



9 MAR 1968

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FOREWORD

It is now over a hundred years since Mother Teresa Ball began, in 1821, the good work of the foundation of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland. Looking back across the century which has passed since she established the Mother-House at Rathfarnham, our hearts are filled with thankfulness to God, Who has so visibly blessed her work, and given it such abundant increase.

Rev. Mother Ball was called by Divine Providence to be one of the most powerful influences in the restoration of Catholic society in Ireland during forty years of the nineteenth century. The long dark night of religious persecution and political oppression was well nigh spent, and the country was emerging from its age-long struggle, worn out and impoverished in body, but with its spirit aflame and its soul enriched with treasures of grace. We, who live in happier days, can scarcely realize the difficulties she had to face when

she undertook the high and holy work of providing Catholic education for the girls of Ireland. The Penal Code was still the law of the land, though its severity had been, to a great extent, mitigated, and eight years more of struggle had to be endured before Catholic Emancipation was won.

For the first ten years after the foundation at Rathfarnham, Rev. Mother worked with ceaseless, untiring energy at the consolidation of what was destined, in the designs of God, to become the Mother-House of a world-wide Institute. Her most important task was the training of our early Mothers and Sisters in the principles and practice of the religious life, and of strict observance, and the laying deep and solid foundations of holiness on the bed-rock of humility and self-sacrifice. At the same time, she did not neglect the temporal concerns of the growing Institute. The schools prospered, the novices increased, the house was enlarged, and such rapid progress was made that, in 1833, Rev. Mother had the consolation of seeing five of her spiritual children go forth from the Mother-House to found at Navan the

first affiliation. Since then, this development of the work has proceeded without interruption, and to-day, in far distant parts of the world, the nuns of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary are to be found labouring for the glory of God, their own sanctification, and the salvation of souls with the same devotion and self-sacrifice which inspired our Mothers and Sisters of the early days. And if it is asked how, from such lowly beginnings, results so marvellous should follow, the answer is not far to seek. Aided and sustained by the grace of God, and under the protection of His Blessed Mother, the spiritual daughters of Frances Teresa Ball have been true to the inspiring watchword of their Foundress, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all things else shall be added unto you."

The little volume of MEMORIES now published collectively for the first time, appeared originally in serial form in the pages of the *Loreto Magazine*. This fact will account for occasional repetitions, and for a certain lack of sequence between the chapters. The book has been compiled for the private use of the nuns of

FOREWORD

the Institute who will readily overlook these slight defects in a work of such interest and edification, enshrining, as it does, the simple record of the holy, hidden lives of the first Mothers and Sisters of the Institute in Ireland, a record which is our most precious inheritance.

LORETO ABBEY, RATHFARNHAM.

4th November, 1926.

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MEMORIES OF LORETO.

CHAPTER I.

A LONG DARK NIGHT.

WHEN the clouds have swept the sky through the long winter night; when the wind-tossed torrents of thick rain have deepened the nightly darkness; when not a gleam from the blue heavens beyond, nor the glance of a solitary star, nor the pure presence of the soft silver moon, has soothed the terrors of the storm, it often happens that, when the late morning dawn comes on, the gloomy masses overhead begin to roll away, and a clear, delicately-tinted light spreads across the horizon. There is no warmth in it as yet—no richness of colour—and we cannot trust its fair promise, it looks so capable of fading fast; still, it lingers, and grows golden-hued, till, at last, in sudden splendour, “the day breaks and the shadows retire.”

For there is a Watcher above the night, omnipotent and loving, and throned in tranquil light. The silence of that Watcher, while the

darkness broods over His children, is the silence of a tenderness which holds unfailing power to gladden and glorify the eternity of those who pass through "the little while" of earth's tribulation. That Watcher's Hand, with one gentle touch, can "wipe away the tears from their eyes" for ever; and that same Almighty Hand can, and does, rest with unutterable compassion on bowed head after bowed head, as the desolate sink down, sadly, at His Feet.

Did ever a land in this changeful world of ours feel the strengthening power of that Hand more repeatedly than Ireland, "the land of sorrows"? Well may we revere the memory of the hours of our country's long dark night, lit as it was by the star of "the everlasting hills," shining in its unconquerable beauty before the eyes of the suffering and the weak. Well may we revere the hillsides and the valleys, and the caves by the seashore, where the Most High God was welcomed in His Eucharistic robes with such eager, self-effacing love. Well may we deem it holy ground where the uncanonized Irish martyrs braved death for the sake of one hour's communion with the Crucified—one lifting-up of the Sacred Host and the Chalice of

salvation. We may have pondered over the annals of those years with hearts that longed for the relief of hot, indignant words, until in some blessed hour of God's sweet mercy, our thoughts were drawn upwards to the thronged ranks of the God-crowned children of Ireland, in the land where "the former things have passed away."

Less noticeable, perhaps, in the eyes of men, was the spirit of solid, deeply-rooted faith which lived on through the very heart of the busy, crowded cities. And, over these thoroughfares of toil and worldly cares and opulence, so often sanctified by the magic touch of charity's generous hand, arose timidly, but steadily, the herald gleams of morning brightness.

The solemn Scriptural praise: "He was a just man," is a truthful portraiture of the heads of the Irish Catholic households in those days. There was a God-fearing loyalty, a strong sense of the claims of the Creator on the creature, a quiet fidelity to the practice of religious duties, an unquestioning reverence for the ministers of God, and a princely-hearted generosity to God's poor, which we look back to now with a sort of wistful admiration.

Yet, the Catholic Church in Ireland possessed nothing—humanly speaking—to attract the eyes of the wealthy and gifted. “The chapels of that day,” writes a truthful witness, “were invariably hidden away in the meanest quarters of the city, so that a stranger would find it difficult to recognize their sacred character, and distinguish the house of God from the stables, the hucksters’ stores, and the old furniture shops that pressed closely on its walls. Unsightly structures were these old chapels, but sacred as the oratories of the Catacombs. Each had its special traditions, its special characteristics, something or other which made it a place of pilgrimage as well as a place of prayer.”

A typical chapel of the time was St. Mary’s, in Liffey Street. “The Archbishop, Dr. Troy, often officiated in this lowly edifice, which, not daring to show its front, even in an obscure street, hid itself among a cluster of houses, and could only be approached by a narrow passage, leading from the pathway. The small windows only admitted a sort of twilight to play on the low ceiling, the gloomy galleries, and the one ‘thing of beauty’—a lovely Virgin and Child, after Raphael. On Sundays every approach

was filled with an eagerly pious crowd, striving to get as near as possible even to the external walls. From shortly before noon till one o’clock, p.m., at which hours the last Masses were said, the patter of footsteps on the rough pathway was silenced by the clatter of hoofs and the roll of wheels; for, according to the fashion of the day, all who had carriages rode in state to the chapel. It was considered only right and becoming to have one’s best horses and liveries seen in the labyrinth of lanes surrounding the parochial and conventual chapels. The going at midday, in full style, to Mass was held equivalent to a profession of faith.”

The chapel of St. Michan’s, in Mary’s Lane, was served for many years by the Jesuit Fathers; and prominent among its parishioners were John and Mabel Clare Ball, then living in Eccles Street.