jobbery and all the petty graft that goes with it flourished throughout the country; sinecures for men whose background and ability fitted them only for posts of the smallest importance. Such a one was Arthur de Oliveira dos Santos, Administrator of the district of Vila Nova do Ourem, to which Fatima belonged. He was a man of little education or culture, but his fanatical zeal for the cause of the Republic made him a very valuable party-man. Through the help of his Masonic brethren, he became a power. He was a symbol for the whole district, of the new era of “enlightenment” and free thought, which has been born in so bloody and sacrilegious a manner. It is easy to see what a shock he received when the news of the apparitions at the Cova reached him. God’s Mother appearing in his district! Miraculous cures! Revival of religion through the Rosary! All this nonsense would have to be stopped immediately before his masters down in Lisbon began to question his loyalty or his ability. He knew that revolutionary governments have a summary method of dealing with failures and incompetents.

He summoned the parents and ordered them to bring the children to his office at Vila Nova do Ourem on August 11th. Lucia’s father, being of a timid nature, saw nothing for it but to obey. Manuel Marto was made of sterner stuff, and refused to bring his two young children on such a journey and to such a place as the republican Administration Centre. Instead, he went along himself. The Administrator rebuked him sharply for failing to comply with the order and turned his attention to Lucia. She answered all his questions as she already had done to so many others, with simplicity and frankness. But about the Secret, she was silent. He asked her father what did he and the elders of Aljustrel think of the affair. Poor Antonio was always easily cowed and now he quickly replied that not only did he not believe the story himself but that generally it was thought to be merely a fairy-tale. But such was not Manuel Marto’s answer. Fearless, and loyal to his children as ever, he spoke out and proclaimed his own personal belief in the account they had given. The Administrator saw that no headway was to be made by continuing the interview. He contented himself with the threat of punishment and possible death to Lucia if she did not tell the Secret, and so dismissed the group.

Meanwhile, news of the wonders that were happening at Cova da Iria spread rapidly throughout the country. When August 13th dawned there were, according to a report of the time at least eighteen thousand people assembled. They had gathered from early morning and had whiled away the time by saying rosaries and singing hymns. Noon came, but not the children. They had been kidnapped by the Administrator of Vila Nova do Ourem. When the people heard the news of this outrage there was an outburst of indignation, and such was their temper that it would have fared ill for the authorities but for the intervention of Providence. Suddenly the crowd heard a tremendous clap of thunder. A dazzling flash lit up the clear blue sky. Over the tree of the apparitions hovered for about ten minutes a small, white cloud. During this time, to quote one present, “Our faces were reflecting all the colours of the rainbow... the trees seemed made not of leaves but of flowers. The ground and our clothes seemed saturated in colour and the lanterns on the arch in front of the tree seemed like gold.” Satisfied that something supernatural had happened in their presence the crowd dispersed, still shouting threats against the Government officials.

And what of the three children? They were taken to the Centre of Administration at Vila Nova do Ourem, and there for two days and two nights were put through a “third degree” of questioning, which, considering their ages and their simple condition, must have been terrifying. They were interrogated together. They were interrogated separately. They were threatened with death by being boiled in oil. They were made spend the nights in the ordinary town-gaol, with criminals. But

nothing could make them deny the truth of their story, or promise not to visit the Cova again. Seeing that nothing could persuade them, and by now frightened by the threatening attitude of the people, the Administrator sent them back to Aljustrel. It was Sunday, August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption.

As soon as they were free, the children ran off to the Cova and said a Rosary in thanksgiving for their deliverance. They knew that it was due to no fault of theirs that they had failed to keep the appointment there for the 13th, and they wondered what Heaven's next move would be. They had not long to wait. On the following Thursday, August 19th, they were out with their flocks at a place known as Vahinhos, on the slope of the hill. This time, Jacinta was not with them, as her mother wanted her at home for some reason. Her elder brother Joao was there instead. At about four o'clock, there came the now familiar flash in the sky. Lucia sensing that something was about to happen, sent Joao home to call Jacinta. Just as she arrived, breathless and excited, the Lady appeared above a tree. The opening of the conversation followed the usual pattern, with the injunction that the Rosary was to be said daily. Then the Lady repeated her promise to work a great miracle in October and to tell her name. The miracle, she said would have been much greater but for the action of the authorities in kidnapping the children. "St. Joseph and the Child Jesus will appear, to give peace to the world. Our Lord will come to bless the people. Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Sorrows will also be seen"... "Pray, pray much, and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls go to Hell because they have no one to make sacrifices and pray for them." Then the Lady disappeared.

## CHAPTER SEVEN.

It would be too much to expect that the civil authorities would have acknowledged themselves beaten so soon. Excellentissimo Senhor, Arthur de Oliveria dos Santos, Administrator of the District of Vila Nova do Ourem, was hurt in his pride, and was being laughed at by his fellow-Masons. Something would have to be done, and done quickly. He published an offensively blasphemous leaflet inviting all lovers of Free thought and Progress to meet outside the church in Fatima after Mass on Sunday. The people, warned by their priest, attended Mass at another church that morning and the disappointed Freethinkers set out for the Cova. And what a reception they got there! The people had collected a number of loud-braying donkeys to greet them, and had provided for their refreshment loads of hay and straw. From a safe vantage-point, the good people of the Serra jeered at these discomfited rationalists and shouted down with prayers, their obscenities and blasphemies. Nothing could be done, so the forces of "Law and Order" had to retire, probably reflecting philosophically that at any rate "a policeman's lot is not a happy one".

When September 13th came, all the roads, such as they were, leading to Fatima were alive with the crowds of people, from all over the uplands, and from all parts of Portugal. Towards noon, the children arrived, made their way with difficulty to the azinheira-tree and waited, kneeling, for the Lady. She came, heralded by the usual flash of light and loud clap of thunder. On this occasion, she repeated her demand for the daily Rosary, granted some requests that Lucia made to her, promised again the October miracle and revelation, and then disappeared. As usual, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, were the centre of eager questioners. To many they gave just the merest outline, but one questioner was a priest, Dr. Manuel Nunes Formigao, a professor of theology at the Lisbon seminary. To his shrewd interrogations and sympathetic and careful consideration of their replies, the many historians of the apparitions at Cova de Iria, owe much.

It is difficult after so many years to recapture the excitement which surrounded the little village of Aljustrel in those late summer days of 1917. Feeling ran high amongst those who believed the children and the sceptics. It was a situation dear to the Latin heart, and found expression in exaggerated gestures. The Masons and anti-clericals wrote bitterly abusive articles in their many dailies and weeklies. They organised mock-religious processions, with obscene and blasphemous representations of Christ and His Blessed Mother, in the neighbourhood of Fatima. As a matter of fact, they over-reached themselves and only succeeded in bringing attention to focus on the apparitions and gaining for them a nation-wide publicity. They even served in this way to bring about something in the nature of a cult of Our Lady of Fatima, amongst good Catholics who wanted to make reparation for the terrible things said and done.

So when October 13th came it was no surprise to find Cova de Iria and its neighbourhood thronged with people from all over Portugal. A conservative estimate places the number present at nearly seventy thousand. Seeing this vast multitude, poor Maria Rosa's doubts and fears became aggravated. She had long ago given up the idea of getting her daughter to abandon the story of the Lady of the Cova. Now, her fear was that if nothing happened at noon on the 13th her daughter's life would be in danger. This may seem an exaggerated fear, but feeling runs high and quickly amongst the Latins. Already rumours had been circulated of a plot to beat the children, if not worse, if the Lady failed to appear. So fearful was she of the possible danger from a disappointed mob, that on the morning of the 13th, she told Lucia that they should all make their peace with God in confession as they might be killed at the Cova. Despite her feelings on the matter, she was determined to accompany her daughter and die with her if necessary.

With great difficulty, the children with their parents reached the Cova, owing to the tightly packed crowds of people. A few minutes after noon, by which time many of those present had decided that nothing was going to happen and were giving voice to their anger, the announcing flash came. At Lucia's call the multitude knelt down, and all eyes were fixed on the three children as they gazed on what they alone could see. The Lady had come as promised. This time she said very little. "I am Our Lady of the Rosary and I desire a chapel to be built here in my honour. Continue to say the Rosary daily. The war will end and the soldiers will return to their homes." As usual, she told Lucia that some of the petitions she had presented would be granted. Finally, she said: "Men must correct their faults and ask pardon for their sins. They must no longer offend God, Who is already too much offended." And when Lucia asked if she wanted anything else of her: "I want nothing more." So ended the message of Our Lady — devotion to the Rosary and amendment of life.

Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima opened Her hands in her familiar gracious gesture. It appeared to Lucia that there came from them a light brighter than sunlight which went straight up to the sky, and in this radiance, Our Lady disappeared.

Just at this moment, the crowd heard Lucia cry out, "Look at the sun." Lucia has no recollection of saying this because she was in ecstasy at the new vision she was seeing. As Our Lady disappeared there appeared high in the sky, three tableaux. But let Lucia tell what she and the other two children saw. "I saw St. Joseph and the Infant Jesus beside Our Lady. Then I saw Our Lord blessing the crowd. Next, Our Lady showed herself, dressed like Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, but without the sword in her heart. Finally, I saw her dressed in another way; I do not know how to say it, but I think it was like Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She was dressed in white with a blue mantle." This much was seen by Lucia alone. All three children saw the vision of the Holy Family, with the Child

making the Sign of the Cross three times over the people. Again, to quote Lucia, “The Child was in the arms of St. Joseph. He was quite small, about a year old. They were both dressed in clear red.”

Nothing of all this was seen by the crowd. But what they did see, was the miracle foretold by Mary.

In a report to the leading daily, *O Seculo*, a Freemason and rabid anticlerical who was present at the Cova on October 13th writes of a “spectacle unique and incredible if one had not been a witness to it... “One can see the immense crowd turn toward the sun, which reveals itself free of the clouds in full noon. The great star of day makes one think of a silver plaque, and it is possible to look straight at it without the least discomfort. It does not burn, it does not blind... But now burst forth a colossal clamour, and we hear the nearest spectators crying

‘Miracle, miracle, Marvel, marvel!’

“Before the astonished eyes of the people... the sun has trembled and makes abrupt movements, unprecedented and outside all cosmic laws — it dances, according to the expression of the peasants...

“It remains for those competent to pronounce on the danse macabre of the sun, which to-day, at Fatima, has made hosannas burst from the breasts of the faithful, and naturally has impressed even freethinkers and others not at all interested in religious matters.”

So writes a hostile witness, who had come to Cova in order to undermine the story of the apparitions. Three times, the sun went through these extraordinary gyrations, like some huge Catherine wheel, each time for about five minutes. Finally, it seemed to leave its place in the heavens and rush down towards the people. Many thought their end was near and began to scream out acts of contrition. When they looked again, the sun was shining quite normally, and all was quiet.

The excitement of the people was tremendous, and they left the scene of the visions singing hymns and thanking God for the wonders He had performed. Greater still was the excitement of the Press on the following day. The facts they could not deny. All they could do was to suggest some natural explanation such as mass-hypnotism. For a while, this seemed to satisfy the opponents of the apparitions. Soon, however, this theory had to be discarded, when it was made known that many reliable witnesses, who were not in the crowd, but many miles away, had seen the miracle of the sun also. All that the anti-clericals could do was to plan a counter-attack.

From the town of Santerem came a band of anti-clericals from the Masonic lodge, on the night of October 13th. They smashed the small shrine built on the place of the apparitions, and scattered the ex voto offerings [the offerings left because of a vow or promise to God]. They cut down an azinheira tree thinking it was the one over which Mary had appeared. But they were wrong. All that was left of the real tree by that time was a bare stump. On their return to Santarem, they staged a mock-religious procession carrying their spoils from the Cova as trophies and singing ribald and blasphemous songs. They had hoped to kill the cult to Our Lady of Fatima by ridicule. The actual result of their outrage was an increase of devotion, and a corresponding increase in the number of pilgrims to the Cova. Daily they came, and on the 13th of each month, there were sure to be thousands present.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

When life had more or less settled back to normal for the three children, the first thing they did was to become regular attenders at the village school in Fatima. That was Our Lady's wish for them. They still had to face the questions of visitors who chanced to meet them, and often hid in the hills rather than bear with the embarrassing adulations showered upon them. All the time they were developing within themselves a life of prayer and sacrifice along the lines taught them by Mary — devotion to her in the Rosary and sacrifice in reparation for the sins of the world.

Towards the end of summer, 1918, the terrible "Spanish Influenza," which was then causing such ravages throughout the world, reached Aljustrel. It had already caused thousands of deaths in Portugal. In the village, Lucia's father was amongst the first to die from the plague. In the Marto household before the scourge was ended, it had claimed five victims. In December, Francisco took to his bed. Four months later he died. During his illness, he showed a wonderful patience and acceptance of God's will. Our Lady appeared to him and his sister Jacinta, telling them that Francisco would soon die and go to Heaven, and that Jacinta herself would go to a hospital where she would suffer much in reparation for sinners before her death. On the 2nd of April, 1919, Francisco received his First Holy Communion. It was also his last. On the morning of April 4th, with a happy smile on his face, knowing that he was now going to be with his Lady of the Cova and her Divine Son for all eternity, he breathed his last.

In the meanwhile, Jacinta had been stricken with the illness. When her brother died, she was already too weak to attend the funeral. Her illness was a slow and terrible one which lasted for almost a year. What was at first just influenza developed into tuberculosis and she suffered from a painful ulcer on the breast. After some months at home, she was strong enough to make the journey to Lisbon. There she was brought to the Estafania hospital, after spending some time in a small orphanage called after Our Lady of the Miracles. In the Estafania hospital, in a last attempt to save her life, two of her ribs were removed. The operation was a success from the doctors' point of view, but Jacinta knew that her days on earth were numbered. On the 20th February, 1920, she made her confession. Holy Communion was to have been brought to her the following morning, but she died that night at ten o'clock.

In Portugal, owing to the climate, burial generally takes place within twenty-four hours, but the corpse of Jacinta was left in the sacristy of a church and later in the premises of an undertaker for three and a half days. Crowds of people came to pay their respect to all that was left of the little seer of Fatima. All noticed the strangely fresh appearance of the little body and the peculiar and pleasant fragrance that surrounded it. From Lisbon it was taken to Vila Nova do Ourem to be interred in the family vault of the Alvaizere family. In 1935, her body was translated to a specially prepared tomb in Fatima cemetery where Francisco was also buried. Before the re-burial, the coffin was opened and the corpse was found to be exactly as it was before her illness. In May, 1951, the tomb was opened and the bodies transferred to their last resting-place within the magnificent new Basilica at Cova da Iria, near the high altar. Church and State representatives, and members of the faculty of Medicine of Lisbon and Coimbra universities were present. Jacinta's body was found to be in an almost perfect state of preservation.

Now her two companions of so many happy hours were gone to Heaven and Lucia was left. She knew from the Blessed Mother that she would have to live on and play a very important role in the spreading of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. If she followed her own wish, she too would have died and joined them in Heaven. But such was not the Will of God for her. After the death of her cousins, she felt herself completely alone in the world. They were the only ones on



earth who could rightly understand all that the visits to the Cova meant. She visited regularly the places so hallowed for her by Heavenly associations, and wondered when she was going to receive direction from God about her future.

In 1921, the bishop of the recently restored diocese of Leiria, which included Fatima and its neighbourhood, Dom Jose Alves Correia da Silva, arranged for Lucia to go to the boarding school of the Sisters of St. Dorothy at Vilar, a suburb of the city of Porto. For four years, she lived there the life of an ordinary schoolgirl, doing her best to prepare herself for the mission that Heaven had in store for her. During these years, she never revealed her identity to the others, nor did she ever discuss the happenings at Fatima. Besides the ordinary lessons on the curriculum, one other thing Lucia learned at Vilar and that was a love for the religious life. This developed, and in 1925, she entered the Order of St. Dorothy at the novitiate in Tuy, in Spain. Later having made her vows, she returned as Sister Mary of the Sorrows, to the convent in Porto.

It was there on the night of January 25th, 1938, that she looked out of her cell window and saw the whole sky ablaze with a tremendous glow of fire which lasted for several hours. As reported in the press of the following day, this phenomenon had been seen all over Europe. Remembering the words of Mary about “the night illuminated by an unknown light” being the forewarning of war and terrible calamities as a punishment for sin, Lucia was convinced that the Sign had come. She wrote to the Bishop of Leiria immediately. Referring to it in a later letter (1941), she says: “...God was pleased in this way to make me understand that His justice was ready to let fall the blow on the guilty nation, and in this way to begin to ask with insistence for the reparatory Communion of the First Saturdays and the consecration of Russia... God in His mercy made me feel that this terrible moment was approaching... and I still say that the prayer and penance that are done in Portugal have not yet placated the divine justice, for they have not been accompanied by contrition or amendment.” She went on to say: “War is imminent. The sins of men will be washed in their own blood. Those nations will suffer most in the war which tried to destroy the Kingdom of God. Portugal will suffer some of the consequences of war, but, because of the consecration of Portugal to the Immaculate Heart, she will not suffer all of them.”

On Holy Thursday, 1948, Lucia still obedient to the Divine Will, left the Sisters of St. Dorothy to enter the still stricter cloister of the Carmelite Order. Today she is Sister Mary of the Immaculate Heart in the Carmel of Coimbra, the university city of Portugal. [Sister Lucia died in 2005 and her cause for canonization has been introduced.]

Meanwhile, the cult of Our Lady of Fatima was growing apace. Within two weeks of taking over his diocese, the new bishop of Leiria began to investigate officially the whole case of the apparitions at Cova da Iria. He interrogated the witnesses and examined the already bulky collection of documents.

Finally on October 13th, 1930 in the presence of a hundred thousand pilgrims at Cova de Iria, the Bishop of Leiria proclaimed that the visions with which the children were favoured were worthy of credence, and that the cult of Our Lady of Fatima was officially authorised. This was a very important declaration as it raised the Fatima devotion from being merely a local interest, to something universal in its appeal. On May 13th, 1931, the National Pilgrimage of Thanksgiving, led by the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, Cardinal Cerejeira, took place. All the other Portuguese bishops took part in it also, and about three hundred thousand of the laity. With Fatima rapidly becoming the venue for many great pilgrimages, the Bishop saw that something would have to be done towards

providing accommodation. His first concern was to build a basilica, of a proportion and dignity suited to the hallowed character of the place. On May 13th, 1928, the corner stone of the present magnificent basilica was laid. Fatima quickly became a recognised place of pilgrimage. Every year it is visited by thousands of people who wish to honour Mary and to beg her help. It is not just another shrine of Our Lady. It is not just a devotion of regional importance and significance only. It is universal.

To confirm this, Fatima was officially recognised by Rome in 1928. In that year, Pope Pius XI blessed a special statue of Our Lady of Fatima and it was placed in the Portuguese College. Special indulgences have been granted by the Holy Father to all who make the Fatima pilgrimage, and in October 1942 Pope Pius XII, speaking over the radio to the assembled pilgrims, consecrated “Portugal and the whole world, on the altar of Fatima at Cova da Iria, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” On May 13th 1946, the Pope sent a special Legate, Cardinal Mazella, to crown, in the presence of almost a million people, the statue of Our Lady, in his name. On this occasion, he also spoke over the radio to the pilgrims and imparted his special blessing. As another mark of his approval, the Holy Father decreed that the extended Holy Year should close at Fatima on October 13, 1951. His special Legate was Cardinal Tedeschini. The number of pilgrims present was reckoned to be over a million and included some five hundred bishops from all over the world.

The Portuguese government which has replaced the Masonic regime so bitterly hostile to all things Catholic, has shown many times, not merely tolerance but active co-operation in the development of the shrine. In 1929, the President of the Republic, General Oscar Carmona, accompanied by the Prime Minister, Dr. Salazar, and other members of the Cabinet went on pilgrimage to Fatima. That all this should have happened in the course of a few years, against such opposition, is in itself a proof of the supernatural origin of the visions at Cova da Iria.

## CHAPTER NINE.

To round off this short account of the visions of Our Lady at Cova da Iria in 1917 all that remains is to stress again the importance and urgency of “the tidings brought by Mary.”

The message of Fatima can be summed up in a few words — Amendment of life and the daily recitation of the Rosary. The words of Mary are so clear that there is no need for erudite commentators to seek hidden meanings. “I am the Lady of the Rosary. Men must amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must not continue to offend Our Lord Who is already so much offended.” What could be clearer? In each of the six apparitions, Mary asked for the daily recitation of the Rosary and for amendment of life. There is no new revelation contained in the message of Fatima. It is merely an underlining of the inspired message of the gospel — the necessity of prayer and good works for salvation. In the effort to live one’s life in this spirit, there is inevitably contained penance and mortification. Lucia herself has said as much — that the penance demanded by Our Lady of Fatima is primarily to be found in the fulfilling of the duties of one’s state in life, and the avoidance of the occasions of sin.

What, then, can be done to comply with the demands of Mary? All over the world, in a wonderful wave of enthusiasm, people have found the answer. Say the Rosary daily, become a member of the Rosary Confraternity which is especially devoted to her. Keep her requests and promises in mind, by making the devotion of the Five First Saturdays. By doing this, her other request, “that men should amend their lives” follows logically and compliance with it will be the result of this devotion to her.

We live in a world where the very elements of Christian living are threatened. Because of that, Peace has practically vanished from the face of the earth. We must not forget that in the Hymn of the Angels, Peace was only promised to “men of Good Will.” There have been times when man seemed to have irrevocably strayed, but now Mary, the God-given Mother of the human race, has come again to point the way that will infallibly lead to Peace and Salvation. The choice is ours: — fulfil her requests and the Peace of God here and hereafter is assured us; neglect them, and on the word of the Blessed Mother, the world will be punished by terrors as yet unknown, and many souls will be damned.

[Francisco and Jacinta Marto were beatified by Blessed Pope John Paul II on May 13, 2000.]

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